

**PLACES** (Professionals Learning about Community, Equity, and Smart Growth) is a transformational leadership development experience for professionals in philanthropy to build knowledge, skills, and partnership opportunities to create more equitable neighborhoods and communities.

**History and Rationale**

Mention equity and diversity to the philanthropic community and often the conversation turns to the struggle of making outcomes match ideals. Work done in vulnerable and distressed communities often falls short of intended outcomes or doesn’t translate into lasting benefits and impacts. Because the needs and perspectives of low-income communities, often comprised of people of color, have been systematically disregarded in decision-making about growth and development, this program develops tools and provides resources to help funders understand and eliminate the disproportionate impact of these decisions. Through site visits, fellows will get out and talk to effective local change agents who are leading the transformation of marginalized communities. This will enable fellows to look beyond established methodologies and seek out innovative, community-appropriate solutions that deliver results.

Through case studies and small group work, PLACES gives fellows increased ability to leverage philanthropy to create more equitable communities through convening, targeted grantmaking, and applied research in their home cities. PLACES’ main goals are:

* To build grant maker capacity and help the philanthropic sector address interrelated issues of community and economic development, environmental sustainability, and regional planning using an explicit lens of social, economic, and racial equity;
* To help funders understand historic, current, and shifting inequities in the field of smart growth and apply systems change thinking/practices to this learning; and
* To create a community of practice among PLACES fellows, alumni and the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities (the Network or TFN) members that inspire leadership in their communities.

**PLACES Fellows**

The first class of seven PLACES fellows graduated in 2009. A second class of 15 fellows graduated in March 2011. Fellows come from a variety of institutions and hold positions as varied as president, trustee, program officer, and program associate. The majority of fellows are new (within three years) to the field of philanthropy and show promising potential to make a lasting impact in their institutions and in the field. All fellows go through a competitive application process and are selected based on a variety of factors, especially a commitment to learning about equity in the context of smart growth and a willingness to invest in their professional and personal growth. TFN strives to have representation from grantmakers of various sizes and classifications (e.g. corporate, community, family, private) and a strong commitment to geographic, racial/ethnic, and gender diversity within each class.

**PLACES Advisory Board**

The PLACES program is guided by input from a dedicated group of individuals who comprise are comprised of PLACES alumni, funders, and others in philanthropy who are passionate about the mission of the program.

**Strategy and Mission**

PLACES is a program of the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities. The mission of the Funders’ Network is to inspire, strengthen and expand funding and philanthropic leadership that yield environmentally sustainable, socially equitable and economically prosperous regions and communities. Founded in 1999, the vision of the Funders' Network is to be the leading resource in philanthropy for interdisciplinary and transformative thinking and action that gives all people the opportunity to live in more environmentally sustainable, socially equitable and economically prosperous regions and communities.

The Network strives to:

* Improve philanthropic understanding about connections between growth and development issues and environmental, economic, and social outcomes;
* Motivate greater individual and collective philanthropic leadership on these issues;
* Encourage more funders to make investments to advance innovative solutions; and
* Strengthen relationships, connections, and networks among funders.

A primary strategy of the Network is to cultivate emerging funder interest and new opportunities for funder engagement and leadership that yield a persistent focus on equity and inclusiveness (people) and a deep understanding of the attributes of sustainable, equitable, and prosperous regions and communities (place). The PLACES program is a key strategy for achieving this goal.

**Inclusiveness at the Funders’ Network**

In 2007, the Funders’ Network began an in-depth examination of how the internal culture, operations, and programs of the Network reflect a commitment to inclusiveness, a stated organizational value. In 2010, after significant exploration, research, and self-reflection, the board of directors of the Funders’ Network completed a three-year inclusiveness blueprint for the organization. This effort codified the organization’s deep commitment to equity and inclusiveness and provided a clear roadmap for how to actualize its stated commitment to inclusiveness. The rationale for the focus on equity and inclusiveness is as follows:

*We believe that growth and development decisions should be fair to all concerned and make communities better places to live. In order to address these impacts, create new solutions to old problems, fulfill its mission, and remain a robust and relevant organization, the Network embraces the diversity of experiences and knowledge among the people we work with, particularly with regard to race, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic background, gender, sexual orientation, age, and physical ability.*

Through PLACES, the Network builds the skills and knowledge of a diverse cohort of professionals in philanthropy to better understand issues of equity and inclusiveness, which are then translated into their grantmaking practices. Further, the PLACES program helps the Network become more inclusive by connecting the Network to people who share its perspectives and experiences with equity and inclusiveness. Finally, the PLACES graduates will develop tools and practices for advancing grant making with an equity focus; these tools will be leveraged and distributed throughout the field of philanthropy.