

San Francisco Foundation to tackle Bay Area 'challenges' involving race, economic exclusion

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Chris Rauber Reporter *San Francisco Business Times*

The **San Francisco Foundation**, long a champion of equity and economic inclusion, is adopting a new funding approach that explicitly aims to advance "racial and economic equity" throughout the region, in some cases by committing more funds for longer periods of time to nonprofits working on such issues. The foundation's leaders tied the new strategy directly to the "profound challenges" facing communities nationwide and here in the Bay Area, calling them both moral and economic in nature.

"We need to ensure that our rising tide is lifting all boats — that everyone has a chance to get a good job, life in a safe and affordable home, can fully participate in the political process, has a strong voice, and can live in a community that provides real access to opportunity," CEO **Fred Blackwell** said in a statement.

To move in that direction, it's making a number of grants totaling nearly \$5.3 million, many of which are larger and last longer than its more typical 12-month support in the range of \$25,000 to \$30,000, Blackwell said during an interview Wednesday afternoon. Some are going to prior grantees, others to new ones.

Of the 42 Bay Area entities winning support in the funding disclosed Tuesday, the following are among those who netted the largest grants:

- Asian Pacific Environmental Network, \$250,000.
- The Greenlining Institute, \$250,000.
- East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy, \$250,000.
- Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corp., \$250,000.
- Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California, \$235,000.
- California Calls, \$400,000.
- Bay Area Rising, \$300,000.

Kate O'Hara, executive director of the East Bay Alliance, one of the big grantees, called The San Francisco Foundation's new strategy "timely, recognizing that our region's rapidly shifting economic and social reality requires a response to lift all workers, especially those from low-income communities of color, out of the trap of low wage employment" and to deal with displacement caused by rapidly escalating housing costs.

Her nonprofit, based in Oakland, is working to raise the minimum wage and push for other steps to help minority and low-income people gain a more secure foothold in the region's economy.

The new approach is "a refinement" of the foundation's long-time interest in issues of economic and racial equity, Blackwell said, inspired in part by recent events, such as the tragic shootings of African-Americans in Minnesota and Baton Rouge, La., by police officers and of law enforcement personnel by people of color.

The new strategy isn't "a 180-degree shift for us," Blackwell acknowledged, since the foundation has long specialized in issues of social justice.

"We need to refine our focus. We're trying to achieve a greater level of racial and economic inclusion" in the region, he added, noting that these are regional issues "and we think any solutions are regional in nature."

Emmett Carson, president and CEO of the **Silicon Valley Community Foundation**, praised the **San Francisco Foundation** for taking this step, and welcomed the chance to join forces with it on this effort.

"We are glad that we have started conversations about regional approaches to the challenges we all face," Carson said late Wednesday.

About a year ago, the San Francisco Foundation **received an anonymous \$34 million gift** to be used to fund a number of nonprofit and public programs in Oakland to achieve similar goals.

Some in the media **have attributed that gift to the late rock icon Prince**, but the foundation hasn't confirmed that the **Prince** was the donor, and isn't planning to clarify the situation.

It "really is committed to anonymity" in this instance, Blackwell told me, and others where donors insist on keeping their identities private.

The new grants are intended to advance its newly articulated strategy, which focuses on issues such as providing workers with a "living wage," ensuring access to vibrant neighborhoods and public transit, and connecting excluded and low-income residents of the region so they can effectively engage in political and social action, officials said.

The new approach centers on three "mutually reinforcing areas," they said, including "people, place and power," with grants divvied up among nonprofit programs seen as advancing those agendas.

In the "people" category, for example, the foundation is giving \$150,000 to REDF to help it "expand job opportunities" to Bay Area residents who face especially high barriers to employment, and \$112,265 to the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, "to expand access to opportunities" for families and communities most damaged by social ills such as racism, a bias against people lower on the economic totem pole and inequities in the criminal justice system, the foundation said.

Reducing current tensions, and making tangible progress on these issues is crucial if the entire region "is to grow, thrive and prosper," Blackwell said. That explains why the foundation is giving larger amounts to groups it believes can move the dial on the issues it cares about the most. It believes it will take "bigger and deeper commitments to this work in order to be effective," he said.