

# BOHEMIAN FUND Companion Guide

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## Welcome!

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This companion is our attempt to explain the thinking as clearly as possible that went into creating this application. You are on the ground and doing the work, and we want to understand your story the best we can. We imagine your application will be just that—a story of the work you are doing to create an equitable community where everyone belongs. We know that you already have compelling stories of the work you're doing, and that the application is just a way of telling us those stories. Hopefully this companion guide helps in the storytelling.

We acknowledge that we are not experts on building equitable communities. We are on our own journey and are asking you to tell us where you are on your journey and your work. We hope to learn and grow alongside you. Some will be very far along—farther than we are—and some will just be starting. This fund is for everyone willing to go on a path toward equity and advancing equitable outcomes within the fund's three goals. The application helps us understand where you are on your path and where you're headed.

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Here's how this companion is laid out. First, we define some key terms (concepts and themes) that are central to the fund. Next, we go through the sections of the actual application, providing some of our thinking and examples of responses. We'll be as brief as we can when explaining the application and encourage you to do the same when writing it!

You may not need to read this entire document in order to write a compelling application. You may find yourself jumping around within the document. Some may find only parts of it helpful, and some may want to read the whole thing. It may be useful once, or you may return to sections later for insights.

We have included numerous examples throughout this guide. As an additional resource, we've created an application storyboard template as a way for you to organize the components of your application's story. We've also created a collection of examples from each of the fund's goal areas as a way to illustrate how a story could develop throughout the application questions. You can access these additional resources in our grantee portal (<https://bohemianfoundation.fluxx.io>), in the workshop materials, or by requesting them at [bohemianfund@bohemianfoundation.org](mailto:bohemianfund@bohemianfoundation.org).

## Key Concepts: Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, Belonging

The terms below are central to this fund. While there are other definitions, and much written about each concept, below is how we're thinking about them in the context of the fund.



### DIVERSITY

Refers to our human differences, such as our racial, gender or income differences. Sexuality, nationality and ethnic backgrounds are examples of diversity, as are ways of thinking and acting. There are many expressions of diversity in our community. In this fund, diversity means recognizing but also valuing difference.



### INCLUSION

This is what puts diversity into practice. It means making sure diverse people are not just invited to the table, but that space is created for their unique perspectives and contributions. We recognize the limits of inclusion or how it sometimes is used to put pressure on marginalized members of a group to assimilate and meet the expectations and norms of the dominant group.



### EQUITY

Ensuring justness and fairness for all people that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes. Equity focuses our attention on how different people experience the world differently because of their race, gender, sexuality, income level or other marginalized identities.

One inequity is how one's race can determine the ability to own a home because of structural racism in the homebuying processes. White people in Fort Collins own homes at a much higher rate than non-white people. An equitable community would be, in this example, one in which race was not a factor in determining levels of home ownership. Equity also points us to the need for different solutions based on how specific groups experience inequities. A program to increase home ownership for non-white members of our community will address the unique needs of members served. If the program succeeded in eliminating inequity in homeownership rates by race, we would say that it achieved an equitable outcome.



### BELONGING

Inspired by the work of John A. Powell to achieve belonging, people must have agency, meaning a sense of who they are and who they are becoming. Agency also means having a genuine say in how they are perceived and treated. Belonging requires power, the power to make real social change. Belonging is about ensuring power is grounded in care and love for each other and for ourselves. Belonging requires a shared responsibility for each other and our lives together. This fund ultimately strives to support a community where all people belong.

## Key Themes: Community Issue, Proximity, Structures

This application is grounded in three key themes: community issue, proximity and structures. We believe that work driven by these themes will advance equitable outcomes. This application will ask you to address these themes in three different ways, looking at how you and your work are understanding community issues, understanding solutions and understanding impact. This guide walks through each section in more detail in the following pages.

### COMMUNITY ISSUE

Grant applications typically begin by asking about what you do or who you are. The Bohemian Fund intentionally shifts the starting place to understanding the community issue your work addresses, meaning not what your organization does but the central issue or issues your organization seeks to address in its work or your request. For example, an applicant might run a soup kitchen but is addressing the community issue of food insecurity for homeless adults.

### PROXIMITY

A way of understanding how your work is connected to and amplifies the voices and perspectives of community members most impacted by the issue your work addresses. This stems from our belief that the voices and perspectives of people most impacted by an issue are the very agents for powerful, lasting change but are oftentimes ignored or not centered in the work meant to support them.

### STRUCTURES

We hope the fund, over time, helps to shift the narrative of community change by focusing on the structures that produce inequitable outcomes. In the application, when we use the term “structures” we are referring both to systems and to structures. Systems include things like the rules that govern a single organization, the ways we direct people to do things, formal and informal practices, resources, and relationships. Structures include lasting, historical forces like public policy, criminal justice, education, culture, and even the ideas we have about the world that shape our actions.

The Bohemian Fund intentionally shifts the starting place to understanding the community issue your work addresses, meaning not what your organization does but the central issue or issues your organization seeks to address in its work or in this specific request.

## Application Sections: Understanding Community Issues

To set up your story, we first ask how you understand the community issue you are working on. We're looking to how you use data, research, and stories to understand these issues. We want to know how your closeness to an issue (or proximity) informs your understanding of it. We also want to learn about how the structures that affect all aspects of our lives impact the issue you're working on. We're not asking you to be an expert on data or structures. What's most important to us is that you are looking at our community critically and with an eye for equity—that you can use data, research, and stories to make the unseen seen. We also believe that solutions rooted in a clear and critical understanding of community issues are most effective and help us see from many angles what's happening in our community.

COMMUNITY ISSUE	PROXIMITY	STRUCTURES
<p>We ask you first to define the issue you're working on. Among the data you can use are <b>community level indicators (CLIs)</b>, which we believe are powerful tools for understanding community issues because they <i>indicate</i> the well-being of a community around particular issues. CLIs often allow you to look at how certain groups within a community experience issues differently. Regardless of what data, research and stories you use, we want to know how you view the information through an equity lens.</p>	<p>We are inspired by Brian Stephenson's work on proximity, where he urges us to get close to the people most affected by issues to truly understand their root causes and solutions. In the fund, applicants might demonstrate proximity by being actual participants in the issue being addressed or by listening to and working closely with those most affected.</p>	<p>We are also interested in the structures that influence community issues. This concept helps us understand how forces beyond individual actions impact our lives. For example, structural racism is the cumulative effect of factors that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color. Understanding how systems and structures affect people is key to creating change that benefits all people.</p>
EXAMPLE	EXAMPLE	EXAMPLE
<p><b>COMMUNITY ISSUE using student success in PSD</b></p> <p>Organizations addressing student success in PSD can utilize student graduation rates, a CLI produced by Poudre School District, and look at rates for all students or specific groups. In the district, the data shows that white and non-white students graduate at different rates. The data on graduation rates by racial groups help us see the presence of a significant inequity in our school system, one we might not see if we did not look closely at the data. This alarming data point should be illuminating for any organization working on student graduation in PSD.</p>	<p><b>PROXIMITY using student success in PSD</b></p> <p>Stories of lived experiences can be powerful lenses through which to understand community. A Native American-led organization working to increase Native American student success in PSD, for example, might uniquely understand the challenges that lead to Native American students graduating at lower rates than other groups. Not only could such an organization point to indicators that show these differences, but they could also bring knowledge to the application, explaining with first-hand accounts of the Native American student and family experience in the district. What's important in this example is that the applicant is close enough to the issue to define it.</p>	<p><b>STRUCTURES related to school discipline</b></p> <p>We know that systems of school discipline impact the educational outcomes of different groups—say graduation rates among white and non-white students—in different ways. Organizations seeking to affect educational outcomes could benefit from an awareness of the influence of structural issues like student discipline and other systems.</p>

## Application Sections: Understanding Solutions

Next in the application you'll build on your understanding of community issues to discuss your proposed solutions. We're looking for some of the usual responses here like the when, where, who and how of your work. But we're also looking for the connection between your strategies and tactics and your understanding of the community issue and how your solutions target the structures you've previously identified. We know you've committed a great deal of time and resources to the work, so we're also curious what you've learned in doing it and how that informs your work going forward. We're not looking for expertise, but a commitment to reflection and growth.

COMMUNITY ISSUE	PROXIMITY	STRUCTURES
<p>We first ask you to describe the strategies and tactics you employ in your work. What's most important to us in this section is that these tactics and strategies align with how you've defined the community issue. If academic student success for homeless students is your issue, and slam poetry, for example, is your chosen solution for addressing the issue, how do the two connect? How have the data, stories and research you've used to understand the issue inform your programmatic work? What activities will participants engage in that might impact their academic success? We want to understand your work but always in the context of the community issue you have defined.</p>	<p>This fund is committed to supporting work that is authentically informed and shaped by communities the work serves. We want to know how these communities influence the work and how you've learned, either first-hand or through intentional listening, from them to improve your strategies and tactics. A slam poetry program for students that is not directly shaped by youth would be not what we are looking for in this fund.</p>	<p>What we want to see is not just that you've designed a great program, but that you've designed one that is in tune with the issue and structures at hand. As those things change and you reflect on your programmatic work, we'd like to hear about how you have adapted and improved the work. For an organization using slam poetry to increase student academic success, we'd want to know what connection can be drawn to the structural forces that impact the issue and the slam poetry program. Perhaps the topics of students' poems are their experiences with school policies and procedures that impact their academic performance. One audience for their performances could be the adults who create these policies who might benefit from more proximity to these students.</p>

## Application Sections: Understanding Impact

The third section of the application asks you to explain the impact you are hoping to make using solutions you've targeted to address community issues. Here we want to understand your definition of success and how you'll know if you've been successful. We're interested in how the people closest to the issue inform your definition of success and how you'll know if you've achieved it. Lastly, we're interested in your thoughts on what, if any, structural change your work might bring about. The most important part of this section is your explanation of your vision for the transformation in community you are seeking to create, one that is rooted in equitable outcomes and belonging for all community members.

An important question that we ask ourselves around impact is this: Will anyone be better off because of the work? We want to make sure we're not just developing interesting strategies and tactics for the sake of it. We need to make a difference. In the application, we first want you to define the difference you're trying to make. If "academic success" is your goal, what do you mean by that? An increase in standardized test scores, improved reading comprehension or something else?

COMMUNITY ISSUE	PROXIMITY	STRUCTURES
<p>Just like you used data, research and stories to understand the issue, we want to know what information you'll use to assess your impact. It's uncommon for nonprofits to have evaluation researchers on staff or under contract to assess impact both programmatically and in the community. If you do, then we're eager to hear about your evaluation framework and how you will use it to assess impact. If not, you might turn to research from other communities that demonstrates your solution has the potential to create the impacts you're hoping for. Continuing our example, have researchers or organizations elsewhere connected academic success to slam poetry programs? Feel free to reference similar studies to suggest your work in our community will achieve similar results. Finally, most of us collect stories on the impact of our work. Stories could come in the form of anecdotes, from reflections by participants, or through other means. If using stories is the way you'll gauge impact, help us understand how you'll collect those stories and use them in that assessment. If, for example, your plan is to ask student participants of a spoken word program to share their experiences, make sure your approach fosters stories that speak to impact.</p>	<p>Proximity again plays an important role in this section. Participants should also be involved in defining impact—in what ways do people closest to the issues define success and how will you know if they believe success has been achieved? As in the previous sections of the application, the voices of people closest to the issues should come through front and center.</p>	<p>Because your work is aware of and targeted at structures, you might see some change at this level. Here we want to know what kind of change you'd like to see. Be aspirational here, but also realistic. Reflect on structures both outside of and within your organization. We know that changing educational policies, for example, takes time and many different stakeholders and processes. Even building awareness of the need for structural change at any level is an important step. And remember that changing hearts and minds matters when trying to change structures. Structural racism, for example, is perpetuated by our laws, policies and institutions, but also by how we think and feel about race.</p>

## Application Sections: Understanding Belonging

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In this question, we want to know how you're thinking about belonging in our community. You may reference your own work or reflect on this more broadly. We use belonging as a guide and ask what it would take to create a community where all people have a say in how they are seen and treated and where all people have the power to make change, even structural change. What would it take for all people to feel care and love for themselves and each other and to take a shared responsibility in our individual and collective well-being?

## Application Sections: Understanding Organizational Financial Health and Key Priorities

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### Overall Guidance

We believe an organization's leadership, staff, financial health, and commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion are important indicators of an organization's strengths and readiness to carry out the work. We recognize that organizations come in all shapes and sizes and that these capacities vary between and within organizations over time.

### Organizational Changes

First, we want to know about recent or anticipated changes to your organization. We know that nonprofits of all sizes grow and change frequently, and that these changes are important. We're also interested in why you may be making changes. Is a change in mission a result of long-term learning about the best ways to create impacts or a change in the actual community issue you are addressing? Leadership transitions are healthy for organizations when done thoughtfully and can help us understand where you're headed. Of course, stability is a strength, too, so you might not have much to say in this section.

### Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

As a funder, we reflect on our own organizational commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, and we develop - as best we can - policies and practices to advance these priorities. We want to know how you're doing the same, at all levels. Major shifts or small steps are equally important. Taking time to learn and gain new skills to advance diversity, equity and inclusion are important here, too. Again, recall that we believe organizations are on a path toward creating an equitable community for all, and this aspect of that journey involves self-reflection.

### Cash Reserves

The final question asks about cash and reserves. We know that small, lean nonprofits can be highly effective, while those with ample cash reserves can still struggle to make a difference. This is a pulse-check for nonprofit financial health. It helps us learn more of where you are in your financial development and how your board is thinking about financial sustainability. We expect a broad range of answers here.



## Thank You

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Thank you for considering and thinking through a possible application to this fund. We know it is a significant shift from our past responsive grant programs and that preparing your application will take a significant shift in how you are thinking about it. We hope that the process helps you think through disparities and the influence of structures in new ways. Over time, we hope the grants made through the fund shift the way our community sees the issues and yields more equitable outcomes. We welcome your feedback and encourage you to tell us what you think. We are on this journey together.

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