

Questions and Answers from the Deaconess Foundation Convening, February 13, 2024

Overall Strategy Questions

Q: Can you expand more on how you define a career pathway? To support a program, do participants need to be earning a family sustaining wage (\$25.50) right away? Or can it be a lower wage to help them move towards that ultimate goal?

A career pathway is a visible, transparent “path” of jobs which starts reflecting an entry level position and, through additional learning and earning, enables one to progress through jobs of increasing responsibility and wages. The career path articulates what learning (including training) is needed to progress to the next role; sometimes it is securing a credential, sometimes it is earning a higher-level university degree.

Career pathways are established in various industries and across many occupational groups including healthcare, technology, and manufacturing. They are designed to address the evolving needs of the labor market and help individuals navigate their career journeys in a systematic and purposeful manner. The development and success of career pathways often involve collaboration among educational institutions, employers, industry associations, and community organizations.

Key components of a career pathway may include education and training, skills development, credentialing, work-based learning, career planning and guidance, industry alignment and finally career advancement opportunities to earn a family sustaining wage.

Of note: when someone (particularly someone who hasn’t had the benefit of a 2-year or 4-year university degree) is on a career pathway, they are often starting at the beginning – in the entry level job. This is often a role which does not yet pay a family sustaining wage. What is important to DF is that the person is in an industry or sector, or a program, which does enable them to be on a career pathway (vs. a random job).

Q: What work is being done toward employers vs. employees. I always feel that we would not need all of this foundation support, if employers supported folks financially and otherwise to succeed. What do “employers” provide to help support your work?

Businesses, by definition, exist to create value for shareholders and to deliver products the market wants. Having a good strategy for talent attraction, development and retention will be a priority for those employers who see it as a critical driver of shareholder and market value. That won’t be every employer.

We know there are some excellent employers who really provide their employees with the support they need to be successful in their work. These excellent employers are often invisible to the workforce system because they don’t need us! They have figured out how to be a preferred employer, how to recruit the talent they need, and how to address the changing needs of their employees to address retention. To learn about one of these employers, check out this [City Club talk](#) from Oct. 2023.

We also know there are some employers who – for a variety of reasons – are ok with high turnover and frequent recruiting (even if they don't say they are. If they aren't willing to change, they are essentially ok with it.) They've built this cost into their business model.

For all the employers who don't fit in either category, the workforce system in general should be in active discussion with them. The system has the opportunity to both help them meet their needs, and to encourage them to strengthen workplaces so they enable worker success.

Because the Foundation doesn't provide direct service, we don't have an understood role for connecting with employers. But we do know this is a need, and we are interested in seeing how we can put more effort in the system into finding and helping these interested companies. We are playing around with ideas and would welcome input from those of you who provide direct service.

Q: Does a focus on career pathways further enforce the negative impacts of credentialing on the lowest skilled workers to get started in their career at a family sustaining wage?

Deaconess Foundation believes to address potential negative impacts, effective career pathway programs should be designed with a focus on equity, accessibility, and recognition of diverse learning experiences. It's essential to consider the unique needs and circumstances of individuals with lower skills, ensuring that pathways are inclusive and supportive.

Many partners (organizations) in greater Cleveland do an excellent job of supporting any individual in understanding their career interests and supporting their training (including providing the training for free or providing funds which pay for the training) such that they are able to enter a career pathway sector, if they want.

Q: How does Deaconess approach childcare workers, who often have an AA or BA degree, but not living wages?

This is a huge challenge. Because this workforce includes people who have degrees and is thus outside of the focus of our mission, we aren't going to take a leadership role. This challenge is one of a host of challenges which do impact our workforce or our region's talent but are outside of the core of what we do.

Luckily, there are experts in the childcare workforce in our region, including organizations such as Starting Point, Pre4CLE, and Invest in Children. These folks and others have put together an agenda to address this challenge and we continually consider how we can support their efforts.

Q: How are you thinking about degreed pathways in this strategy? E.g. Associates of Nursing

We are focused on supporting organizations which make people aware of careers that have pathways, which train people to enter those pathway careers, which provide the right wraparound services and other barrier removal supports, and which enable people to have

support they need as they initially move up the pathway. We currently count on employers to help individuals move even further up the pathway.

Q: Did the landscape analysis in strategic planning highlight or evaluate BIPOC workforce ecosystem/strategies? Were there gaps in the Black and/or Latine workforce infrastructure?

The landscape analysis was not an assessment of the scale and scope of workforce services in Northeast Ohio and how they were or weren't sufficient to meet the needs of our community.

The landscape analysis was focused on national labor trends and considerations, workforce trends nationally (including the trends at the Department of Labor), and the main workforce systems and program changes other regions are considering or implementing.

Q: How aligned or differentiated is this plan (elements) from the strategic priorities of other foundations in the workforce-centric space?

We believe we are aligned with the priorities for at least some foundations, because we work in collaboration with them on both systems-level initiatives, and on some programmatic work. We seek the part of the "Venn diagram" where our work and theirs overlap!

Q: Can you elaborate on the impact area (geography) Deaconess is focused on. Is it beyond Cuyahoga County, and if so, where else in NE Ohio?

We are very focused on supporting both job seekers and businesses – both supply and demand -- which are located in Cuyahoga County. While there might be an opportunity for an organization (which isn't located in Cuyahoga County) training people who live in Cuyahoga County, we'd also need to be clear on how those Cuyahoga County residents complete the program and then are connected effectively to Cuyahoga County employers.

Q: RE: living wage of \$25.50/hr. This equates to \$51,000 per year if someone is able to make \$25.50 and work full-time, 40 hours a week, 50 weeks a year. Is \$51,000 really the living wage we are focused on for a single parent with two children?

It is. We use the hourly wage of \$25.50 because employers pay people an hourly wage and it's measurable; that said, according to TeamNEO's data on the DF dashboard, people need to make at least \$50,000 in Cuyahoga County to sustainably support their family (depending on size of family, etc.) Initiatives we support not only need to help people be on the path to get to that wage (or higher) but also need to demonstrate that the employer base is strong and can offer full-time, 40-hour-week jobs consistently.

Q: How is this new strategic framework different from what you have been doing?

Three of the biggest differences from past work:

- 1) *Advocacy as a strategy.* Prioritizing this relationship building and education with public officials and their staffs is both relatively new and emerging as a larger and larger priority.
- 2) *Career pathways as a majority (but not the only) focus of our work.* In the past, we were 100% focused on career pathways. Now, at least 75% of our grantmaking support should enable individuals to enter career pathways. But that leaves up to 25% to support initiatives which aren't about individuals but still help our mission. One example would be High Road Kitchens, an initiative of One Fair Wage which teaches hospitality employers how to pay employees \$15 an hour PLUS tips (which does get, on average, workers up to \$25/hour in Cuyahoga County.)
- 3) *The commitment to secure ongoing feedback from our stakeholders* is also new.

Q: What “barriers” have you identified as your priority to address over your strategic plan?

We haven't prioritized barriers but we do use the Fund for our Economic Future's research, [“Where are the Workers”](#), from 2022, to help us understand some of the biggest: transportation and childcare, among others.

Q: How do you think about a barrier to employment – like a drug test – which still exists even as the law evolves? (And a related question: Any thoughts on eliminating barriers to employment in some sectors regardless of changes in state law – passing a drug test (Marijuana?))

First, we have an Advocacy strategy because we know how important it is to have conversations with public officials and policy makers about laws. We do define advocacy as being the education of public officials and their staff.

Second, we know there are other stakeholders --- such as employers – who are putting barriers into place for job seekers, even if they aren't required by law (which is the question above). We are currently considering what role we can play in influencing employers. There are a number of organizations and structures – such as a sector partnership – which have shown to be good vehicles for employers to learn and change as a group, but we aren't getting to enough employers that way. The effort is likely tied to working one-on-one with employers willing to change.

Q: Is Universal Basic Income a policy that DF has discussed advocating to enhance a low-income individual's career and workforce development?

Deaconess staff is familiar with Universal Basic Income (UBI). Our mission is to help those impacted by poverty build careers which sustain themselves and their families. We advocate for career pathways – not just a job – because our Foundation is focused on workforce development. At first blush, UBI is an adjacent policy to our core mission and thus wouldn't be a priority for our advocacy activities. We are open to better understanding the policy.

Q: Does 2024 have a priority strategy, particularly is strategy 2 which provides funding for workforce development service providers a top strategy?

While there is no priority strategy for 2024, we do allocate our time to each strategy based on our operating plan goals for the year. Of note: Strategy 5 (advancing racial equity through all our practices) is infused in everything we do.

In 2024, our two biggest strategies are Strategy 1 (commitment to systems change) and Strategy 2 (sustain or grow workforce services or barrier elimination for job seekers).

Q: Given changes in the stock market, many foundations are facing tighter budgets. How might the Deaconess Foundation grantmaking change (if at all) as a response to market forces?

Deaconess Foundation follows best practices, which is to identify its annual budget – which includes its grantmaking budget – based on a three-year average of stock market performance. And yes, unfortunately, the market was down significantly in 2022. This had implications to Deaconess' 2024 budget, and our grantmaking is down almost 15% this year vs. year ago.

The staff is taking many actions to try to allow as many funds to go into our grantmaking budget as possible – steps like moving out of our space to save on rent funding. (We will be mostly remotely working starting in March 2024, but you can reach us via our emails and cell phones as usual!)

The staff will do everything it can to support its partners while working to implement its strategic plan. In past years, we had some one-time grantmaking programs, and those are the first we eliminate when budgets go down. We hope our grant partners will continue to share learnings and needs with us, and we will do our best to continue to provide the financial resources which will help you achieve your goals.

Q: What are best practices and resources for engaging youth/high school to young adults college age in career prep?

I'm sure many service providers/non-profits/practitioners are better able to answer this than us, as they are the experts in these best practices. Engaging youth, high school students, and young adults in career preparation is crucial for helping them make informed decisions about their future. In Cleveland, CollegeNow of Greater Cleveland, Youth Opportunities Unlimited, the Urban League of greater Cleveland, Junior Achievement, and Towards Employment (among others) are engaging daily with high school youth and young adults, and they would know these best practices and resources.

Advocacy

Q: Would you speak more about the type of advocacy work you have done and what you are thinking it might look like next year?

In our advocacy work, we want to increase funding available for all the work you all do, or to reduce administrative barriers and improve the systems in which you are working.

Here are a couple of guiding principles for how we think about advocacy:

- 1) First, for us, this is not a grantmaking strategy. We will use all our other levers – communicating or educating, convening, leading and collaborating, but we are not likely to provide grants – at least not in 2024 – for others to do their advocacy work. This is principally because this is a new strategy for Deaconess, and we are going to learn a lot more about what it takes to be effective at advocacy this year.
- 2) Second, our primary priority in 2024 is developing or strengthening relationships with local and statewide public officials and staff. Having those relationships and being ready to provide education to public officials and staff about issues which affect you and all our constituents will be critical not just for this year but for years to come.

We know the number of things we could advocate for is endless. The closer to our mission an issue is, the more likely we'll spend significant time and be able to leverage our own knowledge.

Lastly, we recognize that so much of advocacy work is opportunistic. We've discussed that we are likely to get involved in topics we haven't planned as of today. We hope, as you have advocacy priorities, you reach out to us to think about how we can support your goals.

Q: Do you advocate for transportation barriers?

We understand that transportation barriers disproportionately impact low-income individuals and communities with limited access to public transportation or a vehicle, and that transportation is one of the largest barriers to successful work.

Our primary priority in 2024 is developing or strengthening relationships with local and statewide public officials and staff. Having those relationships and being ready to provide education to public officials and staff about issues which affect you and all our constituents will be critical not just for this year but for years to come.

Once we have the relationships, would we educate policy makers on this particular barrier? Potentially we would, but only in partnership with other people, as we know there are many people working full-time on advocacy issues related to transportation. We will consider how we can be additive and valuable to these efforts.

Q: Why did you exclude grantmaking from your advocacy strategy?

This is the first time we have an advocacy strategy, so we will learn as we go. Perhaps in the future we will be able to fund the advocacy work of other organizations, but our focus for right now is our own relationship building and education of policy makers and staff.

Data and Impact

Q: How does the Foundation feel about grantees falling short on outcomes/metrics vs. outlined in the proposal?

Generally, the Foundation understands that not all projects go exactly as planned, and unforeseen challenges may arise. Our response will be based on the nature of the project and the reasons for the shortfall. We encourage open and transparent communication between grantees and Danielle. If grantees encounter challenges or are falling short of expected outcomes, it is crucial for them to communicate early.

Deaconess views setbacks as opportunities for continuous learning and improvement. We appreciate when grantees demonstrate a commitment to understanding why outcomes fell short and implementing changes to address the issues. If desired, we'd be happy to help you brainstorm ways to overcome setbacks, particularly if you bring us in early in the learning.

Q: We are currently reviewing our data & evaluation processes within our dept. in order to provide more valuable information to our key stakeholders. As part of your strategic plan, do you expect any significant reporting changes for grantees? If so, do you have any data suggestions we should be capturing?

We don't expect significant reporting changes based on this strategic plan. We are balancing trying to keep data collection needs easy, while also gathering data of all kinds to inform our understanding of impact. Feel free to reach out to the VP of Grantmaking (Danielle) for a more detailed discussion.

Q: Do you have data collection software/systems to help that? We are new to data collection and currently most data lives in spreadsheets.

We don't have a recommended data collection software or a partner. We ourselves use spreadsheets as well, although I know this is laborious and there are better solutions. I think several non-profits use Salesforce to collect data while also managing clients, and some organizations need to use a Federal or state-required software.

For this question, I'd recommend asking others in the workforce field how they do this work and make it easier on staff than a spreadsheet. Reach out to Danielle or Cathy to get names of recommended people to ask.

Q: What is the biggest challenge in measuring an individual's growing career path once employed?

I am sure many service providers/non-profits/practitioners would be better able to answer than us! We would hypothesize that the biggest challenge is gathering information from individuals once employed, because they become part of an employer's record. Maintaining a relationship and gathering data to understand their paths is much harder.

Grant Applications and Reporting

Q: How will these new strategies be represented on your grant application? Will you be updating the grant application?

The short answer is Yes, we will be updating our grant application to reflect our strategies. The first step in this work was the strategic framework and rollout to grantees and the community. Subsequent work includes a revised grantmaking philosophy which can be reviewed under what we fund and policies and procedures.

We are working with recommendations made by the Greater Cleveland Funders Collaborative on how to best streamline our application, make it accessible to grantees and get quality disaggregated data from our grantees.

Q: Since you are requiring organizations which get grants to submit reports, how do you use the data you are collecting? (and a related question: How are you measuring the impact of your strategies?)

We take all the data on the metrics which are provided to us and we accumulate them. Knowing there is probably some overlap in data, we use it as a directional sense of the quantitative metrics our partners are having on our impact statements. We do measure these over time and as we make changes in our portfolio.

Grantmaking

Q: Do you encourage or allow a small group of non-profits (with one lead) to collaborate for one grant application?

Deaconess encourages collaborations among multiple nonprofits for a single grant application under the right conditions. Collaborative efforts among nonprofits can bring diverse perspectives, expertise, and resources to address complex issues more effectively. A small group of non-profits coming together to collaborate would:

- Leverage collective strengths: Collaborative proposals often allow nonprofits to leverage their collective strengths, skills, and resources to tackle a common issue more comprehensively.
- Enhance impact and sustainability: Collaboration can lead to a more significant and sustainable impact by creating a model at the beginning for the delivery of the service which is the most cost effective, right from the get-go. Furthermore, collaboration often allows for even more collaboration as program needs continue to be understood and evaluated by the team of partners.
- Resource efficiency: Collaborative projects can be more resource-efficient, as organizations can share costs, expertise, and infrastructure. This can be especially beneficial when addressing complex challenges that require diverse skills.
- Building community capacity: Collaboration can contribute to building the capacity of the nonprofit sector by promoting partnerships, knowledge sharing, and mutual support among organizations.

Q: Is DF more inclined to fund a comprehensive program created and initiated by multiple community stakeholders with a common vision, versus funding one organization with that comprehensive program?

There are benefits to the approach you outlined, including the opportunity for newer or smaller organizations, who haven't had the benefit of learning from larger organizations or through a collaboration, to participate. But we aren't more inclined to fund either model.

We do like the idea of organizations of any size collaborating with each other to leverage the skills of your teammates. If you want to talk more specifically about how to do this, please reach out to Danielle or Cathy.

Q: Have you considered, for orgs not led by people of color, requiring partnerships or sub-awards to Black/Latine orgs in grant agreements or project proposals? (and connected to project budgets)

We don't use requirements in our grants as the way to encourage any change, including the advancement of racial equity. There are a few different ways we encourage the type of change and outcome suggested by this idea:

- 1) We will meet with anyone who asks for a meeting. This enables us to understand organizations led by Black/Latine individuals in the workforce or workforce adjacent space, their unique value, and what types of partnerships they want.

- 2) We encourage all the non-profits with whom we work to partner with other non-profits as a critical and preferred method of delivering more (to more people, more services, or whatever “more” would mean.) We’d be happy to provide recommendations for individuals or organizations to encourage this partnership.
- 3) To this last point, we are also happy to introduce people to each other so these partnerships can be built between organizations based on strong understanding of each other’s value and appreciation of the value of a partnership.

Q: Can you provide another example of successful partnership between grantees?

A successful partnership between grantees is characterized by effective collaboration, shared goals, and the ability to achieve meaningful impact. Here are some examples of successful partnerships:

- Open Doors Academy students receive career services from Youth Opportunities Unlimited.
- Cleveland Neighborhood Progress partners with several local CDCs to build their capacity in workforce development services.
- The Greater Cleveland Career Consortium has a small staff but uses Youth Opportunities Unlimited to fill some of its needs (such as managing its financial operations) and uses several existing organizations to deliver services (such as CollegeNow Greater Cleveland, Junior Achievement, and the Urban League.)

Q: Can you provide us with the % or \$ for grants that will go to each strategy? (Do you have percentages allocated for funding per strategy?)

We don’t set a goal around the percentage or dollar amount to implement each strategy; we do have a goal representing the percentage of our time for each strategy in our annual Operating plan. As we’ve mentioned, Strategy 5 (advancing racial equity through all our practices) is infused with everything we do. Strategy 1 (commitment to systems change) takes about 50% of our time and Strategy 2 (sustain or grow workforce services or barrier elimination for job seekers) takes about 50% of Danielle’s time.

We have noticed in the past that these two strategies, 1 and 2, are together 80% or more of our grantmaking. I would expect this to stay the same in 2024, as our grantmaking budget has not grown compared to past years.

Q: Although you have shared the foundation funds work being done and having an impact in Cuyahoga County exclusively, does that also include where the potential grantee’s organization is physically located (if outside of Cuyahoga County)?

We are very focused on supporting both job seekers and businesses – both supply and demand -- which are located in Cuyahoga County. While there might be an opportunity for an organization (which isn’t located in Cuyahoga County) training people who live in Cuyahoga

County, we'd also need to be clear on how those Cuyahoga County residents complete the program and then are connected effectively to Cuyahoga County employers.

Q: What is your average grant size?

There are three types of grants we make. The most common grant we make is a programmatic grant. These are typically in the \$20 – 100K range. We also sometimes do general operating grants, but those are typically only for workforce organizations where workforce is their core and only mission, and those grants are typically larger than programmatic grants. And third, we sometimes will do capacity building grants to existing partners, and the size of those grants really depends on how we are implementing it that year.

Q: How are you supplementing grantees that receive public funds to connect adults to industry pathways? Public funds have historically been restrictive and cause more barriers for low-income families (e.g. TANF eligibility.)

Organizations know what funding needs they have, and we take our cue from the organizations themselves. Any organizations who wish to meet with Deaconess Foundation may indicate this is one of the needs they have for funding.

Q: Commitment to racial equity and focusing so heavily on existing partners seems to be in opposition. Those organizations are systemically excluded from access to philanthropy.

Thank you for this feedback. We have been actively seeking to fund organizations led by Black and Latine leaders for several years and will continue to do so. With ~25% of our grantees led by Black or Latine leaders, we have made progress.

We also very much appreciate how the foundation's "existing partners" have advanced racial equity in their work. They regularly tell us the work they are doing to diversify their teams and their boards, and we are seeing increases in people with lived experience or Black or Latine people in more senior leadership positions. We collect their disaggregated data and know many "existing partners" have very diverse workforces themselves, and very diverse client pools. We know about the training staff members receive to strengthen their cultural competency.

Q: I'd like to understand more about how you all feel about the intersection of "continuous improvement" and dealing with those most in need? It can be rewarding as well as challenging!!!

Supporting people impacted by poverty is certainly something many organizations in our community experience and bring expertise to every day. We appreciate both the reward and the challenge written in this question! When we use the phrase "continuous improvement", we are referring primarily to the way an organization does its own work, not how or what it expects of its clients. For example, we really appreciate when organizations:

- Allow their team members to discuss different career coaching tools, what they have learned from using them, and which ones have been the most effective or the most enjoyed by clients
- Look at their disaggregated data and consider what changes they might need to make in their own service model or what partnerships will help their clients
- Consider how to use technology differently so team members can work smarter, not harder

Q: Do you pay for search firms for leaders of non-profits?

Our capacity building strategy is to support capacity at our existing partners. For organizations which have very strong alignment with our mission, we would consider supporting a search. For organizations which have workforce programs but a broader mission, we are likely not to support a search firm for a new leader.