



# Commitments to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Deserve Smart Consulting

By Stephanie Clohesy, National Network of Consultants to Grantmakers

Stephanie Clohesy is the vice chair of NNCG's steering committee and CEO of Clohesy Consulting. To learn more about the National Network of Consultants to Grantmakers and the DEI Initiative, contact [lori.jane@nncg.org](mailto:lori.jane@nncg.org).

On February 1, 2018, the National Network of Consultants to Grantmakers (NNCG) launched a new initiative to sharpen the impact of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) work in grantmaking by increasing the capacity of consultants and grantmakers engaged in DEI efforts. NNCG believes that funding strategies and program commitments for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) deserve smart consulting to help funders and their grantee partners achieve impact.

As part of this initiative, NNCG is expanding its efforts to increase the number of consultants and grantmakers who have experience, skills and/or goals to advance diversity, equity and inclusion as core strategies in grantmaking. Beyond increasing the network of consultants, the initiative will build and support programs that intensify inclusion and make progress towards equity in our institutions and communities. The DEI Initiative will:

- Design reflective practice among consultants and clients so that learning – especially emergent changes in strategy and practices – are noticed, monitored and named. Currently NNCG is hosting a series of webinars exploring consulting practices in DEI consulting. (See [www.nncg.org](http://www.nncg.org) for the schedule of the Equity Webinar Series.)
- Provide training for consultants and grantmakers to improve their skills in analysis, program design, implementation and evaluation in terms of greater diversity and inclusion and measurable improvements in equity.
- Transform the NNCG membership into a Community of Practice through which DEI innovation and experimentation can be shared openly so that all can benefit from the transparency of success and failure.
- Advocate for consulting standards and agreements that recognize commitment to and expertise in DEI.

## First Steps: Documenting What We Know

NNCG's 174 members – consultants and funding partners – innovate daily to meet the needs and aspirations around DEI.

To help launch the initiative, case studies are being created from the experiences of NNCG members. The first case studies – freshly harvested from consulting files and reports – have already yielded valuable lessons for consultants and the grantmakers who want and need smart consulting on diversity, equity and inclusion.

NNCG researchers used a systematic protocol to debrief each consultant on a specific client project focused on using a DEI lens. The case studies created from these interviews show that wisdom and strong norms of practice are emerging in our sector. However, few practices are documented thoroughly or tangibly available to help consultants and funders to do their best work. The NNCG case studies are the first step toward creating consulting tools from the collective experience of members.

SECF members are the first to reap the benefit of NNCG's reflective learning based on these case studies of real experiences from its member funders and consultants. A few tips and insights are crystallizing as key to providing consulting or engaging consultants to help make DEI-related work smarter, better, stronger:

- Consultants should be prepared to help grantmakers define (or refine) the meaning of diversity, equity and inclusion. Don't use these terms with the board, staff, grantees or stakeholders without taking the time to define them. Smart consultants can offer starting definitions and a process for creating clear and useful definitions (even if they change somewhat along the way).

- Work together – consultants and grantmakers – on understanding where equity fits into the funders' values, vision, mission. How does it connect? How does it improve the vision, mission goals? How can the funder embed diversity and avoid a "stick-on" commitment?
- Make room in the process for all partners to understand that equity goes beyond "color" and "geography"; smart DEI consultants will be prepared to help their clients understand the complex intersectional identities and contexts inherent in DEI. Sometimes this includes a "DEI lens" review of current grant portfolios looking for hidden gems or problems.
- A good DEI consulting process helps to distinguish technical and complex dimensions of a diversity/equity/inclusion commitment. This analysis helps the funder to identify their passion for "upstream" or "downstream" interventions. In other words, is the funder interested more in root causes or services and relief?
- The consultant and the funder care about and create a scope of work that helps develop internal leadership skills among staff, board and key consulting teams as well as investing in grantee/community/issue leaders.
- Smart DEI consultants understand and honor emergent strategy and help the funder follow opportunities without overwhelming the size and scale of the funder's capacity. In DEI work, the starting point is usually a brief take-off point for quick and lively evolution of ideas and commitments.

Following these tips and insights for good consulting engagement could make a difference in your impact! Look for more insights, ideas and tools as NNCG's DEI Initiative takes off!

## What is NNCG?

NNCG is the only national network and database of consultants whose experience in philanthropy consulting has been vetted and documented. The network includes both consultant members as well as grantmaking partners who are driven by a belief in and passion for the value of consulting as a bridge between specialized knowledge and the quality of grantmaking where social change impact is highly desired.