

Learning Forward Foundation models equity commitment

BY DEB RADI, AMY COLTON, AND JANICE BRADLEY

The Learning Forward Foundation recognizes that fulfilling our vision and mission requires us to examine our policies, procedures, practices, and structures with an equity lens. As we shared in the April 2021 issue of *The Learning Professional*, the first step in this process is examining our values, beliefs, and biases. The next step is building a collective space for action, starting at our board table.

As learning leaders, it is our responsibility to create and model professional learning spaces that are open, authentic, trusting, and caring, where all voices will be listened to and heard. We strive to create opportunities for dialogue so we can unpack who we are and who we aspire to be in kinship with each other.

Educator Nel Noddings (2005) reminds us that caring for one another “does not mean that I will always approve of what the other wants, nor does it mean that I will never try to lead him or her to a better set of values, but I must take into account the feelings and desires that are actually there and respond as positively as my values and capacities allow” (p. 2).

As a board, we are intentionally creating a learning environment that nurtures and strengthens each and every person’s meaningful engagement and learning. We aim to cultivate equity of voice and expect all board members to do so as they attend meetings and retreats, engage in fundraising for scholarships and grants, and support grantees through touchpoint conversations.

We use three intentional strategies during virtual board meetings to ensure equity of voice.

First, the meeting facilitator restates



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each idea shared by participants after all ideas are on the table so that all ideas are equally considered. When doing so, the facilitator focuses on the ideas, not who is saying them or how the idea is communicated through body language and tone. For example, the facilitator might say, “We have three suggestions for allocating funds this year. First, wait until next year. Second, fund one project. Third, consider developing and funding a new project.”

Second, participants move into breakout rooms of three to four participants for a more intimate space to share one’s voice.

Third, the facilitator poses a question or discussion point and calls on each person one at a time to “play or pass” so that everyone has a chance to share their voice, thinking, and opinions.

Within this safe learning space, we believe we are well-positioned to take collective action to address the inequities of our policies, practices, and structures. We are working to develop consensus around a common definition of equity and a theory of action to influence our board operations, grants,

and scholarships.

In the process, we are ensuring that whatever we develop aligns with both Learning Forward’s equity statement and the equity standards in Learning Forward’s draft revised Standards for Professional Learning.

We hope that by following along with us on our journey, you will be inspired to act within your own learning spaces toward an equitable future for all.

REFERENCE

Noddings, N. (2005). Caring in education. *The encyclopedia of informal education*. www.infed.org/biblio/noddings_caring_in_education.htm

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