



## THE PROMISE OF THE BOSTON FOUNDATION

The Boston Foundation's strategic vision, *Our New Pathway*, centers on the remarkable power and provenance of its civic leadership role in greater Boston and beyond. Our defining ambition is to achieve equity, which is, first, to acknowledge and then, seek to eliminate the structural and underlying causes of outcome disparities for historically marginalized communities.

At The Boston Foundation, our equity work requires us to develop new pathways that repair and build. As we say below, repair means addressing the critical factors responsible for the continued production of racialized, economic and gender disparities and opportunity gaps. We acknowledge that repairing the threadbare social fabric in our society is one of the most pressing issues of our time. Build means to seek to erect new social and economic structures and policies that, in turn, create new habits of being that contribute to an equitable and just society.

The contours of our strategic vision conceive civic leadership as the path we take to achieving equity through our repair and build work – *Our New Pathway*.

### **Civic Leadership**

Civic leadership sits at the heart of the Boston Foundation. It knits together our role in the community as a whole. It is how we serve as a partner with the people and the institutions in Boston that seek to do good and make positive change — with our donors, and with the whole array of public, private and nonprofit actors who are crucial collaborators in Boston, and who toil to support and strengthen a more equitable place for our citizens to work, live and play. It is the defining expression of who we are and what we are called upon to do.

To know the Boston Foundation's civic leadership role is to know the history not only of Boston, but of America as well. While the foundation is authentically Bostonian, it is also deeply American, a proxy for the ideas and hopes for an unfolding and bright future of an increasingly diverse United States — the common enterprise of many divergent peoples and perspectives, acting together in shared interest.

Early in the 20th century, when TBF was founded, Boston was undergoing profound change, as immigrants were pouring into the city, crowding especially into its North End. Boston's port became not only a major staging area for shipbuilding and troop deployment, but for those new arrivals, many of whom were from Southern and Eastern Europe. At the same time, the Great Flu Epidemic of 1918 was killing nearly 200 Bostonians each day, challenging the city's resources and its ability to respond.

It was in this environment that the Boston Foundation's identity was forged. Over the past century the Foundation, as the permanent charity tied to our city and region, has evolved to meet the moment, and we must do so again, so that this moment becomes a movement. Movements can be sustained and strengthened when institutions, like the free press during the Abolitionist movement, the Black church during the Civil Rights movement, and the courts in our progress towards LGBTQ+ equality, are inspired to support movement leaders — with sustained and unflinching effort — on behalf of a common cause.

During the Great Depression and during and after World War II, the Boston Foundation focused on direct relief to the unemployed and those impacted by that war. It offered early funds for most of the city's neighborhood health centers and community development corporations, leaving an indelible mark on community health care and affordable housing. It also played a major role in important urban challenges such as the cleanup of the Boston Harbor, helping to transform it from one of the filthiest bodies of water in the world to one of the cleanest urban harbors in America. Over time, the Foundation evolved from an organization that was primarily focused on "call and response" tactics to a more strategic funder, focused on seeding innovation and catalyzing change.

Over the last two decades, the Boston Foundation has provided far more than philanthropic dollars; it has brought clarity and enabled solutions to some of the most vexing challenges facing us—challenges that are intensely local, but also resonant nationally. These are the distinctive attributes that made this institution — and all those who support it — such important actors during the most critical times we face in our city, our region, and our country.

Our civic leadership model is built on collecting data and commissioning research, convening conversations, and predominantly using that shared knowledge to create public policy strategies and build powerful coalitions that successfully advocate for legislative and systems change. These efforts are often in service to specific issues, such as workforce development, housing and education. While these are vital and crucial tools, they are essentially the tactics that bring the fullness of our civic leadership to life and enable it to flourish. The full embodiment of civic leadership means seizing the moment, choosing to be innovative, daring and bold as we seek, in the words of Langston Hughes, to “let America be America again—the land that never has been yet—and yet must be...”

In Boston, despite its best efforts and decades of spectacular growth and prosperity, our City on the Hill continues to be a tale of two cities: one prosperous and well off, the other struggling to make ends meet in one of the nation’s most expensive and economically unequal cities. The triple pandemics of Covid-19, economic disruption and racial injustice have only thrown these inequities into sharper relief. And while the last several months have been extraordinarily challenging for so many, they also provide the Boston Foundation with an opportunity once again to help write a new chapter for the city of Boston and its current and future residents. The Foundation now has an opportunity to rethink and reimagine its role and help reshape Boston for years — if not decades— to come.

Today’s challenges are both longstanding and brand new. Responding to them, while creating new solutions full of promise and possibility, will be at the heart of the work of the Foundation at this critical juncture. We will need extraordinarily strong, committed and collaborative leadership in our public, private, nonprofit and civic sectors not only to close the gaps, but to build anew with resolve and purpose. Clearly, the Boston

Foundation needs to be – must be – at the forefront of that charge.

But to be able to embrace this momentous opportunity and continue to write the history that our city demands and that the Boston Foundation has so often done throughout its more than 100-year lifespan, the institution is in need of a serious refresh — a thoroughgoing rethinking of its internal structures and a bold reinvigoration of its civic leadership platform — a new platform, our new pathway that will show the way forward with hope, renewal and belonging.

Civic leadership requires focus, energy, and a commitment to persist in the face of obstacles — both internal and external — with an unwavering belief in the potential of the Boston Foundation and the people that it serves. This belief is not rooted in arrogance or privilege — though an acknowledgment of the privilege that forms the base of our resources and conviction is necessary — but in a deep commitment to the fact that we are a permanent institution with the sole purpose of making Boston and the region more just and equitable. As the Jewish tradition of tikkun olam suggests: to mend and perfect the world.

While the Foundation is called to boldly assert itself once again in the leadership of the city and the region, it also must do so in a collaborative, racially and gender-focused way to help this great city recover, rebuild, reimage and newly claim its place as a truly diverse, inclusive and equitable home for all. And we must lead not only with generosity, but with humility and genuine empathy, recognizing that we cannot do any of our good work alone, but must do it in collaboration and partnership with those we serve. We accept this challenge with the ‘fierce urgency of now,’ as Dr. Martin Luther King once remarked, in a city whose racial demographics have changed dramatically in the last twenty years but who is now witnessing a significant exodus of many of its Black and brown citizens — many of them long time Boston residents, relocating to less expensive cities nearby.

And as we accept these challenges, we will — to paraphrase the great urban architect Daniel Burnham — make no small plans because they have no magic to inspire and stir the imagination and soul, and probably themselves cannot be realized. We will make big plans, aiming high in hope and in work. That is the promise that the Boston Foundation now makes, without arrogance, in full partnership with our community.

Three guiding concepts form the core on which the Boston Foundation will focus as we seek to drive the conversation, apply our resources and take action – Repairing, Building, and seeking Equity. While civic leadership represents the platform on which our strategy rests, Repair and Build to achieve Equity will guide the direction of our work, our grantmaking, and our partnerships with the public and private sectors, as well as our donors and colleague funders.

## **Equity**

As we work to repair and build, we must do so with the concept of equity at the core. While the term “equity” has been increasingly used since the May 2020 murder of George Floyd and the ensuing public exposure of the systemic racial disparities that have long plagued our country, it is not commonly understood. For some – perhaps for many – it is mistakenly used as a substitute for or the equivalent of the concept of “equality.”

Equality and equity are related, but they are very different concepts. Simply put, the former refers to “equal inputs;” the latter refers to “equal outputs.”

The distinction between equality and equity is significant. For instance, when debating or discussing public K–12 school funding, equality would mean ensuring that all schools have equal resources per pupil. On the other hand, advocating for equity would mean recognizing that some schools – like those serving students in low-income communities of color – will perforce require more resources if our aim is to reduce or even eliminate educational disparities.

Racial inequities are systemic; they have an accumulated history and have impacted many cultures, races, and groups. And because these inequities are structural, commonplace and forged over decades – even centuries – it will require patience, generosity and time to disassemble them. Much of the focus of the Boston Foundation going forward will be focused on that work.

At the Boston Foundation, we say that equity means that the structural and underlying causes of outcome disparities are eliminated for historically marginalized communities. Our work has an explicit, but not exclusive, focus on racism as a root cause of inequities

that intersect with other class, economic, gender and ethnic forms of injustice. In doing so, we recognize that this effort is not a zero-sum game, for all of us are uplifted in an equitable and just society.

We recognize that many people and groups suffer from these inequities — Black, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islanders, Indigenous, LGBTQA+, immigrants, migrant workers, and low-income and underserved communities. We also recognize the many forms of religious intolerance and hate, such as anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, which seek to deny certain groups their common humanity. We recognize slavery as a central national narrative and its persistent and deleterious impact on Black Americans, who have spent more time in slavery than they have as emancipated people.

If we are to move to repair the wounds of the past and seek to achieve equity and a more just society — we must redouble the civic leadership role that the Boston Foundation has undertaken and is now called upon to reactivate as it continues to work as its best and most idealized self.

In doing so, we will need the full-throated support and participation of our staff, our board, our donors, and our broad networks of partners. Most especially, we will make an honest appraisal of our own work — now and into the future — as we reach out to other funders, non-profits, businesses and policymakers to work together to imagine, develop and implement the big ideas that will turn the tide of human want into a sea of joy and light. The Boston Foundation is being called to meet historic challenges and make historic progress. The times challenge us to accept the call — with a sense of urgency and with humility, and in partnership with others — to help make a new period in history.

Nothing less than that will do.

## **Repair**

Repairing the threadbare social fabric in our society is one of the most pressing issues of our time. But this is not a new problem. Throughout the centuries, our country's inability effectively to confront its racial history and our city's well-known history of underlying racial inequity issues have prevented the generational benefits that previous public policy

and social change solutions — such as Roosevelt’s New Deal program or the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s — intended them to have.

Repair means truly and doggedly addressing the critical factors responsible for the continued production of racialized, economic and gender disparities and widening opportunity gaps in vital areas, from education, to health care, to business, and more. Today, we realize that if we do not address the underlying issues preventing us from achieving equity with an inclusive approach, the economic and social divisions that drove the civil unrest following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 will only worsen.

As a redress system for injustices, repair is not a new concept in our country. Through reparations, indigenous people have received funds and benefits for being exiled from native land. Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II received \$1.5 billion in restitution. But true repair moves beyond policy solutions and payments and brings with it deep understanding. True repair work is a process of responding to the damage of racism. It is an approach that can address racial trauma and injustice, while simultaneously initiating healing, mending relationships, building community, transforming institutions, and offering justice. It is very much about a broader discourse. As scholars have noted, responding to racial trauma and injustice requires critical reflection that can be blocked by fear, trauma, denial and/or blame. Repair is about restorative justice and asks us to see the harm, work to understand it, and find a way to redress it from a shared place.

In his historic Letter from the Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “In a real sense, all life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be... This is the interrelated structure of reality.”

Repair is the process by which we recognize and acknowledge the interrelatedness of our nation’s history of racial, gender and economic inequities and disparities in order to build anew.

## **Build**

As we have so profoundly experienced over the last 18 months with the convergence of the health, racial and economic pandemics, this point in time and the historic opportunity that it presents requires the Boston Foundation to build new pathways to our shared future. We understand ever so clearly now that decades after the end of de jure segregation and the passage of national civil rights legislation, Blacks and other historically marginalized citizens and residents continue to experience the gravely unjust historical legacies of slavery, racism, hate and structural inequality.

Across most dimensions of our society, the equity landscape continues to be grim. Social justice progress has been slowed by the failure to embody civil rights laws. Our country's inability to truly confront criminal justice reform continues to exacerbate racial inequality, while the aggregate income and wealth disparities between whites and Blacks continue to grow.

We must repair the damage that has been done, but that alone is not enough. As we move forward, the Boston Foundation must also use its resources to nourish new ideas and create and grow enterprises that confront that reality and contribute to the common good. We must consistently support ways to evolve our knowledge and understanding of racism and racist structures that will then allow us to imagine, develop and implement the best policies and programmatic solutions to do away with them. We must engage the arts to socialize and inspire all of us in that effort, for the arts tap into universal human emotions and aspirations that can unite people of divergent backgrounds and beliefs as they elevate the mind, connect us to life's enduring themes, and humanize the landscape of historical events. We must support a culture of learning that includes rigorously evaluating our current strategies so that we know what is working and what is not. And we must engage and expect partner funders, community leaders and donors to truly reflect on their roles in this work and actively support a deeper analysis of ways that we can all better contribute.

As the Boston Foundation charts its course through the coming decades, we commit to approaching our work with humility, hope and intentional collaboration, as well as an acknowledgment of the missteps and unintentional harm that it may have caused so that



we might ensure that new structures, programs and policies are built in league with the community, not simply for the community.

Ours is a bold agenda. But it provides increased and substantive focus and clarity on the issues we face and the efforts of the Boston Foundation to respond to them. As we join together in this work, we will be buoyed once again by the exhortation for Boston to be a beacon of hope and inspiration for others to follow.