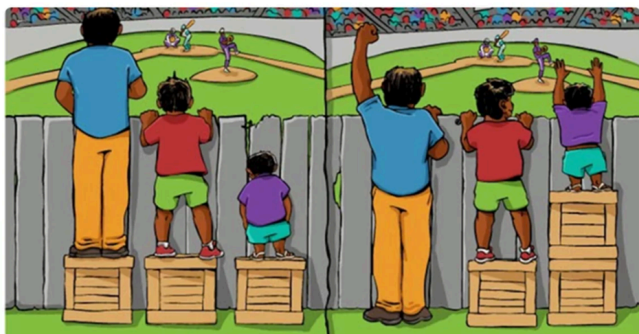




Equity and equality are often used interchangeably, but equality refers to treating everyone the same and offering the same tools and opportunities to all, whereas equity makes adjustments to achieve equitable outcomes by addressing specific barriers. The image below provides a useful example of the difference – equality on the left gives everyone the same thing (the same box to stand on), while equity on the right gives people what they need to achieve an equitable outcome (in this case, seeing the game over the fence)<sup>2</sup>. Equity is about rebalancing towards fairness.



**Equality assumes that everybody is operating at the same starting point and will face the same circumstances and challenges. Equity recognizes the shortcomings of this “one-size-fits-all” approach and understands that different levels of support must be provided to achieve fairness in outcomes (Annie E Casey Foundation 2023).**

Lack of equity in philanthropic practice shows up in a range of ways:

- Funder processes only work for some people and groups, e.g. those proficient in the English language, with writing, with using technology, with Pākeha or Western thinking and processes.
- Funding keeps going to the same kinds of groups, for the same kinds of things, despite strategy being broad or targeted to specific groups.
- Funding levels are low or not proportional to those most marginalised in our society.
- Community feedback is clear about access barriers to funding, yet little changes fundamentally in funding systems, other than on the edges. Or, we don't meaningfully connect with those who aren't coming to us that we want to fund, to see how we can change to meet their aspirations.

<sup>2</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation 2023, [What's the Difference Between Equity and Equality?](#)

- Deficit-based language that identifies some in our communities as ‘high needs’ or ‘hard to reach’, rather than as priority communities for which we as funders need to change, in order to support.

### **Being more intentional and strategic about increasing equity invites funders to explore these kinds of issues:**

#### **1. Unpack what ‘equity’ means for you**

Seeing how equity currently shows up in your strategy, clarifying your intentions around equity, and ensuring they are shared is step one. In Aotearoa New Zealand, this includes your role in upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a foundation for equity in this country. Dunedin Community Builders identifies these key themes for funders to focus on equity:

- Te Tiriti o Waitangi should be embedded in funding strategies and practices.
- Strong relationships with mana whenua and diverse communities are essential.
- Funding systems must prioritise equity, accessibility, and community involvement in decision-making processes.

How transparent is your strategy on what equity means for you? How clear are you to your communities, and how might you be clearer? People will invariably hold different views and assumptions about what equity means and looks like, depending on their worldview and life experiences, and these will need to be navigated skilfully.

#### **2. Clarify your intent regarding equity**

What are you specifically wanting to achieve in relation to equity? Is it mindset and cultural shifts, changing baked-in structural or system failures that recycle inequity, responding to immediate needs (the symptoms of inequity), or elements of equity affecting a particular group, such as policy that disenfranchises disabled people? Or are you wanting to listen deeply to what your communities are telling you they want in relation to equity and to consciously back those things?

#### **3. Look at your current funding picture**

What do the numbers tell you? Who is benefitting from your funding and non-funding support and who is not? How does that align with your strategic intentions and priorities? How might you better align these two pictures?

#### 4. Centre the voices of those you want to support

What are the communities you most want to support telling you about blocks you may be putting in the way of funding access and an equitable approach in your own processes? Co-design your application and reporting processes with your priority communities. Make sure you are not excluding or disempowering the very groups and communities you most want to uplift.

#### 5. Consider your scope of influence, including non-funding levers

Funders typically hold more power to further equity than they realise. Funders have the power to convene and to use their own influence, connections, and networks to advocate and enable collective approaches. They also have investment portfolio, procurement and recruitment levers. What non-funding levers can you utilise more deliberately, in service of equity?

#### 6. Hold yourself to account

Once your strategic and practice intentions towards equity are more transparent, how can you track and learn about the impact towards equity you are enabling? What would indicators of progress look like for your communities and for your practice?

#### Further resources

- See [here](#) for guidance from Dunedin Community Builders as to what a funding sector focused on equity might look like (shared by Inspiring Communities).
- See [here](#) for a 2023 Productivity Commission report called A Fair Chance for All, on how to break cycles of persistent disadvantage in New Zealand.
- See [here](#) for five practices to advance equity from the San Francisco Foundation.
- See [here](#) for a 2024 blog on equitable grantmaking practices from Exponent Philanthropy.

