

# Resilient Social Sector Design Process

Highlights of Stakeholder Engagement



RESILIENT  
SOCIAL SECTOR

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## Introduction

The overarching goal of the Resilient Social Sector (RSS) portfolio design process was to define a framework that maximizes Meyer's ability to contribute to building a resilient social sector in Oregon. A critical piece of the design was a credible statewide stakeholder engagement process to ensure the RSS framework and strategy was community informed and relevant.

Meyer's RSS stakeholder engagement strategy and process was supported by ten key external advisors and included the following: one-on-one interviews with 17 key stakeholders, a survey with 535 respondents from across the state and a dozen focus groups around the state attended by 120 nonprofit leaders. Given Meyer is defining a Resilient Social Sector to encompass a wide range of focus areas from arts and cultures, civic engagement, social safety nets, health and safety systems, and other key social aspects of community, the themes heard are broad and directional.

## Overarching Stakeholder Themes

Stakeholders were asked via survey, interview and face-to-face meetings a range of questions – such as “what are Oregon's greatest needs in building a resilient social sector,” “what is Meyer's role in addressing those needs,” “what types of investments are most important,” and “what criteria should Meyer Trust use in determining where the money is directed?” In addition, we asked several questions about equity, as it is foundational to Meyer.

Along with these themes there were many thoughts, ideas and suggestions for Meyer to consider in program implementation.

We heard ten high-level themes consistently throughout the stakeholder engagement process. This list is ordered from larger concepts and roles to particular funding ideas.

### **1. Define Resilient Social Sector**

The name for this portfolio area was confusing for most people. All wanted to know what it meant and encompassed. Most wondered if it was a catch-all for everything not included in the other three portfolio areas. Some felt 'resilient' was the right word; others felt it wasn't quite aligned with what it 'should' mean. While others felt 'social sector' as part of the name indicated 'handouts' and was too similar to social services. A few mentioned the word 'sector' as a word that separates rather than brings together, that it wasn't inclusive enough, and that it was too clinical.

Art stakeholders who attended the listening sessions assumed the term “social sector” did not include the arts. Many felt arts and cultures are integral parts of building diverse and resilient communities as well as a key avenue to providing young people from all backgrounds a place to dream about what is possible.

All said no matter what Meyer decides to call this portfolio area – Meyer define it clearly and succinctly.

In addition, participants in listening sessions were asked “what makes a resilient organization?” We heard the following responses.

Resilient organizations have:

- A clear purpose and deep connection to its constituents;
- Strong leadership at the board, executive director and staff level;
- Strong capacity to accomplish its mission/goals and deliver high quality services;
- Strong organizational structures and structural sustainability in terms of infrastructure /policies/organizational roles and functions;
- Sustainable business processes;
- Strong planning skills and processes, both strategic and business planning;
- Highly capable staff;
- Financial sustainability. A strong funding portfolio. Financially healthy (which does not necessarily mean a lot of money) with diversified funding streams;
- Nimbleness and adaptability;
- Collaborative nature and skills; and
- Ability to know when to exit a program or area, to have an exit strategy that works and a track record of being able to do so.

## **2. Lead + Influence**

Meyer is seen as a leader in Oregon among funders and at a statewide level around key issues that matter to Oregonians (e.g. education, equity, etc.). Stakeholders want Meyer to continue its good work as well as facilitate the difficult things that need to happen to make Oregon better.

Meyer is seen as a key influencer and stakeholders want Meyer to continue to influence what needs to change at the social sector level. Additionally, they want Meyer to recognize that ‘in all that they do, they influence’ and that a responsibility comes with that. Meyer is seen as an organization that learns, adapts and changes and shares what it is learning. Strong requests were made for Meyer to continue to be transparent and keep sharing what it is learning along the way so all can raise their game.

It was also recognized, because of Meyer's interactions with so many nonprofits, Meyer Trust could lead and influence by acting as a resource and sharing the best practices garnered in their interactions with nonprofits.

Staff were recognized for their knowledge and understanding of nonprofits and the Oregon landscape, and appreciated for their helpful and caring approach to grantees. Continue to be innovative and bold and support the innovation of others.

### **3. Advocacy + Systems Change**

It was acknowledged that there is a "dysfunction" of the social sector in Oregon, with so many key pieces of the social system struggling to achieve their missions. Because of this, stakeholders recognized the importance of Meyer funding advocacy and policy work to bring about change and support the development of organizations to do this work.

Stakeholders also felt there was a place for Meyer to use its influence at the systems level to bring about change. Most mentioned was the convening power around issues both within sectors and across sectors. Stakeholders said they wanted Meyer to "be innovative and bold" in helping to bring about change in Oregon.

### **4. Collaborating + Convening**

There was a strong theme around supporting collaboration as a solution to leverage change, address issues, and accomplish more. Many non-urban listening sessions saw collaboration at the community level as integral to building resilient communities and being able to do more together with limited resources.

Stakeholders recognized Meyer as both a funding support to collaborative efforts and a convener in the process. From focused collaboration on a project, to communities of practice on a subject, to regional cohorts, there were many good ideas on a programmatic level that will be shared and discussed with Meyer staff.

There was a strong call out for more convening across sector to address issues as something that would add value in building more resilient communities. This theme came with a number of innovative ideas for how to collaborate and who to collaborate with.

### **5. Equity as a Central Tenet**

There is a wide range of understanding regarding what equity means and a request to define what Meyer means when it uses the term. Through all the conversations and survey data the following themes emerged:

- There was general support for Meyer prioritizing populations and communities that have historically been marginalized, though this meant different things to different people. Some felt Meyer should explicitly focus on race, others encouraged a broader lens. In addition, some felt culturally specific organizations should specifically be prioritized for funding, others felt culturally responsive organizations are also needed and play an important role in addressing equity and opportunity.
- Many felt equity work needs to be done at the ground level in organizations as well as at the systems level to bring about change, encouraging Meyer to support both.
- Education is needed for nonprofits to understand what equity is and how it can be integrated into organizations and communities.
- Many stakeholders talked about the value of learning from each other in the process, wondering if Meyer Trust can convene around this and share the learnings more broadly.
- Most stakeholders emphasized and wanted Meyer to understand that equity is a journey and they will need help in getting there. There was a general agreement that one training wasn't going to bring about the change that is needed.
- Two consistent areas of need in nonprofits were at the staff and board level, including:
  - Hiring – finding diverse candidates and running an inclusive hiring process
  - Development and education on issues of equity for staff
  - Understanding and implementing needed internal policy changes
  - Leadership development focused on equity for executive directors and boards
- The final theme on equity was recognizing Meyer's great work in this area, how important it is to nonprofits and the state, and a call of support for Meyer to continue to be innovative and bold in its approach to equity.

## 6. Rural Matters

The stakeholder engagement process involved good representation from rural Oregon in both the survey and all of the face-to-face conversations. We consistently heard about the issues facing those in rural areas and the need to understand their needs as slightly different in some ways than urban Oregon.

The themes of rural needs revolved around the smaller pool of funders and funding opportunities in frontier and rural communities; how smaller grants go farther in rural areas; and due to the geographic challenges rural areas face with populations being so spread out, access to transportation and community places and spaces carry a greater importance. This translates to stakeholder themes around a greater need for small grants and capital funding and that these kinds of funding could add value in a bigger way in rural areas.

There was a loud call for help in building the capacity of organizations and providing technical assistance for rural nonprofits. Support for convening and gathering together of organizations, where all can learn from each other and look at how to best leverage resources, was seen as beneficial. Meyer could consider community or regional collaboratives, and partnering with other

fundors or nonprofit providers to ensure funding and support is given proportionally across the state. Communities want Meyer to be transparent with its rural strategy or approach.

Two other rural themes were a desire to have geographic equity in Meyer's funding distribution and when using providers for capacity building, technical assistance and leadership development, a desire to use local or regional talent. Sending non-local people into small communities to deliver training is not seen as a long-term support strategy for that community. Meyer could also consider increasing rural communities' capacity to engage remotely.

## **7. Capacity Building (including technical assistance) + Leadership Development**

Consistent across most types of stakeholder engagement, nonprofits want, and feel they need, help to build the capacity of nonprofits in Oregon if Meyer is serious about building a resilient social sector. Leadership development is a big factor in building capacity as well and many talked of the need for the development of their existing leaders and those in the pipeline. Capacity building was a strong theme with many examples of different kinds of needs from computer systems support and marketing help, to finance training. There was a sub-theme around Meyer partnering/supporting existing providers and in rural Oregon building the capacity of local providers as much as possible.

## **8. Fund Core Support + Innovative, Bold Ideas**

A theme from nonprofits was that funders needed to fund the "good work being done," not just new projects. The majority of those who were asked what Meyer should keep doing, responded: provide core funding support to nonprofits. "Organizations just need to be able to do their good work" and not struggle so much for direct funding. Stakeholders felt Meyer should support both current good core work and new innovative and bold ideas.

## **9. Multi-year Funding**

Multi-year funding and longer-term funding was another strong theme. Stakeholders urged Meyer to fund over multiple years to allow the programmatic work of the nonprofit to be focused on, rather than spend time writing proposals for more grants each year. In addition, stakeholders wanted to recognize and have Meyer understand that change happens over time and funding in the short term doesn't necessarily support change happening long term.

## **10. Capital Projects**

There were concerns that Meyer might no longer fund capital projects. Capital project funding seemed especially a desire for rural, given their lack of deep funding pools and often limited ability to fund from community members and businesses to support community needs. Stakeholders wondered whether Meyer could consider supporting capital funding in instances if special considerations merit it.