

American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation

The Building Blocks of Trust

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The American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation has spent a lot of time over the last year talking to community partners and learning about their challenges, innovation, and outright determination in weathering the pandemic.

This listening did not happen by accident and was set in motion in late 2019, as we began to assess our role in philanthropy and the communities we serve.

The question was simple and open-ended.

“How can we be better community partners?”

As expected, funding and other resources were highly sought after; however, it was also clear that our partners wanted and needed more from us and philanthropy as a whole. Throughout our conversations, we continuously heard themes of **trust, agility, innovation,** and **humility** in their aspirations. As we reflected on this feedback, we realized we had work to do in our supporting actions as a corporate funder.

We used this as a catalyst to change the way we show up for our community partners and committed to implementing [trust-based principles](#). The journey to get here has most certainly included mistakes and the need to set aside our own notions of how we best serve but also very necessary to begin disrupting the inherent power imbalances of philanthropy.

By leaning in and trusting those closest to the work, our approach does not require us to be experts in grantmaking or philanthropy but to only actively listen, offer support when

we can, and create a collaborative space for partners to grow, fail, and learn. We are inspired by our peers who jumped in headfirst and by champions who are bridging the gap between our collective past and future.

We're still in the early stages of this journey, and we realize it's one that not all funders will feel compelled to embrace. As you consider if a commitment to trust-based philanthropy is right for your organization, we encourage you to start somewhere, even if small. Find the first building block of trust with your community partners. We also encourage you to reach out if you want to hear more about our journey and why we feel so strongly about using our collective power to improve the dynamics in philanthropy.