

THE
Americana
FOUNDATION

Roadmap for Impact

Adopted by the Board of Trustees December 1, 2023



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Background

For more than 50 years, The Americana Foundation (Americana) has been a reliable and important funder of the preservation of early American furniture and stories as well as Michigan food systems and natural resources. This work has been steeped in the vision and interests of its founders, Adolph and Ginger Meyer, and stewarded by a long-serving, dedicated Board of Trustees (Board).

From preserving Tollgate Farm, the only remaining agriculture property within the City of Novi, to seeding the careers of agriculture professionals via scholarships to EARTH University in Costa Rica, Americana's impact has been felt far and wide. Americana's success has generated additional opportunities: the first quarter of 2023 saw a 50% increase in concept letters to the foundation compared to the previous three years, with requests for funding considerably outpacing Americana's capacity to invest.

Recognizing this trajectory is likely to continue, the Board engaged in an impact planning process to:

- Coalesce around a set of values both to guide Americana's decisions and behaviors, and to enable potential grantees to test for alignment before making an informed decision to apply for funding; and
- Identify key funding priorities to optimize Americana's impact in the existing program areas of American Heritage, Agriculture, and Natural Resources.

These elements, in combination, become Americana's Roadmap for Impact over the next four years.

Process Undertaken

In December 2022, Americana contracted with Brittany Galisdorfer of [Bridgeport Consulting](#). Skilled in the design and delivery of participatory strategic planning processes, Ms. Galisdorfer launched the project by conducting individual interviews with each member of the Board. The purpose of these conversations was to identify the topics related to the Board's desired impact that required further discussion.

Key takeaways from those conversations were:

1. To fulfill their responsibilities as Board members requires contemporizing Americana's mission to ensure continued impact in the evolving world,
2. To contemporize and serve communities well requires a more diverse Board - in terms of race, gender, and age, and
3. Americana can have the greatest impact by funding work that supports those who have traditionally been underserved relative to Americana's program areas.

In March and April 2023, Ms. Galisdorfer conducted interviews with forty (40) current, former, and prospective grantees, representing a balanced cross-section of program areas. A three-question survey link was provided to those who were not able to participate in an interview. The questions asked were designed to uncover Americana's strengths and opportunities, trends that should inform the organization's future direction, and additional context about Americana's program areas. Members of The Americana Foundation NextGen group, which comprises the founders' great grandchildren, and a former Board member also generously added their perspectives via a focus group and interview, respectively, in spring 2023.

Americana was consistently lauded for its thoughtful, respected, mission-oriented approach and for its program areas that have evolved to meet the challenges of the rapidly changing world. Interviewees reported that Americana's grantmaking processes reflect thoughtfulness and care. These strengths are enabled and amplified by the organization's devoted Board, and accessible and knowledgeable Executive Director.

Americana is perceived as being deeply committed to the founders' vision. Many of the geographic areas in which Americana has invested (e.g., the Upper Peninsula, Northeast Michigan, Lansing, etc.) see little philanthropic funding otherwise, underscoring the importance of Americana's investment in those regions.

The Board met in each February, March, and May 2023 to reflect on the themes that arose from the various conversations, to confirm that the mission continues to reflect the purpose of the organization, to articulate a set of values that reflects both the organization today and into the future, and to clarify the organization's program area priorities. The outcomes of these deliberations follow.

Guiding Statements

Mission

The Americana Foundation supports the sustainable development of agriculture and community food systems, the protection of natural resources, and an inclusive narrative of early American art and history.

Values

<i>Impactful</i>	We invest to positively impact people’s lives, especially where scarce other funding options are available.
<i>Respectful</i>	We support the work of organizations that design and implement programs, projects, and initiatives in partnership with those they seek to benefit.
<i>Collaborative</i>	We understand that problems are interconnected and complex. We invest time and effort to cultivate the trusting relationships needed for effective solutions.
<i>Equitable</i>	We prioritize work that positively impacts people who have been traditionally disadvantaged, marginalized, or underrepresented, especially people of color, Indigenous people, and women.
<i>Adaptive</i>	We learn and evolve with experience and as circumstances change - and expect the same from our grantees - recognizing that change takes time and innovation risks failure.
<i>Climate-conscious</i>	We consider climate impacts when making organizational decisions regarding grants, investments, and operations.

Strategic Initiatives

In reflecting on the perspectives shared via the interviews and focus group conducted in spring 2023, the following five strategic priorities were developed to optimize Americana's impact while better aligning its funding and leadership with its values over the next four years.

I. Align Program Scopes

Americana's purpose in awarding grants is to support projects and organizations that positively impact people's lives by creating systematic and/or structural changes that align with Americana's values and program areas. All things being equal, projects and organizations that have the most potential for improving people's lives will receive funding. Americana will make the following clarifications to optimize impact and align its program areas with its values.

- The **American Heritage** program area will focus on projects and programs across the U.S. that seek to broaden the inclusivity of early American art and historical narratives to "tell the full story" of the American experience. The goal is for all people to see themselves in American art and historical narratives interpreted by and represented in museums and other cultural institutions. The program area will prioritize elevating those whose perspectives have been traditionally underrepresented, especially people of color, Indigenous people, and women. Furniture acquisitions and building restorations will not be a priority. Nonprofit organizations from anywhere in the U.S. will be eligible to apply.
- The **Agriculture** program area will focus on transforming food systems in Michigan to focus on growers, processors, and distributors and to provide healthy and culturally appropriate food through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. The goal is for all Michiganders - rural and urban - to be connected to a sustainable local food economy. The program area seeks to benefit those who traditionally have lacked power over and resources to access healthy, regionally produced food. Nonprofit organizations located in Michigan will be eligible to apply.
- The **Natural Resources** program area will focus on projects and programs in Michigan that protect or address significant threats to Great Lakes water quality. We will prioritize efforts and organizations receiving relatively few resources and attention and will seek to benefit communities that are most likely to experience disproportionate harm. We recognize that this is an emerging focus area for us and will listen carefully for emerging needs and evolving opportunities. Nonprofit organizations doing work that impacts Michigan will be eligible to apply.

II. Invest in Multi-Year Grants

Grants of \$20,000 - \$50,000 are particularly effective to test strategies, to initiate new programs, and/or for small or young organizations. Foundation grants can be used to unlock additional funding - signaling confidence to other funders, and/or providing matching or upfront monies, particularly with state and federal grants.

Generally speaking, however, one year is not enough time to make or measure impact. Problems are increasingly complex and require the development of relationships in a way that makes multi-year grants ever more important. Meaningful impact is more likely to be achieved by giving to fewer organizations for multiple years than by giving to many organizations each for one year. It may be more impactful for grantees to grow, sustain, or adapt proven programs that a community has come to rely on, rather than to create a new program.

To allow organizations flexibility to assemble disparate funding streams and maximize program effectiveness, Americana will embrace multi-year grants and will work within the limits of its grant-making budget to fund proposals in full. Americana will also continue its practice of welcoming and encouraging conversations with prospective grantees to help shape applications.

III. Refine the Grant Funding Application

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are expected and necessary organizational and programmatic guiding principles. Americana can live this value by directly funding organizations composed of and/or led by impacted people, and by allowing for subgrants, stipends, and/or honoraria to compensate individuals not affiliated with a grantee organization when they contribute to impactful work. Grantees can live this value by partnering with those they seek to serve to develop and implement programming. Americana will refine its grant application to collect information that leads to better understanding of potential grantee partners and their proposed projects to ensure they are working with communities, not for them.

IV. Strengthen the Board of Trustees

The Americana Board of Trustees is composed of seven Trustees. There are currently six Trustees and one open seat. Over the next year, two long-time Board members are expected to retire. Three new Board seats offer tremendous opportunity to align Board expertise with emerging areas of opportunity for Americana and to welcome diversity into the Board in terms of race, gender, and age. Terms will be introduced to provide for ongoing diversity.

V. Update Communications Collateral to Reflect Americana Today

One of the galvanizing reasons for this project was to provide clarity to those outside of the organization about the types of grant applications that are most likely to be successful. Interviewees reinforced the need for this, repeatedly stressing that greater specificity in terms of desired impact would help organizations, especially those that are likely *not* good candidates for funding, more accurately determine whether to apply for a grant from Americana. As the primary communications vehicle for potential grantees, clear, concise website language is a way to positively impact organizations by allowing them to efficiently and effectively invest their development time in efforts most likely to yield results. Americana will update its website and other materials to align with its values and funding priorities, and with today's expectations for brevity and visual storytelling. Americana will also continue to lift up the stories of impact to which it has contributed.



BRIDGEPORT

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