

Frequently Asked Questions: Victoria Foundation Transition to a New Framework



Victoria Foundation shared our new framework, mission and vision, and developed these FAQs to answer questions we have heard. We will continue to evolve and grow this document as we have more information.

Helpful links

- [View a PDF](#) of our new vision, mission, values and framework.
- [Watch a webinar about the transition](#) featuring Craig Drinkard and Irene Cooper-Basch, co-executive officers of Victoria Foundation, sharing the new framework and responding to questions from nonprofit partners.

If your question is not answered below, you can [click here](#) to submit it to the Victoria Foundation team.

REASON FOR THE TRANSITION

Why are you making this change?

We believe that the shift to our new framework will allow the Victoria Foundation to support powerful, community-driven work – work that has the potential to change conditions on the ground for Newark children and families for the better and build power in communities for generations to come.

For the last few years, we have been asking ourselves this question: Can we use our resources to do more to help address root causes, systems, and structures that drive community disinvestment, persistent poverty and inequality in Newark? We saw we were funding good, important work, but at the same time, the underlying dynamics driving poverty and inequality were largely staying in place. In 2019, Victoria trustees and staff decided to take time from active grantmaking to reflect, to reassess, and to reimagine our role in supporting place-based change.

We originally planned to set aside the year 2020 to explore these questions. Our timeline was extended by the need to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, but even without that crisis, we can see that the learning journey we were on would take more time.

During the last 18 months, we sought the input and expertise of our nonprofit partners, heard the experiences of community members and leaders, engaged in training and other intensive

learning experiences, and engaged in candid and at times uncomfortable conversations about the unbalanced power and privilege of philanthropy.

Our new strategic framework emerges from our learning during this period. It is framed around our growing understanding that the systems and structures that reproduce inequality can be shifted if resources are moved to support those most directly impacted – in our case, Newark residents and deeply-rooted community organizations – in growing their own power to create change.

We are aware that this shift creates challenges for our current nonprofit partners. We are trying to make the shift toward our new strategy in ways that respect current work and are communicating with current nonprofit partners about how we can support them during this transition.

ABOUT THE NEW FRAMEWORK

What are the elements of the new framework?

We have aligned our mission statement and new strategic framework to address generational poverty in Newark by supporting the aspirations and priorities of Black and Brown communities and other communities pushed to the margins in Newark. [You can read our new mission, vision, values statements, and framework here.](#)

We are dedicating our efforts to four strategic priority areas:

Victoria Foundation partners with Black and Brown residents and other marginalized communities in Newark and nonprofit organizations to:

- 1) Champion bold strategies that strengthen community power.* We will support efforts that focus on amplifying the voices of the people closest to issues, and on the issues that matter most to them.
- 2) Foster economic justice.* We know there is a pervasive economic wealth gap here in New Jersey, between white families and Black and Brown families. We want to figure out strategies to address this so we can change the lives of Newark families today and for generations to come.
- 3) Promote youth self-determination.* We envision Newark being a place where residents and youth thrive, a place they choose to stay in or come back to. We plan to invest in young people in Newark to become leaders and change agents to realize that vision.
- 4) Respond to pressing needs.* Whether it was Superstorm Sandy, the COVID-19 pandemic, or the most recent effects of tropical storm Ida, Victoria Foundation has and will continue to respond to any major calamity that impacts our city and its residents.

We are currently reorganizing our grantmaking priorities and will be sharing more about the new focus and strategic framework over the next few months.

How are you determining new priorities?

We are intentionally calling this a strategic “framework” and not a “plan” because we want to develop the priorities in partnership with people proximate to the issues we hope to address.

We hope to be on a continuous learning journey and to engage with community in a way that's different from past practice. As we begin to stand up our new strategic goals, we will be talking to a lot of people and organizations who we've never funded before, along with long-time partners – those that have been identified as understanding an issue that we're trying to grapple with as a foundation. We will be seeking to connect with community organizations and leaders in an authentic, intentional way, as well as continuing to learn from good work happening outside of Newark. Our strategy development will take place over time, as we learn from community partners.

How will the Newark community be involved in or able to provide feedback and input on new strategies, priorities and grantmaking?

We're calling it a strategic framework on purpose. We're staying away from having a strategic plan. A strategic plan indicates that we spent time internally and came up with the ideas, strategies, and the best ways to do this work and then tell partners to operate in a certain way. But that's not the value that we are aspiring to embody. We aim to do this work in partnership with our nonprofit partners and residents of the city of Newark.

As part of our process to develop the framework, we have been in conversation with nonprofit partners to learn about the equity issues facing them and residents in Newark. We are still determining how to continue to bring in the voices of community partners, and we are committed to continuing this practice.

We're going to be leaning in the expertise of community organizations and seeking their ideas to help inform and shape our funding strategies. In particular, we will connect with organizations that are most proximate to the problems and conditions in Newark, that have relationships with people, local context, and a deep awareness of Newarkers' lived experiences.

We plan to seek regular counsel from community leaders to inform our work and to create accountability as we move forward. We have already started the planning and recruitment work to initiate a Victoria Foundation Youth Advisory Board, which should be operational next summer. We also plan to engage in a range of one-on-one and collaborative conversations in the coming months and years that will bring new voices into our work.

The new mission and framework do not name environmental work. Is this an intentional step away from supporting that work?

In the past, we've had a two-part mission: we focused on Newark and also the environment, primarily through land conservation. One major outcome of our process has been a decision from trustees to move away from this two-pronged mission to a unified mission that focuses on Newark. The new mission includes the environment. It uses an environmental justice lens and seeks to support the environmental priorities of communities in Newark. We don't know exactly what our investments are going to look like in the future. Our priorities are going to be based on the concerns that we're hearing from community stakeholders on the ground.

This decision was reached with difficulty, and we recognize that this means that the foundation will be moving away from our grants and efforts that support statewide land conservation and direct land acquisition. We know this shift in our focus will create challenges for our much-valued grantee partners in the statewide environmental sector. We are committed to doing our best to minimize the impact of these challenges.

When will you be able to share the new grant guidelines and deadlines? Will the size of grants change?

The honest answer is that we don't know yet. We will be working hard in the coming months to develop new strategies in collaboration with community partners. We want to support the goals and vision that community-led groups have for their communities, and to do that in a way that is collaborative.

While there is much still to be determined about grants under our new framework, our hope is that we will be moving toward longer-term, multi-year general operating grants in support of key strategies. If we are successful, it will build infrastructure and connection to support each other and sustain community power and justice movements going forward.

We are also working to re-imagine our grantmaking processes so that they are accessible, collaborative, and respectful as opposed to transactional and competitive. As we lean into trust-based philanthropic practices, the grant guidelines, application, and reporting processes may look different from the past. We hope to move "at the speed of trust" and remain in open communication with our partners as we progress. We will share our new processes as soon as we can.

Victoria Foundation trustees have approved transition grant support over the next three to four years for current grantee partners. While we do plan to invest in our new strategic goals in the near term, it will likely take several years to build up the knowledge and new investment areas to fully evolve into our new mission and framework.

Do you have examples of the work you might fund moving forward? Will we be eligible or given preference to apply because we are long standing partners?

We don't know today who our grantee partners will be once the new strategic framework is fully implemented. The three-year transition grants available for all current grantees does mark the end of our current grantee relationships. While we recognize that it introduces a challenging

uncertainty for our partners, we will not know which organizations we will be funding following this period. We are committed to remaining in transparent communication with our grantee partners as we move through this transition.

While we cannot give examples, we can share that our hope is to lift up and welcome more grassroots groups led by community members, as well as groups engaged in organizing and advocacy. This does not mean we will be moving away from all other groups, but it does imply a shift in our mix of grantee partners.

Will the groups included in the new framework include government - county and state - and the business community?

We hope to support change that meets the scale and depth of the challenges facing Newark residents and that will require partnerships and resources beyond our own. It will be critical to leverage resources of government to this end, as well as using our positioning and relationships to move forward policy and advocacy work that is prioritized by community organizations.

While remaining consistent with all IRS guidelines and requirements, we seek to do more to raise the profile of important issues using the foundation's resources as a platform.

As part of standing up our new framework, Victoria Foundation trustees have established a new standing board committee: the Partnerships & Advocacy Committee. This committee is charged with lifting up and advancing community priorities and policy agendas through trustee social networks and relationships and via the Victoria's "clout" and reputation.

Will you deploy other levers outside of grantmaking? Relationships with other funders? The foundation's endowment or other investments?

To address the big, systemic challenges named in our new framework, we need more resources than we have at the Victoria Foundation. We hope to leverage relationships with other foundations, and with the public and private sectors to help bring resources and attention to the issues that are of greatest concern to Newark residents.

We hope to leverage the resources from other foundations in terms of not just dollars, but their knowledge around how to go deeper and have greater impact. We plan to convene with our funding partners, share with them what we are doing and learning, and figure out the best ways for us to strategize and work together.

Additionally, we have a new ad hoc committee of the board called the Mission Investing Committee, who is looking at our investment strategies. As a private foundation, we are required to spend a minimum of 5% of our endowment for charitable purposes each year, leaving up to 95% of our resources invested in the market and private equities. The goal is to align how that 95% is invested with our new strategic goals and values. Over the next six months, we will begin to shift how that money is being invested. Some of you may have heard

the term ESG investing, which stands for: environment (clean energy and environmental justice), social (social and racial justice) and governance (diversity among the fund managers). We're going to take a deep look at ESG standards to revise our Investment Philosophy Statement and change our investment strategies.

We're also going to be looking at our Program-Related Investments (PRI), a tool that private foundations have to use a portion of their endowment to invest in their local communities. These could be low-interest or even no interest loans to drive community improvements in the city of Newark. Victoria Foundation has used this tool very infrequently in the past, and we want to dramatically step up our PRI program going forward.

SUPPORT FOR CURRENT NONPROFIT PARTNERS DURING THE TRANSITION

How are you supporting nonprofit partners during the transition?

We have been in touch with all of our current nonprofit partners through emails and [a webinar about the new framework](#). We will share more information during one-on-one calls between Victoria Foundation staff and our current partners to discuss the specifics for each organization. In these conversations we will be able to hear reactions to the new framework, how it impacts each organization, and respond to additional questions. Hopefully we will have more information to share about how we will continue to communicate with nonprofit partners and how they can play a role to inform strategies moving forward, too.

How are you navigating the impact that this will have on organizations and issues you no longer fund?

We put a tremendous value on the work of nonprofits we have partnered with. This transition does not speak to the value and importance of that work, rather a focus and shift in our approach. We are conscious that making such a significant shift creates challenges for our nonprofit partners, some of whom we have been funding for decades.

We are trying to make the shift as smooth as possible, in ways that support and respect current work, and we are communicating with current nonprofit partners as information is ready. Our board of trustees unanimously passed three years of grant support for our nonprofit partners to provide a longer off ramp while we stand up the new framework.

Are there other funders or donors you will connect nonprofit partners with?

We are organizing a webinar specifically with sister foundations in our region to let them know about our new strategic direction and how it may impact current nonprofit partners. Some of these funders may have an existing relationship with these organizations and others may want to learn more about the work of those nonprofits that align with their mission. We will do our best to make connections and introductions to other donors when we see opportunities for other funding relationships. We are also aware that with over 100 current nonprofit partners, our ability to successfully assist with making these connections is limited.

How can nonprofits apply to funding that is currently available?

Transition grants are underway for all current nonprofit partners. We are not requiring new written applications for these sunseting grants. At this moment, there are no new funding initiatives or RFPs (request for proposals). As soon as any opportunities emerge that are relevant for current nonprofit partners or new partners, we will share out that information and how to apply.