Equity has been an important part of the conversation in The Kresge Foundation boardroom since I joined the board in 2004. As I look back, I find that as trustees we have not been outwardly vocal about equity, but it has indeed — in my recollection — always played a central role as we determine how best to fulfill our duties. All the while, foundation staff have gravitated with determination to address equity as a core principle and have demonstrated that in their fine work, day in and day out. As we consider the environment today in which federal, state and local policy decisions traced to race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality continue to deepen disparities in health, wealth, education and safety, I feel compelled to declare where our board stands and to discuss our work and how it matters.

Kresge’s focus and reach have completely transformed since I joined the board. For the 80 years following Sebastian S. Kresge’s generous mandate to “promote human progress,” the foundation issued capital challenge grants to help countless institutions and organizations across the U.S. build and expand their physical plants to serve public needs such as health care services, education and the arts. In the mid-2000s, we began using our resources in much more direct ways. Today’s work is incredibly complex and intricate, fully aimed at tearing down barriers and replacing them with enablers that increase opportunities for people to enter and thrive in the economic mainstream.

Although still firmly seeded in our founder’s mission, this new way of working forced our trustees — willingly — to establish a framework to ensure that each of the hundreds of unique grants and investments awarded by the foundation each year is keenly focused on an overarching goal.
As this strategy was taking shape, our reflections and deliberations were difficult: We knew the vision we sought would take time, involve risk and test every facet of the organization. Through much individual and group soul-searching, guided by our incredibly insightful President and CEO, Rip Rapson, the board adopted the “urban opportunity framework” as our north star. It was — and remains — rooted in the aspiration that American cities grow more inclusively so that disparities among their residents are eliminated and all have full access to the building blocks of just and equitable life opportunities. More simply: to expand opportunity for people with low incomes in America’s cities.

To consider our framework is to deal head-on with issues of equity. We constantly ask ourselves how we might demonstrate our commitment to help ensure that status at birth does not equal destiny. We ask how we might support our grantees as they confront bias and constraint. And we ask each other if we are truly advancing equity.

The lived experience of inequality in our country is well documented. Take, for example, practices such as redlining, which contributed significantly to persistent racial wealth gaps. Generations of African Americans seeking home ownership were blocked from receiving federally backed loans and experienced restricted neighborhood choice.

In Detroit, Cleveland, Baltimore, Philadelphia and countless cities across the country, African American families were prohibited from obtaining loans to improve their homes. They were also restricted from buying or building homes in flourishing communities while their white neighbors fled to newly built residences on spacious lots surrounded by schools with better resources and modern suburban shopping districts. A decade earlier, following Pearl Harbor, more than 100,000 Japanese
society. We are a small part, but to us it is a crucial tenet of our responsibility, and it is unimaginable to do otherwise.

As trustees of this organization, we have been entrusted with an incredible sum and responsibility. Driving change in America’s cities is the strategic focus toward which we persevere. But at the very core of this work is the desire to confront the systemic inequality that pervades almost every corner of every community.

Fourteen years as a Kresge trustee have taught me that a strong and sustained focus on equity always has been — and must always be — a central measure of our success.

Welcome

We were delighted to welcome Kathy Ko Chin and Cecilia Muñoz to the Kresge Board of Trustees in 2017. In just a few months, Kathy, who serves as the president and CEO of the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, and Cecilia, who serves as vice president of Public Interest Technology and Local Initiatives at New America, have demonstrated their tight alignment to the foundation’s strategic direction. Both have made it their life’s work to find solutions to the most pressing challenges affecting our democracy and the people most impacted, and we are delighted that they have chosen to bring that perspective to Kresge’s work.

Americans were held at internment camps based on unfounded fear that they were a risk to national security. These heinous actions, and thousands more, were intended to wall off entire populations. Acts of similar intent and spirit continue today.

Such patterns of inequality are abhorrent and self-defeating. We are carefully confident that our urban opportunity framework is a strong vehicle by which we can begin to address them, and I am extremely proud of the examples you will read about in this report that demonstrate innovation by cross-cutting issues at their root cause, including:

- **“Connecting the Dots,”** which brings to life an innovative partnership of data sharing among six health and human service providers, powering them to provide clients access to health care, housing, education, employment and other assistance in the same visit.

- **“Food and Housing Insecurity – in College”** describes the ways our Education and Human Services programs are collaborating to further student success by understanding and addressing student hunger and homelessness.

- **“A Rising Tide of Climate Resilience”** illustrates how climate-adaption and preparedness solutions are coming directly from residents most affected by climate-induced extreme weather — partly through Creative Placemaking activities — in New Orleans, a city on the front lines of a warming world.

Addressing systemic barriers to opportunity — deliberately and over the long term — is the challenge and objective of many fine philanthropic organizations that seek a more just and equitable