The mission of the Kalamazoo Community Foundation is to mobilize people, resources, and expertise to advance racial, social and economic justice towards the vision of Kalamazoo County being the most equitable place to live.

Programmatic funding from philanthropy alone cannot undo systemic barriers—policy change in these areas is critical for advancing equity. Policies must acknowledge the impacts of structural and individual racism in our community. The initiatives held by the Kalamazoo Community Foundation have policy intersections and inform the advocacy priorities.

KZCF’s initiative and public policy work is rooted in the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) framework, which started at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 2016. TRHT Kalamazoo started in 2017 as an initiative at the Kalamazoo Community Foundation as one of 10 initial TRHT sites nationwide. Since 2017, the work of TRHT Kalamazoo has grown to encompass the alignment of all initiative and public policy work at KZCF. Specific phases and terms in the framework have been pulled from the TRHT Implementation Guidebook, which can be found at https://healourcommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/TRHTImplementationGuide.pdf.

Building Context: Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation

TRHT is a community-driven vehicle for change that engages communities, organizations, and individuals from multiple sectors across the United States in racial healing and addressing present-day inequities linked to historic and contemporary beliefs in a hierarchy of human value.

TRHT is a coordinated, multi-sector effort that centers on authentically exploring current and past racial realities and implementing practices, policies and principles resulting in a respect for all humanity that will be evidenced in our patterns of behavior and societal structure.

To create sustainable change, the Kalamazoo Community Foundation Initiative and Public Policy framework:

- Focuses on eliminating the belief in a racial hierarchy from which behaviors, structures, laws, and public policies have been created.
- Is inclusive of all racial and ethnic communities in America and understands intersectionality is part of inclusivity.
- Is implemented throughout public, private, nonprofit, academic and faith-based sectors.
- Recognizes the interconnectedness of racial healing and racial equity and the need for both in the process of systemic change.
- Creates a local and regional infrastructure that sustains healing and advances systemic change efforts statewide which impact Kalamazoo County.

As a Community Foundation, in order to activate our public policy agenda, the following tactics are considered:

- Advisory groups
- Civic education
- Convenings
- Educating local and state lawmakers
Initiatives and Public Policy at KZCF prioritizes work that falls into the one or more of areas of the TRHT framework:

The first two areas—1) Narrative Change and 2) Racial Healing and Relationship Building represent the people-work that is necessary to fuel transformation.

The other three areas—3) Separation; 3) Law; and 5) Economy—represent the systemic change that must occur to achieve the transformation of a society in which we embrace our common humanity and in which institutions are inspired to develop policies and practices that ensure sustainable racial equity.

All areas are interconnected. Systemic change cannot happen without relationship building, narrative change, and racial healing. For example, bodies of work held in the area of Law might have intersections in narrative change.

The Framework Areas: A Deeper Look

People Work: Narrative Change

Narrative change examines how to create a more complete and accurate narrative that will help people understand how racial hierarchy has been embedded in our society. The human brain is wired for story. The stories told about histories, our children and our communities reinforce the false belief in the hierarchy of human value – and absent changing these stories, we will have wrong and harmful understandings of ourselves and each other. We must demonstrate the absurdity of the belief itself and transform our consciousness to move from a taxonomy of human hierarchy to one of equity, or the belief will find a way to continue manifesting and reinforcing negative outcomes for our country.

We all need to know the truth about who we are and our histories. We need a more complete story presented in school curricula, in the news media, in movies and television and radio, in digital media and gaming platforms, in cultural institutions and memorials of all kinds.

In Initiatives and Public Policy, the work is reflected in storytelling, partnerships, and projects involving journalism and news media, school curricula, the arts, and historical and cultural landmarks.
People Work: Racial Healing and Relationships

Racial healing and relationship building focuses on the ways all of us can heal from the wounds of the past and build mutually respectful relationships across racial and ethnic lines, relationships that honor and value each person’s humanity. Relationships that reflect our common humanity can build more equitable public policy. Celebrating the common threads that bind us all together allows us to recognize and value the differences inherent in all of us.

It is critical to focus on racial healing. We must challenge racial hierarchies, while building authentic relationships grounded in appreciation, respect, trust, and reverence that extend across and within racial groups. Healing will accelerate human capacity for resilience, truly embracing one another and reconnecting many people who previously had their identities denied back to their roots, culture, language, and rituals. We want to increase the capacity of bringing people together in safe spaces for these healing experiences.

In Initiatives and Public Policy, the work is reflected through institutionalizing healing practices like land acknowledgements and reviewing the touchstones, racial healing circles, racial healing practitioner trainings, and programs within institutions that embed racial healing and relationship building into required professional trainings and certifications. The truth about systemic racism and how it is enacted through public policy informs the racial healing work.

Systemic Change Work: Separation

Once the belief that some people have more value than others is embedded, it is sustained by keeping people apart. Once there is segregation and concentrated poverty, there are barriers to opportunity which are demonstrated throughout this community through segregation, colonization, and concentrated poverty in neighborhoods.

We examine residential segregation, colonization, isolation and what they produce: concentrated poverty. We also recognize the ways separation is embedded in our education system, our health and mental health care systems and in immigration and migration practices and policies. We envision a society in which social institutions, neighborhoods, civic lives, politics and recreational spaces reflect the diversity of a region and where people have real choices about where they live, work and attend school.

In Initiatives and Public Policy, we convene and resource key community stakeholders to design solutions to systemic barriers that encourage separation in education and housing.

Systemic Change Work: Law

The country’s founding documents perpetuate the false belief in a hierarchy of human value, from the federal and state constitutions to criminal and civil laws and practices and policies that derive from them. We must address the criminal justice system, how it is enforced at local and state levels, and the harm the justice system causes in communities.
We recognize the historical significance our system of law and how it has perpetuated the hierarchy of human value. We can embrace a system of law that reflects our common humanity, the dignity of all people and our commitment to civil and human rights.

We cherish the value of full civic participation in our nation and expand opportunities for civic engagement in Kalamazoo County.

In Initiatives and Public Policy, we convene and resource key community stakeholders including law enforcement leaders, people with lived experience in the justice system, elected public officials, and community-based organizations to design solutions to systemic barriers that seek to improve relationships between law enforcement and community, educate community stakeholders on their rights, and advocate for change.

In addition, we support voting rights and voter education efforts through community awareness campaigns, convening, and grant making.

Systemic Change Work: Economy

In a capitalist society, the systems are driven by the belief in the hierarchy of human value, from the period of enslavement to the treatment of paid labor, including farmworkers, child care, health care, and other direct-care workers. Historically, and still today, financial gain has been the impetus for annihilation of indigenous people, enslavement of Africans, exclusion of some immigrant groups and exploitation of people of color in the labor force.

We examine structured inequality and barriers to economic opportunities and develop solutions that will create a more equitable society. Our efforts aim to build upon our racial healing and relationship building work to create an economic democracy, where every person, family and community of all racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds can individually and collectively participate and thrive in the U.S. economy.

In Initiatives and Public Policy, we support policy change that recognizes the value of work by groups who are historically underpaid and under-resourced. We advocate for opportunities for family economic stability. We provide support and convening space for BIPOC entrepreneurs and grassroots organizations and leaders.

Civic Engagement

Improving our Civic Health – our community’s ability to address challenges – is core to our mission. KZCF’s grantmaking often includes efforts to support civic engagement and advocacy: since 2019, over $2.2 million has been granted to agencies who have identified policy change, grassroots organizing, voter outreach or legislative accountability in their grant proposal. Efforts to improve the civic engagement of the entire community must work in tandem with initiatives and public policy change.

Preservation of civil rights, including voting, education, and protections when engaging with government entities, like the justice system, are foundational to achieving the Kalamazoo Community Foundation’s
mission and vision. Inequities in public systems founded in the belief in a hierarchy of human value must be undone, and efforts to encourage full civic participation in our communities must be supported.

Change in public systems should be informed by the voices of those served and adopt policies to increase civic participation. The Kalamazoo Community Foundation, in partnership with stakeholders in the community, including the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) Design Teams, the KZCF Youth Advisory Council (YAC), the KZCF Anti-Racism Transformation Team (ARTT) will create opportunities to redress racial and social inequities imbedded in our Country’s founding documents.

Voting is a cornerstone of our democracy and communities must continue to support options that reduce barriers to voting and increase civic participation. During a general election Kalamazoo County typically has slightly higher than the national average for rates of voting, particularly on partisan races and controversial ballot measures. However, during a primary election and non-presidential year, other issues like nonpartisan races for judges, school boards, libraries and other municipal races often have markedly lower rates of engagement on election day. The Kalamazoo Community Foundation will help educate the public on nonpartisan candidates, ballot proposals and voter registration opportunities to improve voter education and rates of voting.

A Note on Lobbying

Lobbying is a Federal IRS definition and nonprofit organizations, and their employees, must be aware of the distinctions between lobbying and advocacy. While the vast majority of the activities and tactics used to achieve KZCF’s policy and civic engagement goals fall into the education and advocacy category, occasionally representatives of KZCF will need to lobby in their official capacity representing KZCF.

To meet the definition of Lobbying:

1) information must be *shared in an official capacity*;
2) with an elected official (or their designee);
3) to impact a vote or opinion on a specific piece of legislation.

All three must be met to be considered lobbying and include communications on budget and policy change items. When these three requirements are met, expenditures toward those efforts are tracked and accounted in annual tax filings. While there is no official IRS threshold, a “significant proportion” of a 501c3 organization’s annual expenditures must not be used for lobbying. Additionally, as a 501c3, KZCF may never give financial support or public endorsement to a candidate for office, even in nonpartisan races.

Nonpartisan education efforts like candidate forums and ballot education initiatives are allowed. When considering publicly supporting a ballot initiative, the voters are the electorate and communications that ask for a yes or no vote must be tracked as lobbying.