

What's in a name? Why some labels do matter...

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I am sure we all have experiences of being given labels in our lives. Sometimes these labels are applied with affection by friends, family, and colleagues, in recognition of the characteristics and virtues they most admire in you. Other times, labels may be applied in ways that are harmful and diminish one's sense of self – shunting you into some large, faceless group or category. When it comes to the labels and language we use to describe each other, it is clear that the *intentions and motivations* behind the choices made are of great importance.

For grantmakers though, and really any organisation that manages data, I think the labels used to organise and categorise information matter enormously. This work allows grantmakers to understand in real time the kind of work and groups you are reaching, whether your organisational strategy and policies are working, and if there are any unintended consequences to the approaches you are taking. Good data management supports deeper dives into specific areas of your work, and it leads to increased transparency too.

In July 2020, we started an internal project to develop a new approach to categorising the grants we make and the organisations we support. We started by reviewing our existing approach, which we decided was no longer fit for purpose. Consequently, we identified new categories and labels that are fully related to our [current funding guidelines](#), and these have been added to our online application forms, which organisations can choose from when creating their first-stage application to us. This new data categorisation approach has been applied retroactively to our existing grants portfolio, based on the information we already hold about organisations and our own knowledge.

This work has helped us to discern geographic and thematic trends and clusters that are forming within our grants portfolio, and reflect upon further support we may be able to offer as a result. We can also better understand the types of organisations that are applying for our funding successfully and unsuccessfully. This helps us to identify where there may be biases or issues within our processes that impact some groups more than others, which is vital for us to understand as part of our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).

Managing one's data effectively is an ever-evolving exercise. There is no definitive end point. As soon as we started sharing our approach with our Board, we were able to work together to notice things that had been missed or could be improved further.

Another recent change that we are implementing relates to the [DEI Data Standard](#). This Standard has been created through the DEI Data Group, which we have been part of since it was formed in August 2020. The Group is an independent working group convened by Fozia Irfan, from BBC Children in Need, and Josh Cockcroft, from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The Group includes a wide range of fellow funders, including those that are small, medium, large, corporate, non-departmental public bodies, place-based, UK-wide and more!

The Standard was researched and compiled by Bonnie Chiu, from The Social Investment Consultancy, and Tania Cohen, from 360Giving. Bonnie and Tania built upon the Group's experience and expertise, as well as existing DEI-related work from groups like The Funders for Race Equality Alliance, specifically their work to create the Race Equality Audit tool, and the DEI Coalition, which supported the development of the Association of Charitable Foundation's Stronger Foundations report on DEI released in 2019. The Standard will no doubt continue to

evolve, especially as the language and labels used within it are going to be reviewed every six months.

By adopting the Standard, we can understand more clearly the DEI-related work that we are supporting, and how representative it is of the communities and causes being supported. The Standard allows us to benchmark and review our performance against other funders too, and the more funders that use it, the easier it will be for those applying to us, as they won't be asked about the same DEI-related information in tonnes of different ways!

The Standard is designed to be a force for good. Developed in consultation and collaboration with specialist infrastructure organisations and groups working to further social justice, the Standard offers clear explanations for how the language for each label was selected, how best to implement it and how to address the inherent problems with any form of classification which diminishes individual identity.

Personally, I have always felt a little unsure and conflicted about labels. However, I haven't experienced any such feelings since we started this work nine months ago. Our intentions and motivations are clear. Of course, we will make mistakes, and we won't always know how best to proceed. This won't stop us from trying to make progress though, because we know that against the backdrop of Covid-19, and copious evidence highlighting the inequitable distribution of charitable funding to groups experiencing systemic and structural barriers, it is vital that we use our data as a tool through which we can gather insights, learn, reflect and, ultimately, improve.