



***The Barra Foundation invests in innovation to inspire change
that strengthens communities in the Greater Philadelphia region.***

Building on [learning](#) from these past few years and feedback gathered since our Strategic Plan launched in 2014, Barra has updated and refreshed its strategy. We remain committed to our [mission](#) and overall [approach](#) to philanthropy, while making the following modifications:

- *Build out our Impact Investing efforts*, to leverage more endowment assets to create greater social impact.
- *Sharpen our Equity Lens* to integrate equity—particularly racial equity—more intentionally across grant making and impact investing.
- *Refine the Catalyst Fund* to better support early-stage, novel and potentially transformative ideas in and across Arts & Culture, Education, Health and Human Services.
- *Phase out the Barra Awards* and integrate valuable components from them, such as opportunities for cross-sector idea generation.

Ultimately, the Board of Directors has affirmed Barra’s long-term commitment to innovation and its unique role in its willingness to support untested ideas.

OUR STRATEGY AND APPROACH

We will be guided in our approach to our work by the following principles:

- Supporting innovation is a process and different from transactional, traditional grantmaking
- Diversity and equity are critical to the innovation we support
- How we work is as important as what we fund

Barra offers grants, impact investments and other opportunities to changemakers who think bigger and differently about problem solving in the Greater Philadelphia region. These individuals and organizations are working on the most promising ideas that will inspire change and strengthen communities. Our support includes:

Catalyst Fund: Grants that act as risk capital for early-stage, bold approaches that have the potential to result in outsized-impact and thriving, equitable communities.

Impact Investing: Investments that have both a financial return and an intentional, measurable social or environmental outcome.

Knowledge and Networks: Beyond financial support, we do our best to deploy our resources—networks, relationship, knowledge and experience—to build connections and share information that cultivates innovation, leads to lasting change and strengthens communities. We often refer to this work as Beyond the Money (BTM).

What Does Success Look Like?

Some of the key success measures of the projects we support will be that they:

- Influence a significant shift in practice; transformative, not incremental
- Advance knowledge and learning in a field
- Influence a system and disrupt the status quo
- Create more equitable outcomes for under-resourced individuals, families and communities compared to existing interventions
- Attract additional funders to a promising project
- Learn that a project or idea will not work and why

Special Grants: While our main mission uses innovation to address deep, long-term change, Barra also recognizes the unique ability of foundations to move swiftly in certain situations and work intentionally with other funders to address a local need or opportunity. Thus, we reserve some funds for special grants to address timely “good citizen” efforts.

WHY “INNOVATION”?

In the social sector, there are established and proven approaches that work to address certain challenges. On the other hand, there are emerging and intractable problems that require a different approach; those problems often require solutions that challenge assumptions and bring fresh bold thinking to the situation. However, social sector organizations often lack the early-stage “risk capital” needed to test approaches or seize important opportunities to respond to new or entrenched challenges.

Barra was founded in 1963 by Robert L. McNeil, Jr., a scientist who not only believed in the power of innovation, but who also understood that innovation is a process that requires more than just a grant. We continue this practice of testing ideas and recognize that innovation requires more than just money. Financial risk capital, combined with other resources, such as networks, learning and knowledge sharing, can enable the process of intentional innovation. With these resources, local changemakers are better positioned to develop and test early-stage approaches that challenge old assumptions and develop new models for accomplishing important work—and outsized-impact—in the social sector.

2023 AND BEYOND

Our Strategic Plan is a living document that will evolve over time. While staff and Board foresee the principles and criteria outlined in this document guiding the Foundation for the next several years, the strategic execution may shift based upon learning that occurs over time. Staff will monitor data and other information to be reflective in their approach and deliberate in their execution. As the Foundation celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2023, Mr. McNeil’s legacy of innovation remains at the core of our organization and relevant to a sector and a region in need of change. We seek to continue his vision in our efforts to invest in intentional innovation as a means to create a thriving and equitable Greater Philadelphia for all.