SECTION 2

CONNECTING EQUITY WITH DATA AND EVIDENCE

The worst equity problem we're dealing with in data at the moment is that we're making prejudiced choices, but don't understand how.

—HEATHER KRAUSE, "ALL DATA IS BIASED"

Equity will continue to be elusive if we dance around the edges of racism and power dynamics and fail to address these issues in our strategies, organizations and systems.

—CARINA WONG, "FIVE DESIGN PRINCIPLES OF JUST PHILANTHROPY"

Decision power is ultimate power. Past norms for building evidence have imbalanced power and exacerbated inequity by creating a black box between the practitioners and communities who collect and submit data and those who evaluate it.

Authors in this section of our book point out harmful practices and propose helpful ones to bring an authentic equity lens to building evidence of social impact. Michael McAfee calls for recasting evidence as justice, and calls out current racial disparities in who is called to account to show

evidence to prove their "basic humanity." ("No one ever asks a white school what evidence they have for expanding an afterschool program. . . .") Heather Krause shatters the myth that "data offers an objective, bias-free way to make decisions" and offers a roadmap for equitably using data to advance racial equity. Carina Wong, speaking to philanthropy, offers five design principles to improve a strategy's equity orientation. Chris Kingsley highlights initiatives in Los Angeles, New York City, and Cuyahoga County that take seriously the needs of agency and nonprofit practitioners and their clients. Robert Newman, Dylan Edward, Jordan Morrisey, and Kiribakka Tendo propose alternatives to the enduring tendencies in subfield evaluations in sub-Saharan Africa to extract data. Meanwhile, Amy O'Hara and Stephanie Straus describe how to de-risk civil court data through clarifying public interest and creating transparency.

Issues of inclusion link to equity, and practical cases in this section address both. Coauthors Tatewin Means, Dallas Nelson, and Dusty Lee Nelson write about Lakota data sovereignty. Carrie Cihak issues five calls to action for local governments to move toward a pro-equity approach to evidence building, born of her policy work in King County (Seattle area).

Tracy Costigan and Raymond McGhee of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Lola Adedokun, formerly at the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, share learnings on centering evaluation norms on equity at their respective foundations. Nisha Patel flips the lens from eradicating child poverty to achieving guaranteed minimum income levels, citing cases and evidence where practitioners' cash distributions make a difference. Finally, the use case of ParentCorps describes how tapping into community voice enabled the early childhood education nonprofit to pivot to virtual programming almost overnight, amid tremendous uncertainty and fear during the pandemic.

Questions raised and addressed in this section include:

1. What does it mean to say that "all data is biased?"
2. How can evidence builders account for and diminish racial and other bias across all steps of evidence building?
3. What can practitioners, policymakers, funders, and evaluators do to support more equitable practices?