Simmons Foundation Overview

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The granddaughter of Ola and L.B. Simmons founded The Simmons Foundation in 1993 as a tribute to her grandparents’ lifelong tradition of contributing toward the betterment of any community in which they lived. To honor the memory of Mr. and Mrs. Simmons, the Foundation seeks to impact the lives of individuals by providing them with the tools to sustain a healthy and productive life. This work is achieved with a social justice lens that actively encourages diversity, equity and inclusion among the Foundation’s grantees. While grantmaking is the general tool, advocacy and capacity building remain primary levers to achieve success in our funding. Our funding weaves a story throughout all of our focus areas and fields of interest by adhering to our foundational values.

Our framework, strategy and approach reflect our core values and our work is guided by the belief that all Houstonians, including women, children and our most vulnerable neighbors, deserve access to their desired necessary health care, safe homes free from violence and welcoming communities. We believe that the issues we seek to resolve are caused by lack of access, education and opportunity and compounded by harmful systems and trauma. We seek to alleviate these root causes through advocacy, operating and program support, capacity building and philanthropic leadership. We acknowledge the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of service. We seek out partnerships with organizations that take an inclusive and client-centered approach that centers individuals being served as they are their own best advocates. Lastly, we acknowledge the impact of trauma as it applies to all of our focus areas and seek out partnerships, where necessary, that address the impact of various types of trauma.

The following document outlines: our social justice framework; systems change strategy; overarching approach; fields of interests and advocacy issues, along with definitions to clarify language used to articulate both our substantive work and organizational process.

VISION
To help create a harmonious, dynamic and informed communities, where all people have the opportunity to improve their lives.

MISSION
To partner with organizations that strengthen women, youth and families while building an educated, tolerant and resilient community.

MOTTO
“Freedom to Make a Change”

OVERARCHING VALUES
Diversity – Inclusion – Respect
SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK
Social Justice is the way in which human rights are manifested in the everyday lives of people at every level of society, which includes racial, gender and reproductive justice. This is the lens through which we view the world and catalyze change.

SYSTEMS CHANGE STRATEGY
Systems Change is the fundamental shift in policies, processes, relationships, and power structures. To create lasting change, the voices and experiences of people most impacted by systems must be centered in the work.

OVERARCHING APPROACH

ADVOCACY
- Individuals and communities advocating for themselves
- Organizations advocating for issues
- Supporting timely and accurate information for civic education
- Engaging public officials and support beneficial public-private partnerships
- Philanthropy advocating on behalf of the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors

CAPACITY BUILDING
- Providing financial and in-kind assistance to encourage organizations and their leaders to grow, to learn, and to step outside of their comfort zones to better serve their clients and create a strong nonprofit sector.

PROACTIVE RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
- We seek out organizations and issues rather than waiting for them to come to the Foundation. We fund organizations that respond quickly and are adaptable to change.

PHILANTHROPIC LEADERSHIP
- Our funding does not happen in a silo – we model collaboration, challenging conversations, catalytic leadership, and share our expertise with peers.

FIELDS OF INTEREST

HEALTH
Toward increasing access to comprehensive, informed care for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.
HEALTH ADVOCACY & RESEARCH
- Efforts that support and complement the Foundation’s health fields of interest.

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE FOR THE UNINSURED AND UNDERINSURED
- Comprehensive care for those without access to healthcare.

MENTAL HEALTH
- Trauma-informed approaches and broader access to services

WOMEN’S HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
- Comprehensive care including access to birth control, scientifically accurate sexual health, and all choice options.

YOUTH – BY INVITATION ONLY
Toward supporting holistic and equitable approaches to improve the lives of vulnerable youth.

SYSTEM OF CHANGE: ADVOCACY & RESEARCH
- Efforts that support and complement the Foundation’s Youth fields of interest.

CHILD WELFARE
- Child Abuse
- Foster Care
- Juvenile Justice
- Homeless Youth (up to age 24)
- Disconnected Youth

PREVENTION & INTERVENTION
- School Discipline and Restorative Justice
- Education Equity
- School Culture

CIVIC & COMMUNITY
Toward building equitable and inclusive communities.

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY & RESEARCH
- Efforts that support and complement the Foundation’s Civic & Community fields of interest.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
- Community-Centered Change
- Civic Education
ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING
- Education & Outreach
- Survivor-centered care
- Disrupting Demand

IMMIGRANTS & REFUGEES
- A wide range of services that includes, but is not limited to: refugee resettlement, immigration legal services, access to services, mental health, fraud prevention, education and outreach.

HUMAN SERVICES
Toward providing opportunities for adults to start over and build a healthy life.

ADVOCACY RELATED TO ROOT CAUSES AND SYSTEMIC BARRIERS
- Efforts that support and complement the Foundation’s Human Services fields of interest.

HOMELESSNESS
- Prevention and Intervention aligned to systems change work

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
- Education & Outreach
- Survivor-centered care
- Ending violence in all relationships

RE-ENTRY
- Restorative Justice
- Supportive Services

PRIORITY ADVOCACY ISSUES
The Foundation identifies the following 5 priority issues to be addressed at the local, state and/or federal level:
Women’s Healthcare And Reproductive Justice (State)

Mental Health (State And Federal)

School Culture, Including Trauma-Based Interventions And Positive School Discipline Models (Local)

Immigrants And Refugees (Local, State And Federal)

Homelessness, Including Youth Homelessness (Local, State And Federal)

COMMUNICATIONS PRIORITIES

**CAPACITY BUILDING**

- Inform and publicize our capacity building initiatives
- Signaling information about best practices and polices
  - Ex. Succession planning, boards, budgets

**ADVOCACY**

- Educate on issues on the Foundation’s advocacy agenda
- Demonstrate and encourage philanthropic leadership
- Include non-legislative calls to action

**SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS**

- Publicize the Foundation’s collaborations
- Talk about the conferences we attend
- Release data and reports that relate to our fields of interest
  - Ex. Homelessness, Immigration, Advocacy, Women’s Healthcare and Reproductive Justice
- Demonstrate progressive leadership

**GRANT MAKING**

- Attract new grantees and innovative projects
- Explain the Foundation’s grant making process
  - Ex. Sample site visit questions, Writing Tips, Telling Your Story
- Talk about the Foundation’s values and the issues about which we care deeply
FUNDING RESTRICTIONS

- Underwriting or contributions to luncheons, galas and social fundraisers
- Requests to support candidates for political office, political parties or PACs
- Requests for individual scholarships
- International organizations
- Major arts organizations
- Grants to local, national or international organizations’ annual giving or holiday campaigns
- Grants to 509 (a) (3) Type III supporting organizations
- Medical research or disease-specific organizations

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS
The Simmons Foundation funds faith-based organizations. However, the Foundation will deny funds to organizations that require clients to participate in religious worship or practices as a condition of service.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE
The Simmons Foundation will deny funds to organizations that deny assistance, including family planning, contraception and access to abortions services.

LGBTQ INCLUSIVITY
The Simmons Foundation will deny funds to organizations that discriminate on the basis of an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

NONDISCRIMINATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES
The Simmons Foundation is committed to providing an environment free of discrimination where all individuals are treated with respect and dignity, have equal opportunities and can contribute fully to their communities. The Foundation disapproves of discrimination by organizations against individuals based on their age, employment status, socioeconomic status, military status, religion, pregnancy status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, race, ethnicity and national origin.
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Advocacy
Advocacy is an activity by an individual or group which aims to influence decisions within political, economic, social systems and institutions. Advocacy can include many activities, such as, media campaigns, public speaking, along with the commissioning and the publishing of research. Advocacy represents the series of actions taken and issues highlighted to change the “what is” into a “what should be.” Advocacy may include lobbying, which is a form of advocacy where a direct approach is made to legislators and policy makers.¹

Capacity Building
Capacity building is whatever is needed to bring a nonprofit to the next level of operational, programmatic, financial, or organizational maturity, so it may more effectively and efficiently advance its mission into the future.²

Child Welfare
Child welfare is a continuum of services designed to ensure that children are safe and that families have the necessary support to care for their children successfully.³

Civic Education
Civic education is the education to all people about their role in the democratic process.⁴

Client-Centered Care
Client-Centered Care prioritizes the rights, needs, and wishes of the client.⁵

Community-Center Change
Community-centered change occurs when neighbors work with neighbors to build safe, healthy, tolerant and engaged communities.

Community Engagement
Community engagement refers to the process by which community organizations and individuals build ongoing, permanent relationships for the purpose of applying a collective vision for the benefit of a community.

Comprehensive Women’s Healthcare
Includes the provision of services, policy and practices that impact the entirety of women’s health including mental, behavioral and reproductive care.⁶ Comprehensive services include presenting women with all of their choice options and include trans women.

¹ Boulder Advocacy, through Alliance for Justice, helps organizations fully understand the rules and become assertive in their right to pursue their policy goals. [http://www.afj.org/our-work/issues/bolder-advocacy](http://www.afj.org/our-work/issues/bolder-advocacy)
² [https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/what-capacity-building](https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/what-capacity-building)
³ [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/cw_educators.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/cw_educators.pdf)
Disconnected Youth
Young people ages 14-24 who are homeless, in foster care, involved in the justice system, and/or are not employed nor enrolled in school.7

Education Equity
Public schools should provide equitable access and ensure that all students have the knowledge and skills to succeed as contributing members of a rapidly changing, global society. The goal is to provide all students with equitable schools that have the resources they need to graduate prepared for success after high school, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, English proficiency, immigration status, socioeconomic status, or disability.8

Exclusionary Discipline
Exclusionary Discipline is the removal or exclusion of a student from his or her usual educational setting. The two most common exclusionary discipline practices are suspension and expulsion from school.

Gender Identity
Gender Identity is one’s innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.9

Gender Expression
Gender expression is the external appearance of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.10

Healthy Relationships
A healthy relationship is when people develop a connection based on mutual respect, trust and honesty.11

Human Trafficking
Human trafficking is the illegal movement of people, either domestically or from country to country, typically for the purposes of forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation.

8 The National School Board Association Beliefs & Policies, http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/educationalequity
**Inclusive**
Inclusive programming offers services for all people regardless of race, class, ability, sexuality, or gender expression. Using inclusive language means talking in a way that does not specify a gender, sex, or sexual orientation unless it is pertinent to the comment.\(^\text{12}\)

**Intersectionality**
Intersectionality is used to describe how different forms of discrimination can interact and overlap, and why it was necessary to take into account the needs of people from a variety of backgrounds when considering social questions and issues for which to study and solutions for which to advocate. An intersectional framework recognizes that people have multiple identities that can be/have been used to create systems of oppression that shape their experiences in the world.\(^\text{13}\)

**Immigrant**
A person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country

**Holistic Intervention**
Holistic Intervention is the treatment of the whole person, taking into account all physical, mental and spiritual needs.

**Positive School Climate**
A positive school climate is the product of a school’s attention to fostering safety; promoting a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment; and encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community no matter the setting.

**Re-Entry**
Re-Entry organizations and programs help people transition from jail or prison back to their home community.\(^\text{14}\)

**Refugees**
A refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

**Reproductive Justice**
Reproductive Justice exists when all people have the social, political and economic power and resources to make healthy decisions about their gender, bodies, sexuality and families for themselves and their communities.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{12}\) https://case.edu/lgbt/media/caseedu/lgbt/documents/resources-for-allies/communications.pdf
\(^{14}\) https://www.bjs.gov/content/reentry/definition.cfm
\(^{15}\) http://www.who.int/topics/reproductive_health/en/
Restorative Justice
In general, restorative justice is the cooperative practice of repairing the harm caused by criminal or hurtful behavior. In schools, restorative justice empowers students to resolve conflicts through a cooperative process.

School Culture
School culture is the set of norms and values that teachers and administrators hold about teaching and learning.

School Discipline
Positive and proactive discipline methods address challenging behaviors on school campuses. This includes addressing implicit bias, reducing suspensions, teacher training on resolving conflicts within the classroom, and using restorative justice practices when harm has been caused.

School-to-Prison Pipeline
The School-to-Prison Pipeline is a metaphor used to describe the diversion of a disproportionately large number of minority youth away from schools and into the criminal justice system.

Sexual Health
Sexual health is a state of physical, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

Sexual Orientation
Sexual Orientation is an individual’s inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Often labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to (often mistakenly referred to as sexual preference).

Social Emotional Learning
Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

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16 https://www.edutopia.org/blog/restorative-justice-resources-matt-davis
18 http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin275.shtml
21 http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/
Social Justice
Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equitable economic, political and social rights and opportunities.23

Systems Change
Fundamental change aligns policies, processes, relationships, and then restructures power for the purpose of making sustainable social gains.24

Transgender
Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression are different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.25

Trauma Informed
Trauma Informed Care is an organizational structure and treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of various types of trauma.26

Youth Voice
The ideas, opinions, involvement, and initiative of young people (under the age of 24) are centered in planning and decision-making at the program and policy levels.27

23 http://www.socialworkers.org/pressroom/features/Issue/peace.asp
24 https://ssir.org/articles/entry/fostering_systems_change
27 http://www.serviceandinclusion.org/conf/Youth_Voice_Definition.pdf