

Interview with Olivia Orr, Equity Fund Advisor

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Olivia Orr is originally from Michigan's Upper Peninsula but decided to stick around southern Maine after graduating from Bowdoin College. She transitioned away from nonprofit development and administrative work a few years ago and is now a web designer at Bates College. Orr also serves on the board of Portland Nordic and volunteers as the assistant coach for the middle school racing team.

Maine Community Foundation: What is your take on the Equity Fund and its mission? Why is it needed?

Olivia Orr: As long as there are LGBTQ+ folks in Maine doing work to uplift the LGBTQ+ community, at any scale, there is a place for the Equity Fund to provide support for that work. I was pleased when we decided to shift our priorities to specifically require that eligible projects and organizations involve people who identify as LGBTQ+.

MaineCF: Say something about how the committee works in reviewing applications.

Orr: Something I appreciate about the committee during the review process is that we manage to be respectful of everyone's time, while still carefully considering each and every grant. We share equal airtime as individuals when considering the applications.

MaineCF: In the three years you've been a member of the Equity Fund advisory committee, has there been a particular grant that has stood out for its impact/vision/boldness?

Orr: I had the honor of speaking to Quinn Gormley of Maine TransNet a few years back. The requested funding (which was granted) helped support the expansion of peer services in Midcoast and Western Maine. I was completely blown away by Maine TransNet's ability to cover so much ground with such minimal staff. I know that it's certainly no small feat, and it didn't happen magically and without Quinn's immense dedication. The compassion and care came through in both the written proposal, and through every word Quinn shared with me. I felt almost giddy when it was my turn to share the proposal with the group.

MaineCF: Where do you see the greatest need(s) for the LGBTQ+ community in Maine?

Orr: As someone who grew up in an extremely rural town, my heart soars when I get to learn about the rad work that folks are doing outside of Cumberland County, all across the state of Maine. I think it's important for Portlanders to remind ourselves that we're in a unique position; we have more services, more people, more queer spaces. But that simply isn't the case for everyone. In addition to recognizing those differences and some of the privileges that come with that, it's also important to uplift those who are doing the work to make their communities more inclusive for queer folks in those rural spaces.

As a Black person, I also think that the queer community in Maine still has a long way to go in terms of acknowledging and confronting white supremacy. White queer folks must continue work to upend the system. Opportunities to support and uplift LGBTQ+ folks of color are of the utmost importance. Maine is one of the whitest states in the nation, and it is not exempt from the racial disparities that persist in health care, education, and housing.

MaineCF: We are marking the 25th anniversary of the Equity Fund this year. What's your vision for the fund in the future?

Orr: I hope that the fund will continue to grow in the future. On the one hand it would be great to be able to fund every single grant request that comes through. On the other hand, that goal feels a bit like an “end point,” and what I'd really love to see is an increase in LGBTQ+-led organizations in Maine. It would be amazing to see the funding grow alongside the number of LGBTQ+ folks in Maine doing amazing work for their communities.