

Effective Strategies for Organizations of Color in Philanthropy

Building Bridges is a national initiative working to ensure that comprehensive mental health services and supports are available to improve the lives of young people and their families.

Building Bridges identifies and promotes practice and policy that creates strong and carefully coordinated partnerships and collaborations between families, youth, community- and residentially-based intervention and service providers, advocates and policymakers.

In July of 2018, the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) Leaders of Color (LoC) Project was launched with support from The Annie E. Casey Foundation (Casey). Through the BBI LoC Project, LoC are given the opportunity to utilize their collective experiences and knowledge to support other executive leaders, staff, and youth and family advocates to increase their level of cultural and linguistic competence (CLC).

The grant initially supported the attendance of LoC from government-level oversight (licensing and monitoring) agencies and residential programs across the country at the University of Maryland, Baltimore and BBI Pre-Training Institute in Washington, DC.

As the possibilities were expanded through the relationship with Casey, the LoC were able to deepen their contribution and add to the development of other CLC resources and documents that support the field. BBI Leaders of Color are professionals committed to establishing and supporting policies and practices to improve outcomes for youth and families of color.

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Effective Strategies for Leaders of Color in Philanthropy concept paper:

Challenging the philanthropic community to effectively address inequities faced by Organizations of Color (organizations led by, staffed by, and/or serving Persons of Color) and offers Leaders of Color effective strategies for obtaining equitable funding

Executive Summary of Key Findings & Themes

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is 'What are you doing for others?'"

~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Effective Strategies for Leaders of Color in Philanthropy concept paper illustrates the inequities prevalent in fundraising practices led predominantly by White leaders, therefore resulting in lesser access to philanthropic dollars by Leaders of Color and their organizations. It goes on to offer strategies that White leaders of nonprofit organizations, and White funders and philanthropists can employ to remediate these inequities. Nonprofit philanthropy is an inherently exclusionary proposition based on the power dynamic between White philanthropists/funders and the Leaders of Color-led nonprofits that seek their support.

To generate equity in philanthropy and in access to services, industry analysis shows that more organizations led by Leaders of Color must receive access to funding from the mainstream philanthropic community at the same level and degree to which White-led organizations receive access. Respondents to BBI's questionnaire support this analysis with personal experiences of successes and roadblocks on the path to organizational growth and impediments to their ability to effectively serve youth, families, and communities of color.

Industry leaders teach us that the fundraising tenets taken for granted by White-led organizations are not necessarily available to organizations led by Leaders of Color. [Echoing Green](#) and [The Bridgespan Group](#)¹ (Echoing Green and Bridgespan, 2020) noted that the two most salient issues impeding philanthropic efforts to help advance social change are grounded in race. Those factors are:

- "Understanding the role of race in the problems philanthropists are trying to solve; and
- The significance of race when it comes to how philanthropists identify leaders and find solutions" (Dorsey, et al., 2020).

¹ The Bridgespan Group, a global nonprofit organization that collaborates with mission-driven organizations, and Echoing Green, an organization devoted to supporting emerging leaders and their early-stage organizations, join forces to analyze racial inequity in philanthropy and fundraising. They are referred to in this concept paper as [Echoing Green and Bridgespan](#).

The Building Movement Project's *Race to Lead* report highlights that on average, Leaders of Color have small operating budgets and are more likely to experience challenges accessing and securing financial support from various funding sources as compared to White leaders. This is underscored by Echoing Green's (2020) applicant pool of the most promising early-stage organizations, which revealed "revenues of the Black-led organizations were 24 percent smaller than the revenues of their White counterparts, and the unrestricted net assets of the Black-led organizations were 76 percent smaller than their White-led counterparts."

To address unrestricted net asset inequity, Multiyear General Operating Support (GOS) offers organizations the flexibility to utilize funding to achieve their mission and to plan and implement sustainability efforts to ensure continuous operations, programming, and services.

The journey to equitable access and funding requires allies, self-examination, and a willingness by White leaders to serve as allies for Leaders of Color. The Resonance Collaborative's [Resonance Framework](#) posits "Philanthropy must take an active role in building a thriving and just world by redistributing all aspects of well-being, democratizing power, and shifting economic control to communities. With this new vision, we can build a world that honors the sacredness of our natural resources and recognizes the inalienable rights of all."

We also know that creating positive social change requires the inclusion of Leaders of Color who understand how racial inequity and systemic racism affect communities of color. Through this lens, these Leaders can shape the dialogue with which they educate their boards on fund development, the role it plays in the sustainability and growth of the organization, and how to create a roadmap of introductions to key aligned funders.

To build, grow and sustain organizational health, Leaders of Color-led organizations recognize that they need to have grant writers, fund developers, door-openers, and rigorous donor engagement/donor stewardship activities, an active and supportive board of directors, and a robust social media/marketing strategy. More importantly, they recognize that they need to be at the table and in conversation with White leaders in philanthropy such as those who are currently posing substantial barriers to their success- and take an active role in shifting the conversation from exclusionary to inclusive.

Purpose of this Paper

The objective of this concept paper is to highlight challenges that have been identified through research and from the BBI Leaders of Color Project questionnaire results as having been experienced by leaders within the non-profit industry who identify as Black, Indigenous,

Latinx/Hispanic, and other Leaders of Color and to provide non-profit organizational Leaders of Color with concrete strategies for successfully increasing fund development.

In addition, the desire of the BBI Leaders of Color Project workgroup is that philanthropic leaders and community review and discuss the challenges and recommendations offered throughout this paper. Hopefully, these discussions will lead philanthropic entities to evaluate their practices for supporting individuals and organizations of color [organizations led by, staffed by and/or serving people of color] and make the necessary changes to ensure racial equity in the diversity of their program officers/staff/Board of Directors, giving strategies, practices, and policies.

Background

Echoing Green and Bridgespan collaborated to examine racial inequities in philanthropic funding and argues that population-level impact cannot occur without including and funding more leaders of color. Unfortunately, including and funding more leaders of color is hampered by the fact that “racial bias---both personal and institutional, conscious and unconscious---creeps into all parts of the philanthropic and grantmaking process” (Dorsey et al., 2020). Impact is impeded by the fact that nonprofit organizations led by individuals of color receive significantly less funding than those led by White individuals. Consequently, while philanthropic efforts are intended to support social change, they often perpetuate the same racial disparities that they are working to alleviate.

This excerpt clearly illustrates the challenges faced by Leaders of Color: “A Native American-led nonprofit was recently up for a grant renewal. Its CEO had hoped the process would be routine. After all, his organization had been a grantee of the foundation for 25 years and part of the program officer’s portfolio for almost eight years. Yet he still found himself having to defend his organization’s approach and its demonstrated success. Meanwhile, one of the CEO’s White peers ran into the same program officer in a bar after a conference and sketched out a three-year project plan on the back of a napkin. The White CEO secured funding in three months. The Native American CEO’s turnaround time? Eight months” (Dorsey et al., 2020). This is but one example of the prevalence of White-led foundations’ disregard for Leaders of Color. Leaders of Color are worthy of the same level of investment and partnership as White leaders.

The Building Movement Project’s *Race to Lead* report highlights that on average, Leaders of Color have small operating budgets and are more likely to experience challenges accessing and securing financial support from various funding sources as compared to White leaders.

Challenges these organizations face include 72 percent of board members in agencies led by Leaders of Color did not raise funds compared to 64 percent of White leaders; 63 percent of

leaders of color reported a lack of access to individual donors, compared to 49 percent of White leaders: and 51 percent of leaders of color lack access to foundations compared to 41 percent of White leaders (BMP, 2019).

Echoing Green and Bridgespan discovered that the two most salient issues impeding philanthropy's efforts to help advance social change are grounded in race. Those factors are:

- “Understanding the role of race in the problems philanthropists are trying to solve; and
- The significance of race when it comes to how philanthropists identify leaders and find solutions” (Dorsey, et al, 2020)

Philanthropist Jeff Raikes shares: “Tricia and I recognize that we come into this work with blind spots, as did many of our staff. Over the past few years, we have challenged ourselves to better understand the ways a race-conscious approach leads to better results for the communities we want to support” – *Dorsey et al., 2020.*

Research shows that race is the greatest predictor of life outcomes across multiple areas, including life expectancy, academic achievement, income, wealth, physical and mental health, and maternal mortality (Dorsey et al., 2020). These inequities cannot be eliminated by controlling for socioeconomic status. It is critical that donors whose focus is on supporting social change consider diversity, equity, and inclusion, and how those factors impact their funding decisions. It is critical that donors hire and include staff of color, who understand the issues and needs of communities of color, in funding decisions.

It was the Summer of 2020 when numerous protestors poured into America's streets demanding justice for Blacks after millions viewed the murder of George Floyd by police. This event sparked countless corporations and major philanthropists to pledge donations aimed at addressing racial inequity. Billions of dollars were committed to improving the financial strength of communities of color, business practices in and impacting communities of color, and police practices and conduct. Many donors directed their funds to under-funded nonprofit organizations serving Black communities. While numerous pledges were made, most nonprofits have not received the money. Mostly due to “...a tangle of complex tax rules and the absence of a framework to track funding for racial-equity programs --or even a consensus on what a racial-equity program is -- it has been all but impossible to assess the overall effectiveness of the donations” (Gamboa, 2021). Funding alone is not sufficient to position Organizations of Color for success. Technical assistance meant to support Leaders of Color in understanding how to

navigate funding systems, including Donor-Advised Funds (i.e., simple, flexible, and tax-efficient method to support charities) and methods used to pledge dollars but not fulfill the pledges, is a required tool if these leaders are going to be successful. A significant amount of time has passed since George Floyd’s death and yet, there has been little systemic progress that can be readily identified.

“The events of the last year have changed the way some foundations work,” said Aaron Dorfman, CEO of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, a research and advocacy group. “You’re going to see higher raw-dollar figures and higher percentages explicitly intended to benefit Black communities and other communities of color. A lot of us who are proponents of racial justice and social justice are really hoping that this newfound commitment continues. It’s an open question as to if it really will” (Gamboa, 2021, June 2).

With few exceptions, Leaders of Color and their organizations are significantly under-funded. Research has illuminated Black-led organizations earning nearly 25% less revenue than White counterparts and having unrestricted net assets of only 25% of what their White counterparts operate with.” Disparities based on race continue to occur even when considering the focus areas of Organizations of Color. For instance, “among organizations in Echoing Green’s Black Male Achievement fellowship, which focuses on improving the life outcomes of Black men and boys in the United States, the revenues of the Black-led organizations are 45 percent smaller than those of the White-led organizations, and the unrestricted net assets of the Black-led organizations are 91 percent smaller than the White-led organizations—despite focusing on the same work” (Dorsey et al., 2020).

The road to positive social change must include funding Leaders of Color who understand and are prepared to demonstrate how racial inequity and systemic racism affect communities of color. Many of these leaders have been wrestling with these issues for years and have developed some effective strategies for addressing them.

Systemic Barriers to Equitable Funding

A barrier to equitable funding for Leaders of Color that is also a solution is Multiyear General Operating Support (GOS). GOS offers organizations the flexibility to utilize funding to achieve their mission and to plan and implement sustainability efforts to ensure continuous operations, programming, and services. An increasing alliance of nonprofit leaders and advocates for more effective philanthropy, which includes a small group of grant makers, has been advocating for multiyear GOS to be established as the funding norm versus the exception (Thomas-Breitfeld,

2020). Research conducted by the Building Movement Project demonstrates the importance of GOS for nonprofit Leaders of Color. This research further highlights how critical GOS was during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter demonstrations focused on anti-Black racism, and highlights the need to successfully address issues of racial justice (Thomas-Breitfeld, 2020).

Regardless of the conversations about multiyear GOS, The Center for Effective Philanthropy's (CEP) report, *New Attitudes, Old Practices: The Provision of Multiyear General Operating Support*, has not led to any sustained changes in funding. CEP's report indicated that just over one-tenth of grants (12 percent) were multiyear GOS; and of the foundations surveyed, just a fraction (11 percent) of funders that make these grants provide them to most of their grantees. The prevailing question is "why do most foundations refuse to make most of their funding multiyear GOS when the research clearly indicates the benefits for nonprofit organizations?" This discussion is receiving more public attention through expert panel discussions and dialogue with subject matter experts. Nevertheless, the most common justification for the lack of grantees who receive multiyear GOS is based on a foundation's level of trust and familiarity with the grantee (Buteau, et al., 2020). It is important that funders carefully examine how decisions about awarding multiyear GOS are made. Factors such as the organization's experience and knowledge working with the community are crucial components that must not be overlooked. During the award process, funders must assess an organization's capacity to provide the necessary data and outcomes illustrating program effectiveness. If an organization does not have an information and data tracking system, it is equally important to invest multiyear GOS so they may create and implement a robust information and data tracking system for their long-term sustainability.

Stanford Social Innovation Review's *Overcoming the Racial Bias in Philanthropic Funding* (May 2020) identified four barriers to fundraising that are consistently experienced by Leaders of Color and represent ways unconscious bias can work its way into institutional processes and be internalized by philanthropic professionals.

Barrier One: Getting Connected

Leaders of Color have inequitable access to social networks that enable connections to the philanthropic community.

When funders say, "Leaders of color aren't coming to us for funding, so it feels like there's a pipeline problem. But maybe we just aren't connecting with the right people", Leaders of Color experience being excluded from both formal field events like convenings and informal gatherings. Because the world of philanthropy is built on relationships, who you know and who knows you, matters. Lacking this access- in essence, the absence of the "friend-of-a-friend"

privilege- can have lasting repercussions for Leaders of Color and the survival and growth of their organizations.

Barrier Two: Building Rapport

Interpersonal bias can manifest as mistrust and microaggressions, which inhibit relationship-building and emotionally burden leaders of color.

When funders say, “I’m pretty conscious about trying to treat everyone the same. But I’m having trouble connecting more personally with leaders of color”, Leaders of Color experience funders imposing their cultural norms (purposefully or not) upon grantees. It is a form of unconscious bias that can complicate relationships with Leaders of Color because of the dynamics of race and can lead to the exclusionary behavior or “othering.” The constant struggle to build relationships under these difficult conditions can leave mental and emotional scars on Leaders of Color. Circles are small, and Leaders of Color repeatedly run into funders who are exclusionary. Female Leaders of Color note that in these situations, it can be difficult to interpret which “isms” are at play (racism, sexism, or both), a reminder that the experiences of the intertwined identities of race and gender should not be underestimated or overlooked.

Barrier Three: Securing Support

Funders often lack understanding of culturally relevant approaches, leading them to over-rely on specific forms of evaluation and strategies that are familiar to them.

When funders say, “I’d like to fund solutions generated by communities of color, but they don’t have sufficient evidence of effectiveness or capacity to execute. And many of the approaches just seem too broad and are trying to do too much”, Leaders of Color experience “lack of capacity” and “lack of evidence” as code words used by funders to justify a decision not to invest. Additionally, funders often rely on their own understanding of “what works” to gauge promise, further limiting their likelihood of investing in leaders that draw on their personal experiences to inform solutions to challenges.

Barrier Four: Sustaining Relationships

Grant renewal processes can be arduous if mistrust remains, and funding may stop if the funder has a white-centric view of what is a strategic priority and how to measure progress.

When funders say, “the organization didn’t meet the targets we set for them and didn’t give us a heads up,” Leaders of Color experience the grant renewal process being particularly difficult- a sign that mistrust often lingers- and find themselves having to navigate outcome reporting when the funder and the leader are not aligned on how to measure a program or on what constitutes a strategic priority.

Strategies for Effectively Addressing Systemic Barriers to Equitable Funding

Strategies developed for the philanthropic community to create greater racial equity in funding include:

1. To increase organizational sustainability, funders must offer Leaders of Color Multiyear General Operating Support (GOS), giving them flexibility to use funding as needed to achieve their mission and to sustain continuous operations, programming, and services.
2. Funders must broaden their lens regarding the weight given to program outcomes data and recognize that Organizations of Color may lack funding to create and implement a formal information and data system, and therefore request GOS to develop such a system.
3. To improve access by Leaders of Color, funders must diversify their sourcing pools, including via recommendations from peers, to move toward a more racially diverse portfolio of grantees. They must reach out to racial equity experts, scan conference attendees, and use resources created by equity efforts like CHANGE Philanthropy.
4. To facilitate Leaders of Color building rapport with funders, funders will need to own the work of uncovering and addressing their [unconscious or conscious] bias and proactively meet Leaders of Color where they are rather than expecting them to always come to the funder. Ultimately, says Fred Ali of the Weingart Foundation, breaking down this barrier requires a funding community willing to embrace humility.
5. To bridge the support gap faced by Leaders of Color, funders must create a portfolio with a more diverse set of grantees, which will require funders rethinking their assumptions about what is worth funding and where solutions are found. For instance, eliminating often-used baseline criteria for the size of the organization a funder is willing to fund, as this practice has created an almost invisible class of organizations that are constantly dismissed for being “too small to fund.”
6. To make relationships more organization-focused and open the door to accessible donor stewardship, funders must treat Leaders of Color grantees as partners: welcome honest communication, establish shared goals that work for both funder and applicant, and work to truly understand the communities that applicant organizations represent (such as attending a community event as an observer, rather than a funder).

Quotes from Leaders of Color

Recognizing the sustained effort required to abolish the inequities in philanthropic funding, and wholly committed to creating an equitable future, Leaders of Color offer the following inspirations and observations:

- "Life's most persistent and urgent question is "What are you doing for others?" ~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." ~ Maya Angelou
- "As a leader of a historic Foundation that provided shelter for children of color when others did not and funding focused on the black community, when others looked away, it is my obligation to not only see that this mission is sustained into the future but also to build a pipeline for leaders of color to carry on the work long after I am gone." ~ Kilah Walters-Clinton, The Providence Shelter for Colored Children
- The lack of accountability for the behavior of rogue board members or reverence given to outside consultants who are White is appalling, and in some cases, has been blatantly racist." ~ Black woman ED/CEO BMP survey respondent
- My board is predominantly White, and we have a great relationship ... I walk into a room with 'beards' all the time. If I understand who is sitting across the table from me and I don't think they're going to be able to hear something from me ... I then think about the person I need to have [with me]. Whether it's a White Jewish board member or a man of color ... oftentimes I need help from one of them, especially with the funding community." Woman of Color ED/CEO focus group participant in New York, NY ~ (bmp, 2019)
- "The future belongs to those that prepare for it today" ~ Anonymous Leader of Color
- "Message and action over money" ~ Anonymous Leader of Color

Strategies for Organizations of Color to Increase Funding

The following sections illuminate strategies, recommendations, and interventions offered by the Leaders of Color Project workgroup members who responded to the Effective Strategies for Leaders of Color in Philanthropy questionnaire. Many respondents run organizations with annual budgets of \$10M or less. Therefore, their plan for success is reflective of the creativity needed to stand out to donors in a highly competitive arena but are also reflective of the hurdles faced by organizations that do not have a sufficient financial position from which to operate in a sustainable fashion. Consequently, the strategies noted below can be seen as both innovative and unfortunate, in that they underline the disadvantage at which minimal funding for operations puts Leaders of Color and the organizations they operate.

Strategies from BBI Leaders of Color in Philanthropy Questionnaire

- Questionnaire respondents recommend the following strategies for increasing fund development:
 - Hiring a grant writer and/or donor relations manager
 - Updating organizations' websites with relevant, current, engaging content
 - Strategically placing the *Donate Now* button on various pages of the website
 - Exploring Giving Circles² and capital campaigns as new donor cultivation tools
 - Educating the Board of Directors on fund development, the role it plays in the sustainability and growth of the organization, and how to create a roadmap of introductions to key aligned funders
 - Joining membership groups that contribute to fund development stewardship by offering greater access to funders, and can result in introductions to donors aligned with the organization's work

Strategies for identifying new corporate, foundation, government, and individual donors

Organization leaders know that funders from all sectors – corporate, foundation, government and individual - must be engaged as partners in building a fundraising infrastructure so that missions can be fulfilled, and communities can flourish. The following recommendations increase access to this partnership for Leaders of Color and their organizations.

- Lesley University uplifts [recommendations](#) from The Forbes Council for successful grant writers:
 - Think outside the box as you communicate with funders
 - Use relevant research and data to inform your writing
 - Create and implement a process for tracking grant applications from exploration to final decision
 - Construct a case for an organization's need through a narrative, storytelling progression [it is critical that organizations of color tell their story and outcomes]
 - Conclude with a focus on community impact
- The Libra Foundation, led by Executive Director Crystal Hayling, a woman of color, shares key lessons learned from the Foundation's work funding People of Color-led groups in the social justice space:
 - We must listen to our grantees, even when they tell us uncomfortable truths.

² According to the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers' [More Giving Together](#), a giving circle "is formed when individuals come together and pool their dollars, decide together where to give the money (and other resources such as volunteer time), and learn together about their community and philanthropy."



- We must help organizations that are controversial, struggling, or just getting started in the work, too, since these are the organizations often leading change where it's most needed.
 - We must back up our allies.
 - And we must be willing to be corrected if we make a mistake.
- Darren Walker, a philanthropic Leader of Color and President and CEO of the Ford Foundation, recommends:
 - Philanthropists should act as “venture investors” by finding and backing the best ideas and the best people.
 - Philanthropists should give unrestricted dollars – “the most precious and important dollars to a nonprofit - because that gives management a chance to deploy those dollars as they see fit.”
 - Funders should disrupt the status quo, or “fund the troublemakers, because sometimes we need those troublemakers to make trouble, hold us to account, to challenge our privilege and our power. Even if it makes us uncomfortable.”
 - Simon Schriver, international consultant at [FundraisingEverywhere](#), recommends before writing proposals, work meticulously through the organization's or leaders' networks to identify corporate prospects. This research is a big task, and a good bit of work before we even consider a proposal! But it's so important to remember who you're asking can be more important than what you're asking for. Rather than spending valuable time 'cold calling' businesses for support, you will want to start building your list of potential corporate partners and approach those most likely to respond favorably to you. The more relevant and connected to your organization they are, the greater the likelihood that they will consider a proposal.

“When one rises, we all rise.” Spoken in 2018 by 12-year-old Elijah, a social justice advocate, this sentiment underscores the importance of many coming together to benefit all. Fundraising and fund development are not adversarial activities, and access to engagement is the great equalizer across organizations. This is especially true for Leaders of Color leading organizations that have historically been too small, too quiet, or too 'on the fringe' to draw the attention of funders who are positioned to be changemakers. Now the time is upon us to bring about this change.

Supporting Schriver's recommendations, predominantly White-staffed organizations and White-led organizations are perfectly positioned to lead the field advancing equitable funding access and practices. White leaders already at the funding table have a moral and historical obligation to serve as allies to Leaders of Color. Allyship includes White leaders assisting Leaders of Color in identifying and nurturing their own funding networks. This includes sharing

tools and/or resources while these leaders build their organizations' financial foundations and providing warm introductions between the Leaders of Color and the White leader's network for partnership development.

The *Quick and Dirty Guide to Finding New Donors* by [DonorSearch](#) recommends that organization philanthropy teams "make your organization's web presence a priority."

"People spend much of their time on the internet now. It's how they pick restaurants and talk with friends. It's the way of the present, and it will be the way of the future. If your organization wants a seamless method to reach new donors, it has to have a solid web presence." Therefore, says the *Quick and Dirty Guide to Finding New Donors*,

You need to:

- Build online authority
- Develop your social media accounts
- Funnel new contacts into email streams

One of the challenges that comes with online donor acquisition is figuring out which internet activities are the ones generating donations. You can help determine that by studying your fundraising success metrics to see what is working and what is not; and by using a low-cost social media engagement service like [Sprout Social](#) or [Hootsuite](#).

Additionally, you want to find ways to move interested donors from the website scanning phase to the donating phase. When you send out social media posts and add news to your website, ensure that you are including calls-to-action that capture your prospects' attention.

Then you can send out email streams with the intention of building your relationships and eventually securing gifts and the new donors that come along with those gifts.

The calls-to-action to potential donors should be written through a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion lens, and serve the dual role of bringing awareness to your work and educating donors and potential donors about the need for social, gender, and/or racial justice services in your community.

Strategies for connecting with potential funders

Aside from the Grant Writer taking on this role by exploring alignment with new funders and building engagement with current funders, questionnaire respondents also reported:

- Increased reliance on LinkedIn and other social networking sites to develop relationships; and
- The importance of sharing organizational successes through solicitation emails/phone calls to engage donors

Transform Consulting Group prioritizes three tips for finding funders that align with what questionnaire respondents encourage:

1. Identify your objectives and funding needs:
Before you even start looking for funding, make sure you and your team have a clear understanding of the project you want to fund. Having a clear concept and focus will prepare you to identify funders with the strongest alignment. It's also crucial to identify your funding needs...as many funders have guidelines regarding the type of projects and expenses they are willing to fund. It is critical to identify any specific challenges that Leaders of Color have faced with funders implementing guidelines that exclude Leaders of Color due to the funder simply not understanding the work being undertaken.
2. Start by searching existing funder databases:
Once you have clarity around your project and funding needs, it's time to start researching funders. There are several existing funder databases that can help you find funders. Most of them have a subscription fee, but the investment is worth it. Funder databases help to streamline your research process and find funders more efficiently. The good news is that many of these databases have inexpensive subscription costs. Discuss with your Board and determine with your team how much you can invest in a subscription.

Recommended foundation grant databases include: [Foundation Directory Online](#), [GrantStation](#), The [Grantsmanship Center](#) and trade associations that include foundations as members (ex: the [Indiana Philanthropy Alliance](#)).

Recommended government grant databases include: [USA.gov](#), [Benefits.gov](#), [Grants.gov](#)

3. Determine funders with the best alignment:
Once you have found a funder database and compiled a list of potential funders, determine the funders who align most closely with your goals/mission and have historically supported similar organizations of color. Consider any target populations or focus areas the funder is committed to and whether those priorities align with your

project. It is also important to consider the type of projects they typically fund (i.e. capital projects, etc.).

Strategies for building rapport with potential funders

Questionnaire respondents report an expansive range of approaches, including:

- Constant Contact or other social media platforms to share information
- Hold discussions with funders through intermediaries such as the Grantmakers Council and ABFE: A Philanthropic Partnership to Black Communities
- Small, localized issue-focused community and church meetings
- Outreach conversations to discuss alignment and the intended request
- Invite employees' and leaderships' contacts to give the organization a warm introduction
- Request invitations to events with shared interests

Strategies for securing funding support

Responses noted most often by the questionnaire respondents include:

- Hiring grant writers
- Implementing ideas from fundraising and strategic planning board committees
- Diversifying their Board of Directors

Strategies for effectively cultivating relationships with funders

Responses noted most often by the questionnaire respondents include:

- Continued use of written and print materials
- Continued use of or adoption of Constant Contact or other list serv communication platform
- Share regular updates with funders
- Share the project pipeline and other opportunities to garner trust and open communication.
- Performance, program delivery and timely reporting

Recommendations from Visionary Grantmakers for effective funder relationships

- GrantCraft, in partnership with Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity, offers words of advice from grantmakers that have started these critical conversations with colleagues and board members:
 - Don't look for "one size fits all" solutions
 - Foundations are made up of people with many different roles and responsibilities: they are at different levels of readiness to use a racial equity lens. We [know] that whatever else we do will need broader institutional support to move forward.

- Frame the strategic opportunity that your organization is seeking funding to address, and how the funding will address this opportunity.
- Create space for learning
 - Because racial equity is such a charged issue, grant makers often need to create opportunities to explore issues of racial equity with each other. Those should be structured so they can eventually seed larger institutional investments in racial equity.
- Resist the temptation to stay under the radar
 - Looking back on her own experiences as a program officer, one Latina foundation president said “I stretched my portfolio to bring in people-of-color organizations, but I never told the board what I was trying to do. My intention was to get money out the door, not to change their thinking.” Today, she advises program officers to “be very practical. You need to present clear evidence that a focus on race will help your foundation be effective.”

Strategies for sustaining relationships with current funders

- Responses noted most often by the questionnaire respondents include:
 - Brochures, email, phone calls and invitations to visit the organization
 - Communicate with the funder when you don't need anything
 - Hold in-person individual and group gatherings
 - Data documentation, success stories, updates to funders
 - Submit reports on time
 - Keep the organization's website updated
 - Focus on improving the quality of funding applications

The National Council of Nonprofits shares its **Recipe for the Secret Sauce** [of great funder/nonprofit relationships]. The recipe addresses strategies raised by questionnaire respondents around building rapport with potential funders, securing funding support, effectively cultivating relationships with funders, and sustaining relationships with current funders.

Recipe for the Secret Sauce

An abridged version of the **Recipe for Secret Sauce** is excerpted here. The full Recipe is available at <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/thought-leadership/the-secret-sauce-of-great-funder-nonprofit-relationships>.

- Ingredients for great funder/nonprofit relationships include mutual respect, clear expectations (from both sides), open and ongoing communication, trust, humility, and mission alignment; plus, respect for failure, open-mindedness, and a willingness to learn from each other.
- Directions: Stir together power and respect. One of the most important steps is to intentionally acknowledge the tension that exists due to the [power dynamic](#) between grantmakers and nonprofits.
 - Fold in trust and transparency: trusting each other – even when you feel that you are taking a risk – is a hallmark of a respectful and strong relationship. Find ways to show up as a trusted partner.
 - Marinate: Connect and share information outside of the grant making process.
 - Manage expectations: Communicate a new direction or the need to shift gears; ask for insight or recommendations for an organizational challenge you are facing.
 - Whip up a communications plan: Nonprofits: ask your funders, “How would you most like to receive information from us? Foundations, look for opportunities to share what’s important to your work – and theirs – and reach out personally.
 - Sauté: Rather than requiring lengthy reports, foundations can ask nonprofits for short, timely snapshots/updates via phone call, or a coffee date, or suggest that a nonprofit share the same report they submitted to another funder.
 - Taste! How’s it going? Nonprofits are hungry for feedback, especially about why their proposal was turned down. Foundations are eager to learn about the experiences of nonprofits that did and did not receive funding.
 - Check: What additional/different resources could help the nonprofit even more than a grant? What information from nonprofits could help the grantmaker make more strategic grantmaking decisions?
 - Garnish the plate: What added value can each side bring to the other? Sometimes site visits aren’t practical or possible, but a new and interesting way to introduce the foundation to your nonprofit’s mission area could offer a sensitive touch that nourishes a great relationship.

Strategies for obtaining the greatest impact on fundraising/organizational budget

Responses noted most often by the questionnaire respondents include:

- Having a Development Officer, working committees, and fundraising seed money
- Proper marketing for brand awareness and for a start-up
- Network of partners
- A strong grant writer, conducting prospect research, and having a fund developer
- Knowing the funder's interests and having a contact at the funder's organization

The Stanford Social Innovation Review's "**Overcoming the Racial Bias in Philanthropic Funding**" encourages funders to "...examine and diversify their sourcing channels by reaching out to racial equity experts, scanning conference attendees, and using resources created by equity efforts like CHANGE Philanthropy. Does a given sourcing method prioritize DEI [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion]? Have certain channels given rise to a more racially diverse pool than others? Are filters applied (like budget size) that would disproportionately exclude organizations led by people of color? If a sourcing pool does not meet a threshold of racially diverse leaders, consider not accepting it or conducting proactive outreach to further diversify it."

Further, the [Chron.](#) newsletter blog post "**Organizational Structure for a Fundraising Department**" notes the ideal fundraising department structure has a fundraising director at its head, who carries responsibility for strategic planning of the organization's resource development portfolio. The organization should have three levels of staff so the director can maintain close involvement with all aspects of the business.

The greatest challenges associated with fundraising

Responses noted most often by the questionnaire respondents include:

- Having a board that is invested in leading large fundraising initiatives, resulting in sustained funding to support adequate staff and volunteers
- Adapting to the ever-changing fundraising environment while remaining mission-aligned
- Funders' lack of trust in African American-led organizations

Strategies for addressing the greatest challenge(s) associated with fundraising

Responses noted most often by the questionnaire respondents include:

- Educate the Board of Directors on their role in fund development and their role in establishing and fulfilling annual fundraising goals

- Hire a full-time development person to identify and steward likely funders and donors
- Implement a variety of virtual fundraising platforms and event types to reach wider donor audiences
- Utilize data and outcomes to demonstrate the efficacy of programs and financial stewardship

Emerging voices in philanthropy have been steadily and stealthily advancing an agenda that requires equitable access to resources to build a just world.

- Doug Stamm, the CEO of Portland, Oregon’s [Meyer Memorial Trust](#) and a White leader, embraced the concepts and practices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion across his employees and the pillars of change that his foundation chose to invest in. He introduced this change in course by explaining to his team: “you have to start with the people who have not had the benefits that I have—people who, unlike me, might have to worry about being pulled over when they drive down the street. “

In the end, Meyer decided to overhaul its approach to grantmaking: It would move from a responsive and broad approach of funding worthy groups that shared its values to something deeper and more systemic: working to identify the barriers to racial, gender, and disability status equity—and other forms of equity—and attacking those barriers.

The definition of equity that the foundation settled on (and posted on its website) was: “the existence of conditions where all people can reach their full potential.” But the

statement makes clear that understanding the concept requires grappling with how “bias and oppression” manifest themselves in society along lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, and other factors. For the foundation as an organization, it “means grappling with our identity in a field born out of wealth and power.”

- Oakland, California’s [Justice Funders](#) is a partner and guide for philanthropy in reimagining practices that advance a thriving and just world. They envision “a world that honors the sacredness of our natural resources and recognizes the inalienable rights of all. We assert that philanthropy must take an active role in building this world by redistributing all aspects of well-being, democratizing power and shifting economic control to communities.”
 - The [Resonance Collaborative](#) produced the conceptual document [Resonance: A Framework for Philanthropic Transformation](#). The Framework supports philanthropic organizations and those who lead the organizations in accelerating

- a Just Transition by reducing extractive practices and increasing regenerative practices.
 - The Resonance Collaborative is a constellation of movement and philanthropic leaders, anchored by Justice Funders, which aims to facilitate a Just Transition for philanthropy.
- The national collaborative [D5 Coalition](#), launched in 2010 as a five-year initiative, has worked to help foundations and other philanthropic organizations recruit diverse leaders, identify the best actions for organizations to take, increase funding to diverse communities and improve data collection and transparency. More than a dozen organizations with connections to thousands of grantmakers came together to establish the D5 Coalition. Since then, the coalition has continued to grow.

“If we are going to succeed in our missions, we need to embrace this reality and reflect it in our organizations. If people at a foundation’s decision-making table understand and share the perspectives of the people they are trying to help, we are far more likely to achieve impact as we collectively work to advance the common good.” -Kelly Brown, CEO of D5

- Nonprofit Quarterly Magazine’s *Voices from the Field* series urges funders and service providers alike to not “be a leader in name only. A leader has to be vulnerable, open, and actively engaged. Racial equity work is hands-on and requires co-ownership with board and staff. As [Equity in the Center](#) posits, leaders must “model a responsibility to speak about race, dominant culture, and structural racism both inside and outside the organization.”

“You can have a conversation about diversity and never talk about racism. My staff needed to see me show up and be present in that space,” said one president.

GrantCraft offers the following tools for creating a successful grant-making approach:

1. *Reflections from grant makers of color for equitable access to funding:*

Your Race/Your Role: Reflections from Grant Makers

FROM INTERVIEWS WITH GRANT MAKERS OF COLOR

On raising issues of racial equity –

I'm often the only one [at the community foundation] raising issues like, "Why don't we try to develop more upper middle class donors of color, rather than only extremely wealthy people who are generally white?" Engaging donors of color would have an impact on who we support, what relationships we build, who we are accountable to.

People often think that raising race issues is divisive and unnecessary. When I raised issues of race at my previous foundation, I was told, "We are not a diversity foundation," meaning we took a colorblind approach. The colorblind approach goes hand in hand with unconscious racism. Because people don't realize their biases or society's, they don't feel there is anything to correct.

On the role of race in professional interactions –

There are times where I feel the pressure as being "the Latino." I'm expected to answer on behalf of my community, and my community expects me to give resources that it may not have gotten in the past because I'm the one they go to.

On the risk of being pigeon-holed –

As people of color we need to avoid becoming "Johnny one-notes" by making race issues the only thing we speak up about. We need to build our credibility by also succeeding in other ways as a program officer.

In taking this job, I basically defied all the advice I got from my community, which was, "Whatever you do, don't let them pigeonhole you and only work on Latino issues." I said, "I don't care. I'm going to work on these issues no matter what." As my role expanded, it was no longer a question of wading in deep water and watching out for the sharks. It was about learning to swim smoothly, knowing I had the support of leadership.

FROM INTERVIEWS WITH WHITE GRANT MAKERS

On raising issues of racial equity –

The messenger matters, and we can all hear different things from different people, so the question for me is how I can use not only my position but also my race to help people see things they might otherwise not be able to see.

White people need to be challenged to take this issue on. I try to be as forceful, explicit, and persistent as I can be because I think that's what people need to see. It helps prevent the issue from getting marginalized as an issue for people of color to deal with.

On the role of race in professional interactions –

Racial equity grant making takes a much higher tolerance for personal discomfort and ambiguity than most grant making. You feel vulnerable to criticism that isn't just about what is traditionally thought of as "good grant making," but also criticism about your entire view of the world, from both white people and people of color.

I'm getting more confident in my understanding of racial equity and more comfortable, even when I'm criticized by people of color. This is my struggle, too.

On developing a racial equity lens –

My experience is that you need to start from within the foundation first and really examine all aspects of your work. Programming is only part of that examination. When you hit resistance, it's possible to move forward using a step-by-step process based on values that reflect equity and inclusion.

I try to find opportunities where I can be in conversations with people of color talking about race. The main thing I do is just listen. I've never lived racial injustice in the same way as a person of color.

2. Questions to ask inside your foundation

Questions to Ask Inside Your Foundation

ABOUT YOUR FOUNDATION'S OWN POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- How is a commitment to racial equity reflected in our mission, vision, goals, and workplans?
- How diverse is our own staff? How about our executive leadership and board? Are we doing enough to establish or maintain a diversity of voices inside the foundation?
- Is our staff experienced in talking about race? If not, what internal staff development might strengthen our ability to discuss issues of race and act on racial inequities?
- Do we have criteria and policies in place to assess the racial and ethnic diversity of grantees? Do we have protocols for discussing the role of racial equity in shaping their organization priorities? What data do we gather about the race/ethnicity of their boards and staff? What do those data tell us, and are we doing enough to respond?
- What do we know about the racial and ethnic diversity of our contractors and suppliers? Do those relationships reflect our commitment to racial equity?
- How can we ensure that we stay open to new ideas and diverse voices? Do we have criteria and policies in place that seem race neutral but may be barriers to potential grantees of color?
- Are foundation staff assessed and rewarded for their ability to connect with diverse grantees and community members?
- How should our commitment to racial equity be reflected in the foundation's own performance measures? What should the foundation be held accountable for?
- If we're a community foundation, how do we celebrate and support philanthropy by people of color?

ABOUT YOUR GRANT MAKING STRATEGY

- What might racial equity look like in the arenas where we work?
- How could a racial equity lens strengthen our own understanding of the problems we're trying to address? How could it strengthen the understanding and practice of grantees? What quantitative data would help clarify the problems that matter to us?
- How is our grant making strategy responsive to demographic changes in our community?
- Are we consciously asking if there are racial disparities in the arenas where we work? If so, why do they exist? Do our strategies align with our reasoning about the disparities? Are they targeting the right problems?

CONCLUSION

We are optimistic that more foundations will adopt the practice of offering grantees Multiyear General Operating Support (GOS). The research gleaned indicates that GOS presents organizations with the flexibility to use funding to support their mission and for their sustainability efforts to ensure continuous operations and services. While only 11% of funders currently support GOS, our desire is that as more foundations understand and acknowledge the important role that this funding presents for organizations of color, they will implement this practice. The many issues facing organizations of color are exacerbated by them having less access to funding and operating with smaller budgets and less unrestricted net assets than White organizations.

We also know that personal and institutional, and conscious and unconscious racial biases greatly influence philanthropic funding. The philanthropic community must acknowledge that creating positive social change requires the inclusion of Leaders of Color who understand how racial inequity and systemic racism affect communities of color. It is paramount that the philanthropic community that is invested in social justice and change assesses how diversity, equity, and inclusion are impacted by their funding decisions.

Creating equitable access to grant funds will demand that the philanthropic community conducts a self-assessment and examine their own practices related to how grant funds are awarded, ensuring that their process is a vehicle to eliminate the inequities that exist rather than contributing to them. Additionally, leaders of predominantly White-staffed organizations can also play a vital role in helping to eliminate the funding inequities by serving as allies to Leaders of Color. The relationship must focus on successful methods and approaches for obtaining grant funding, growing the organization's donor base, and introducing and connecting them to various foundations and key personnel that have a role in awarding grant funding.

We recognize that some grantmakers are struggling with the 'why' question. For those organizations, we strongly encourage them to read and discuss the challenges and strategies presented in this paper. We understand that until grantmaking organizations' boards and leaderships can comprehend and fully appreciate the benefits associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion, they will be unable to accept or integrate these essential strategies.

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