

THE FUTURE OF PHILANTHROPY IS TRUST-BASED



The trust-based philanthropy movement has grown in rapid time, challenging old norms and fundamentally reimagining the role of funders. But despite its recent prominence, there are still basic misunderstandings about this approach and its bold vision for a more just and democratic society.

Bringing together a variety of perspectives, this supplement illustrates what a trust-based approach really means, why it is essential to effective philanthropy, and what will be possible if more funders embrace it.

p. 2 The Rise of Trust-Based Philanthropy

BY SHAADY SALEHI

p. 3 Racial Justice Requires Trust

BY NAT CHIOKE WILLIAMS & LIZ BONNER

p. 5 Reimagining Funder Accountability

BY LORRIE FAIR ALLEN, ASHLEE GEORGE & CHARLIZE THERON

p. 8 A Framework for Corporate Social Good

BY JOHN BROTHERS

p. 10 Trust, Rest, and Joy

BY CARRIE AVERY, STELLA CHUNG & SARAH WALCZYK

p. 12 Operationalizing Trust

BY JAMIE ALLISON & JENNIFER C. HAAS

p. 14 Building a Multiracial Democracy

BY PIA INFANTE

THE RISE OF TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY

Funders are embracing a more equitable way of working with nonprofits by prioritizing collaboration and trust.

BY SHAADY SALEHI

became a nonprofit executive director at 29 years old. As the child of immigrants, I was aware of social and political inequities at an early age, which eventually led me to a career in social-impact media. By the time I found myself at the helm of a nonprofit, however, my vision of what that work would be and what it entailed had become two separate matters. The years that followed were the most challenging of my career.

As a young nonprofit executive, I averaged 60-hour workweeks, often working on grant proposals late into the night. I struggled to maintain my confidence and well-being as I juggled my responsibilities. I still shudder to think of my traumatic experiences during those years. Once, a funder berated me on a conference call, criticizing my “lack of preparedness” in front of my peers. In another instance, I spent days designing a strategic plan for a funder on a topic he was passionate about and never received a dime. Then there was my most destabilizing experience: A new program

officer at one of our longtime funding institutions abruptly ended my organization’s renewal funding, slashing our budget by one-third overnight.

Anyone who has worked in a nonprofit leadership role has confronted similar dynamics. They are symptoms of a toxic culture in philanthropy. Yet these affronts are so common that our sector has tacitly accepted them under the guise of “due diligence” and “strategic philanthropy.”

When philanthropy holds the reins this tightly, it cannot create the conditions necessary to advance social change. Inevitably, nonprofits’ missions are undermined when they spend most of their time meeting funders’ demands. This produces the ultimate irony: Funder behaviors and norms *inhibit* nonprofits’ ability to achieve the impact they want to see.

A WAKE-UP CALL FOR FUNDERS

For years, nonprofit leaders’ calls for change have gone largely unheeded, despite compelling arguments for shifting power dynamics and normalizing

unrestricted funding. Studies have shown that philanthropic norms have inhibited nonprofit impact and exacerbated racial inequalities.

The tide finally began to turn in 2020, when, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, political turmoil, and global uprisings for racial justice, funders began to reexamine their work at every level. Many dropped onerous reporting requirements. They moved money quickly, with fewer strings attached. They converted restricted grants to general operating support so nonprofits could pivot to meet unforeseen needs.

Of course, sector-wide change does not happen spontaneously. Years prior to the sea change of 2020, a small group of funders had been organizing around a shared approach rooted in trust and collaboration. They listened deeply to what nonprofits needed. “Trust us” was the message from nonprofits. Following that cue, these funders pooled their time and resources to influence others. Inspired by their vision and motivated by my personal experience, I joined them in building the campaign that would eventually become the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project.

A RISING CULTURAL SHIFT

The Project launched in 2020 with humble aspirations to promote six grantmaking practices to alleviate funder-grantee power dynamics. Since then, we have inspired hundreds of funders to embrace unrestricted funding, streamlined paperwork, and support beyond the check. We have shifted the narrative around conventional practices while providing tools and resources for operationalizing trust-based giving.

One insight we have gleaned is that making changes in practice is relatively easy. But trust-based philanthropy goes *much* deeper than grantmaking. We envision a future where nonprofits and communities are celebrated as essential contributors to social change. This trust-based future requires shifts in philanthropic mindsets and cultures, as well as the structures that scaffold them. It requires funders to relinquish their individual power to achieve a more equitable and democratic future.

Fortunately, more philanthropic leaders are stepping up to do the bold, rigorous, and infinitely more rewarding work of institutional change. They are reimagining traditional roles and structures in radical ways, including transforming organizational cultures from corporate to community-centric. These leaders recognize nonprofit health and well-being as a major ingredient in advancing social progress.

Trust-based philanthropy also expands our definitions of accountability in ways that center the needs and dreams of marginalized communities, providing a pathway to liberation and justice. Trust-based funders are modeling the kind of culture that will contribute to a more democratic future for everyone.

The stories in this supplement demonstrate that while there is no one-size-fits-all approach to trust-based philanthropy, the core values remain the same. What was once expressed on the sector’s fringes is now a chorus, with voices coming from across the United States and abroad. This movement proves how the power of an idea can reshape philanthropy, especially when funders relinquish personal power to build collective power. I hope our sector can maintain this momentum to realize a better future.

Shaady Salehi is cofounder and executive director of the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project. She has worked at the intersection of narrative, culture, and social change for more than two decades.

RACIAL JUSTICE REQUIRES TRUST

A commitment to racial justice means transforming conventional practices and embracing trust-based philanthropy.

BY NAT CHIOKE WILLIAMS & LIZ BONNER

Over the years, funders would tell those of us at the Hill-Snowdon Foundation, “You’re such an example.” They were so proud of our organizing work, especially in the US South. They pointed to how we centered our relationships with our partners and how we focused on racial justice as underlying and informing every issue. These acknowledgments could have served as a signal that we were doing enough, causing us to stop interrogating our own behaviors.

But we did not stop. Instead, we uncovered gaps in our approach and outdated practices that did not align with our values. Like so many in philanthropy, we relied on old habits, having inherited certain practices without taking time to critique them. A new philosophy that aligned with trust-based philanthropy helped us realize that our commitment to centering racial justice and power building required us to change.

Together, we offer our combined reflections on that process as executive director and board president of the Hill-Snowdon Foundation. We share the following road map for other funders who are committed to advancing justice but may feel stuck using conventional practices that cause more harm than good.

STOP AMBIVALENT NO’S

Our need for change came into sharp focus in 2020. Funders that had long accepted status quo philanthropy began to shift when faced with the unprecedented needs of communities amid the pandemic, racial justice uprisings, and political upheaval.

In the spring of that year, the Hill-Snowdon staff had many calls with our partners to hear what the foundation could do to better support them. At the end of one call, one of our longtime partners, the Black Organizing Project, inquired if the foundation could begin multiyear grantmaking.

Until that point, Hill-Snowdon had only provided long-term grants on an annual basis. To us, longer or shorter grant periods were a technicality; our commitment was the same. However, for our community partners, who had asked us to shift to multiyear grants during our 2005 strategic planning process, longer-term grants brought stability to their work.

Yet we had failed to grasp this truth—not because of a strategic disagreement but simply, we realized, because of habit: Multiyear grants would have required changes to our accounting practices. The shift from one year to multiple was tedious and technical, which at the time was enough of a barrier to stop us changing.

Fifteen years later and in the context of crisis and turmoil, our “no” to the request for multiyear funding felt wrong. It served our own interests, not our community partners’.

REORIENTING TO SERVICE

Our shift from single-year grants to multiyear funding opened other questions and possibilities. We called this our *strategic reorientation*: We reoriented ourselves from supporting our partners to serving them, by not only moving the foundation's grant dollars to our community partners but also doing it in a way that fully and deliberately aligned with our values.

This service reorientation gave us a different lens for examining our work. We began to ask ourselves, "How is this serving our partners?" When the answer was that it wasn't, we then asked what must change so that it did. For example, staff members previously spent hundreds of hours creating long and detailed write-ups for our board dockets. When we realized that this wasn't serving our partners, we eliminated these time-consuming write-ups, which created time for staff to connect with community partners to learn more about how to better serve them.

THE CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

Among many elements that helped the Hill-Snowdon Foundation introduce these changes was the clarity of our values around power and racial justice. Building trusting relationships with our partners had always mattered to us and was central to Nat Chioke Williams' experience as a community and youth organizer. We were committed to investing directly in and following the lead of marginalized individuals working to create a new system that benefited everyone.

Hill-Snowdon's racial justice orientation made it possible to explore the changes we incorporated into our organization. Trust-based philanthropy gave us the language to understand that while we were clear on our values, our commitment to relationships was not being reflected in our grantmaking practices. With changes like embracing multiyear grants and doing away with lengthy dockets, we saw our organization's actions more closely reflect our words. As we moved into our strategic reorientation, we learned four lessons, which we hope will inspire other foundation board and staff members seeking to strengthen their own racial justice and trust-based orientations:

Consider the changes your board needs. | One of Williams' primary roles is to foster relationships between the board and the community. This is done through site visits and other opportunities that ground racial justice issues in personal experience and connection. By making this an explicit part of his role, Williams built trust, eventually paving the way to expanding the board to include trustees beyond just family members.

In 2020, three non-family community trustees—leaders of color who are experts in their fields—joined the board. Recruiting, selecting, and onboarding new trustees took a great deal of care and contemplation. We pushed ourselves to understand how to create a multiracial space from a monoracial one. We also redefined our board's role in order to increase support for Black-led organizing.

Additionally, in November 2022, the Hill-Snowdon board decided to relinquish some of its decision-making power. In that meeting, we voted to move to multiyear general operating support grants and to transfer decision-making for all grants up to \$100,000 to our staff.

Deepen internal racial justice work. | Hill-Snowdon was not new to racial justice and equity grantmaking. But we realized that becoming fully committed to anti-racism as an organization required exploring what it means to have a predominantly white board investing in Black-led organizing. It was not enough to rely on aligned grantmaking or to invite the board to build alliances with our community partners. We also examined our identities in relation to the work, including the biases we bring.

While we already had the desire to engage in this work, we did not have the structure and support for reflection and learning. Hill-Snowdon hired a racial equity consultant to embark on this journey with family



members on the board, year over year. The process included having deep conversations about the family's intersections with racism and examining their sources of wealth.

Invest in building trust internally. | We strive for nonhierarchical dynamics and relationships. For example, any staff member may attend any board committee meeting. We also respect the expertise, experience, and knowledge of each person on the team. Liz Bonner, a family trustee, has full faith in Williams as the expert in grantmaking and the person who has deep relationships with grassroots partners and other funders. It may sound simplistic, but sharing each person's contributions and working together for so many years have cultivated mutual trust and respect.

In 2014, when Michael Brown was killed by police in Ferguson, Missouri, and BLM was gaining mainstream visibility, Williams wrote an article called "Making Black Lives Matter," about philanthropy's role in investing in Black-led social change. As executive director, Williams informed the board that the article would be published under the Hill-Snowdon Foundation's name, rather than asking for their permission. The entire board endorsed his decision because they fully supported his leadership—a level of affirmation reflecting their relationship rooted in trust, shared values, and a shared commitment.

Start with power. | If our goal is to redistribute power toward a more equitable future, we must begin by identifying how and where power exists in our work and processes. From there, funders can begin making intentional shifts toward a greater goal.

When Hill-Snowdon began updating our approach, we got organized by creating a map of the changes under our new model. With every interrogation of a process came change. All the elements in our work were connected, requiring us to stay deliberate and flexible. For example, when we removed our board dockets, we had to rethink board meetings and staff roles so that we could continue to share high-level learnings with the board. We discovered that 100 elements had to change.

VIGILANCE IS THE ONLY VICTORY

How, in this moment, can there be racial-justice funders who do not adhere to trust-based principles? How are we still witnessing funders who voice their commitment to social justice while missing the chance to truly serve their partners?

When we understand that this work is about breaking down hierarchies and restructuring relationships, we realize, as Williams says, that vigilance is the only victory. Who we are and how we show up is a perpetual experience. There is no finish line. You cannot have a just society without trusting in the humanity of all people.

In recent years, we have seen some funders change the window dressing of their grantmaking to resemble trust-based practices. But trust-based philanthropy is deeper than a shift to multiyear grantmaking or simplifying grant applications. If we stop being vigilant about making racial justice and trust the foundation of our work, we risk replicating the very dynamics that define our unequal society. Vigilance is especially important if we understand philanthropy as a direct product of racialized power in this country. If we can change relationships in our sector, imagine the potential for change on an even broader scale.

Nat Chioke Williams is the executive director of the Hill-Snowdon Foundation.

Liz Bonner is a family trustee of the Hill-Snowdon Foundation.

REIMAGINING FUNDER ACCOUNTABILITY

Funders often mistake accountability for compliance. Instead, accountability must be rooted in mutuality, relationships, and power analysis.

BY LORRIE FAIR ALLEN, ASHLEE GEORGE
& CHARLIZE THERON

was born in apartheid South Africa, where racism and injustice defined society. The country's white minority used its power to build systems and structures to divide and oppress people. Inequity was all around us. While this history still looms over the country, South Africa is not alone. Historical inequities have shaped every society, every sector, our contemporary lives, and our organizations. Philanthropy is no exception. I founded the Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project (CTAOP) because of the lasting impact of inequity on young people and their communities. The longer we do this, the more we realize that conventional philanthropy, like many other sectors, keeps power where it is. — Charlize Theron

As funders, if we are to achieve our shared vision with our grantee partners, we need to build an environment with strong relationships, where each of us takes responsibility for our role. Too often this isn't the case. Our mission at CTAOP is to invest in and advance the health of young people in southern Africa to create a more equitable future for all. We achieve this by forming close bonds with our program partners, which requires both trust and accountability. It is our belief that through these relationships we can best support community leaders to create positive change in the lives of young people.

By defining accountability as taking responsibility for our actions, we can think critically about the role we play in a larger ecosystem of change. While we understand that each funder operates in unique contexts and with limitations that shape their approach, our hope is that this article encourages them to think more with an equity lens, especially as it pertains to their own accountability.

FROM CONTROL TO ACCOUNTABILITY

In philanthropy, accountability is a practice generally required solely of the grantee, and grant makers often pass on any accountability requirements to their community partners. Many funders require burdensome proof of numbers reached and completed activities, quarterly impact, or detailed financial audits. Such data are often more about compliance with funders' requirements than learning about community impact. Funding and strategy decisions not based on learning may subsequently be based on biases shaped by non-local norms. Individuals with relevant lived experiences are often labeled solely "beneficiaries" or "recipients," while others who possess greater positional power are deemed "experts" or "authorities" best suited to solve societal challenges.

Some indicators can be helpful for learning about our partners' work. But if we are honest with ourselves, philanthropy's conventional accountability practices often more closely resemble a comprehensive

CTAOP has always prioritized care and responsiveness, an approach that is mirrored in how we honor the expertise and experiences of youth and our program partners.

audit. Very rarely does a funder’s measurement of impact include any reflection on or evaluation of their own role in achieving the shared goal. Rather the focus is on judgment of the community partners’ work. Beyond receiving occasional feedback, few funders truly build mutual accountability—what we define as *an agreed-upon process for both funders and grantee partners to be held responsible*—into their work.

Nonprofits are conditioned to view accountability through a similarly tinted compliance lens. They must play by the rules of the philanthropic game, conforming to funder requirements frequently at the expense of their work and the communities they serve to receive funding. “Given the limited amount of funding available, grantees like [us] often have no choice but to accept funding from donors,” one CTAOP program partner explains, “even when our experience, values, and passion are not recognized or acknowledged.”

The likelihood that trust erodes between organizations and the communities they serve increases when funders make unilateral decisions about data collection, impose perspectives that only represent the Global North, or demand that organizations carry out what funders deem “evidence-based” programming because funder requirements may force organizations to push aside local needs or compromise cultural norms. Community-based organizations cannot carry out meaningful work when communities lose trust in the organizations that serve them.

As funders, we must sharpen our analysis of accountability and power within our organizations when we assess impact instead of only focusing on unhelpful metrics imposed upon grantees.

AN ALLYSHIP APPROACH

Like many funders, we rely on the leadership of local changemakers to advance our mission as a grant maker. Our program partners know the nuances of societal inequities they experience. They see how seemingly disparate issues are interconnected, which levers to pull to make change, and how to navigate the local network.

This ethos has been integral to our work from the beginning. When Charlize Theron founded the organization, she was driven by the power and passion of young people in South Africa and a desire to provide the respect and space that society rarely affords them. Mobilizing resources was an important piece of CTAOP’s role, but we knew that *how* resources are deployed was just as important. While we raise money and provide multiyear, flexible, long-term funding and capacity-strengthening support, we work together with youth leaders and community organizations to ensure that we are centering the young people and communities.

CTAOP has always prioritized care and responsiveness, an approach that is mirrored in how we honor the expertise and experiences of youth and our program partners. We build relationships rooted in allyship and self-accountability by sharing our commitment to them at the beginning of our relationship and then holding ourselves accountable by soliciting anonymous feedback about our support for our program partners. Relationships are less transactional and more personal—aside from one annual

check-in, program partners reach out as little or as much as they’d like. All current partners connect more often than the check-in to share what is meaningful to them. While we can’t always meet everyone’s needs, learning helps us proactively and reactively deploy whatever resources we have in support of our shared goals. Our annual summit emerged from this allyship approach, and it has become the most valuable support CTAOP provides outside of core grants. We host multiple staff from all program partners in a space dedicated to their health and well-being, where they can strengthen skills and connect with one another, and unleash their collective strength and creativity and return to work rejuvenated.

Reimagining accountability requires self-examination, humility, curiosity, and a willingness to change. Part of our journey has included confronting the power imbalances inherent in traditional philanthropy—especially in grantmaking from the Global North to the Global South. Rather than being recognized for their leadership, expertise, and wisdom, communities working for local change are often portrayed as victims or in need of aid. Within this context, grant makers working across geographies have a responsibility to work toward decolonization. Several organizations are reimagining traditional organizational structures, such as OneVillage Partners, which has shifted from offering community-led programs to becoming a community-led organization, with plans to move from the current leadership structure to one where Sierra Leoneans define and lead the organization’s strategy, operations, and programming. In the spaces we hold—from our one-to-one relationships to advocacy efforts to the design of our summits—CTAOP sees our role as facilitators and true partners in learning and action. We are there to help raise and move resources to where our partners determine it is needed.

REFLECT AND ACT

Acting as a trust-based, accountable funder means recognizing that we will occasionally misstep—we may even inadvertently cause harm. Although our program partners inform our processes and have largely shaped CTAOP’s theory of change, we sometimes unintentionally revert to conventional practices that reinforce control and compliance.

For example, we modeled our initial reporting process on typical funder questions and length. In our quest to be comprehensive and inclusive of the various programs, we required reporting numbers on 10 types of activities, numbers of participants in each activity (both new and recurring), numbers of youth receiving specific services, and descriptions of each activity and population. We also asked open-ended questions about successes and challenges and asked why they were successful and what plans there were to overcome challenges. These semiannual reports were burdensome to our partners and took valuable time away from their work. We spent hours collecting “overdue” reports and even more reviewing them and asking follow-up questions, to which they had to respond in writing. The process consumed everyone’s energy, delayed grant renewals, and reinforced the harmful funder-nonprofit dynamics we sought to avoid.



Our shortcomings did not go unnoticed. But admitting our failures and showing vulnerability opened the door to candid feedback from partners, including, “Yeah, your reporting sucks.” True accountability meant that we had to be open to honest feedback and make adjustments collaboratively. The result was a less burdensome and more meaningful system to share the learnings that inform our work.

Our plans for the future include working with our partners to establish shared goals informed by their expertise and experience. This road

map, created together, will allow us to reinforce our commitment to accountability. It will also clarify how we might adjust or shift strategies to better help our partners achieve our collective vision. Whether we are facing a challenge, testing our assumptions, or seeking to learn more, we have found that engaging our program partners as teammates and thought partners not only aligns with our values, but also produces a better result in service of the mission.

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO BUILD SOMETHING BETTER

Our partners on the front lines of change have been unfairly burdened by philanthropy’s draconian approach to accountability. It is time to replace the old story about accountability—one that places the burden on the community partner—with new norms and practices rooted in trust and mutuality. In the words of one of our earliest program partners, with trust came “outcomes we didn’t imagine possible. A major lesson for organizations like ours is that we also have to transform ourselves if we are to embrace all the magic that can be conjured when two entities collaborate on the basis of trust.”

In the Eastern Cape of South Africa, we have seen a program partner’s mental-health screening idea result in widespread adoption by the provincial government. We have witnessed complex and vital health information about anti-retroviral medication (ARVs) communicated to rural Xhosa communities rooted in oral culture through local song and dance. And we have supported the transformation of more than 40 shipping containers into solar internet cafés across Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces, providing safe spaces for young women and girls to access sexual and reproductive health information and programs tailored to meet their needs. These examples emerged from program partners taking the lead and CTAOP listening and responding with support.

Now more than ever, we need the leadership, vision, and brilliance of our nonprofit partners. A more equitable, just approach to accountability is fundamental to supporting them. When funders relinquish control and take responsibility for how we show up, we can cultivate relationships that unleash bold solutions.

Lorrie Fair Allen is the chief program director of the Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project.

Ashlee George is the executive director of the Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project.

Charlize Theron is the founder of the Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project.

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A FRAMEWORK FOR CORPORATE SOCIAL GOOD

Instead of mirroring corporate practices, trust-based philanthropy listens to what communities want and need.

BY JOHN BROTHERS

Our work is not serving communities as well as we think. This may not be the message you'd expect from a corporate-social-responsibility leader. But we are fooling ourselves if we think we can understand and address complex, multifaceted social challenges in the same way a company approaches putting more cell phones or hamburgers in the hands of customers. The entry point for philanthropy is *othering*. The problem is the framework we use, whereby funders “give” and communities “receive.” This perspective muddles the fact that communities hold the solutions and wisdom necessary for effective change. Without community knowledge, context, and relationships, funders would not be able to make progress on issues we care about.

For nearly a decade, the T. Rowe Price Foundation has worked to transform the ways we partner with community organizations. While our journey is ongoing, we have clarity on the essential role that community wisdom plays in leading our work. As a corporate leader practicing trust-based philanthropy principles for nearly nine years, I would like to share the lessons we have learned and our framework for carrying out trust-based corporate funding.

WHEN HELPING HURTS

The price my father had to pay for a pair of warm shoes for winter taught me about resources, power, and belonging.

When I was a child in Minneapolis, we often headed to a local soup kitchen that also helped community members get shoes for the winter. I remember sitting with my father on a long row of chairs as we watched a smiling woman make a big show of removing each participant's shoes and socks so she could pass a moistened towel over their feet.

When the woman reached our seats, my father handed her a red ticket and removed his shoes. I began removing mine, too. He put his hand over my hands—“Not you, John,” he said. “Just me.” I closed my eyes and exhaled in thanks, relieved I did not have to reveal the holes in my socks. A small crowd moved in front of us as my father's feet were washed.

The woman never looked at us, not once. My father, uncomfortable and teary, also averted his gaze. Perhaps his sadness came from having me there, or from a world that allowed what we had to endure. There was clapping all around and the clicks of a camera focusing on us.

I share this story because it reminds me how the systems that ostensibly promote good in our communities can cause deep harm. The foot-washing woman was more concerned with the photos than with the individuals whose feet she washed. The greater beneficiary of her giving was herself and the organization she served.

STEPPING OUT OF THE SPOTLIGHT

Like the volunteers at the soup kitchen that day, funders are more often celebrated than criticized because of a community organization's fear of losing funding. Most of my peers have likely never stood in lines like the ones my father and I waited in. If they had, they would not recommend foot-washing to receive shoes or adhere to the current norms of strategic philanthropy.

A similar relationship dynamic exists between philanthropy, nonprofits, and the communities they serve. Too many funders, including in corporate philanthropy where I work, see their role as ambassadors rather than relationship-builders. They view the path to impact in extractive terms instead of understanding that the best way to serve others is to establish and nurture trust with community partners.

Several philanthropic approaches originate in the corporate world. Institutional philanthropy such as family foundations that have obtained wealth through business endeavors, corporate foundations, and donor-advised funds that are often housed at financial institutions all benefit from immense corporate resources. Strategic philanthropy also mirrors corporate practices with its overreliance on predetermined metrics, top-down strategies, cultures of compliance, and outcome-centric evaluation.

Trust-based philanthropy intentionally departs from the sector standard of “running a nonprofit like a business.” Instead, trust-based funders seek to understand their nonprofit partners, mobilize their unique assets, and invest in their relationship over the long run.

THE HOW MATTERS

In my years working at various levels of social change, from social services to community organizing, I've kept encountering the same problem of jumping into actions of serving without the focus on the ways of our service. Rather than the *who, what, when, where, and why* of an organization's work, the *how* of its approach matters most to those who are the ultimate receivers of that service, whether a client of a social services agency or a grantee of a philanthropy. When the *how* is done right, it can become the most transformative element of the work. But done wrong, it is often the most damaging.

Unfortunately, the philanthropic sector's approach to philanthropy's *how* is deeply flawed. The discomfort and lack of trust my family experienced at the soup kitchen is not uncommon. Many community members and nonprofit staff understand this experience when seeking support in a funder-centric world. Our burdensome applications, our unreal expectations around data, and the power dynamics we use to push and pull communities to unfair places are some of many reasons why local communities and their leaders distrust philanthropy. As funders, our task is to acknowledge these experiences and offer a new way forward. Only community-centered

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approaches can alleviate these current philanthropic challenges because community members are the customers of our philanthropic support.

At the T. Rowe Price Foundation, we reexamined our *how* in 2015, spurred in part by the death of Freddie Gray. While some pockets of the sector had incorporated elements of trust-based philanthropy, the concept was hardly known in the corporate community. We began experimenting with approaches that focused on the self-determination of our local communities before learning about trust-based philanthropy.

I started my role at the foundation the same week as the civil unrest that followed Gray's death. Several colleagues at T. Rowe Price asked what the firm should do to support the residents of our city. As a former community organizer, I recommended that our best response was to listen to the residents of West Baltimore, since they would not look to the corporate community for answers because our expertise and experiences were not their own.

In the weeks and months that followed, I sat in the pews of local churches and on the chairs of elementary schools at community meetings, where I listened to the hopes and dreams of residents, as well as their frustrations and concerns. In those meetings, residents discussed inadequate housing or the lack of employment, but more often they shared their dismay about their treatment by the various public and private systems they encountered every day—the long lines at hospitals, the difficult treatment by a staff member at a social service office when trying to sign up for services. Similarly, local nonprofit leaders sometimes mentioned their frustration with the lack of financial support in those meetings. But more often, they talked about what it felt like to try to navigate the complex structures of philanthropy—systems that were not built with their experiences in mind. It was the *how* of philanthropy, how the sector purportedly existed to help while in reality remaining elusive, removed, and inaccessible. *How* our grant processes were overwhelming, *how* philanthropy's quest for data was burdensome, and *how* our worldview did not reflect the experiences of the communities we serve.

A NEW THEORY OF PHILANTHROPY

Some foundations claim to be trust-based while relying on practices that harm local communities, such as an overreliance on evaluation approaches that burden their grantees. Trust-based philanthropy is inherently difficult because it challenges traditional, hierarchical power dynamics. In considering how to walk a trust-based path, I suggest the following takeaways to my fellow corporate funders:

Funders must have a power analysis. Funders often gloss over an important fact: Our work happens within power structures. It can be uncomfortable for funders to interrogate their own power, which might explain why many avoid the subject. But skipping this step undermines our work with communities and our mission.



Hoping to build authentic relationships with local communities, more than 200 global brands have connected with T. Rowe Price to learn about our trust-based approach.

Following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, nearly 20 Minneapolis-based companies reached out to us to learn how we connected with our Baltimore communities amid the unrest that followed Gray's murder. I suggested that this moment not only concerned the loss of George Floyd but also revealed both how systemic racism made his murder possible and how companies have played a role in building those structures.

As funders, we must become comfortable discussing past mistakes and our role in creating the inequities that plague our communities. Honesty and accountability are required to repair past harms and build trusting relationships with the communities we serve.

Listen to communities to inform your grantmaking. When we began connecting in person with our community partners, we realized that many were asking for support to strengthen the health of their organizations. We started a capacity-building program that has served more than 800 nonprofit organizations and more than 7,000 nonprofit leaders. A council of community members guides this work, providing feedback on how we can better assist the community.

To become better grantmaking partners, we updated our external applications with the goals of becoming more intentional about our language (i.e., moving away from burdensome needs statements) and serving as a concierge for the community, by providing resources that could help them in their work. In 2017, we began offering multiyear general operating support, which eliminated our burdensome grants management process.

Recognize and use all your assets. Trust-based approaches require engaging in continuous self-reflection to break down power dynamics. By examining our own resources and listening to what communities were asking for, we ensured that our support extended beyond grant dollars.

For example, Baltimore struggles with outdated infrastructure, from service-delivery systems to public-funding mechanisms. Many companies, in contrast, enjoy robust, well-functioning infrastructure. Recognizing this disparity, we considered areas other than funding where we could offer support for community benefit. We have started referring to this work as *trust-based community investment*, knowing that our model as a corporation goes beyond just grantmaking.

We have focused on using our firm's nonfinancial assets to advance communities. One example is the Bmore CoLab, a dedicated space in our corporate headquarters that houses several intermediaries serving small businesses and entrepreneurs in Baltimore. We invested in building closer collaboration with community partners and our corporate peers. We helped bring together more than two dozen corporations to develop Civic Innovators, which provides cross-corporate consulting teams to improve local consulting assistance. Our experiments and efforts fall outside the parameters of conventional philanthropy and have benefited the city and its communities in powerful ways.

THE WILL TO CHANGE

Now that trust-based philanthropy and power-shifting approaches have entered the mainstream, the question that arises is whether funders, including my peer corporate funders, are willing to depart, sometimes in radical ways, from old norms. Can we lean into our strengths as corporate funders, with our resources and the resilience of the communities we serve, who know what they want and need?

Trust-based approaches are highly personal because the *how* leaves the longest—and sometimes most unfortunate—impression. I heard the importance of the *how* from West Baltimore residents, just as I saw it sitting next to my father at the soup kitchen many years ago. As history shows, the most successful social movements are locally led. We must look to our amazing community champions because they will lead us to a nonprofit-funder ecosystem rooted in care and self-determination.

John Brothers serves as the president of the T. Rowe Price Foundation and president of T. Rowe Price Charitable. He was the founder of Quidoo, an international consulting firm that he led for more than a decade.

TRUST, REST, AND JOY

Rest and joy are essential to not only leaders but their teams, their organizations, and the communities they serve.

BY CARRIE AVERY, STELLA CHUNG
& SARAH WALCZYK

On her sabbatical from work, Debra Suh watched her kids and husband play in the Hawaiian waves while her parents relaxed with their books on the shore. Her father, a survivor of domestic abuse, had inspired her work in the domestic-violence-prevention field. Debra's beach memories became more poignant when her father died the following year.

In addition to being a parent, partner, and daughter, Suh was the CEO of the Center for the Pacific Asian Family (CPAF), an organization dedicated to ending domestic and sexual violence in Asian Pacific Islander communities. She loved her work and team but was exhausted by her efforts to do as much as possible for both CPAF and her two young children. In 2007, Suh received a three-month sabbatical grant from the Durfee Foundation, which invests in leaders making community change throughout Los Angeles.

The sabbatical marked a turning point for both Suh and CPAF. Before leaving, she restructured it, putting in place a skilled team to manage during her absence. She also delegated more, even after returning from sabbatical. Suh's senior team handled day-to-day operations, allowing her to focus on more generative leadership. When she returned, she achieved greater balance between her roles as CEO and parent. She remained in leadership for years, growing CPAF's reach and budget from \$1.6 million to more than \$5 million. She instituted a sabbatical policy for all staff.

When Suh transitioned out of her leadership role at CPAF after 23 years, the change was smooth. While she was on sabbatical, the staff member who would eventually succeed her many years later as CEO was on the team, burnishing her leadership skills.

PHILANTHROPY'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING REST

Our belief as foundation leaders is that rest is critical to the work of nonprofits and movements. We have gained many insights in our work supporting sabbaticals and other forms of renewal. Our peer funders—some of whom are leading thoughtful approaches that recognize and fund the essential role of rest and joy in social change—have also provided inspiration.

Rest is transformative. Stories like Suh's reverberate not only for individuals taking a sabbatical, but also for their organizations and the wider community. Research shows that when nonprofit leaders disconnect from their work for three months, they return with renewed purpose, extend their tenure, and discover new sources of energy and inspiration.

Individual rest is important for more than simply avoiding burnout. There are sector-wide implications for how we see collective care. According to the Clare Rose Foundation's 2020 report on nonprofit sabbatical programs, only one in four nonprofits have a leadership-succession plan in place, and two-thirds of leaders plan to leave their positions within two to five years. Funders have not invested in nonprofit retention—and it shows.

NONPROFIT SABBATICALS

There is an admonition floating around: “Work smarter, not harder.” But what if the smartest approach is to stop working and truly rest? It may seem counterintuitive, but the Durfee Foundation has adopted this approach since 1997, when it launched its sabbatical program.

Durfee’s sabbatical “formula” is simple: provide a coach to help participants think through their plans, offer wisdom from previous Durfee sabbatical awardees, and prohibit all contact with work and work-related activities. Because sabbatical and renewal grants can be interpreted as grants to individuals, Durfee applied to the IRS for approval to make grants to individuals.

When Durfee introduced the program, the response from the funder community ranged from bemusement to concern. Some saw the funding as frivolous. Others wondered what would happen if overworked nonprofit leaders got a taste of freedom and quit. But our question was different: What if nonprofit staff continue to do their jobs without getting the rest they need?

After 27 years and more than 120 sabbatical awards, Durfee can say with certainty that sabbaticals are remarkably effective tools for change. Rest and joy are not the enemies of productivity, but its source. After Suh’s sabbatical, CPAF’s expanding programs, strength, and budget were not a fluke. At Durfee, we have seen how dozens of organizations across Los Angeles have followed a similar path after their leader took a sabbatical.

Sabbaticals plant seeds that flower. Like Suh, other Durfee sabbatical recipients have gone on to implement organization-wide programs. The Children’s Law Center, with more than 500 employees, recently established a one-month wellness leave for longtime staff.

A three-month CEO sabbatical is not the only option to address the need for rest and rejuvenation in the sector. Alongside its sabbatical program, Durfee offers Lark Awards, providing \$30,000 grants to smaller community organizations to support the well-being of all staff. Each recipient can determine how to use funds based on its culture and needs.

EXPANDING NONPROFITS’ CAPACITY TO REST

In recent years, the Satterberg Foundation has listened closely to grantee partners to learn how to best support their capacity toward building a more just society and more sustainable environment. A theme quickly emerged during its listening tour: staff exhaustion and looming burnout. Many staff described the emotional and physical toll they experienced from work. Some planned to quit, while others desired to leave the nonprofit sector altogether. Such decisions can unleash a domino effect: Leadership transitions reduce staff capacity, diminishing institutional knowledge and leading to fundraising challenges.

Grantee partners emphasized that the most effective role for the foundation was to fund community and nonprofit organizations, allowing



them to create their own sabbatical programs and awards, and advocate for other funders to make similar investments.

In response, Satterberg began funding grantee partners to increase opportunities for rest, joy, and renewal in their work. In Washington state, Satterberg provided seed funding and multiyear support to establish the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Executive Director (BIPOC ED) Coalition’s sabbatical program. The coalition responded to the community’s need for flexibility, creating a menu of options, including breaking the traditional three-month sabbatical into shorter respites of three to five days. The coalition also hosts wellness retreats across the state, making it possible for leaders to find rest and renewal without the burden of planning transportation, covering expenses, and securing extended childcare or eldercare.

WHO GETS TO REST?

While leadership happens in all positions, at all ages, and with all voices, most of the sabbatical programs we have researched target executive directors or CEOs of organizations. These leaders have responsibilities that are often unrelenting and isolating, but they are hardly the only staff members who deserve to rest.

Yet there is an undeniable trickle-up effect of this approach. Organizational leaders model work culture. When a leader practices self-care, takes breaks, and trusts staff in their absence, the example is healthy work-life balance. When a leader is available 24/7 and never takes vacation, the message is self-sacrifice. A nonprofit executive director who takes a sabbatical can influence the entire organization for the better.

The question of who gets to rest is of course shaped by power disparities along the lines of race, gender, and class. The BIPOC ED Coalition was created to provide relief from the particular challenges that racially marginalized nonprofit executive directors face. As the coalition's 2022 *Sabbaticals for BIPOC Leaders* report explains, BIPOC leaders "address pressing daily needs with inadequate resources and create cultures of justice and compassion in the face of oppression. We keep going while grappling with multigenerational trauma, structural economic and access limitations, and ... the burden of leadership without culturally aligned support."

Nonprofit and movement leaders are reclaiming rest to fight racial capitalism. And more and more funders have seen that rest and joy are not separate from work, and that progress is impossible without time to dream. The Hidden Leaf Foundation invests in mindfulness and wellness at social justice organizations. To date, the Disability Inclusion Fund at Borealis has provided \$450,000 in grants to support disability joy and justice. Libra Foundation began providing \$50,000 wellness grants to grantees without requiring any paperwork or reports. The Rasmuson Foundation in Alaska offers \$50,000 sabbaticals to nonprofit and tribal leaders. In Tennessee, the Healing Trust provides \$20,000 sabbatical grants. More funders are investing in the rest and joy of nonprofit staff.

REST REQUIRES TRUST

Before funders launch a sabbatical program, establishing cultures of trust is an essential ingredient for helping our nonprofit and movement partners to rest. At Satterberg, this has meant a transition from direct sabbatical program support to equipping grantee partners to determine their own needs and help them advocate for sector-wide change. At Durfee, the process entails trusting nonprofit CEOs to design their own sabbaticals, whether spending time with family, silently retreating, or exploring the world in exuberant ways.

Depleted individuals cannot make the change for a more just world. Funders can support nonprofit partners by helping them cultivate rest and joy. But this requires philanthropy to trust our partners, understand that they know what replenishes them, and invest in their ability to rest. We have done this over and over again at Durfee and Satterberg, and over and over, our trust has been rewarded.

Carrie Avery chairs the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project's steering committee and is the former board president of the Durfee Foundation.

Stella Chung is the director of programs and operations at the Durfee Foundation, where she manages the Stanton and Sabbatical Fellowship programs.

Sarah Walczyk is the executive director of the Satterberg Foundation.

OPERATIONALIZING TRUST

Funders must commit to making our institutions sites of trust and relationship-building for our grantee partners to realize their mission.

BY JAMIE ALLISON & JENNIFER C. HAAS

When Jamie Allison joined the Walter & Elise Haas Fund in 2018 as executive director, she wondered, "Where have I landed? How do I lead here? Where is the center of gravity in this place?"

Trustees had similar questions as they wrestled with their desires to fund in deeper, bolder, and more effective ways. It was during this time—amid an executive transition and a board shift from the family's third to fourth generations—that the board of directors embarked on a process of reflection. Jennifer Haas, a fourth-generation board member and former board chair, remembers those days and the slow transformations spurred by questions about how to operationalize trust at the fund while contending with the organization's history and building for the future. Today, at 71 years old, the Walter & Elise Haas Sr. Fund is changing.

In recent years, we have engaged more deeply with our program partners to identify moments when we operate from a place of habit instead of intentionality. With greater curiosity, we have been asking questions that lack simple answers. Deeper listening has led to greater clarity, including about how we must work differently to do our work well.

We recognized early that these processes might point our foundation in new directions. We asked ourselves, "Given our resources, knowledge, and strengths, how can we be the most effective grant maker and changemaker in our community?" As our conversations continued, we arrived at the realization that we had to become a different type of funder, embracing a full commitment to equity and justice, rooted in trust.

BENEATH THE GRANTMAKING SURFACE

In 2020, COVID-19 and uprisings for racial justice brought urgency to reexamining the fundamentals of our work. Although we were funding efforts that advanced racial justice, we knew that our commitment had to become more explicit, and it felt important to deepen our understanding of our grantmaking practices. As part of this process, trustees identified four values to serve as guideposts for our work: family, possibility, shared responsibility, and belonging. We conducted a justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion snapshot of the previous five years of the fund's grantmaking and a 15-year review of the foundation's capital grantmaking.

The findings revealed that we were making little to no capital investments in neighborhoods with large populations of color, including Oakland, the Mission, and Bayview-Hunters Point, despite being a foundation with a historic focus on the Bay Area. They also showed that most of the foundation's large endowment and capital grants were going to large, white-led cultural institutions and universities. To address the disparities in our findings and to better support our nonprofit partners, we introduced three significant shifts in our grantmaking:

From silos to integration | We created an integrated portfolio called Economic Well-being to reduce the racial and gender wealth gap. Our integrated approach addresses the interconnected nature of structures, policies, and practices to create a more sustainable economic outlook for future generations. In breaking down silos between our grantmaking-program areas, we aim to meet individuals and families where they are in their lives while transforming the structures that drive intergenerational poverty.

From symptoms to solutions | COVID-19 and the national reckoning around systemic racism catalyzed new conversations about the effectiveness of philanthropy in times of crisis. While we are proud of how we showed up to support our community during the tumult of the last three years, we are now shifting to a more proactive approach that seeks solutions to problems before they reach crisis levels, including funding organizations that work within systems that *create* the cycle of poverty, from education and criminal justice to government and the workforce.

From contributions to commitments | Traditionally, philanthropic contributions have served as evidence of support of a grantee's mission. Their scope, duration, and impact have been limited, however. To support nonprofits more effectively, we are shifting to long-term partnerships characterized by shared responsibility. Our new grantmaking approach is to make larger and longer general operating grants, which nonprofits have identified as critical to their sustainability. Establishing committed relationships with organizations provides opportunities to build honest, trusting partnerships.

NEW ROLES, NEW POSSIBILITIES

The Haas Sr. Fund is not the first philanthropic organization to recognize that some conventions related to foundation staff roles are outdated, such as the separation between program and administrative roles. As an extension of our shift from silos to integration, staff now works in matrixed teams that include program and administrative leaders working in partnership. For our largest grants, the fund's director of administration conducts financial due diligence and shares her report with the fund's program lead and with the grantee. Grantees have expressed deep appreciation for relieving them of this burden and have begun to use the fund's financial diligence reports internally. Old models shape how grantee partners are supported, where foundations spend the bulk of their time, who leads, and more.

As part of our process of change, we have created staff roles that embrace a different view of the work and the structures that support it.

In conventional foundation models, program staff are regarded as experts and gatekeepers of resources. But at the fund, we have reoriented program work to focus on facilitative leadership: listening to community and inviting community voices to influence our work. We embrace mutual learning and interdependence and view community members and nonprofit leaders as experts.

To help us learn in ways that are grantee-partner focused, we created the new staff position of strategist for justice, equity, and learning. This role helps us adopt our grantees' goals as our own, monitor progress in partnership with our grantees, and share mutual learning with one another. While grantmaking remains a function of the Fund, it is done alongside other core work, including organizing funders, convening grantees, sharing our approach, and amplifying grantee wisdom.

To apply a reparative lens to our grantmaking, we created a task force made up of staff members. With the task force's work as a guide, our staff decided on capital-grant recommendations to bring to the board. Staff working together in this cooperative, non-siloed, cross-program, and cross-functional way was a different experience for us. This approach, which includes program leads; the grants manager; the strategist for justice, equity, and learning; and the director of administration, among



other staff, requires the same trust and collaboration internally that we seek to build externally in our relationships with the community. The premium is on listening, compromise, sharing power, and recognizing the wisdom of the collective.

Another area of change is our board docket. As at other foundations, the docket became a way for program staff to demonstrate value and expertise; the longer and more detailed their memos, the more they felt they were being respected and heard. But we realized that the opposite was the case: The memos were indigestible. More important, they were symptoms of an academic, transactional approach to grantmaking that prioritized process over impact and lobbying the board over learning with them. As a result, the docket has become shorter, focusing on elevating major themes across issues and grants. For staff and board members, this shift has clarified the intersections of our work as well as our mission. The board transitioned from approving grants individually to approving them as a slate.

FROM OPERATIONALIZING TO TRANSFORMING

We discovered that our grantmaking needed an overhaul to better align with our values and give our partners more room to do their work, experiment, invest, and win.

The Endeavor Fund is our most significant philanthropic investment to date. We awarded \$3.5 million each to seven leading nonprofit organizations over seven years, for a total investment of \$24.5 million, with the aim of closing the racial and gender wealth gap. This multiyear initiative enables organizations led by people of color to determine the best ways to deepen and grow to change systems. We acknowledge and encourage the importance of investing in organizational capacity, including worker pay and professional development.

Multiyear unrestricted grants are still not the norm. Even for those who embrace a multiyear approach, the average term is two to three years. Allison recalls being at a grant maker conference years ago and watching the audience members' jaws drop when Pia Infante, a senior fellow at the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, proposed that future grant periods be 10 years. "The shock for the audience—myself included—tells me how critical it is for funders to push ourselves and one another to share the ideas we have not yet seen proven, especially when our nonprofit partners are telling us what they need to do their work."

The conventions of status quo philanthropy—working in programmatic silos, imposing rigid requirements that overly rely on transactions, written proposals, and reports—once offered predictability in our grantmaking cycles, comfort in our positional power, and recyclable templates. They required less of us and, in turn, resulted in less impact and fulfillment. Our work today requires us to be active, engaged partners, and our relationships are rooted in trust, not control. Our accountability is to all our partners—our community, staff, and board.

During our journey to operationalize trust, we continue to learn lessons about what this work requires. Rather than a hard pivot, operationalizing trust can be an evolution. This transformation is well worth the effort if our goal is to bring about change and support our nonprofit partners to build a more equitable, trust-based future.

Jamie Allison is the executive director of the Walter & Elise Haas Fund.

Jennifer C. Haas is a trustee of the Walter & Elise Haas Fund.

BUILDING A MULTIRACIAL DEMOCRACY

The practices of trust-based philanthropy require grappling with deep-rooted inequities while living values in action.

BY PIA INFANTE

Philanthropy is crucial to sustaining and strengthening democracy, now more than ever. Trust-based philanthropy, like democracy, happens through practice. Both require commitment, rigor, and adaptivity. As this supplement has shown, some philanthropic leaders and institutions are exercising democratic, trust-based practices that could contribute to a more manifest multiracial democracy in our time.

If funders understand our collective goal to be strengthening and sustaining democracy, especially as democracy has come under attack around the world, trust-based philanthropy has a major role to play. To illustrate the connection between an embodied practice of democracy and trust-based philanthropy, I highlight the work of three powerful leaders: Brenda Solorzano, a trust-based funder in Montana; Aria Florant, a movement leader bringing reparations and repair to the work of philanthropy; and Kierra Johnson, the executive director of a national LGBTQ+ justice nonprofit.

Invest in community wisdom. | As the inaugural CEO of the Headwaters Foundation, Brenda Solorzano led a democratic process to build a trust-based foundation in Montana. She began by listening to others. In what she refers to as the 600 Cups of Coffee Tour, she worked her way across western Montana to talk to communities about their lives. For Solorzano, the tour's purpose was about "having frank conversations with the people of Montana—city officials, tribal communities, health workers, childcare providers, parents, and nonprofit leaders—about health-related issues that were most important to them." Communities shared their desire for the foundation to "go upstream" to address the root causes of poverty and poor health outcomes among Montanans, and to build more collaboration between organizations and across sectors.

With a committed board and staff that viewed the foundation as a community resource, Headwaters developed a democratic ethos through a trust-based framework. Across differences of perspective, identity, priorities, and history, Headwaters collaborated with nonprofit partners to support community-defined interventions that have contributed to better health outcomes in western Montana. Solorzano's work represents how funders are forging in building institutions committed to the practice of democracy and trust-building.

Trust requires truth-telling. | "When we think of power as only something that's likely to abuse us, we often become so counter-dependent on it that we forget our own agency in that scenario. This is actually part of the recipe for authoritarianism," says Aria Florant, cofounder and CEO of Liberation Ventures.

Florant has worked to help social sector and philanthropic leaders understand the importance of reclaiming our individual and collective



power. For Florant, our ability to remake our relationship to power, including financial power, is critical to building a multiracial democracy. “When power can show up differently in the form of trust-based philanthropy,” Florant says, “it makes space for those who have perceived themselves to not have power to feel more of their power and to start to construct relationships that are built on so much more.”

As Florant and others have indicated, building a future where money and resources are equitably shared cannot happen without reckoning with the past. Laura Gerald, the president of the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, recently shared that “there is no trust without truth.” Gerald’s call mirrors growing efforts in the sector to encourage donors and funders to examine philanthropy’s history as a product of racial capitalism. There can be no trust-based future without reckoning with the reality that philanthropy exists because of structural inequities.

The work of grappling with the sources of foundation wealth requires both humility and courage, but it is required if our aim is to break inequities once and for all. Luckily, Florant and her collaborators have created a reparations road map that could model shifts beyond philanthropy to make federal-level reparative change.

Realize that the future is our responsibility. | Trust-based philanthropy allows funders to share power, collaborate, and learn from social-movement leaders such as Kierra Johnson, the executive director of the National LGBTQ Task Force. When asked what it would look like if trust-based philanthropy were the norm, Johnson responded that nonprofits and social movements would finally “shift from thinking of ourselves as an identity-based movement to one that is *building our democracy*—where we are instrumental in infrastructural and cultural solutions to the problems in this country and *not having to focus solely on just surviving.*”

At the center of Johnson’s work is an intersectional analysis. Without recognizing connections between our often-siloed work, Johnson says, funders and nonprofits provide piecemeal solutions rather than “harnessing our collective power to change the fabric of democracy.” We do not have to look very far to see the interconnected nature of issues or imagine how more intentional alignment would make our work more effective.

The message from Johnson and other movement leaders is clear: Funders need to use our resources *and our imaginations* to set the conditions for trust. Only then can we achieve structural and cultural change.

In trust-based philanthropy, funders are saying “I trust you” to the communities we serve, many of whom the political, social, and economic systems have consistently failed. Johnson calls on funders to “show us you believe communities have the power to shape society, to build a democracy that we’ve never seen before.”

PRACTICING DEMOCRACY

The ultimate work of trust-based philanthropy is to build a democracy that acknowledges the role of structural racism in the creation of wealth in the United States. One where decision-making takes place in communities rather than behind foundation doors. A democracy that is a daily practice emphasizing the connections between our work and the solutions that collaboration makes possible.

Like democracy, trust-based philanthropy is strengthened through practice. Its impact only grows when it’s implemented collectively. I am grateful to Brenda Solorzano, Aria Florant, Kierra Johnson, the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project staff and steering committee, and our many other colleagues who have helped evolve and strengthen this approach with generosity, humility, and conviction.

My fierce hope is that these models and others weave together to help build a strong, multiracial democracy and trust-based future.

Pia Infante is a senior fellow at the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project.

The trust-based philanthropy movement is fundamentally reimagining the role funders can have in building a more just and equitable society.

The Trust-Based Philanthropy Project

provides donors and grantmaking practitioners with the tools, frameworks, and community spaces to deepen their work and increase their impact.



This supplement was coordinated for the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project by Maya Trabin.