

The power of collaborative philanthropy:

Giving together to advance racial equity in the United States

Racial inequity is a persistent problem in America. Race remains one of the primary predictors of outcomes in several critical areas including education, wealth accumulation, pay equity, and life expectancy; racial inequity is even recognized as a public health crisis by cities spanning the country. If socioeconomic differences explained our racial inequities, then controlling for socioeconomic status would eliminate them. But it does not.¹

The truth is, many of our most cherished narratives about success in America fall away when we overlay a racial equity lens. Consider that nearly seven out of ten Black children born into the middle-income quintile fall into one of the bottom two quintiles as adults.² In 2016, the median white family retained 10 times the wealth of the median Black family.³ Donors of Color Network (a community of high-net-worth donors building the power of people of color communities to win systemic change that builds racial equity, and co-author of this article) is among those⁴ who have noted that, were wealth of white households in the United States to remain stagnant, it would take the average Latinx family 84 years to catch up. For Black families, that figure jumps to 228 years.⁵ Given this context, it is apparent why nearly half of all people of color in the United States are living in poverty.⁶

Identity is multifaceted and so is inequity. Importantly, disparities exist for all people of color when compared to their white counterparts. The routine lack of data documenting the inequity experienced by

Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islander communities only adds to their harm. Likewise, the lack of disaggregated data of Asian American communities continues to mask how inequity manifests across diverse populations and ethnicities. Similar disaggregation is needed for Latinx communities to better understand the intersection of race and ethnicity. Furthermore, the continued lack of action that follows new data confirming these inequities contributes to Black people, and other people of color, being deprioritized and underrepresented in collective decision-making processes, furthering the divide. Lastly, the compounding effects of race, gender, and sexuality can make disparities even greater.

The depth and widespread nature of America's racial disparities indicate that the root cause is not individual bias nor individual shortcomings but instead is systemic in nature—meaning that such racial disparities are the symptom of a system of structures and institutions designed in ways that create and exacerbate inequity. The National Equity Project points out that because these racial inequities have become normalized, policies and practices routinely ensure access to opportunity for some and exclude others. Such normalization also creates an underlying assumption that mere access to "opportunity" is enough to overcome systemic inequities.

Given all this, it is clear that even the most well-meaning attempts to make the country a better place are destined to stall without bringing an intentional, explicit, and sustained focus to addressing the racial disparities and injustices that exist among virtually any social problem philanthropists seek to address.

The role of philanthropy in advancing racial equity

Given this overwhelming need, there is significant opportunity for philanthropic giving to advance racial equity. Drawing off definitions developed by the <u>Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE)</u>, in general, racial equity work is that which focuses on prevention of harm and making benefits more equitable within the existing system, while racial justice work focuses on the root causes of the harm with ultimate goals of changing the system. In 2018, the last year for which fully complete grants data are available, only 6 percent of philanthropic dollars supported racial equity work and only 1 percent supported racial justice work.⁹

Giving to racial equity and justice is one of the most frequent areas donors want to learn more about. There are also a few high-profile donors who have committed significantly to these causes more recently, including Robert Smith and MacKenzie Scott. The inequities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic further ignited interest in giving to advance racial equity. Following the police killing of George Floyd in 2020, even more funders expressed the intention to be explicitly antiracist. Ibram X. Kendi writes that it is not enough to be "not a racist" but the goal should be to expose and eradicate racism wherever you encounter it. Therefore, in Kendi's view, there are only racists, those who allow racism to proliferate, and antiracists, those who fight it wherever it is found.

Given the complexity of these issues, truly advancing equity and justice requires both giving more as well as making a sustained, long-term commitment. In a <u>recent open letter to philanthropy</u>, a set of high-networth donors called upon their peers to step up their giving to Black women in particular because Black women, despite their roles in leading the charge for various social reforms, "are the least likely to receive the financial support and other resources to sustain their work." Similarly, a group of 28 foundation leaders <u>recently urged philanthropists</u> to make a long-lasting commitment to support Black-led racial justice organizations, following the police killing of Tyre Nichols in Memphis in 2023.12

High-net-worth donors of color can help drive systemic change and serve as a model of commitment to giving that advances racial equity and justice. Recent research by Donors of Color Network found that donors of color represent a significant and long-term source of revenue for racial and gender justice organizations and movements. When asked about their annual giving for the year, the 113 donors surveyed reported a total of \$56 million. The top philanthropic priorities of these donors of color not only included philanthropic mainstays such as education, but also focused on social justice, women and gender rights, and racial justice, among others.¹³

While there are countless ways to get involved in giving to support racial equity, collaborative giving vehicles can offer a promising way to kick start such giving.

The value of collaborative giving

Donors have long worked together, from informal giving circles to local fundraising campaigns. Collaborative giving vehicles—like funds, platforms, and other intermediaries—take these efforts to the next level, formalizing collective giving to amplify impact. They are philanthropic organizations and initiatives designed to unite donors, provide deep subject matter expertise, and channel resources to the people and groups (e.g., nonprofits/NGOs) best positioned to accelerate progress on complex issues.

Such funds are particularly suited to advance racial equity because of the considerable proportion dedicated to systemic change. 14 For funders, these equity-focused collaboratives can provide a ready way to tap into expertise that reflects deep engagement with nonprofits and community leaders dedicated to the transformative change needed for improving the lives of people of color. These vehicles enable funders to leverage their resources, mitigate individual risk, and deploy greater capital to address pressing problems. They offer a range of options for donors to get involved—some pool money from donors but retain decision-making rights themselves, while others deeply engage donors in selecting the ultimate recipients; still others develop participatory processes to support communities in allocating dollars.

Recent research conducted by <u>The Bridgespan Group</u> and funded by the <u>Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation</u> identified hundreds of collaborative giving vehicles that have collectively channeled more than \$20 billion to social causes. This builds <u>on research</u> from across the sector that indicates collaboratives can offer the following advantages:

- Partnerships with other donors who enable funding issues at a greater scale than donors could do on their own.
- Specialized knowledge and important relationships with community leaders and grassroots groups that would be otherwise inaccessible.
- **Opportunities to engage** (depending on donor interest) with governance structures that offer a range of approaches—from hands-off to deeper engagement with learning and decision-making.
- Efficiencies that free donors from feeling like they need to become experts in new fields and assure donors that priorities and realities on the ground are incorporated.
- Potential for earlier detection and faster response to emerging issues and opportunities that are more evident to those who are closer to, and hold deeper relationships with, communities served.
- **Coordination** in developing targeted, networked strategies led by community members to address complex issues rooted in systemic inequities.

The nonprofits funded by collaborative vehicles also can realize significant benefits—including reputation boosts, access to new and more funder relationships, non-financial supports, and streamlined reporting—to name a few. 16 Engaging donors is particularly critical for leaders of color because of the <u>race-based</u> <u>barriers to capital</u> they face, and because it is these leaders that are most likely to focus on issues of racial equity.

Giving collaboratively to racial equity

The above research highlights significant momentum in global collaborative efforts both generally, and specifically in the field of racial equity. Working in partnership with one another—the <u>Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation</u>, <u>Donors of Color Network</u>, and <u>The Bridgespan Group</u>—we have identified, we have identified over 120 funds that prioritize racial equity (primarily in the United States, but some with a global purview)— and there are likely many more. In a recent survey of collaborative fund leaders, racial equity was the second most cited primary issue for funds—with funds that report either a primary or secondary focus on racial equity comprising ~55 percent of survey respondents. Very few of the funds that primarily focus on racial equity are among the largest collaborative funds—indicating that racial equity focused collaboratives themselves experience the same systemic underfunding as we see in the nonprofit sector writ large. However, these funds are accomplishing significant impact and collectively give over \$1 billion per year and report the ability to absorb significantly more (upwards of \$8 billion).

While most funds approach their work from multiple angles, donors often inquire about giving opportunities by issue area, communities served, or type of fund governance. The pathways below can be helpful for donors seeking to advance racial equity by giving through a specific issue area and for those looking to address social problems at a systemic level via a racial justice lens.

Social issue area







Donors may focus on advancing racial equity through a narrower aperture. Certain collaborative vehicles organize around particular social issues, aiming to realize social, economic, or legal outcomes within a specific field such as:

• Advocacy and civic engagement (e.g., supporting grassroots movements to influence policies or change social norms)

For example, the <u>Democracy Frontlines Fund</u> is giving to racial justice groups led by and for Black communities, specifically with the goal of amplifying the voices of disenfranchised voters, and prioritizing Black, LGBTQI+, youth, disabled, undocumented, and formerly incarcerated leadership. The <u>Four Freedoms Fund</u> strengthens the capacity of the immigrant justice movement to help ensure all immigrants, regardless of immigration status, have dignity, power to shape change, and agency to determine the quality of their life, community, and future.

· Arts, culture, and media (e.g., supporting BIPOC-centric expressions of art and journalism)

For example, the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation nurtures and funds the creation and presentation of diverse artistic expression and connects people to meaningful art experiences. The Pivot Fund is a new venture philanthropy organization dedicated to investing \$500 million into independent BIPOC-led community news and journalism. Pop Culture Collaborative works to transform the narrative landscape in America around people of color, immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and Indigenous peoples, especially those who are women, queer, transgender and/or disabled.

• **Criminal justice** (e.g., providing wraparound support for people with records, working to dismantle harmful cash bail practices)

For example, the <u>Borealis Philanthropy: Communities Transforming Policing Fund</u> is a donor collaborative launched in 2017 that supports local grassroots organizing groups led by and for communities most impacted by deadly and discriminatory policing practices. The fund values and resources work that addresses both the immediate harm caused by state violence and systemic changes necessary to create healthy, well-resourced communities, and transformative safety responses.

• **Community empowerment** (e.g., supporting organizing, community engagement efforts, and power-building activities)

For example, the <u>Emergent Fund</u> resources rapid response and emergent organizing led by frontline Black, Indigenous, and people of color with trust-based grantmaking. Its leadership comes from directly impacted communities committed to building movement and transforming crisis into change. <u>Liberation Ventures</u>, which contributed to this piece and acts as a field catalyst and a funding intermediary in the movement for reparations for Black people, is working to build a culture of repair in the United States. They invest in organizations that accelerate the reparations movement and co-create grantmaking strategies with practitioners in the field.

• Education and youth development (e.g., subsidizing affordable childcare and tuition for low-income children, supporting leaders of color focused on education, etc.)

For example, <u>Communities for Just Schools Fund</u> gives to organizations that change schools and the system of education through community organizing, with the goal of decreasing suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests. <u>The 1954 Project</u>¹⁷ identifies established leaders of nonprofit organizations in the education sector and selects at least five "Luminaries" each year. The Luminaries receive transformational \$1 million grants, along with professional supports and membership in a community of their peers.

• Environmental justice (e.g., protecting the socio-cultural practices of Indigenous peoples and addressing the full breadth of harms on communities most negatively impacted by climate change)

For example, Arctic Indigenous Fund is a new fund being led by young Indigenous leaders from across the Arctic with the goal of preserving Indigenous cultures, traditions, and practices. The Tribal Solar Accelerator Fund is a tribal-led fund that supports new solar projects in tribal communities across the United States. Its vision for Indian Country is a transition to energy sovereignty that is educational, entrepreneurial, and completely renewable. NDN Foundation was formed to repatriate wealth back to Indigenous hands under Indigenous control. The foundation is committed to dramatically increasing philanthropic investment into Indigenous-led organizations and modeling a mindset of abundance. The Hive Fund for Climate and Gender Justice focuses on building power to accelerate an equitable transition to cleaner, renewable energy in the US South, where philanthropic investment is low despite high pollution levels. The Fund for Frontline Power, another example, is focused on "grassroots-led climate solutions" where governance is held by thirteen grassroots movement leaders.

Health equity (e.g., ensuring access to baseline mental healthcare for BIPOC youth)

For example, The Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund supports some of the most powerful community-based civic engagement, grassroots organizing, power-building, and voter turnout programs for climate and clean energy solutions in the country—recognizing the ongoing and worsening health effects for communities living closest to areas where climate change is having the greatest impact. The Upswing Fund for Adolescent Mental Health aims to support a more integrated and higher quality adolescent mental health system for adolescents who are of color and/or LGBTQ+ by providing direct resources to organizations serving these populations.

• Housing and economic development (e.g., providing affordable housing solutions, workforce development programs)

For example, <u>Funders for Housing and Opportunity</u> brings the nation's leading funders together to ensure stable housing, especially for those who have historically been denied access. <u>The Southern Reconstruction Fund</u> seeks to enhance wealth creation, social mobility, and health outcomes for those most affected by unjust policies across the South. Specifically the fund engages "with communities with at least 100,000 residents, a 30% or more minority population, and close proximity to a minority-serving institution."

Communities served







Donors interested in racial equity may focus their giving on specific populations. As such, one potential approach to giving is finding funds or collaboratives that direct capital to specific communities of color. In a North American context, common racial and ethnic identity markers include Asian American (e.g., New Breath Foundation), Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (e.g., PAI Foundation), Black (e.g., Black Liberation Pooled Fund), Native American (e.g., Native Voices Rising), and Latinx (e.g., Latino Community Foundation).

It is also critical to keep in mind that although race and ethnicity may be the defining factor of racial equity giving, it is not the only marker of a person's identity. Instead, it is the ways that various aspects of identity intersect—for instance, race/ethnicity and gender identity (including nonbinary and trans), sexual orientation, disability, etc.—that might define not only the layers of inequity that exist but also the approaches to solve it. Collaborative giving vehicles can be a powerful way to focus giving to organizations that take an intersectional view of the community served.

Fund governance







Another dimension to explore in a giving strategy is the governance structure of the fund or donor collaborative. The following models have specific resonance in the racial equity issue space given the historical disenfranchisement of the communities being served:

- Proximate leadership or staff: Fund leaders and staff who are proximate to the communities and issues they serve (e.g., are from those geographies, are members of the same identity group) tend to have the lived experience, existing relationships, and knowledge that make the fund's work more impactful. For example, proximate leaders and staff can bring differentiated perspectives on local needs and assets within their communities that might be overlooked or misunderstood when viewed through a dominant culture lens. In Bridgespan's annual collaborative fund survey, 70 percent of fund leaders who say that racial equity is core to their work identify as leaders of color.
- Shifting power: A hallmark of equitable philanthropy involves intentionally shifting decision-making power from those who traditionally have held it to those who have not. This can be expressed in various forms including trust-based philanthropy, reparative grantmaking, and pushing philanthropy to be more transparent with who and what they are giving to.

Trust-based Philanthropy: A trust-based approach advances equity by centering humility and collaboration in how funders show up. It is a holistic approach that has implications for a grantmaker's practices, culture, structures, and leadership. Some practices at the foundation of trust-based philanthropy include giving multi-year, unrestricted funding; simplifying and streamlining applications and reporting; practicing open, honest, and transparent dialogue, relationship-building and mutual learning; and providing support beyond just financial.¹⁸

Reparative Grantmaking: Reparative grantmaking strategies are developed by movement leaders who are both accountable to and a part of an organizing base (i.e., residents and community members). These strategies aim to repair the historical and ongoing harms perpetrated against low-income and communities of color by those in power, and work to build lasting wealth and economic mobility.

Participatory Grantmaking: Participatory grantmaking embraces a wide range of activities that aim to shift decision making power about who and what to fund to the very communities most impacted by the issue and problems.¹⁹ Often influenced by traditional giving norms found in communities of color and among movements, activities might include peer-led grantmaking panels and other collaborative based decision making that includes community members.²⁰ Participatory grantmakers acknowledge and focus

on power²¹ because as the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy explains: "As a grantmaker, you cannot truly strive for and advance equity until you understand your own power and privilege in society and in relation to your grantees."²²

Notes

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- ³ Nick Noel, Duwain Pinder, Shelley Stewart III, Jason Wright, "The Economic Impact of Closing the Racial Wealth Gap," McKinsey & Company, August, 2019.
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- Dedrick Asante-Muhammad, Chuck Collins, Josh Hoxie, Emanuel Nieves, "Ever-Growing Gap: Without Change, African American and Latino Families Won't Match White Wealth for Centuries," Institute for Policy Studies, August 2016.
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- Michael McAfee, Josh Kirschenbaum, Laura Lanzerotti, Willa Seldon, Lyell Sakaue, Cora Daniels, "Moving from Intention to Impact: Funding Racial Equity to Win," PolicyLink and The Bridgespan Group, July 2021.
- ⁸ Kathleen Osta and Hugh Vasquez, "Implicit Bias and Structural Racialization," National Equity Project.
- Malkia Devich Cyril, Lyle Matthew Kan, Ben Francisco Maulbeck, Lori Villarosa, "Mismatched: Philanthropy's Response to the Call for Racial Justice." Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity, 2021.
- ¹⁰ Michael McAfee et al, "Moving from Intention to Impact."
- 11 Connie Matthiessen, "Funded to Win." These 11 Funders—and Counting—Are Stepping Up for Black Feminist Movements," Inside Philanthropy,
- Alex Daniels, "28 Foundation Leaders Urge Peers to Channel More Funds to Black-Led Nonprofits," The Chronicle of Philanthropy, February 1, 2023.
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- Alison Powell, Simon Morfit, Michael John, "Releasing the Potential of Philanthropic Collaborations," The Bridgespan Group, December, 2021.
- ¹⁵ Forthcoming data from The Bridgespan Group survey of 200 collaborative vehicles conducted in 2022.
- ¹⁶ Alison Powell, Susan Wolf Ditkoff, "Are Fund Collaboratives Valuable?" The Bridgespan Group, July 2019.
- ¹⁷ The 1954 Project has previously been a client of The Bridgespan Group.
- ¹⁸ For resources on the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, a 5 year peer-to-peer funder initiative to address power imbalances between funders and grantees, please see the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project website.
- 19 Cynthia Gibson, "Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking," GrantCraft a service of Foundation Center, 2018.
- ²⁰ Kelley Buhles, "A Primer for Participatory Grantmaking," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, November 2, 2021.
- ²¹ Cynthia Gibson et al, "Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking."
- Power Moves Advisory Committee, "Power Moves: Your Essential Philanthropy Assessment Guide for Equity and Justice," Philamplify and National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, May, 2018.

Illustrative list of racial equity-focused funds

As part of its ongoing research into collaborative giving vehicles, The Bridgespan Group surveys such organizations annually. To develop the list below of collaborative funds and vehicles focused on racial equity, Bridgespan reviewed its survey list of 500 such vehicles and consulted with leaders in the space including the Donors of Color Network, Liberation Ventures, and PolicyLink. The list is not exhaustive nor have the funds included been independently vetted by the authors; if you know of a fund that should be added, please contact Jennifer Stout (jennifer.stout@gatesfoundation.org).

US-National scope

- · AAPI Civic Engagement Fund
- · Abundant Futures Fund
- · American Indian College Fund
- Art for Justice Fund
- AYNI Fund
- · Black Feminist Fund
- Black Liberation Pooled Fund
- · Borealis Philanthropy: Black-Led Movement Fund (Particular focus on Midwest and South)
- Borealis Philanthropy: Communities Transforming Policing Fund
- · Borealis Philanthropy: Disability Inclusion Fund
- Borealis Philanthropy: Emerging LGBTQ Leaders of Color Fund
- Borealis Philanthropy: Racial Equity in Journalism Fund
- Borealis Philanthropy: Racial Equity in Philanthropy Fund
- Borealis Philanthropy: Racial Equity to Accelerate Change Fund
- · Borealis Philanthropy: Spark Justice Fund
- · Constellations Cultural Change Fund and Initiative
- · Climate and Clean Energy Equity Fund
- Climate Iustice Alliance
- Democracy Frontlines Fund
- Echoing Green: Racial Equity Philanthropic Fund
- Emergent Fund
- First Peoples Fund
- Funders for Housing and Opportunity
- · Grantmakers for Girls of Color
- Growing Justice: Fund for Equitable Good Food Procurement (Amalgamated Foundation)
- Hispanics in Philanthropy
- Inclusive Racial Equity Grant Fund
- Indigenous Environment Network
- Latino Community Foundation
- · Liberated Capital: Decolonizing Wealth Fund
- Liberation Ventures

- · Life Comes From It
- Movement for Black Lives (M4BL)
- National Collaborative for Health Equity
- National Trust for Historic Preservation: African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund
- Native Voices Rising
- NDN Collective
- Neighborhood Funders Group
- NEO Philanthropy: Four Freedoms Fund
- New Breath Foundation
- PA'I Foundation
- Partnership Funds
- · Pawanka Fund
- Pillars Fund
- Pivot Fund
- Pop Culture Collaborative
- Proteus Fund
- Rise Together Fund (Proteus Fund initiative)
- Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples
- Solutions Project
- · The Collective Future Fund
- The 1954 Project
- Third Wave Fund
- Thousand Currents
- Trans Justice Funding Project
- United Way: Equity Advancement Fund
- Upswing Fund for Adolescent Mental Health
- Visionary Freedom Fund
- Youth Engagement Fund

Midwest

- Chicago Community Trust: We Rise Together
- · Chicago Racial Justice Pooled Fund (Crossroads Fund)
- · Minneapolis Foundation:
- Climate Action and Racial Equity Fund
- Minneapolis Foundation: Reimagine Education

• Minneapolis Foundation: Fund for Safe Communities

Northeast

- EdVestors: Racial Equity Seed Fund (Boston Area)
- Fund for New Citizens (NYC)
- Let Us Breathe Fund (NYC)
- Long Island Racial Equity Initiative
- · Maine Expansion Arts Fund
- Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation
- Mosaic Network & Fund (NYC)
- New Commonwealth Racial Equity and Social Justice Fund (Boston Foundation)
- Poise Foundation Human Equity and Justice Fund (Pittsburgh)
- Robin Hood Foundation: Power Fund (NYC)

Northwest

- Black Resilience Fund (Portland)
- Black United Fund of Oregon
- Na'ah Illahee Fund (Pacific NW including Alaska and British Columbia)
- Potlatch Fund (Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana)
- Seattle Foundation: Fund for Inclusive Recovery
- Social Justice Fund NW (Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, & Wyoming)

South

- Black Voters Matter Capacity Building Institute (Georgia)
- Cypress Fund (The Carolinas)
- Florida Rights Restoration Coalition
- Hive Fund for Climate and Gender Justice
- · Miami Foundation: Racial Equity Fund
- Southern Power Fund
- Southern Reconstruction Fund
- · Women's Foundation of South

West

- African American Alliance Fund (Orange County, CA)
- Black Future Co-op Fund (Washington State)
- Black-Led Joy and Wellness Fund (Greater Seattle)
- · California Black Freedom Fund
- · California Health Equity and Racial Justice Fund
- · California Immigrant Resilience Fund
- · Colorado Plateau Foundation
- Native Cultures Fund (California)
- Rapid Response Fund for Movement Building (Bay Area Counties)
- United LatinX Fund (Los Angeles)



To learn more

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The foundation's Philanthropic Partnerships team seeds and supports collaborative giving platforms that make it easier for donors to channel large philanthropic investments to advance equity.

Jennifer Stout: jennifer.stout@gatesfoundation.org

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The **Donors of Color Network** is the first-ever cross-racial community of donors of color—a home for donors committed to building the collective power of people of color to drive systems change and advance racial equity.

Isabelle Leighton: isabelle@donorsofcolor.org



The Bridgespan Group is a leading social impact consultant and advisor to nonprofits and NGOs, philanthropists, collaborative giving platforms, and investors.

Darren Isom: darren.isom@bridgespan.org Alison Powell: alison.powell@bridgespan.org

