



TEN YEARS' TIME

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Masterclass supplementary:

Grant making

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Grant making at the speed of trust

Grant-making, a very bureaucratic and soul-less term for an act that is actually so much more than this. The original definition of the word philanthropy, a greek word, is love of humanity. Let us reconcile that with grant-making, and all it has become. Bureaucratic with process for process sake, detailed budgets and 54 page impact reports. If after all of this, we could say social justice has been achieved, good has triumphed and everyone everywhere can live their best, joy and health filled lives, I would not be writing this piece, and you would not be reading it, but alas, that is not the case. Why? Well because despite all this professionalisation, grant-making, for the most part, is topsy-turvy at best, and harmful and colonial at worst.

The model of moving money accumulated from violence, theft and exploitation then propped up by economic frameworks that reward hoarding, aka philanthropy today, must be understood within the wider structure of neo-liberalism and capitalism. These are not distinct or separate things, Angela Davis and many other scholars and activists have irrefutably demonstrated this interdependence, and as grant makers we must contend and grapple with these truths.

Before you stop reading, I invite you to hold these contradictions and harm, and stay with the trouble.

It is not hyperbolic to say that social movements across the UK and globe need us to get philanthropy right, and now. At the time of writing, social mobility in the UK continues to decline. The majority of people experiencing housing insecurity are in employment, 4.5 million children live in poverty on Victorian era levels, austerity has eroded the public sector and civil society though doing a valiant job, is also over stretched and under resourced, whether it be in Blackpool or London, mental health services or housing.



Taking a global look, every region of the world is seeing, in real time, the consequences of the climate crisis. Nation states are becoming more insular, with anti-rights agendas gaining ground everywhere. Now is not the time to turn inwards, the challenges are many, but we are all here because we believe grant making and philanthropy has a responsibility to alleviate some of this, and can be more equitable and fair.


For movements to flourish, create change, and model the freedoms for a just society, resources need to be redistributed.


So what could that look like?

Well before getting into the weeds of grant making, what does your portfolio of grants look like? Are you funding communities most at the margins and with an intersectional lens?

Intersectionality. This word is used quite widely in philanthropic circles, however, if it was truly understood, the data would look different. In 2020, Ubele's sobering report stated that [9 in 10 Black and Global Majority led organisations risked closure due to financial insecurity](#). Three years later, and Black Feminist Fund's report [Where is the Money for Black Feminist Movements](#) reported that 0.1%-0.35% of global funding went to Black women, girls and gender expansive led organising and 0.27% to Black disability led organisations. Anecdotally, many Black and Global Majority staff at foundations across Europe and the US note that philanthropy's racial reckoning in 2020 was as fleeting as the Black Instagram square, lip service is still the order of the day.

If philanthropy was genuinely funding from the margins to the centre, the above 0. % would not be the case. To enact a just world, philanthropy should be seen as a reparative act, not benevolence or charity. This means centring a diversity of actors and understanding how the harm from patriarchal and racist hegemony compounds to create multiple levels of injustice. Viewing grant-making through a reparative lens, also moves us to fund differently, investing in the root causes of injustice, and in the movements who are rehearsing [ancient futures](#). These may be registered or unregistered entities, informal coalitions, and individuals.






The recent pandemic showed us that the world wouldn't end, nor would the Charity Commission come knocking, if we didn't ask partners to jump through 450 hurdles and prove their trustworthiness and competence. We were suddenly able to move money at pace, and suddenly able to accept stories of change (colonially known as impact) in mediums that worked for partners. Some of this continued into 2021, even less in 2022, and by 2023, we were transported back to the bad ol' days. To move at the speed of the trust, we must stop compliancing out the very organisations and work that it is critical we invest in. Of course it is prudent to make sure partners can do the work safely, and don't use the funds for a week in Ibiza. But proportionality. The supposed legal and financial must haves from the application process to reporting during the grant rightly shifted or dropped completely for emergency Covid grants, demonstrating their futility.

Let us now turn to the grants programme.

Who came up with and informed the strategy, who shaped and designed the process? Lived experience is expertise and should not be an afterthought. So if this isn't found amongst the board and staff team (with the charity sector being one of the least diverse), as well as doing something about this internally, you should be appointing committees or consultants with the required lived experience.

Social change isn't linear, nor can it be tied into a compact, three year cycle. To truly be in service to movement, and give our partners the expansiveness and resilience needed for these trying times, sustained and unrestricted (or at least flexible) funding is paramount. Black Feminist Fund are resourcing their partners for 8 years, [given the fact 81% of Black feminist movements do not have funding to meet their goals](#), this type of investment is unprecedented, sowing the seeds for true transformation. Imagine if this was the norm!

The hurdles we face are many, the world is on literal and metaphorical fire. So let's cut the bullsh*t, free up the money, and get in step with our partners, moving only as fast as the speed of trust to build the just world we are yearning for.



Resources

Books

- Giving Back: How to Do Good, Better: Derek Bardowell
- Decolonizing Wealth: Edgar Villanueva
- Post Capitalist Philanthropy: Healing Wealth in the Time of Collapse: Alnoor Lydha and Lynn Murphy

Articles & Reports

- The Black feminists that broke philanthropy's inaction in Sudan
- Where is the money for Black feminist movements
- An open letter to philanthropy
- Participatory Grantmaking Community
- Paying for involvement
- Power in Philanthropy

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