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Making the American Dream Real for All: An Anti-Racism Primer for Donors

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FOR NATIONAL PHILANTHROPIC TRUST

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Executive Summary

This primer was written for individuals and families who wish to explore how their philanthropy can support racial equity and racial justice initiatives. It has five main goals:

- Provide an overview of key racial equity challenges facing US communities of color.
- Describe grantmaking approaches to racial equity issues, as well as their pros and cons.
- Present examples of grantmakers and nonprofit organizations to illustrate distinct approaches.
- Pose questions for donors to consider in defining their racial equity giving strategy.
- Provide additional resources for readers to deepen their understanding of racial equity grantmaking strategies.

An evidence-based study using a variety of data sources, this resource builds on interviews from diverse leaders in the field; an AI-based analysis of their responses; and expert advice from the author, Dr. Jackie Bouvier Copeland, a noted social justice leader and scholar, to present key issues and practical recommendations. This is not an exhaustive, academic study. Instead, it is written to be a succinct, user-friendly guide for donors committed to racial equity but new to the practice. The resulting primer is divided into three core sections that provide grounding in the key terms and issues as well as examples and recommendations.

Section 1: *Introduction: A New Era for an Old Challenge* gives an overview of the racial equity issues facing the United States. It also clarifies important terms that the philanthropy field uses to address racism.

Section 2: *Making Change Real* highlights three key anti-racism grantmaking approaches with examples donors can use in their own giving.

Section 3: *Anti-Racism Giving Recommendations* concludes with practical actions donors can take to apply a racial equity lens to their giving.

Section 4 includes an extensive reading list and other resources for those interested in increasing their awareness and understanding of racial equity and racial justice initiatives.

1 | Introduction: A New Era for an Old Challenge

RACIAL INJUSTICE IS AS OLD AS THE UNITED STATES ITSELF. Our country's history and culture have been driven largely by an effort to reconcile the contradiction of its undeniable origins in race-based slavery and genocide with the human rights promised to all by its Constitution. America's racial history is a sensitive, often taboo topic that many donors do not have experience addressing. Fortunately, there are effective philanthropic models to help donors make a difference.

The racial equity philanthropy field relies upon certain concepts. So, it is important to start with the definition of some key terms.

"Race" is commonly used but rarely defined. There is one human species, called *homo sapiens*. Race is not an innate biological category.¹ It is a socially-constructed categorization of people based on allegedly distinctive, identifiable and hierarchical physical characteristics. Although it is not a biologically

Structural racism, or systemic racism, is the term used to describe how assumptions of white superiority have been embedded and perpetuated in our laws, culture, institutions and other practices over hundreds of years, resulting in discriminatory treatment of those deemed inferior because they are not white.² Racism is not just the discriminatory behavior of a few prejudiced individuals. It is when an entire system, society and/or institution creates and sustains norms that fundamentally disadvantage those deemed racially inferior—and their descendants—on the basis of skin color or related physical attributes. Isabel Wilkerson, author of the book *Caste*, has even said that structural racism is America's caste system. For many, being a "non-racist" individual is insufficient for real progress. Individuals who want to promote equity must be actively "anti-racist," that is, dismantle the personal biases as well as the structural dynamics that perpetuate racism.

"Economic justice—equal access to jobs, technology and private capital—is the last frontier of America's Civil Rights Movement."

– *Dr. Jackie Bouvier Copeland*

relevant classification, race has been used to classify some people as inherently inferior to others, and it is therefore used to denote individuals as subhuman to justify their subjugation. It is a very powerful and salient social construction. Anti-racism advocates attempt to dismantle the resulting structures of inequality and exclusion that oppress people considered members of inferior races in some societies. Building on science, many advocates also try to undo the notion of race itself as a biological category and the notion that "white" people are superior to all other races.

Structural racism impacts every societal issue. The causes and manifestations of racism are interconnected. For example, a funder trying to reduce COVID-19 infection rates in a racially diverse, urban community would need an "intersectional" approach that also considers how a cross-section of gender, culture, immigration status and other issues impact community infection rates in order to create the best funding solutions.

Racial Equity by the Numbers

Communities of color experience profound disparities with whites in almost every sphere of life. According to The Washington Post, the median wealth of white families is **almost ten times** that of Black families, with similar wealth gaps for Latinx and Native American families.³



Communities of color have the **highest rates of chronic disease**, such as diabetes, asthma and heart disease, as well as premature death and infant and maternal mortality, among others.^{4, 5}

Health inequities are exacerbated by environmental racism, since poor communities of color tend to live in the most polluted neighborhoods.⁶

Data compiled by the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice show that Native, Black and Latinx Americans **are the most likely to be killed by police violence**.⁷

Largely because of the higher concentration of frontline employment and vulnerability due to chronic disease, Native, Black, Pacific Islanders and Latinx communities of color constitute **more than 50 percent of COVID-19 deaths**, according to data analyzed by APM Research Lab.⁸

Through the first six months of 2020, ProPublica found that **unemployment rates remained disproportionately higher** for Black and Hispanic workers as compared to white workers.⁹

A September 2020 poll by the Main Street Alliance and Color of Change found that **60 percent of Black-owned small businesses were likely to close** as a result of the recession.¹⁰

The pandemic has put a spotlight on longstanding and **rapidly worsening racial inequities**. It is in the best interest of society and business to strengthen equity and opportunity for all Americans, including people of color.

The events of 2020 are the most recent expression of a centuries-old American dynamic of racial progress and retrenchment. The very public killings of Black Americans such as George Floyd and others by vigilantes or police, often captured on video and shared on social media, prompted uprisings throughout the nation and world. Also, the pandemic recession hit all Americans hard. The disproportionately high COVID-19 infection and death rates of Black, Native and Latinx Americans further amplified the continuing reality of racial injustice.

But serious challenges remain in promoting racial equity, especially during an historic period when all Americans are adapting to rapid, deeply disruptive changes.

Leaders have responded to this period of racial turmoil by creating a range of funding initiatives to promote racial inclusion and equity. Many US companies have committed tens of billions of dollars to racial equity efforts focused on hiring, economic empowerment and education through investment in Black-owned businesses, financial institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).¹¹ Many foundations have followed suit, creating new initiatives and redoubling longstanding efforts to promote racial equity.

Some funders make a distinction between racial equity and racial justice, while others use the terms synonymously. For those making the distinction, racial equity focuses on improving societal outcomes for oppressed racial groups. Racial justice is a more ambitious approach that attempts to create just, non-racist societies. The figure below, developed by the [Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity](#) and excerpted from [Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens: A Practical Guide](#), highlights the key differences between racial equity and racial justice grantmaking.¹²

| RACIAL EQUITY | RACIAL JUSTICE |
|---|---|
| The original guide describes four important features of a racial equity lens : | A racial justice lens adds four more critical elements: |
| Analyzes data and information about race and ethnicity | Understands and acknowledges racial history |
| Understands disparities and the reasons they exist | Creates a shared affirmative vision of a fair and inclusive society |
| Looks at structural root causes of problems | Focuses explicitly on building civic, cultural, economic and political power by those most impacted |
| Names race explicitly when talking about problems and solutions | Emphasizes transformative solutions that impact multiple systems |

Source: Rinku Sen and Lori Villarosa. Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens: A Practical Guide. Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity. 2019.

Whether a racial equity or racial justice lens is used in grantmaking, the importance of funding equity and efforts to dismantle structural racism are key considerations. Equitable funding and representation of people of color are ongoing racial justice challenges in philanthropy and the nonprofit sector. People of color-founded and -led organizations consistently receive a small percentage of private philanthropy’s overall funding, and when the number of grants to these organizations increases the grant size is typically smaller.¹³ Because community-based nonprofits tend to have more cultural knowledge and credibility among the communities they serve, they have a vital role to play in delivering effective community services in addition to racial equity and justice initiatives.

Any donor interested in creating meaningful outcomes from their philanthropy for any issue in the United States, and much of the world, is more likely to succeed with a racial equity lens. This primer will help donors get started with a racial equity giving strategy and provides additional resources for those who want to advance to racial justice philanthropy.

2 | Making Change Real

Racial equity is a vast and burgeoning philanthropy field. A 2020 report by the Center for Effective Philanthropy indicates that 90% of foundations are actively planning to address racial issues in their grantmaking, albeit with a focus on racial equity and not the more comprehensive racial justice lens.¹⁴ Primary strategies include increasing staff and board diversity; doing more to integrate equity into their strategy and grantmaking approaches; reducing barriers to funding; and doing more and better outreach and relationship-building in the community. Many funders interested in racial equity issues are using their philanthropic dollars to support organizations that are increasing community engagement; support people of color-founded and -led nonprofits; make unrestricted grants; and boost advocacy or community organizing efforts. There are about 400 topical grantmaking categories according to the IRS, and a racial equity lens can be applied to any of them.¹⁵ With a focus on individuals and families giving at various levels, this section highlights three core models, as well as representative organizations as examples. These organizations are presented only for the purposes of illustration and are not endorsements or recommendations. Donors can adapt or combine these strategies depending on their various giving interests and experiences.

Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOCs) need capacity building support just like everyone else. Philanthropy could be better partners, [because] the racial wealth divide [is] not just a financial gap but a capacity and human capital gap. Fund capacity building and share your expertise from the perspective of wanting them to be successful. – Interviewee

2a | Direct Services

With the decimating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting recession on communities of color, many funders are supporting nonprofits that provide direct relief or access to basic services such as food, water, housing, clothing, healthcare, education and technology. To address this crisis, the giving trend for direct services has been “rapid response funding,” that is, streamlined application processes and quicker decision timelines. Direct service giving tends to be short-term gifts, made to social service organizations or programs to address the symptoms

Direct Services Spotlight: United Way (Nationwide)

www.unitedway.org

Combining philanthropy, volunteerism and community services, United Way chapters around the world have established COVID-19 Emergency Funds to support both nonprofits in meeting increasing demand and people vulnerable to job loss or infection. Services vary by community need. In Abilene, Texas, this meant funding safe day camps, after-school programs and play spaces for children during quarantine. In Maryland, there has been a 400% increase in 2-1-1 calls with most requests related to COVID-19 testing and treatment as well as food bank inquiries. In Florida’s Miami-Dade County, United Way established Operation Helping Hands, a coordinated, community-wide response to COVID-19, connecting people and small businesses to their network of service agency partners. The initiative provides groceries and home-delivered meals, job placement referrals, and rental and utilities assistance. Although the United Way focuses on direct service funding, they have continued longstanding policy reform efforts, establishing a recovery and rebuilding agenda applied at the national and local level. With millions of direct beneficiaries in the US alone, the United Way is an example of a legacy American nonprofit providing needed health and human services, including for people of color, although not explicitly focused on racial equity or justice.

of endemic injustices that cause people to need assistance in the first place. While grants to direct service organizations do not address the root causes of racial inequity, they provide vital support to stabilize communities in crisis. They also provide a good initial step to become familiar with the complex challenges facing communities of color, as well as the innovative, community-based nonprofits serving them.

Collaborating with nonprofit partners and other donors, many funders have created special funds to support community direct services as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, 800 organizations have signed a Council on Foundations pledge to offer rapid response funding.¹⁶ Many of the funders are nonprofit grantmakers who raise funds from individual and institutional donors, using their intimate community knowledge to distribute grants to worthy community-based nonprofits. Community-based grantmakers are able to provide flexible, rapid, often short-term support to community-based organizations providing direct relief. Some of the institutional responses have evolved into collaboratives involving multiple funders. Because communities of color are disproportionately affected by COVID-19, these funds have played a vital role in assisting with pandemic emergency relief and recovery.

2b | Racial Equity

Racial equity approaches are often designed to address disparities in a particular socioeconomic

system, sector, region and/or population. For example, they can be designed to improve outcomes for a historically disadvantaged racial group such as Black people in the criminal justice system, undocumented Latinx immigrant patients in the healthcare system, or South Asians in Silicon Valley with a disproportionately high level of heart disease. Such approaches are typically focused on reducing group level racial disparities by improving various outcomes such as representation, health, incarceration, etc. Whether focused on a system at a local or national level, these approaches often define success as narrowing disparities between people of color and white Americans. Although a critical and often more manageable steppingstone to a broader sense of racial justice, they are not necessarily oriented to undoing racism and creating a more just society overall. However, improving outcomes for people of color, or other marginalized people, can create positive benefits for all communities.

There are multiple racial equity initiatives in philanthropy and the nonprofit sector, some founded and led by communities of color. Such efforts are often more complex than a strict direct services approach because they set out to change systems rooted in longstanding structural racism, attempt to improve outcomes for severely disadvantaged communities, and often mix direct services with advocacy to increase effectiveness.

Racial Equity Spotlight: The Woods Foundation (Chicago, IL)

www.woodsfund.org

The Chicago-based Woods Foundation applied a racial equity lens to all its grantmaking in the mid-2000s. With a focus on community organizing and policy reform advocacy to promote economic justice, Woods believes that the communities most affected by inequity should drive solutions to promote fairness. Woods funds organizations, programs and initiatives to dismantle structural and systemic racism to produce equitable opportunities and outcomes for those most impacted. In addition to funding community organizing and policy reform, their Integrated Approach program supports organizations combining both strategies. Special initiatives that advance coalition building and emergency response funding allow the foundation to support unanticipated community needs, while the capacity building program supports nonprofit organizational development. An example of a Woods Foundation grant is one to Chicago's Southwest Organizing Project, a coalition of residents that organized to get affordable homes built in inner city Chicago, promoting stable housing and economic justice for the primarily lower income people of color living in the area. Said one participating resident, "Having stable and affordable housing allows my family to save money and plan for the future. We now have aspirations to become homeowners."

2c | Racial Justice

Transformative racial justice is much more difficult to achieve, because the funder or policymaker must work across multiple diverse stakeholders, places, institutions and systems over a number of years—typically for at least ten years—and often for a generation. The goal is to transform systems so that they do not reproduce racial inequities but, to paraphrase Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., judge people by the content of their character, not their skin color. Racial justice frameworks often uncover the implicit biases that perpetuate structural racism over generations, work to undo them, and create fair policies, practices and accountability systems in their place.

There are several reasons that many donors stop at racial equity and do not pursue racial justice philanthropy. First, social justice is inherently intersectional. Although we use shorthand to describe ethnic or racial groups, they are not monolithic. So-called Black, Asian, Latinx, Native American and other “communities of color” have much diversity within them.

Black transwomen living in New York may have a very different experience of racism than Latinx immigrants living in Arizona. Place of residence, self-identity, age, income, country of origin and many other “intersections” matter greatly when attempting to promote justice.

Navigating the diversity within diversity to impact racism can be daunting for funders of any background, especially newcomers to anti-racism giving. Two common solutions to accommodate these diversities and interconnections is to fund nonprofits and other organizations with the expertise, credibility, contacts and community knowledge to design and execute justice strategies across the relevant systems and places.

Racial Justice Spotlight: The Libra Foundation (National)

www.thelibrafoundation.org

A family foundation established in 2002, The Libra Foundation supports frontline organizations building a world where communities of color thrive. The foundation makes grants to nonprofit organizations that center the voices and experiences of people facing systemic oppression. They believe that those closest to the issues understand them best and can create the most effective solutions. Their grants focus on transforming the criminal, environmental and gender justice systems for a fairer society. For example, their grant to the Black Voters Matter Capacity Building Institute helps to train Georgia leaders in addressing illegal efforts to curtail voting rights. Another grant indicative of their racial justice grantmaking is the Asia Pacific Environmental Network, a California-based coalition organizing to stop big polluters and create safe housing to build a regenerative economy that replenishes the Earth instead of exploiting and destroying it. In addition to supporting community-based organizations, the foundation funds organizations serving broad-based constituencies advancing its mission such as the Center for Reproductive Health, whose goal is to advance women’s reproductive rights worldwide. The Libra Foundation illustrates how a funder can make grants that combine civic participation with community organizing and legal campaigns to move beyond transforming systems to build a more just, inclusive society.

Donors can also fund advocacy organizations doing research, conducting public awareness campaigns or providing program services across diverse groups to create policy change in key systems.

| LOWER ANTI-RACISM IMPACT | MORE COMPLEX DESIGNS | HIGHER ANTI-RACISM IMPACT |
|--|--|---|
| Direct Social Service | Systems Change Racial Equity | Intersectional Racial Justice |
| Fund health and human services as well as disaster relief and recovery for individuals, recognizing that certain populations need more services due to racism, but no or little attention to systemic, root causes | Fund to remove racism from key societal systems to reduce disparate outcomes for specific or multiple racial groups as the primary focus | Fund to create a more democratic society and institutions that heal racial divides and promote justice for all, decreasing the future likelihood that race will be a predictor of equitable opportunity and life outcomes |

Although called by various names, there are multiple approaches donors can use to address the challenges facing people of color. These approaches can be adapted, mixed and matched in various ways, depending on context and donor preference. The key is to ensure the giving strategy is informed by community and other stakeholders, as it surely takes a village to promote racial equity or justice. Strategies that address the root causes of racism to create more equitable systems, outcomes and just societies are more likely to have more substantive, long-lasting impact. Of course, as with any substantive social transformation, as one moves along the anti-racism funding continuum, meaningful change is longer term, may be more subject to critique from a donor’s network, and more sensitive to community leadership changes. Real impact requires courage and risk.

These three approaches and the examples indicated provide a framework for donors to begin planning their own anti-racism giving strategy.

3 | Anti-Racism Giving Recommendations

The previous sections provided some background, context and information necessary to start designing a racial equity or justice giving strategy. One of the major reasons that racial biases continue in grantmaking is because funders' values, vision, mission and strategy are not aligned with their racial equity intent. Missions are sometimes unclear, and funders may unintentionally favor organizations with better networks, disadvantaging many led by people of color. Therefore, when trying to increase the racial equity impact of their grantmaking, most funders begin with a review and retrofit of their giving policies and practices as needed. Following are recommended best practices to jumpstart giving with an anti-racism lens.

3a | Clarify Giving Values and Vision

No matter their resources, if donors want to support racial equity or justice issues, they are more likely to make a difference if they have clear and deliberate anti-racism values and a vision statement. To help clarify areas of focus for support, donors can write down their beliefs, morals and ethics that will drive their giving strategies. Clear values and vision will keep work grounded in the legacy donors want to create with their philanthropy. The resources section includes examples from foundations that donors can use to formalize a values and vision statement.

3b | Racial Analysis

Donors can take concerted steps to ensure their giving promotes racial equity and inclusion. There are many assessment tools available, although most of them are oriented to foundations and those that have the resources for a formal self-assessment process. To get started, donors can assess their grantmaking by asking themselves the following questions.

- What is the average size of my grants to people of color-led organizations compared to white-led organizations?
- Do I support community-based organizations that often have the most community credibility and expertise but often find it difficult to garner funding from outside their community?

- Do I fund people of color-led community organizing and movement building designed to shift power and expand justice for all people?
- Am I supporting organizations that can address the root causes of racism?
- Is my giving informed or even driven by organizational and community needs, or do I dictate grant terms with restrictions that ignore community priorities and capacity?
- Do I provide operating support, flexible program support, and/or funding for capacity building (training, consulting and other services for organizational development) that achieve the overarching goals of the grant while recognizing the need for nonprofits to be nimble especially in complex, rapidly changing times?
- Do I support multiracial healing and reconciliation work to restore healthy, non-exploitative, just, mutually understanding, supportive and respectful relationships across the racial, ethnic and other diversities of the community we serve?
- What have been the outcomes of my giving for the organizations, communities or causes that I have funded? How many people were served or impacted? What services or changes did they experience? What are some ways that I can improve my giving to increase the chances that I can maximize its anti-racism impact?

The answers to these essential questions will give donors a sense of the extent to which their giving has areas for improvement in its racial equity and justice impact. For donors who wish to go deeper, there are multiple tools that can be adapted and applied. [Frontline Solutions](#) has a useful rubric as well as anti-racism assessment services. [The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy](#) has a useful self-assessment tool that includes worksheets to jumpstart the anti-racism strategy process.

For true racial justice, you have to talk about white supremacy as the cause, rooted in American colonialism and racism. “Justice” implies undoing white supremacy. So, one can focus on equity and avoid conversation about white supremacy. Then we’ll never achieve true justice if one group of human beings is always seen as superior to another just because of skin color, ancestry or money. – Interviewee

3c | Towards an Anti-Racist Giving Mission and Strategy

As donors begin the reflection and self-assessment process towards anti-racism, they often discover that their outcomes do not align with their intended values and vision of equity and justice. This is often a signal that the mission and strategy developed need to be updated to maximize the intended impact and legacy. Once donors have answered the questions above, it may be helpful to articulate a mission statement that indicates how they intend to give differently, if needed, to have a greater racial equity impact. A further step may be capturing some goals for the next 2-3 years of giving in terms of grant size, frequency, the types of organizations donors intend to support and how they will seek them out.

The anti-racism materials designed for family foundations by the [National Center for Family Philanthropy](#) provide useful resources for any donor starting their racial equity and justice giving journey, including examples of anti-racist values, vision and mission statements.

For decades, philanthropy has been critiqued for spending more time on the rhetoric of anti-racism than taking concerted action to advance racial equity and justice. The ongoing underfunding of people of color-led nonprofits and their underrepresentation in philanthropy decision-making are just a few of the ways that giving can perpetuate racial injustice.

Reeling from escalating inequality, the pandemic, recession and environmental disasters, our country is at a tipping point. Donors have a critical role to play in building an inclusive democracy and economy, the most urgent work of philanthropy at this point in The American Experiment. As Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s timeless words remind us, “Philanthropy is commendable, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice which make philanthropy necessary.” This guidance is intended to help donors jumpstart a transformative anti-racism giving strategy, to make our country’s vision of equity real for all people.

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Interviewees

- Nwamaka Agbo, Kataly Foundation
- Akira Barclay, Fresh Philanthropy
- Michelle DePasse, Meyers Memorial Trust
- Leni Dworkis, Weissberg Foundation
- Sherry Ilmay Ho, Resource Generation
- Dara Johnson, Horning Family Fund
- Marcus Littles, Frontline Solutions
- Michelle Morales, Woods Fund
- Erik Stegman, Native Americans in Philanthropy
- Lori Villarosa, Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity

Endnotes

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