



Moving towards Power-Sharing in Philanthropic Practice

June 2023

Dear Colleague,

Recently, we have witnessed increased attention in the philanthropic field to how foundations can genuinely reflect a commitment to racial equity. These conversations further intensified with the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities of color, along with the emergence of a national racial reckoning. However, a next level of discussion about the more fundamentally limiting aspects of philanthropy is necessary if foundations are to become authentically racially equitable in internal and external policies and practices.

If foundations are going to reflect a genuine commitment to racial equity and justice, it is important to look closely at evolving practices that encourage power sharing between philanthropic institutions, grantees, and the communities they serve. The expansion of such practices as trust-based philanthropy and participatory grantmaking illustrate growing receptivity to power sharing. These developments are starting points to more comprehensively equitable and inclusive models of philanthropy. But more work is required.

In numerous instances, foundations built their original endowments in ways that exploited people of color—for example, through displacement of native populations and the labor of enslaved persons. This wealth is typically distributed without the adequate engagement of communities of color. However, without grappling with this history and recognizing the need to include communities that have been historically exploited in decision-making, it is difficult for foundations to meet their commitments to advancing racial equity and social justice. In today's environment we are seeing an attempt at a chilling effect when it comes to discussions about racism and the nation's history. Philanthropy has an opportunity to be a leader in engaging in these types of conversations and reflections on the history of the philanthropic field in a productive way. Without these conversations, despite stated goals to reduce inequities and improve society, philanthropy will continue to perpetuate systems of injustice. We must confront these issues and not only engage in a radical reimagining of philanthropy in a theoretical and conceptual way but ultimately develop appropriate policies and practices.

We represent the [Race and Equity in Philanthropy Group \(REPG\)](#), a peer-learning network of various types of foundations whose members have always committed to advancing racial equity internally and externally, recognizing the centrality of racial equity to achieving institutional

mission. During recent meetings members emphasized the importance of further exploring methods of power-sharing in philanthropy. As a result, REPG is embarking on a process of discussion and learning about the practical ways in which foundations are partaking in power-sharing. As part of that process, we are developing a framework to help our members, and others in the field of philanthropy understand the range of ways in which philanthropy can share power. This framework will help define power-sharing practices and enable foundations to assess progress. We will widely distribute the first volume of the framework along with this letter followed by Volume 2, with foundation examples and profiles, next year. Additionally, we will explore other programming on power-sharing to advance practice.

Signed:

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