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Answering Philanthropy's Racial Justice Question

Raikes Foundation



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Philanthropy is at an inflection point. Our sector, long allergic to even passing mentions of racial inequality, appears to be in the middle of a reckoning on racial justice.

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prioritized at the highest levels of philanthropy. We've also seen partners both inside and outside of philanthropy offer loving critiques of the ways in which our sector **perpetuates racism** and offer suggestions for bringing a **racial equity lens to our organizations and grantmaking**.

We've made incredible progress since my days leading the nonprofit Teach for America – Washington. As executive director of that organization I never once had a program officer of color or one with significant education experience. Often, I was actively ignored or forced to choose between speaking up to defend people of color, people experiencing poverty or LGBTQIA folks and securing the funding my organization needed to keep the lights on.

But somehow, despite how far we've come, I continue to be in rooms where people question the value or practicality of prioritizing racial justice. We're surrounded by evidence that this is truly a life or death matter for millions of Americans, and yet we still find a way to put off real action. Brave conversations about our country's racial history and philanthropy's role in advancing racial justice are happening, but they're just that. Conversations. We've reached a moment where the sector needs to move beyond talking and begin explicitly developing anti-racist programs and strategies.

“ *If philanthropy is genuine in its professed desire to advance humanity, to truly have a positive impact on the world, there is no choice other than to commit fully to justice for black and brown people. Justice for indigenous people.* ”

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yet to have our “a-ha” moment on the relationship between equity and impact. In the era of color-blindness, we have seen limited-to-no progress for young people of color, their families or their communities. If we analyze this data, it becomes clear that colorblind strategies, programs and narratives have not helped people of color and in some cases, have set us back. It couldn't be clearer that for strategies to be impactful they must be at a minimum race conscious, if not explicitly anti-racist.

Take, for example, the millions of dollars that philanthropy has spent to improve the education system. Despite our best efforts, race and class still remain the most reliable predictors of a student's academic outcomes. That's not progress for all, that's progress for a privileged few. We focused on “fixing students” to close achievement gaps instead of imagining a system where every student felt like they belonged and had the opportunity to succeed.

It is time for a different approach.

“*We should embrace what people of color have long been saying and that current research is confirming: Impact and equity are inextricably linked. If care about impact for all, we address how race and other aspects of identity differently situate people in relation to opportunity.*”

The unintended consequences of being color-blind have kept us from achieving real impact for the people and communities who need it the most.

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justice lens to every aspect of our work. For starters we should.

- Examine our own lenses, biases and values as grantmakers to understand where we may be unintentionally perpetuating oppression;
- Hire people of color into leadership and program officer roles;
- Equitably fund entrepreneurs of color and community-of-color-led organizations;
- Support our dominant-culture grantee partners to advance racial justice internally and externally;
- Revamp our own internal processes, policies, strategies and grantmaking practices, through a racial equity lens;
- Authentically engage communities and young people in decision-making processes;
- Revamp our strategies so that they take into account the realities of current and historical racial discrimination; and
- Commit to learning the real history of our country and exploring the ways in which our current systems were designed to achieve inequitable outcomes;

Equity must be baked into everything we do, from our own internal processes to our strategies and our grantmaking practices because to ignore oppression is to replicate it. If you're not convinced, consider this: The field of philanthropy has nothing to lose by centering justice. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King once pointed out that we are all tied in "an inescapable network of mutuality." We, as a sector and as a country, have everything to gain.

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question left is “how soon can we get started?”

Original contribution by Lindsay Hill, Director, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the [Raikes Foundation](#).

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Impact Philanthropy is a complex topic, and others found these selections from the Impact Giving archive from Giving Compass to be good resources.

What makes for a collaborative philanthropic partnership? [Audio]

Every now and then she pulled over and chatted with women, inviting them to jump in and visit the Studio. At one stop, a lot of children were playing near a bulging boab tree. “Does the tree...

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