

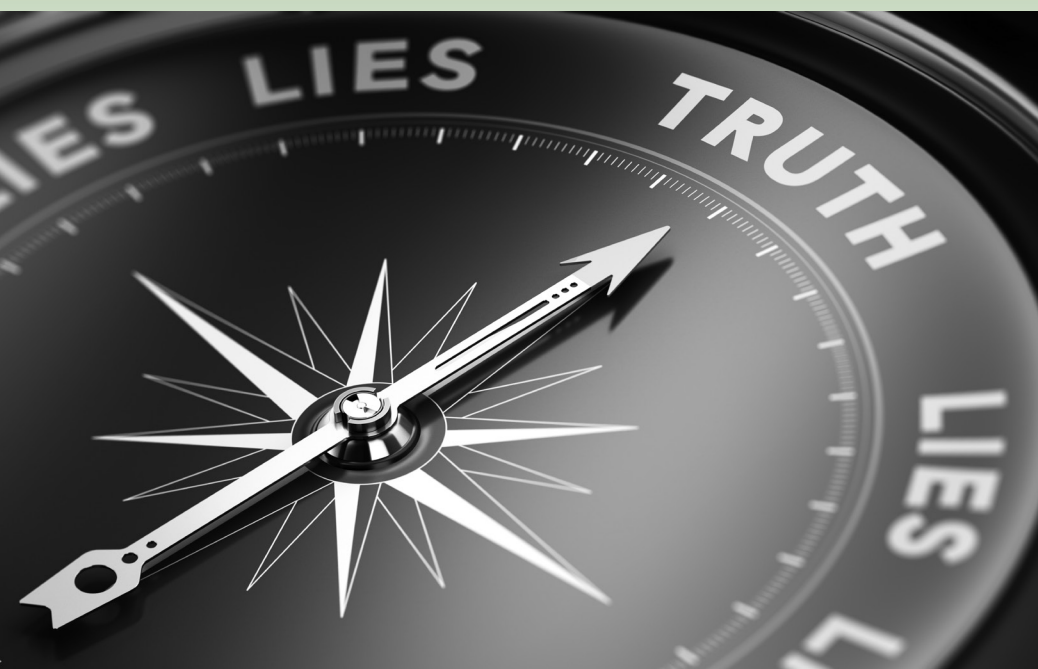
Responsive Philanthropy

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Can philanthropy help rebuild trust in news and the public square?

Today there is real concern about the spread of misinformation and issues of basic trust in our democratic institutions, including the press, our fourth estate. From viral hoaxes disguised to look like news to propaganda spread by automated bots online, we are witnessing a sustained attempt to spread misinformation, generate uncertainty

and undermine objective truth. When paired with the kinds of political attacks journalists have faced in recent months these trends raise troubling questions for a free and open society.

However, despite the new contours of our current political climate and technological developments, issues of trust in journalism extend far back into our nation's history. According to polls, trust in the media has been eroding since Watergate, but the impact of misinformation has been experienced unevenly for a long time. Communities of color in particular have been grappling with inaccurate reporting and outright false stories¹ that have had real and damaging consequences.

By Josh Stearns

As such, we have to understand that the challenges we face today are not just technological, but also economic, cultural and political. The scholar danah boyd has called this an information war that is being shaped² by "disconnects in values, relationships and social fabric." They are fundamentally human struggles and have as much to do with our relationships with each other as our relationship with the media.

Given this complex web of forces, it can be difficult to determine the best role for philanthropy. This is the kind of wicked problem that systems thinking is designed to help untangle. At Democracy Fund, we have invested in systems (continued on page 12)



challenging grantmakers
to strengthen communities

A message from the President and CEO



Dear Colleagues,

Are you encouraged and inspired by the many funders that have taken bold steps to help promote and defend equity and justice in our new political reality?

We are, too. But many more grantmakers are taking a “wait and see approach” as communities battle for health equity, environmental justice, racial justice and other important issues that form the fabric of our democracy.

Time and again in our nation’s history, philanthropy has demonstrated its power and potential to help solve urgent problems and ensure that this country lives up to its democratic ideals. Now could be another of those times.

A number of the articles we feature in this edition of *Responsive Philanthropy* examine some of the opportunities for funders to make a lasting difference in this current moment.

The proliferation of misinformation and widespread efforts to compromise the “truth” continue to fan the flames of distrust on our democratic institutions, including the press. Josh Stearns of Democracy Fund asks, “**Can philanthropy help rebuild trust in news and the public square?**” His answer is “Yes” and offers seven entry points for foundations to engage with ongoing and emerging trust-building efforts.

David Biemesderfer of the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers shares his thoughts on the role of regional associations, affinity groups and other networks in “**In today’s complex and uncertain times, philanthropy associations and networks are more vital than ever.**” He highlighted three specific areas of leadership for these groups.

We’ve been hearing from so many nonprofits in the frontlines of resistance efforts that one of the ways foundations can help is by providing multi-year, general support. In “**Long-term general support: The elusive Bigfoot in philanthropy,**” we asked NCRP members: “Why do you think funders shy away from awarding flexible, multi-year grants?” And how would they respond to these concerns?

In “**Rebuilding the middle: How United Ways and foundations can get in the fight to bring communities together,**” Pete Manzo of United Ways of California says he believes that even at this time of seeming divisiveness, it is still possible – in fact, it is imperative – that we find common ground. He also underscores the need to advocate for policy changes “that can increase the odds of success for the people and communities we serve.”

NCRP board member Bill Bynum notes the growing interest in the South among grantmakers. Bynum shares two critical strategies for successful philanthropy in “**Funding change in the Deep South,**” based on his own experience leading HOPE, a community development credit union serving families and businesses in the Midsouth.

For our Member Spotlight, we feature the **Economic Policy Institute** and its Economic Analysis and Research network. EPI’s mission is to “inform and empower individuals to seek solutions that ensure broadly shared prosperity and opportunity.”

We are committed to highlighting stories and resources that help the sector become truly effective forces for good. Let us know what you think: Send comments and story ideas to community@ncrp.org.

Sincerely,

Aaron Dorfman
President and CEO, NCRP

NCRP STAFF

Ben Barge
Senior Associate for Learning
and Engagement

Jennifer Choi
Vice President and Chief Content Officer

Aaron Dorfman
President and CEO

Caitlin Duffy
Senior Associate for Learning
and Engagement

Kevin Faria
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Peter Haldis
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and Special Projects

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Manager of Nonprofit Membership
and Engagement

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Ryan Schlegel
Senior Associate for Research and Policy



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National Committee for
Responsive Philanthropy
1900 L Street NW, Suite 825
Washington, DC 20036
Phone 202.387.9177
Fax 202.332.5084
E-mail: info@ncrp.org

In today's complex and uncertain times, philanthropy associations and networks are more vital than ever

By David Biemesderfer

I recently attended a conference hosted by The Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP), where the session discussions and hallway conversations all made it clear that many foundation leaders right now are concerned with how they can have a stronger voice and greater impact in today's complex, changing and uncertain times. It is also clear to me that philanthropy cannot respond to this concern without the leadership of philanthropy associations and networks – philanthropy's infrastructure.

A major contributing factor to the widespread feeling of uncertainty today is the recent election results and the deep divides they revealed in our country, which seem to have only solidified since the election. A Gallup Poll taken a few weeks after November 8 showed that 77 percent of Americans – a new high – believed the nation was divided on the most important values.¹ A Monmouth University Poll taken four months later found nearly identical results.² These numbers span political parties and ideological beliefs.

Amid the divisiveness and uncertainty, how can (and should) philanthropy respond? Results of a recent CEP survey, which CEP shared at its conference, offer insights into how foundations are beginning to answer that question. When foundation leaders were asked how they are changing their practice in the current environment, nearly half said they plan to place more emphasis on collaborating with other funders; this was the top response, followed closely by engaging



David Biemesderfer

in more advocacy and public policy at both the state and local levels.³ Philanthropy associations and networks play a vital leadership role in these areas.

PSO LEADERSHIP TO INCREASE COLLABORATION

The Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers represents a growing network of 56 regional and national philanthropy-serving organizations (PSOs). These include regional philanthropy associations, national philanthropy affinity groups and other types of national associations and networks. What they all have in common is that they are indisputable leadership organizations for advancing, informing and supporting philanthropy, with a focus on a region, an issue, a type of philanthropic practice or a type of funder.

As foundations look to collaborate more with other funders, regional and national PSOs are the best places to find others who most likely share their

interests and goals. Funders who care about Indiana will find like-minded funders through the Indiana Philanthropy Alliance, and grantmakers who care about ending homelessness will find their peers through Funders Together to End Homelessness.

PSOs provide safe spaces where the trust level is high; such spaces are needed now more than ever to enable foundations to engage in open and honest conversations about their challenges and fears and explore new paths as they move forward.

PSO LEADERSHIP ON POLICY & ADVOCACY

As foundations look to expand their policy and advocacy work, regional PSOs in particular are the best places to turn for help. Nearly all of the Forum's 35 regional PSO members engage in policy and advocacy at the state or local level, and they have been growing their leadership in this area in recent years, thanks in part to the Forum's capacity-building initiative called Policy-Works for Philanthropy.

As one example of this growth, the percentage of regional PSOs dedicating some staff time to policy work has doubled in the first six years of the initiative, from around 40 percent to more than 80 percent. Clearly regional PSOs are providing an invaluable resource for foundations.

Regional PSOs can provide foundations with education, encouragement and guidance on how to get more engaged in policy and advocacy and

New/Renewed Members & Supporters

Arcus Foundation
Asian Pacific Community in Action
The California Wellness Foundation
California Association of Nonprofits
Caring Across Generations
The Center for Effective Philanthropy
Center for Medicare Advocacy
Center for Popular Democracy
Citi Foundation
Creative Action
Deaconess Foundation
Dyson Foundation
East Bay Community Foundation
Educational Foundation of America
Faith in Public Life
Georgia Justice Project
Greater New Orleans Foundation
Heinz Endowments
Justice in Aging
The Kresge Foundation
Lloyd A. Fry Foundation
MapLight
Meyer Foundation
National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty
Nellie Mae Foundation
New Visions Foundation
Northwest Area Foundation
Perrin Family Foundation
Public Welfare Foundation
Retirement Research Foundation
Voqal
W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Weissberg Foundation
Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

We want to hear from YOU

How can philanthropy best support movements? And what can NCRP to do help?

Send us your thoughts!

community@ncrp.org
or #MovementMoney  



develop a stronger voice, while learning from experts and sharing with colleagues within a critical state and local context. Regional PSOs can also help amplify philanthropy's voice on policy and community issues and provide a stronger collective voice for the field.

For example, last month, the Forum's regional PSO members brought delegations from 28 states to Washington, D.C., for Foundations on the Hill (FOTH), which the Forum presented in partnership with the Council on Foundation and the Alliance for Charitable Reform. More than 300 philanthropy leaders met with their representatives and senators, talking about how to strengthen philanthropy but also discussing policy concerns in such areas as veterans' affairs, housing, homelessness, health care, immigration and criminal justice reform. It was one of the largest gatherings in FOTH's 14-year history and the largest in the past nine years and was made possible thanks to the leadership of regional PSOs. FOTH is part of a yearlong effort to help philanthropy engage with federal lawmakers to advance good policy that improves people's lives.

Right now, regional and national PSOs are also fighting the threatened weakening or repeal of the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits 501(c)(3)

charitable organizations from endorsing, opposing or contributing to political candidates and engaging in partisan campaign activities. President Trump recently signed an executive order seeking to weaken this law. To date, half of the Forum's regional and national members have signed on to a letter to ensure the continued full enforcement of the Johnson Amendment, and more signatures are added every week. These members took the lead to educate their foundation members and constituents about the issue and offer guidance for those wanting to add their foundation's own voice to the effort.⁴

The Forum also harnesses the power of our network to work with our regional and national PSO members to ensure a fair and accurate census count in 2020. When census information is not accurate, it threatens to muffle the voices of undercounted groups and regions and undermine the basic political equality that is central to our democracy. We're working closely with many of our members to help them activate funder groups at the local level around the census and broader democracy issues.

PSO LEADERSHIP TO IMPROVE PHILANTHROPIC PRACTICE

In today's complex, changing times, funders are more interested than ever

in obtaining knowledge about policy, advocacy and many other areas that can help make their philanthropy more impactful; regional and national PSOs play an important role here as well.

We talk a lot these days in our field about how philanthropy can have greater impact, but PSOs are walking the talk in their daily work.

A new, first-of-its-kind research study by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation revealed that foundations' most trusted source of information and knowledge about philanthropic practice is their peers, and they rely heavily on formal funder networks at the local, regional and national levels to connect with them. During interviews and on surveys, foundations cited the Forum's member regional associations as an important point of peer-to-peer connection and interaction. The report noted that "regional associations can offer a more tailored experience and often provide a space for individuals from smaller and regionally focused foundations to have the in-person interaction with peers that is so essential to the spread of new ideas and practices."⁵

The study also affirmed the central role that regional and national PSOs play in leading foundations to change their practice to be more effective with their philanthropy. Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents said they have adopted, or are considering adopting, an idea or best practice during the past two years. When this group was asked an open-ended question to identify the source of practice knowledge that contributed to that change, the top response was a funder network.⁶

PSOs are using their role as a trusted, highly valued source of information and knowledge to inform funders on the most critical issues facing our field and our country today. Right now, for example, many Forum members are helping their foundation members and constituents address how to engage in the hard work of advancing racial equi-

ty, diversity and inclusion in philanthropy. Last year, the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers launched "Putting Racism on the Table," a learning and action series for philanthropy.⁷ The Minnesota Council on Foundations has developed a new strategic framework focused on "advancing prosperity and equity."⁸ ABFE offers leadership, training and coaching on racial equity in philanthropy. The list goes on.

Again, a funders' nearest regional association or favorite national affinity group can provide the type of safe, trusted environment that allow foundations to tackle today's complex, sensitive issues with their peers in ways that are more likely to lead to change than many of the alternatives. Today these types of spaces are more needed than ever.

If I sound like an unabashed cheerleader for philanthropy associations and networks, it's because I am, and not just because I lead a network of philanthropy associations and networks. Based on my 20+ years of working with and for

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these organizations, I feel it's impossible to see how philanthropy can confront today's challenges in a meaningful, sustainable and broad-based way without the leadership of philanthropy infrastructure organizations. They serve as the core of our democracy's civil infrastructure. Collectively through the new and expanded Forum network, they will continue to be a powerful foundation for change in our field and our country. ■

David Biemesderfer is president and CEO of the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, a nationwide network of regional and national organizations that advance, inform and support philanthropy to advance the common good. The Forum is the largest network serving philanthropy in America.

Notes

1. Gallup Poll, "Record-High 77% of Americans Perceive Nation as Divided," November 21, 2016, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/197828/record-high-americans-perceive-nation-divided.aspx>.
2. Monmouth University Polling Institute, "America Remains Deeply Divided," March 22, 2017, https://www.monmouth.edu/polling-institute/reports/MonmouthPoll_US_032217/.
3. The Center for Effective Philanthropy, "Shifting Winds: Foundations Respond to a New Political Context," April 2017, <http://research.effectivephilanthropy.org/shifting-winds-foundations-respond-to-new-political-context>.
4. See Forum website: www.givingforum.org/resources/policy-update-johnson-amendment.
5. William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, "Peer to Peer: At the Heart of Influencing More Effective Philanthropy," February 2017, <http://www.hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hewlett-Field-Scan-Report.pdf>.
6. Ibid.
7. See <http://www.puttingracismonthetable.org>.
8. See <https://www.mcf.org/strategic-framework>.

Long-term general support: The elusive Bigfoot in philanthropy

For most nonprofits, getting a flexible multi-year grant is as probable as spotting the mythical creature. So we asked our nonprofit members to share why they think grantmakers shy away from awarding these grants and how they would respond to funders' concerns.

I SUSPECT ONE REASON FUNDERS don't do multi-year grants is that they have lots of requests and want to support more groups – to say no to fewer people. This is laudable, but since flexible, multi-year support is so valuable in building up a viable organization, it would be better to invite groups to apply together, present fewer rounds of funding or simply choose carefully what groups to invest in for the longer haul.



– Kevin Whelan, Executive Director
MN350

I THINK IT'S HARD FOR FUNDERS TO trust organizations to stay mission-, metric- and client-focused over a series of years. Nonprofits can be prone to reactionary rather than responsive action according to situations as they arise in their communities.



However, a nonprofit's lack of funding is as much a product of short-term funding as a reason for it. Without a steady source of funding, nonprofits may move away from their mission according to a new funder's interest. As a result, their impact is convoluted, their ability to go to scale waxes and wanes over the years rather than growing steadily and their clients cease to trust their services.

Flexible, multi-year funding allows organizations to grow according to their mission, become excellent in their field and track their impact on a more consistent basis. Long-term funding partnerships pave the way for long-term progress.

– Ivy Sjöholm, Engagement Coordinator
Bayview/Hunter Point Community Legal

SOME FUNDERS MAY BE CONCERNED that flexible, multi-year grants could lead to funds being spent in ways funders don't anticipate or are controversial for funders. However, flexible, multi-year grants provide the greatest social impact, as they allow grantees to effectively plan programs for the long term and implement them strategically.



Funders can mitigate concerns by providing multi-year grants to organizations they know well and trust. Funders can also explicitly recognize and accept that giving greater control to grantees does present some risk to the funder, but this risk is worth the certainty of greater grantee effectiveness and greater social impact.

– Daniel Newman, President,
MapLight

IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE THAT FUNDERS would enjoy the flexibility to re-evaluate and shift priorities in their grantmaking strategies from year to year. However, this short-term mindset often results in non-strategic, temporary fixes, rather than addressing the root causes of an issue.



In truth, the issues of our time – bridging race and class divides, gender inequality, the Future of Work, universal health care, immigration and democracy itself – will require expansive, intersectional visions and long-term work. Funders interested in building a just and equitable world must trust those on the frontlines and invest in their leadership and vision for the long haul through flexible, multi-year grants.

– Sarita Gupta, Co-Director
Caring Across Generations

FUNDERS, QUITE UNDERSTANDABLY, want to be sure their dollars are directly linked to specific initiatives that promote good in the community and program-specific grants make that feel more attainable. However, often when organizations lack general operating funding, they can't fully support the time, focus and resources necessary to truly work strategically and smartly to achieve their mission.



– Karen LaShelle, Executive Director
Creative Action

OFTEN, FUNDERS ARE INTERESTED in short-term impact projects that can be achieved through annual grants. Flexible, multi-year grants offer a greater investment that bears richer fruit because organizations have the funding stability to build their capacity and to be more visionary in their approaches.



–Rev. Jennifer Butler, CEO
Faith in Public Life

That's why I'd argue that taking a risk on flexible multi-year grants actually achieves greater impact in the long run and is more effective in helping organizations grow and be sustainable.

WE ARE OPERATING IN AN INCREDIBLY complex, dynamic policy environment where the only certainty is that our work to advance equity is essential. Flexible, multi-year grants – which are traditionally difficult to get – are especially important to those of us engaging in legal and policy advocacy at this time.



– Kevin Prindiville, Executive Director
Justice in Aging

Flexible support empowers us to use our expertise and experience to respond quickly to emerging threats. Multi-year grants encourage us to think big and strategically instead of looking for quick but likely smaller wins. They also allow us to invest in staff and focus on the programmatic work instead of the next grant deadline.

I CAN'T SAY WHY FUNDERS SHY away from multi-year concerns for sure, since I'm not a funder. But as a non-profit with a longstanding and ever-increasing mission, we sure need ongoing, long-term funding we can count on. Funders who provide ongoing support become partners not only in the projects and programs they fund from year to year, but also in the long-term mission and societal commitments of the organization. In the Center for Medicare Advocacy's case, our work to protect a comprehensive Medicare program and quality health care for older and disabled people is increasingly urgent. The needs of the people we serve are expanding, while government support is diminishing.



– Judith Stein, Founder and Executive Director,
Center for Medicare Advocacy

THERE'S ALWAYS A DISCONNECT between the grantee's work and the funder's objectives. Often, funders feel their responsibility is not to sustain organizations but to change them. One-year grants give funders more leverage to do that.



If we really believe that the nonprofits we fund drive social change, then we have to place faith in their vision and their judgment. It's also fair for funders to disagree with or question what grantees are doing. A lot of times nonprofits can get stuck in ineffective or inefficient ways of working because of funders' requirements. Between the extremes of blind trust in nonprofits and deep funder control, there's room for powerful partnership rooted in the knowledge and expertise of both parties.

– Tamir Novotny, Executive Director,
Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy

Rebuilding the middle: How United Ways and foundations can get in the fight to bring communities together

By Pete Manzo

In Salt Lake City, Utah, state legislators passed a bill that provides millions of dollars to fund preschool and childcare for at-risk children.¹

In Georgia, voters passed a state ballot initiative to commit funds to fight human trafficking, following a study that identified Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson airport, the nation's busiest, as a major transit node for trafficking.²

In Los Angeles, California, voters approved a City of Los Angeles ballot initiative in November 2016 and a Los Angeles County initiative in March 2017 that together will provide up to \$5 billion for housing and supportive services to homeless families and individuals, thus implementing a "housing first" policy.³

What do these successful efforts have in common? They all involved broad coalitions of community groups, policy advocates, foundations and, perhaps surprisingly, business leaders. United Way also played a central role in assembling and leading each of these efforts, which happened despite our intensely partisan national political climate.

WORKING AT THE INTERSECTIONS

In the aftermath of the November election, philanthropic and nonprofit leaders have been struggling to find their footing. Alarm at the sharp rise in hateful speech during the election has been only somewhat eclipsed by alarm at a barrage of policy changes since January 20 (made primarily by fiat), which challenge the fundamental values of inclu-

sion and opportunity that most philanthropies and nonprofits hold dear.

Henry Adams observed that "Politics, as a practice, whatever its professions, has always been the systematic organization of hatreds."⁴ With such rancor in our public discourse for the past year, it is tempting to take Adams' hyperbole literally, but we should resist.

Part of the problem is the zero-sum dynamics of our two-party system, exacerbated by partisan gerrymandering and cultural "sorting," which make it easy to forget that far more unites all Americans⁵ than divides them.

One thing all Americans agree on is that families across the country are going through trying times. The stock market is hitting historic highs, and economists say we may be close to "full employment," but working families aren't feeling it. Our middle class is shrinking; wages haven't kept pace with productivity. A solid majority of Americans fear the American Dream is slipping out of their grasp. People may disagree about what to do, but there's broad consensus that something is deeply wrong with our social and economic engines.

America has gutted its economic middle – every year more and more families struggle to meet basic needs – and that zero-sum political conflict has ripped out the middle of our civic life, certainly at the national level.⁶

Where can philanthropy begin to get a handle on rebuilding the middle of civic life in communities?

Dr. Robert Ross, president and CEO of The California Endowment, provided



Children were among last year's participants of United Way of Greater Los Angeles' HomeWalk, an annual march to raise funds and awareness to end homelessness. Photo courtesy of United Way of Greater L.A.

a vivid illustration when speaking a few years ago to United Way board members and senior staff gathered for an annual Capitol Day event in Sacramento, California.⁷ He asked the board members to “Stand up if you have business leaders on your boards. Now keep standing if you also have labor leaders on your boards. And if you have liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats on your boards.” And, with the room filled with board members still standing, he asked, “Now, when your boards meet about your mission, is there blood on the floor?”

This illustrates how the examples from Salt Lake, Georgia and Los Angeles could take root. In each case, the focus was on mission, on achieving a concrete result to improve lives. Those issues attracted support from leaders that many would assume would not agree – liberals and conservatives; business titans and soft-hearted nonprofit leaders; grassroots community organizers and “grasstops” elite foundation and civic leaders.

If we watch cable TV news, it may seem hopeless to expect that philanthropic movements can bring liberal and conservative, rich and poor, people of color and whites to solve real problems and, in so doing, also rebuild the middle ground and bring our communities together. But doing so not only is possible, it is the most important role philanthropy can play in these times.

ADVOCACY THE UNITED WAY

United Way fights for the health, education and financial stability of every person, in every community. We believe everyone deserves the opportunity to lead a good life, and we know we cannot social-service our way to a thriving society.

To achieve the greatest impact possible, we need to catalyze social and cultural change that will be more supportive of human development and self-sufficiency for the people we serve. Catalyzing such change is the highest level of strategic impact the United Way or any philanthropy could hope to achieve,

as observed by Michael Porter and Mark Kramer in their canonic article “Philanthropy’s New Agenda: Creating Value.”⁸

“Give. Advocate. Volunteer” is our call to action, and advocacy increasingly is a central strategy for achieving community impact. Not all “game-changing” initiatives involve policy changes, but in many fields such as health, human services, education and social justice, policy changes comprise a commanding share of potential high-impact strategic goals.

United Ways are independent public charities that share the same mission, brand, goal areas and approach. This shared mission and brand enable United Ways to work together across geographic boundaries – county, region, state and national – while also being responsive to the characteristics and needs of their local communities. As public charities, United Ways are also able to engage more deeply in advocacy than private foundations, such as by supporting or opposing legislation and ballot initiatives

The central task for United Ways and other funders seeking such large-scale change is first to engage with community members to learn their aspirations and work with them to build community. That is both the path and the work itself, in many ways.

United Way’s approach to advocacy is to work through the relationships that individual United Ways – and especially their board members, donors and volunteers – can bring to an issue. We strongly believe the most effective advocates are those volunteers and donors, rather than United Way staff leaders.

Our policy advocacy is most effective when we work together as a network to build a majority of support among policymakers. While most United Ways have strong relationships with stakeholders and public officials in their areas, and can easily gain audiences with public officials, that access is not the same as having *influence*. Ev-

ery United Way has access, but, at the state and national levels, we only can influence power over policy or cultural change when we work together.

Too often, United Ways and other funders are transactional – funding a certain set of activities on the programmatic side or funding a policy goal but then moving on to something else after the vote. However, it is even more important to “win the implementation,” to work even harder on how a policy change goes into effect, and effectively engaging people at the front end makes it much more likely that we will stick with it. The preschool initiative in Salt Lake City and the homeless housing initiative in Los Angeles resulted from years of painstaking work, and rather than being culminations, they instead opened doors to new, more intensive phases of driving change.

Some key aspects of United Ways’ advocacy work include:

- Connecting issues across education, health and income that are far too often addressed in isolation.
- Engaging and bringing business leaders to the table with nonprofits and public sector agencies.
- Being rigorously nonpartisan and working constructively with public officials from all parties (in many cases, public officials will meet with United Ways even when they refuse to meet with United Way coalition partners on an issue).
- Connecting multiple levels of policy activity – local, regional and state – so that messages, best practices, innovation and other activities can be mutually reinforcing and still be responsive to local/regional conditions and needs.
- Statewide and national presence tied to local roots, something many policy-first organizations based in capital cities or big metropolitan centers lack (critical committee chairs and other decision-makers can come (*continued on page 11*))

Funding change in the Deep South

By Bill Bynum

Convincing national foundations to make significant investments in organizations based in the Mississippi Delta has never been an easy task, but several factors fuel the heightened interest in directing philanthropy to this region and elsewhere across the Deep South.

The first is that inequality – particularly economic inequality – has become a priority focus for some of America’s largest private foundations, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Ford Foundation and W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The second is the simple fact that it will be impossible to close the widening gap in income and wealth inequality in the United States without making substantial investments in the region with the largest concentration of persistently impoverished communities.

One third of the nation’s poorest counties and parishes are located in four Southern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. Historically, the philanthropic sector’s investment in this region has been shockingly sparse.

“As the South Grows: On fertile soil” by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) and Grantmakers for Southern Progress indicated that the Mississippi Delta and the Black Belt region of Alabama benefitted from \$41 in foundation funding per person between 2010 and 2014, compared to the national funding rate of \$451 per person and the New York state rate of \$995 per person.

The report determined several reasons for the funding gap, including the



Bill Bynum

perception that these places lacked organizations and people with the expertise and capacity to do effective work.

For some in the region, these circumstances have presented a maddening Catch-22. We need the help, but cannot get it because we have been perceived as incapable of effectively using the assistance provided.

In my organization’s 23 years of work in the Mid South, we have learned a lot about what it takes to bring investment to disenfranchised people and places, which in turn fosters better education, housing, health and employment opportunities.

Some of our strategies align with recommendations in the NCRP report, especially the following two:

Understand context. Build authentic, transformational relationships.

Improving conditions in persistent poverty communities in the South requires being intentional about working with people of color, particularly African Americans.

As a provider of financial services in the Mississippi Delta, we know that a primary reason so many black residents are mired in poverty has been because they were not perceived as viable customers by banks. Historically, Delta banks have served the interests of owners, shareholders and other privileged people. Over the years, some of these banks were absorbed into larger, regional banks, but the banking practices and community participation patterns remained the same. Black customers were never part of setting priorities and likely could not take advantage of personal relationships with bank staff to gain more favorable terms or outcomes.

In making the decision to open credit union branches in small towns across the region, we knew we had to build relationships with people the banks had not served. Since HOPE is a credit union, not a bank, our members are the owners and can offer input into our priorities. Our diverse staff is well populated with people who live in the communities that we serve.

In a four-town cluster in the Mississippi Delta where HOPE opened four branches, over a period of less than a year, we more than tripled the number of accounts and loans provided in these towns compared to the prior bank and now serve nearly half of the households in the area. When one of our staff members asked a man why he opened an account with us, he related an experience about receiving a postcard from HOPE and feeling welcomed. “I had to join; I was invited.”

Rebuilding the middle

(continued from page 9)

Make long-term, flexible investments of capital, time and capacity.

As we have opened branches in small towns, we have strengthened our relationships with the local elected officials, business people and residents. We recognized that, though town leaders and residents had identified needs that could be addressed with public, private and philanthropic resources that are readily accessible in more affluent places, they often lacked the staff and expertise to secure the needed support.

In response, we developed the HOPE Small Town Partnership, an initiative supported by the USDA, Delta Regional Authority and private donors. Through this effort, we have assembled a team to help local leaders and residents develop comprehensive development strategies. Their priorities include affordable housing, healthy food options and community facilities such as health centers and schools – the elements that are required for people in any place to prosper.

National foundations that follow similar strategies will find success in the Deep South. We offer fertile ground for growing a more equitable economic system. Steadfast work by advocates has shown that people in places like the Mississippi Delta and the Alabama Black Belt can prosper when they are equipped with the right tools.

I urge funders to take heed of the recommendations put forth by NCRP and fuel the kind of change that has been a long time coming to this severely distressed, but incredibly promising region. ■

Bill Bynum is CEO of HOPE, a credit union, loan fund and policy center dedicated to improving lives in one of the nation's most persistently impoverished regions. He also serves on NCRP's board of directors. More at www.hopecu.org.

from any community, large or small, so it helps to have local organizations almost everywhere).

- Working in diverse local communities – large and small, rural and urban – offers insight into emerging challenges and increases understanding of possible solutions.
- Working to win the implementation, since a sought-for policy change is not the end of the battle but really the beginning.

For these attributes to matter, though, a United Way or any other public charity must be willing to “get in the fight,” as Dr. Ross urged. United Way expects and strongly encourages all local United Ways to get involved in advocating for policy changes that can increase the odds of success for the people and communities we serve.

This first step in such a journey can be daunting. It requires CEOs and board members to discuss and agree upon policy goals and strategies, and acknowledge that some opponents will claim it is not their place, or that it is “political” for them to pursue advocacy goals. It invokes fears that controversy may damage relationships or turn away donors.

Our experience, though, is that when United Ways do put a stake in the ground and engage in policy advocacy, their relevance in their communities goes up, not down; they attract more new friends and donors than they may lose, and when they win a policy change, whether a ground ball single up the middle or a home run, it can be worth many multiples of the funding invested in charitable programs.

And in these times when governance seems so polarized nationally, engaging community leaders of all stripes to meet and engage on key policy change is vitally important for its own sake. ■

Pete Manzo is president and CEO of United Ways of California and is a former NCRP board member. Learn more at www.unitedwaysca.org.

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Can philanthropy help rebuild trust in news and the public square?

(continued from page 1)

approaches³ because they help us develop multi-pronged strategies that reinforce one another in a complicated and dynamic world. Systems thinking helps us see the often hidden and tangled roots of the issues we care about. We are currently mapping systems that shape people's trust in the public square and will be able to share our analysis soon.

In response to these issues some foundations are organizing rapid response grants and programs designed to invest in new ideas and projects. Some donors are investing in investigative journalism and local news⁴ to expand the capacity of trustworthy newsrooms. Others are taking a measured approach, adjusting their current grantmaking or planning with their grantees for the ongoing engagement these challenges demand. The reality is that we need both long- and short-term strategies.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM WITHOUT ALL THE DATA

For all the concern about "fake news," there is still a remarkable amount we don't know about trust, truth and the spread of misinformation online or the impact it has had on politics and public debate. So much news consumption and distribution happens on private platforms whose proprietary data makes it hard for researchers to study.

And yet, organizations like the American Press Institute, Engaging News Project, The Trust Project and Trusting News Project as well as a number of academic researchers are testing real-world strategies for building trust and probing the reach and influence of mis- and disinformation.

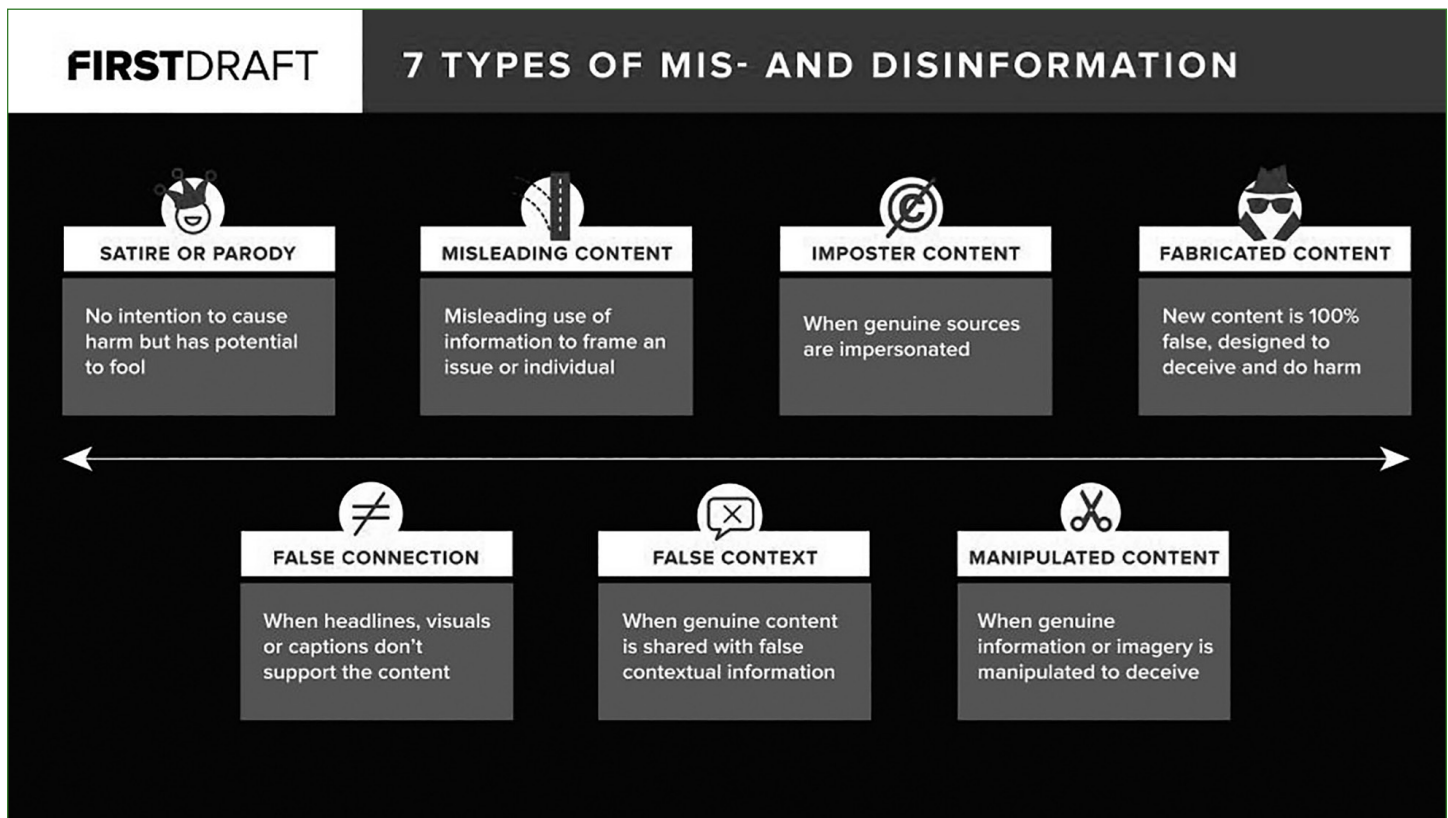
Foundations should expand their support for research in this area but should do so strategically and in coordination with other foundations to ensure that

lessons are being shared and translated into actionable intelligence for the field.

OPEN CALLS AS A CALL TO ACTION

At the start of this year, New Media Ventures launched an open call for media and technology projects from "companies and organizations working to resist fear, lies and hate as well as those focused on rebuilding and using this unprecedented moment of citizen mobilization to shape a better future."⁵ In about a month, they received more than 500 applications, an unprecedented number for them.

A few days later, the Knight Foundation, Rita Allen Foundation and Democracy Fund announced a prototype fund for "early-stage ideas to improve the flow of accurate information." That fund received 800 applications in a month.⁶ Finally, the International Center for Journalists just launched a "TruthBuzz" contest,⁷ funded by the Craig Newmark Foundation.



This typology of misinformation by Claire Wardle of First Draft News identifies the spectrum of fabricated stories and the motivations behind them.

These open calls are a way for foundations to catalyze energy and surface new ideas, bringing new people and sectors together to tackle the complex challenges related to misinformation.

NEGOTIATING NEW RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN JOURNALISTS AND THE PUBLIC

Trust is forged through relationships, and for many, the long-term work of rebuilding trust in journalism is rooted in fundamentally changing the relationship between the public and the press. For the last few years, foundations like Democracy Fund, Knight Foundation, Rita Allen Foundation and others have been deepening their investments in newsroom community engagement efforts.

Organizations like Hearken, which reorients the reporting process around the curiosity of community members, and the Solutions Journalism Network, which encourages journalists to report on solutions, not just problems, help optimize newsrooms for building trust. The Center for Investigative Reporting, ProPublica and Chalkbeat have also pioneered exciting projects in this space.

Making journalism more responsive to and reflective of its community demands culture change in newsrooms and an emphasis on diversity and inclusion. If we want communities to trust journalism, they have to see themselves and their lived experiences reflected in the reporting. Too often that is still not the case, and foundations can play a vital role in sustaining the ongoing work to renegotiate these relationships.

WEAVING FACT-CHECKING INTO A PLATFORM WORLD

In December, Facebook announced that it was enlisting fact-checking organizations around the globe to help assess the veracity and accuracy of stories flagged by Facebook users on the platform.⁸ Google is working with Duke University's Reporter's Lab on how to

surface fact checks in their search results⁹ and is trying to give more weight to authoritative sources.¹⁰

The growth of the fact-checking field in recent years has been fueled by strategic investments from a number of foundations, including Democracy Fund. These investments have helped strengthen the practices and infrastructure for fact-checking making these platform partnerships possible. However, new challenges demand new kinds of fact checking.

Foundations should not wait until the next election to increase support for these efforts. Now is the time to invest in learning and experimentation to make fact-checking work even better, engage an often critical public, and adapt to the new realities we face.

CULTIVATING NEW SKILLS FOR COMBATING MISINFORMATION

While fact-checkers hone the science of debunking official statements from politicians and pundits, we need to develop new skills for combating the wide array of unofficial and hard-to-source falsehoods that spread online. The leading organization working on these issues is First Draft News, which combines rigorous research with practical hands-on training and technical assistance for newsrooms, universities and the public. (Disclosure: I was one of the founders of First Draft News.)

Other efforts include Storyful, Bell-ingcat, the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensics Research Lab and On the Media's "Breaking News Consumer's Handbook" series.¹¹

Most of these efforts work not only with newsrooms, but also human rights organizations, first responders and community groups who are on the front lines of confronting misinformation. Foundations should help connect their grantees to these resources and support First Draft and others to scale up their work in this critical moment.

A NEW ERA FOR NEWS LITERACY

In April, five foundations and four technology companies launched the News Integrity Initiative at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism. Designed to advance a new vision for news literacy, this global effort is rooted in a user-first approach to expanding trust in journalism. Today, we the people are the primary distributors of news. As such, it is critical that the public be adept at spotting fakes and debunking falsehoods, and that we cultivate the skills to track a story to its source and the motivation to hold each other accountable.

With support from MacArthur, Robert R. McCormick, Knight and other foundations, projects like The News Literacy Project, Center for News Literacy and The LAMP have been working with students for years to address these issues. Similarly, youth media groups like Generation Justice in New Mexico, Free Spirit Media in Chicago and the Transformative Culture Project in Boston, are working with diverse communities on becoming active creators, not just consumers of media. And libraries across the country are hosting workshops and trainings for people of all ages.

In the past, foundations funding health, climate change and racial justice have recognized the need to help people sort fact from fiction. Today, foundations can help expand the field by investing in engaging models of news literacy and supporting efforts to get news and civic literacy into state education standards.

PROLOGUE TO A FARCE OR A TRAGEDY

James Madison wrote in an 1822 letter that "A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both." We are increasingly facing an information ecosystem flooded by misinformation and disinformation being strategically deployed to spread uncertainty and dis-

trust. Those efforts are being amplified by the speed with which information is shared across social media, algorithms tuned for viral views and emotional impact and filter bubbles that increasingly divide us into silos.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to address the challenges of eroding trust and the spread of false and misleading information. The interventions discussed above are largely focused domestically but there is more that can and should be done to confront these issues on the global stage. Foundations and donors should invest in approaches that focus on making change across three interconnected areas: the press, in the public square and social platforms.

Given the diverse strategies foundations can pursue in their response to this moment, it is critical that we work together to share what we are learning, invest strategically in what is working and put the people most impacted by these issues at the center of our funding. ■

Josh Stearns is associate director for the Public Square program at Democracy Fund. Learn more at www.democracyfund.org.

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HEALTH EQUITY BRIEF

FOUNDATIONS, DONORS AND HEALTH POLICY: Why federal health debates matter to you and how you can respond



Learn more at www.ncrp.org/publication/health-equity-brief

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*Dianne Stewart, Director of EARN
and Network Engagement*

NCRP: Why is EPI's Economic Analysis and Research Network especially relevant today?

DS: EARN is a network of 62 organizations in 43 states that are focused on the economic conditions of working families and are affiliated with EPI. Network members publish annual reports titled "The State of Working XX" (e.g., Florida or Ohio), which not only provide a snapshot of the economic wellbeing of people in their state but also offer proposals to address the economic challenges working people face.

EARN groups are actively involved in efforts on the ground to advance policies at the state and local levels to boost economic security for low- and middle-income working people. EARN groups often provide their state's only source for reliable analysis on economic policy issues affecting workers and their families and have recently been key in the initiatives related to minimum wage and paid medical and family leave.

EARN's relevance has never been greater, prompting EPI and EARN to invest in a ramp-up and reboot of the network to meet the challenges and opportunities of the moment. The 2016 elections opened the country's eyes to the fact that a substantial contingent of working Americans feel economically insecure and neglected. EARN sees this as an opportunity to create a proactive pivot, focusing on the potential for action at the state and local levels that can make meaningful progress for working families.

NCRP: EARN is shifting resources to focus more intentionally on "red" states, especially the South. Why now?

DS: EARN has always had members in the South; in fact, some of its strongest members are in the region. However, the network has in the past typically focused on policies that are often impractical in more conservative states. There was an appetite for "gateway" analysis and policy efforts that EARN's members in southern states could successfully pursue.

Our theory is that the South is where the need is greatest, and it is an abdication of responsibility to working families to neglect building the infrastructure there that can advance economic progress – even if initially the gains are incremental. The heartening development of movement-building and organizing efforts in southern states deserves a parallel creation of strategies to build the economic policies that improve the conditions of working families.

EARN is launching another project called The State of Rural XX (your state name here), which will overlap with our work in the South. Recent events have revealed the degree to which well-meaning analysis and policy approaches have emphasized conditions in large cities, eclipsing the very real economic

challenges in non-urban areas. Building on EARN's long-standing "The State of Working XX" reports, this project will focus on the state of working families in rural areas, providing both data analysis of the current economic situation in the small towns and cities in each state and ways to create the conditions that can spur the creation of good jobs and better living conditions.

NCRP: What tips would you offer grantmakers that wish to make lasting impact in their communities but are cautious about supporting policy advocacy and policy change?

DS: Particularly in the South, long-term impact requires a systemic view of the challenges people face every day. People internalize the notion that they are personally responsible for their insecure employment, their lack of health care, the fact that they have to work three jobs to make ends meet. Historically embedded social and economic structures are the taproot of these challenges, and among the tools that are necessary to root them out is intentional, concerted, systemic change; in other words, policy change. While we build movements and organize for community power, we must also equip these activists with concrete policies to improve the economic condition of people who have been left behind. This means investing in the home-grown analytic and policy expertise that is tied to the future of the community and the state. ■

Select Publications

Foundations, donors and health policy

by Lisa Ranghelli

May 2017

This new health equity brief is a handy resource for grantmakers and donors who are unsure about whether it should, and if so, how to respond to attempts to reverse recent advances in health equity through the Affordable Care Act, Medicare and Medicaid.

As the South Grows: On Fertile Soil

by Ryan Schlegel and Stephanie Peng

April 2017

This first in a new series looks at the lack of philanthropic investments in the Deep South. It features stories of four community leaders in Alabama's Black Belt and the Mississippi Delta who are standing up for the well-being of people of color, the poor, women, immigrants and other vulnerable populations.

visit: www.ncrp.org/publications

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