

Responsive Philanthropy

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Tax March is a growing movement of Americans who want a tax system that doesn't favor the superrich and big wealthy corporations. According to its website, more than 125,000 people joined demonstrations across the country on tax day 2017, like this one in San Francisco, to pressure President Donald Trump to release his tax returns and call for a fairer tax system. Image by Master, Steve Rappart under CC BY 2.0.



Amplifying the impact of outrage giving

Last year was one of the most polarizing and outrageous years in recent memory. The threats posed by President Donald Trump and his administration's policies of economic and environmental deregulation; tax reform benefiting corporate and wealthy interests; attacks on health care, journalism and democratic institutions; and the rising tide of

racism, sexism, homophobia and isolationism are daunting.

Yet, we also saw widespread mobilization and the activation of hundreds of thousands of people, including many first-time activists, to protect justice and democracy. We witnessed millions of dollars in new small gifts to support the progressive social movement, a flood of "outrage giving" expressing collective anger and resistance to the attacks on our rights and our future.

As we look to 2018, our challenge in the philanthropic sector is to amplify the impact of this new giving and support critical resistance work in the months and years to come.

By Jason Franklin, PhD

If Trump's tweets and executive actions felt like a constant bombardment throughout 2017, they also served as powerful fuel to fire an outpouring of new financial support outstripping any expectations. Anchor institutions protecting our civil rights ranging from the ACLU to Planned Parenthood saw tens of millions of dollars in new small gifts. Similarly, the activation of new activists was accompanied by a flood of giving for new organizing groups as well, with Indivisible standing as perhaps the foremost example. This new wave of outrage giving sparked by ongoing offensive actions from the alt-right¹ is spurred by and facilitated by advances in online (continued on page 13)



challenging grantmakers to strengthen communities

Amplifying the impact of outrage giving

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giving and crowdfunding that make this kind of giving fast and viral in ways unlike philanthropy from years past.

In the last year, we've also seen a slower-building but similar activation among progressive people with wealth. Current donors are giving bigger. They are changing their giving to move more money to civic engagement and movement organizing, while people who had not previously given to progressive issues are getting politicized and making their first forays into social change philanthropy.

This growth among new progressive major donors is further fueled by the continued intergenerational transfer of wealth and the rapid accumulation of new wealth, especially in technology and finance, which, although deeply problematic from an economic justice perspective, is giving access to resources to younger donors who skew more progressive.

PHILANTHROPY'S CHARGE – AMPLIFY THE POWER OF ACTIVATION

So, how then should both established and new major funders respond to this growing wave of outrage giving?

While we don't know how long this surge will last, I believe our charge is clear: Foundations and donors committed to social justice work need to step up their support for frontline organizers to engage this flood of new energy and giving in ways that enable powerful organizing today and stronger movements tomorrow.

Stepping up can take many forms, but I would suggest five critical opportunities in particular as we enter 2018:

1. Invest big in capacity building

The need for core capacity support is perennial, but, especially in a moment like today, where groups are raising new funds for frontline resistance work, our funds should be unrestricted. We

need to build the capacity of groups to respond when the viral outpouring of support takes place, invest in the tools and staff needed to engage these donors, and trust the organizers we believe in by giving them unrestricted dollars to quickly and flexibly add and sustain capacity to respond to a rapidly changing fundraising and political landscape.

The [Security & Rights Collaborative](#) offers a powerful example of this type of deep capacity building. Launched by the Proteus Fund after 9/11, the SRC has been investing in Muslim, Arab and South Asian communities for years. Last year, in the face of the Muslim travel ban, it provided critical communications, coordination and strategic small grant support as its grantees worked to both mobilize quickly and engage thousands of new volunteers and donors responding to increasing Islamophobia, which these frontline groups have been fighting for decades.

2. Fund new strategies and exploratory work

Today's social movements are evolving, with new tactics from distributed online mobilization to expanded 501(c)(4) advocacy work that builds on traditional 501(c)(3) community organizing. We need to stand with movement leaders by funding the exploration and testing of new strategies that will position movements to win in today's political environment.

For example, I've been privileged to work with the [Movement Voter Project](#) to move funds for one of the donors I independently advise to 41 groups in the last year to help launch new (c)(4) advocacy campaigns led by indigenous communities and people of color (like North Dakota Native Vote), youth organizing efforts, digital mobilizations, mass resistance coordination (we were among the first funders of Indivisible) and more.

Not all have been as wildly successful as Indivisible, but we have to keep experimenting and trying new approaches to create a winning mix of strategies for 2018 and beyond.

3. Support movement ecosystems

Amid today's reenergized resistance efforts, individual groups can become momentary superstars when a key viral video or powerful direct action generates a wave of attention and funding. But we must remember that social change movements are bigger than individual organizations; they are made up of a complex ecosystem of groups. Philanthropy needs to avoid the "group of the moment" syndrome and stay focused on lifting and building up entire movement ecosystems.

[Open Philanthropy Project's](#) funding for criminal justice reform is a remarkable illustration of this approach. It's worked with Color of Change and other high-profile groups benefiting from grassroots outpourings of support while simultaneously lifting up many smaller frontline groups to nurture winning coalitions that are reshaping the narrative on incarceration. One example of this was Black Mama's Bailout, an action on Mother's Day 2017 where multiple Open Philanthropy grantees collaborated with local groups to bail out over 100 black mothers around the country aligned with local actions generating major press attention to the destructive impact of the cash bail system.

4. Give at the pace of modern social change movements

Sometimes we have months to plan a campaign but, especially today, social change efforts are also faced with mobilizing in weeks or days. The rise of rapid-response funding mechanisms is an encouraging reaction to this accelerating pace, offering philanthropy the means to provide critical funds at the start of new movement activity or

offer a powerful reinforcement/validation that can help a campaign build momentum.

Traditional grantmaking practices were built for pre-digital policy change efforts when social change moved at a slower pace. Today, philanthropy needs at least some money to move faster than the normal 3 to 6+ month cycle if we are to effectively fund the work we believe in.

Public foundations skilled in rapid giving like the [Groundswell Fund](#), [North Star Fund](#) or [Solutions Project](#) offer vehicles you can invest in to move funding faster without overhauling your grant processes. Alternately, you can launch or join new collaborative rapid response funds like the [Defending the Dream Fund](#) established by the Hill-Snowdon and General Services foundations or the [Emergent Fund](#) launched by the Women Donors Network and Solidaire. Some of these, like the North Star Fund and Emergent Fund, even use decision-making practices that put the power of the grantmaking decisions in the hands of organizers themselves.

These funds can also serve as models to replicate for rapid giving to your priority issue or community or as you

develop internal practices to accelerate some of your grantmaking.

5. Stand in solidarity with long-term support

While today's fast-changing and exhausting dynamic of constant resistance calls upon us to fund fast, we have to balance this speed with the determination to fund social change efforts for the long term. For we know that deep structural change happens over years, and sometimes decades.

Outrage giving tends to be episodic, triggered by a shocking policy action, a viral video, a hateful speech, a galvanizing march, a bold direct action or some other act. Large-scale philanthropy (whether foundation or major donor) should have a longer time horizon. Even as we respond in the moment, we must also focus on sustaining movements for the years to come.

I am particularly inspired by the [Solidaire Network's](#) collaboration with the Movement for Black Lives resource table to support long-term black-led organizing. This [Aligned Giving Strategy](#) organizes donors to make giving commitments over five+ years, raising over \$7 million so far to provide powerful

baseline support for the M4BL in acknowledgment that the fight for racial justice will not end soon.

Ultimately, I believe our charge today is to sustain and increase our funding of social movement leaders and to be, as this journal is titled, responsive. Foundation funding strategies have to change and adapt the way that movements and resistance efforts are playing out on the ground. Sometimes we backfill, sometimes we shore up, sometimes we add on or sustain, sometimes we need to fund fast and at others we need to stretch funding over years.

If I have to make a prediction for 2018, it's that we're in for another year of polarizing attacks and unjust policy proposals. But I remain hopeful that we'll also see a continued wave of activism and outrage giving that will stop these attacks in their tracks and build momentum to reverse the political trajectory of the last year.

Philanthropy's job in this moment is to follow the lead of resistance movement leaders, ask what they need to succeed and design our funding strategies to amplify the voices and gifts of the millions who will be stepping up for racial, social, environmental and economic justice in the year to come. ■

Jason Franklin is board chair of the Pro-teus Fund and co-founder and co-chair of the Solidaire Donor Network.

Notes

1. "Alt-right" is defined by Merriam Webster as "a right-wing, primarily online political movement or grouping based in the U.S. whose members reject mainstream conservative politics and espouse extremist beliefs and policies typically centered on ideas of white nationalism." More at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alt-right>.



Protestors attending the DC Tax March in April 2017. Photo by Janay Richmond.