

Responsive Philanthropy

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Willie Turner, a Hope Community tenant. Photo by Bruce Silcox. Courtesy of The Minneapolis Foundation.

Responsive Philanthropy in Black Communities

Editor's Note: The following is an excerpt from Karen Kelley-Ariwoola's 2012 James A. Joseph Lecture titled "Responsive Philanthropy in Black Communities: Mobilizing Our Resources for Impact," which she delivered during the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE) Annual Conference in April 2012.

Everywhere – in your city and mine – the reality of where we are and where we want to be are miles apart. In Minneapolis, the disparities faced by people (both American-born and foreign-born) are stark. Though we are surrounded by more Fortune 500 companies per capita than any place in the country (including the headquarters of Target, General Mills and Best Buy), need and poverty surround us. For example, although only 19 percent of Minneapolis residents are black:¹

- Just 67 percent of black kids are ready for kindergarten versus 94 percent of white kids.
- Only 39 percent of black kids are reading-proficient at third grade compared

to 88 percent of white kids – that is a 50-point gap at third grade – one of the highest black/white achievement gaps in the country.

- Only one in three black Minneapolis high schoolers graduate on time compared with seven in 10 white students.
- More than half of all black children (some 11,000 children) in Minneapolis live in poverty.
- While only 60 percent of Minneapolis residents are white, they hold 83 percent of the jobs – leaving a 25 percent employment gap between white and U.S.-born blacks (one of the largest gaps in the country).

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challenging grantmakers
to strengthen communities

Responsive Philanthropy in Black Communities

(continued from page 1)

As we heard from the National Urban League earlier today, these are the sobering facts that are mirrored in many of your communities around the country. As we begin to think about the impact we wish to have in our communities, we need to know how we are doing – but we also need a vision of where we want to go. Knowing the data on your community and disaggregating them by race is fundamental to ABFE's Responsive Framework. In the absence of good data, we cannot design effective strategies for closing the gap.

During my last year at the Minneapolis Foundation, I had the privilege, along with my colleague Jo-Anne Stately, of designing a community indicators project we call One Minneapolis. We commissioned Wilder Research to develop it. Embedded in One Minneapolis is a vision of *one* city where everyone benefits.

In One Minneapolis, we identified 24 community indicators in the three areas of The Minneapolis Foundation's strategic plan – education, economic vitality and building social capital – and we painted a picture of Minneapolis that most people do not see. The dirty little secret is that Minneapolis is two cities and not one: one where many people (primarily white) thrive and another where primarily low-income people of color suffer from disparities on every indicator. The data on each of the indicators, broken out by race and ethnicity, and in some cases home language, gender and whether residents were born in the U.S. or abroad, revealed gaps that we in this room are so familiar with – what we call the equity gap. I refer to the report as the Community's Dashboard because it provides that high-level overview of how we are doing and speaks the truth about our community without placing blame. The facts are the facts.

REDEFINING OUR ROLE: BEYOND GRANTMAKING

So often as blacks in philanthropy, we do not think we have the personal or

institutional power to create the change we feel is needed in our community. Too often, we think of ourselves exclusively as grantmakers, thus leaving many opportunities for impact off the table. As we think about the resources we need to close the gaps in disparities for black communities, we need to think very expansively about the options and opportunities. I challenge you to think very differently about your role. While ABFE's framework touches on our roles beyond grantmaking, we need to be much more explicit about the other ways that we can lead.

Though I began in the field as a program officer and have spent my philanthropic career with varying degrees of accountability for The Minneapolis Foundation's unrestricted grantmaking (by my conservative estimate, influencing nearly \$90 million over my 18 years), I rarely call myself a grantmaker. I think of myself as more of a catalyst, a facilitator or even a broker. I think of myself as an advocate, a connector of dots, a community leader, an influencer of influencers, a puller of levers – a midwife of sorts, not always personally having the baby but helping to coach and support it along the way.

Perhaps this mindset comes from entering the field through a community foundation. On my first day of work, I was given a book called *An Agile Servant: Community Leadership by Community Foundations*, and was told that we had many tools in our toolbox. Grantmaking was only one of them. Others included community knowledge, relationships with donors, convening, communications and public information strategies, policy and advocacy, and in 2012 we would add social networking and support for our communities to register to vote and build the capacity for civic engagement. There is also one that we often forget: our foundation's reputational capital. One of The Minneapolis Foundation's trustees

once coined the phrase that the foundation has both “cash and cache,” and urged that we think strategically about when and how to use each. Many of these strategies lend themselves to digging beneath the symptoms of problems to truly understand the underlying and structural causes. It is at that macro, systems level that ABFE's framework is designed to have the greatest impact.

While I know that there are many types of philanthropic interests represented in this room, from our black churches and black Greek organizations to community, private and family foundations and to individual donors, staff and trustees, we all can think **beyond the grant** as we work to amass the resources we need to create impact in our community. I encourage you to ask yourself: what are the tools in my philanthropy's toolbox? What can I bring to bear in addition to grantmaking to help my community?

MONEY ALONE IS NOT THE SOLUTION

Over the years, one of my core operating philosophies has been not to lead with money. Doing so sells everybody short. If the exchange with the grantee or the receiving party is only about the money, then why not just send a check? My notion of working in community starts first with building relationships up and down and across the community, at all levels, across sectors, across race, political affiliation and role. *I believe that relationships are the most important currency that we have in building support for our community.* Building relationships starts with simply listening to the needs and concerns of the community, then sharing our perspectives – and then together exploring the best way that philanthropy can help.

I can think of hundreds of examples (and you probably can, too) where money was not the answer or at least not the complete answer. For example:



Left: A Twin Cities Rise! work skills and personal empowerment training. Right: Girls learning in CommonBond Communities children's space. Photos by Bruce Silcox. Courtesy of The Minneapolis Foundation.

- In Minneapolis, we would never have had the first accountability reports published by our school district back in 2000² if we had focused the conversation on the size of a grant we could give, and not on the size of the impact we could have.
- We would never have reduced youth violence in Minneapolis if we had only made grants to organizations helping young people instead of convening the community to get at the real underlying issues, engaging the mayor and the City Council and current and former gang-engaged youth, then building a Blueprint for Action³ that created a citywide infrastructure for reducing youth violence.
- In 2012, the state of Minnesota would never have received a \$45 million Early Learning Challenge Grant and a \$28 million Promise Neighborhood grant (both deeply benefiting black communities in Minneapolis) if funders across the state had not joined with the community to convene, advocate and influence new legislation and to compel the governor to create a new Office of Early Learning – and, yes, leverage a small pool of grant dollars for change.
- We would have never positioned a stellar black charter school called Harvest Preparatory School by offering a small grant, when, after

bringing a group of wealthy donors to see their gap-breaking work with the same black kids who are failing in Minneapolis public schools, in a single morning, we were able to leverage a combination of grants and a program-related investment totaling over \$800,000.

These illustrate just a few ways that we can “act bigger” by being more than grantmakers, with a greater benefit to our communities. And we cannot do this work alone. We must link arms to do it together.

Each of us has more power than we realize, and so do each of our institutions. Most of us sit at various tables of influence, and yet so many of us are not maximizing those opportunities for the Black community. If we are honest, some of us are just happy for ourselves to be at the table for ourselves, for our own individual edification and career growth. Some of us want to be more effective in speaking up and standing up for the needs of our Black community, but we are timid and often quiet when we need to be speaking truth to power.

I remember my earliest years in philanthropy (as a closet introvert). I was quiet so many times when I should have spoken up. We need each of us, in all of the roles we play, to have zero tolerance for the disparities in our community, and

we need to speak truth to power at every opportunity we get. We don't have to engage in blame or beat people over the head with the problems in our community, but we have an obligation to be bolder and more forthcoming.

Philanthropy holds a very special place in our society where we can often speak truth to power in a way that others can't. We are that third-sector voice that can, on behalf of the community, share what we know and believe to be true. I urge you to challenge yourself and your institution to find new ways to do this.

BUILDING STRONG BLACK NON-PROFITS AS OUR PARTNERS

As we mobilize around change for black communities, I want to be sure that we take time to engage and strengthen our black nonprofits in the process. The African American Leadership Forum across the Northwest is thinking hard about this issue, as are some of our regional black philanthropic networks. I remember the folks at Bay Area Blacks in Philanthropy (BAY BIP), who honed the phrase “strengthening our house.”⁴ This reminds me of watching basketball games in my house (a house full of men, by the way) with a thunderous roar of “Whose House? OUR HOUSE.” Perhaps ABFE needs to co-opt this chant as its own as we think about working with our black institutions. “Whose House? OUR HOUSE.”

Although they are bursting with the very black people ABFE's framework purports to help, many of our black organizations are hanging on by a shoestring, reeling from years of disinvestment by government and philanthropy, lack of the most current technology, and board and staff capacity that cannot meet the demands of the work or the competition from their mainstream counterparts. And, like those of us who are black in philanthropy, many of our nonprofit heads feel isolated without a peer support network and without a talent pipeline of strong successors.

Our ancestors worked hard after slavery ended to establish an infrastructure of black organizations. To be sure, times have changed, and we can theoretically go anywhere we want for help. But as part of ABFE's Responsive Philanthropy in Black Communities Framework, ABFE and all of us on the ground must lead the effort to lift up

and partner with our NAACPs, Urban Leagues, the various former settlement houses named after our black heroes and she-roes, as well as other black nonprofits that must play a critical role in rebuilding our community. We should not be afraid to hold a high bar for the quality of the work and demonstrated outcomes while at the same time offering a hand of support as they remain a critical part of the fabric of black communities.

And if there are some organizations that cannot or will not or should not survive, let's not kill them by death by a thousand cuts, but let us help them find a humane and respectful way to close. We must strengthen "our house" in the context of ABFE's Framework for Responsive Philanthropy. We must not apologize for working to lift up our own organizations, just as others of various backgrounds do not apologize for lifting up theirs. ■

Karen Kelley-Ariwoola is former vice president of community philanthropy at The Minneapolis Foundation. You can read the full text of her ABFE James A. Joseph Lecture at www.abfe.org/FCDOCS\21st_James_A_Joseph_Lecture.pdf.

Notes

1. *The Minneapolis Foundation, One Minneapolis Report, Fall 2011.*
2. *The report was Measuring Up 2000, published by the Minneapolis Foundation, Minneapolis Public Schools and the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce.*
3. *Download the Blueprint for Action at: www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/www/groups/public/@health/documents/webcontent/convert_278139.pdf.*
4. *See <http://blog.mkf.org/2012/04/17/strengthening-our-house-capacity-building-seminar-april-24th/>.*

Bolder Together *(continued from page 7)*

Looking ahead, we are interested in applying what we are learning across the four counties and to further our understanding about innovative strategies to boost civic participation that might be working in one place and could potentially be applied in others.

The glue that holds our collaborative together is our relationship with one another. We do not have a formal management structure. It's loose enough so that each of us determines how to take part in the work in ways that makes sense for our organizations.

In addition, no one dominates the group. We have strived to keep in good communication so that everyone knows and understands what everyone else is doing and can tailor the work accordingly. One of our partners has taken on the de facto lead in organizing meetings, docu-

menting the group's collective investments and generally keeping things on track. Each member plays a leadership role in a different way. While sometimes challenging, the informality of this collaborative has allowed us to be much more flexible in what we do, while still being very diligent about communications, learning and overall strategy. We also genuinely enjoy the time we spend together and try to always allot time for a bit of fun.

We hope that by sharing our approach and what we have learned so far, we can support other funders interested in collaborative funding for social justice. We do not presume that we have come up with the model for others to emulate, but rather offer up our approach as food for thought as funders and nonprofit partners weigh how best to build or strengthen our movements, especially in a moment

of declining resources for this work.

We look forward to further identifying shared innovative approaches that will help all of us be more effective in this work. ■

Adapted from "Bolder Together," written by William H. Woodwell Jr., a report commissioned by the California Civic Participation Funders. You can read the full report at <http://www.haasjr.org/what-were-learning/resource/bolder-together>.

For more information about the collaborative, please contact Cathy Cha at cathy@haasjr.org.

Notes

1. *You can find more information about State Voices here: <http://www.statevoices.org/>.*