

Insights from Conversations
with NEID Global Commission on

Racial Equity in International Philanthropy



Network of Engaged
International Donors

Introduction

At NEID Global, we've had a front row seat for over 15 years to conversations among global funders on their approaches to giving, the values they aim to lead with in their work, and the deeply personal nature of building relationships within and across borders. In recent years, an increasing awareness of the uneven power dynamics in global philanthropy, has resulted in an imperative and growing interest in racial equity praxis among international private donors. With significant variation in funder awareness, understanding, and skilled practice, many in donor networks like our own are seeking clear recommendations to bring to their work, as well as a community of peers to learn alongside. It is our ambition as a network to support our members to move through their giving journeys with intention, self-awareness, and a racial equity lens.

Though the resurgence of interest in racial equity in recent years is notable, this area of work has been built and fortified for decades by the work of many, both within and outside the field of philanthropy. Countless studies, convenings, and resources have continuously resurfaced foundational issues of racial bias to hold our sector accountable to its promises. NEID Global has sought to understand the unique role it can play in building upon these lessons with our donor community. Our efforts to prioritize racial equity began in the summer of 2020, when we held over 40 consultative conversations in an effort to understand how we could make a valuable contribution to this issue.

The overwhelming recommendations were to focus on educating our members, who are predominantly white, and to bring our members into closer proximity with social sector leaders of color living in the Global South. Our conversations led us in 2022 to prioritize doing an internal DEI scan of NEID Global and to create a wider Racial Equity Commission to understand how we might meet these evolving needs in our community of primarily US-based donors giving internationally.

We proceeded to assemble a commission of members, colleagues and advisors from across the globe to provide a diverse set of perspectives on the practical choices that donors can employ to move their work beyond values statements and into full operational integration. The recommendations shared in this report are drawn from interviews with the members of our Racial Equity Commission, and will be utilized to inform approaches to donor education and organizing within NEID Global's programs and community conversation. They will also be shared broadly for others to hear and benefit from.

To effectively adopt an equity lens, philanthropy must first reckon with a new understanding of its own self image. A vast sector with a wide variety of individuals, institutions and motivations, we often focus on the positive opportunities philanthropy offers. To diagnose opportunity areas, we must give ourselves permission to balance our reflections on

“**Philanthropy isn't immune to the problems of the rest of the world - if anything it's concentrated.**”

—Purnima Thakre,
Refine + Focus



philanthropy and its origins with acknowledgement of its more challenging underpinnings as consistently as its good intentions, starting with the conditions of global wealth inequality that make philanthropy both possible and necessary.

Equity-focused work offers not only the potential to deliver greater impact, but the opportunity to repair and heal the foundational problems of resource inequality that make philanthropy possible. No philanthropic institution should be exempt from these considerations. Regardless of the issue areas they focus on, an equity lens is essential to our communities of practice.

“Philanthropy itself is an expression of inequity because we concentrate power and money in a small group of people. It’s challenging because the very system that allows philanthropy to exist is what creates and perpetuates inequity. The reason we have a concentration of power and money is we left people behind.”

—Gracia Goya, Hispanics in Philanthropy

Where Do We Begin?

Racial equity initiatives in philanthropy have a long history, and the last several years have been the latest, and perhaps most publicly integrated revitalization of a longstanding area of work. The 2020 reinvigoration of the Movement for Black Lives was a mobilization point whose far-reaching scale and household-level importance created a public push for racial equity and justice in almost every industry in the United States, including philanthropy.

An increase in public calls for accountability have prompted significant advancement in the scope and intensity of what philanthropy is willing to discuss and examine about its own practices. In international funding, this often manifests in calls to fund more proximate leaders, and prioritize community level ownership of impact work. Among many global funders, the openness to consider these questions with vigor is an encouraging and positive trend.

“I think philanthropy is open to grappling with these topics in conversation. The discussion is wide open, but how that actually translates to ceding power is where we have a canyon.” —Hafeeza Rashed, Moore Philanthropy

Though shifts in conversation have been promising, there is significant frustration that shifts in practice have not followed so closely behind. A huge gap remains between conversations about power shifts and the actual ceding of power. Several

noted that new ambitions and actions are happening without adequately addressing the long legacy of harm and inequity, which emerges in the consistent challenges to shifting philanthropic praxis. There is significant importance in acknowledging and understanding the broken trust resulting from decades of meager change in nonprofits and philanthropy. In addition to focusing on practical points of advice for the evolution of funding practices, those interested in deep change should also stay aware of who is allowed to make mistakes, permitted to have misunderstanding, or be provided resources as part of this change process - all reflections of persistent imbalances of power within the structures of our industry.

This resource was generated in collaboration with invited commission members to:

- ▶ Share practical insights and recommendations with peers within and beyond our donor networks
- ▶ Inform our own donor education initiatives and serve as a discussion and collaboration prompt with other donor networks
- ▶ Offer donors additional tangible strategies beyond subject matter discussion of racial equity
- ▶ Invite donors to share the ways in which they have operationalized their commitments to racial equity

Honoring Local-to-Global Distinctions and Connections

When operating at a global scale, a common stumbling block in racial equity conversations is foundational - “Across borders, do we even have the same definitions, agreements or understanding of what racial equity?” Centering a racial lens has taken on various definitions across the world and vary widely between communities in the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, Asia and the United States. How do racial equity considerations in a donor’s country interact with racial equity considerations in the countries where their nonprofit and social enterprise partners are operating in?

Our commission members had many thoughts to share on the relationship between approaches to racial justice in the US and abroad. Many emphasized the need to hold two truths side-by-side—first, the real tension between geography-specific differences in racial justice definitions and priorities, and second, the need to recognize the highly interrelated nature of power imbalances globally and locally.

“These issues would actually be better addressed if we could move beyond a black-and-white characterization of race. How racial equity is described in the US versus in the Global South, when people grow up with a particular perspective, means there are different approaches to equity in different communities. They are all important perspectives to consider and remember that there is not a single narrative that represents all experiences.”

—Theophilus Odaudu, Disability Rights Fund



RECOMMENDATIONS

- **You can't skip the local if you seek to address the global:**

While our community is made up of US-based donors giving abroad, encouraging funders to engage with racial equity conversations in the US is an essential component of beginning to understand and address it in their practices elsewhere.

- **Maintain a learning mindset:** We encourage donors to start with and maintain a 'beginner's mind' when seeking to understand the power dynamics at play in contexts outside their home countries. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring funders bring open mindsets to learning about the roles and legacies of colorism, colonialism, migration, imperialism and ethnic marginalization. These root issues that create systemic inequalities may be less familiar to American funders.

- **Relevance of 'passport privilege':** When we flatten equity conversations into box-checking exercises of people's racial identities, we leave out other important layers of privilege and marginalization. In addition to recognizing the power dynamics of racial identity, we must also examine the outsized roles and authority held by American, European and multilateral institutions and professionals working in the Global South.
- **Different but related:** While emphasizing that contextual difference is essential, funders should look for shared patterns and connections between racism in the US and elsewhere. Some commission members felt it important to address an oft-asked question—how is racial inequity showing up in countries with greater racial homogeneity? Two areas of emphasis emerged: recognizing the internalized racism left behind by colonialism, and the neo-colonial effects of persistent international power and interventions in the Global South, most particularly in development work.

“ For us on the African continent, for centuries we've had to deal with the impact of colonization and slavery. This has come to inform some values we've adopted over time due to the indoctrination that another race is superior to ours. Sadly, these values align with those who colonized us, such that we see or gravitate towards them as examples of 'how to get things done'. Inequity in Africa is related to inequity in America because we're living in a system that is unfair to Africans and Black people and is ultimately rooted in who has power and access to capital. We are Africans living in Africa being governed by Africans—but we also recognize the power of the international community on the continent.

A lot of decisions that are being made are influenced by the international community. And when we begin to make decisions on behalf of Africans, your own orientation to racial inequity filters in when you begin to put in systems and structures that do not allow us to make decisions for ourselves. By deciding what interventions to carry out and how those interventions are to be funded, these systems unwittingly take power away from the people these interventions are intended to benefit. In the international development space, you see people coming into Africa, bringing non-Africans to lead organizations regardless of the fact that there are people who are capable of leading such organizations in-country. Non-Africans are making decisions about the lives of those who they

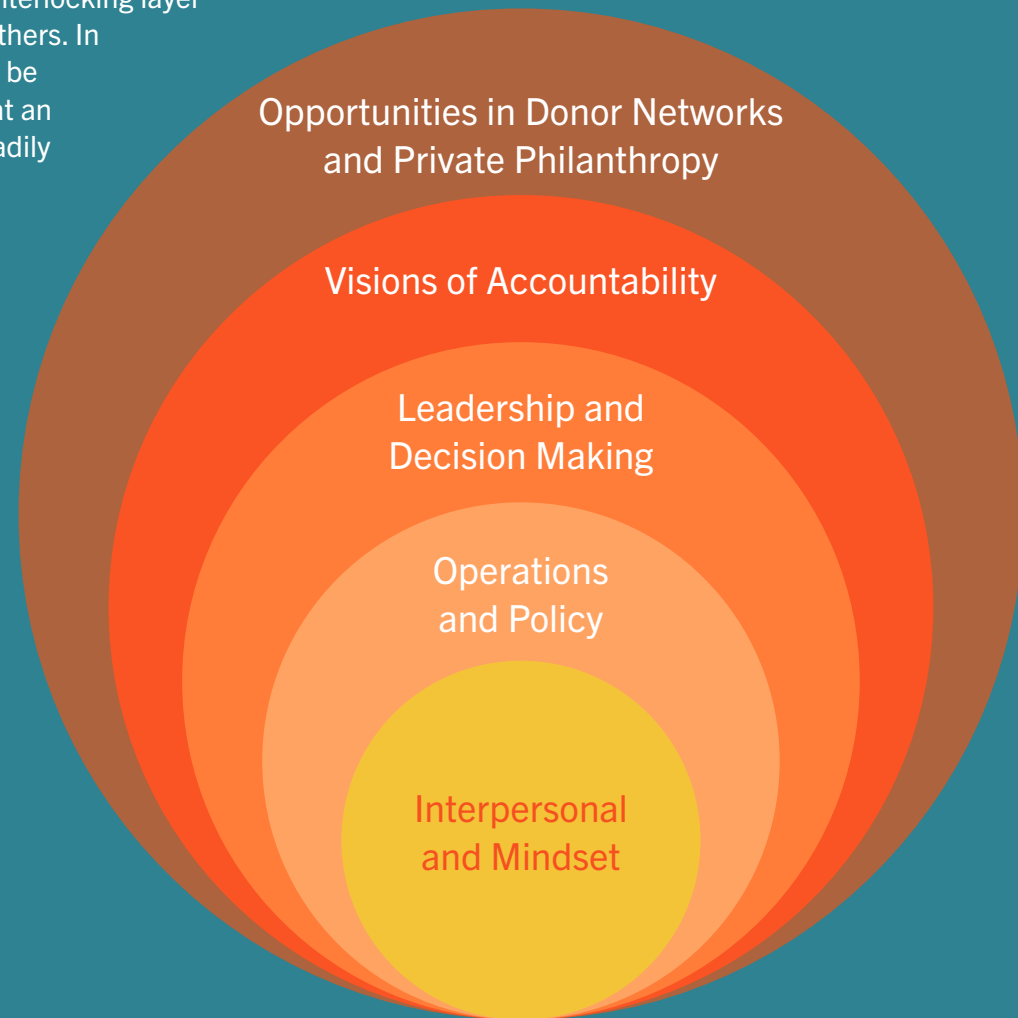
don't know anything about. They are not proximate and don't know what the issues are the way the locals do. But Africans have to abide by those decisions that have been made without their involvement, because power lies with people of a different race and continent.

That exclusion of Africans from decision-making and power holding is tantamount to racism, a variety of which is different from what someone who is on the streets of New York or is in Alabama who for generations have been disenfranchised because they are Black. Their reality is different from ours, but the consequences are similar. Both of us experience exclusion from power and conditions which limit our self-expression and independence.”

—Mosun Layode, African Philanthropy Forum

Major Issue Areas and Proposed Solutions

From the generous discussions of our commission members, several issue areas and potential solutions emerged, each an interlocking layer dependent on the others. In this report, they will be presented starting at an individual level, steadily working outward to organizational systems and policies, finally arriving at collaborations and network actions in philanthropy.





Interpersonal + Mindset Changes

A theme raised by all members of the Commission was the need for deeper mindset shifts among donors seeking to adopt an equity lens. Taking on this work is a vital component of the journey, alongside operational and strategic reshaping.

CHALLENGES

Philanthropy is a deeply personal and relational sector: While efforts to create racial equity strategies may seem clear on paper, they are much more challenging to implement in the context of personal relationships. Though policies can and should change with urgency, shifting mindsets takes time.

“The first barrier is that people probably do not really work to change their mindsets. The things we always believe to be true or untrue, how we look at other people, deep seated beliefs or stereotypes. This is something that has to happen on an individual level—to be open minded, to challenge some things that we believe we already know all about.”

—Theophilus Odaudu, Disability Rights Fund

Careening between over-simplification and information overload: Many in philanthropy feel knocked back and forth between two extremes. Overly simplistic framing of these problems and their solutions can result in tokenism or surface level ‘box checking’ work without real change. On the

other hand, when prompted to embrace the intersectional complexity of these issues, some feel overwhelmed and paralyzed about how to take practical steps forward.

“Resources are too simplified to make them workable, too much like a training. Do not treat these resources like they are a way of ‘being done’ thinking about this and learning.”

—Purnima Thakre, Refine + Focus

Defensiveness and the savior complex are common roadblocks to progress:

Racial equity work requires humility and the decentering of individuals who are not accustomed to stepping away from decision making power.

“A lot of well-meaning philanthropists have no concept of their white saviorism. The power dynamic runs so deep in this country and they then carry it with them when they go abroad. There’s so much shame associated with it; people don’t want to address it when it arises. Their instinct is to wave away critique.”

—Laurie Franz, Five Together Foundation

Performative approaches to equity work:

Several actors in the space give the impression that they are undertaking the work out of desire to be correct rather than cultivating self-awareness. In practice, this can look like when stated values or intentions aren’t accompanied by a sufficient budget, staffing changes, or policy shifts. In several cases, commission members expressed that they wished funders could be more honest about what work they are actually undertaking, instead of trying to manage public perception.

“Philanthropy is personal. So be real with yourself. If you don’t want to make changes to fund equitably or with local organizations, then be honest and don’t put those ideas into your mission statement. What I would love to see in philanthropy is the space to be able to point out these gaps with candor.”

—Hafeeza Rashed, Moore Philanthropy

SOLUTIONS

Challenge assumptions around who we consider to be credible and respected philanthropists and why: In a sector that runs on interpersonal confidence and follows the lead of bellwether institutions, it stands to reason reflect on why ultra-wealthy white men are often considered the prominent tastemakers of global giving. We need to more consistently interrogate the concept of the ‘typical donor’ and their role within a broader landscape of giving, including widely practiced mutual aid and remittances within communities of color and their diasporas.

Take a more critical eye to how wealth is created: Often in philanthropy, we focus on how money is spent, but many commission members urged their peers to spend more time considering the roots of wealth in the US, and to consider that American funders are not exempt from the work of remediating the impacts of militarism, imperialism, and the extraction of resources and opportunities from the Global South.

Normalize offering challenge or correction: To facilitate real change, funders must increase their comfort with being called in

or confronted with critique and requests for gradual change. We must all develop the skills required to more often embrace learnings from principled disagreement. In the implementation of any version of an equity lens, mistakes will be made, and rather than avoiding accountability for those mistakes, we can emulate a collective culture that treats them as the valuable lessons that they offer.

“ Sometimes we have to be disruptive if we want to challenge the status quo—this will be imperfect and painful, but in order to make real and deep changes, we need to change and challenge the status quo. This will not be easy. There will be a lot of discomfort, for everyone involved. There will always be people who are offended and offensive, and other people really need to be confronted to see themselves and their behavior, and when they are in a bubble that cannot happen.”

—Gracia Goya, Hispanics in Philanthropy

“ How do you break through the defensive reaction, because it’s so personal, right? Someone’s calling you out on how you’re behaving and saying that you need to make

a change and you feel bad. The automatic response is defensiveness, but how do we talk about improving our relationships and grounding them in equitable practices based on shared values where we are listening to one another. And not then just falling back on ‘Oh, it’s a cultural difference. That’s why we’re not getting each other.’ I think that the cultural difference card is being used as a defensive response. But when you’re just talking human to human, how can I and you work together in a way that is relational, in a way that’s based on respect, stripping away some of those power dynamics—focusing, listening, talking. I think there is an opportunity for us to encourage ownership of making mistakes. I think that we don’t want anyone, including ourselves, to fall backwards, but we should acknowledge that it’s hard work and that we are going to make mistakes. If you make the mistake, own up to it and keep moving forward because that’s how we’re going to evolve.”

—NEID Global Commission on Racial Equity in International Philanthropy member

Working for and with communities, not trying to save them: To counter the imbalance of ‘savior’ mindsets, ensure there is strong community ownership. This entails not just consent, but active involvement, leadership and design of how priorities are being set for investment and development.

“Who has the power and decision making? Is it held by the most impacted? I think that’s really what it comes down to. It’s important to turn over resources to the most impacted, the ones who are closest to the solutions. That is what I am most hopeful for, is seeing more of that.”

—Hehershe Busuego, Essex County Community Foundation

Holding urgency and patience side by side: Funders must be prepared for the reality that this is continuous, long-term work and not treat it like a trend. Communities of philanthropy peers should support and encourage each other to stick to patient, long-term commitments while maintaining an understanding of the urgent need for change and cultivating greater absorptive capacity for justified frustration from marginalized people.

“This whole process takes time and isn’t happening fast. So we have to acknowledge it’s not happening fast. We aren’t able to rebuild trust quickly. We aren’t able to [quickly] learn different practices that allow us to behave in very different ways. At the same time, this has been going on for so long. We are at a moment of great urgency. And there’s zero patience for the process that needs to take place, mostly because people are dying, people are being harmed... It is a tension between the timeline required to reset, rebuild, redefine the relationships around philanthropy and the ‘urgent now’ needs for the resources that philanthropy holds.”

—NEID Global Commission on Racial Equity in International Philanthropy member

Resource healing of the marginalized as much as you resource education of the privileged: Many of the resources, discussions and tools generated in response to these conversations have been oriented toward educating the privileged. While important, there is a large gap between the energy for those efforts and the resources being provided to those who have been on

the receiving end of inequity, both on the receiving end of grants and for professionals of color in philanthropy.

Intergenerational opportunities in philanthropy: Within family foundations, there has been a generational evolution in perspectives on equity and the ethical imperatives that should guide giving. There is huge potential in intergenerational exchange of perspectives on what kind of philanthropic legacy funders want to leave.

“I think that not enough young people are engaged in philanthropy and that young people do bring a different perspective. Engage youth in the decision making process and give them access to the management of those funds. I think we’ll see maybe a faster shift. I think that there may be more trust among young people than there is among folks of maybe my generation and older.”

—Laurie Franz, Five Together Foundation



Operations + Policy Changes

While personal change is pivotal, a wealth of insights came from suggestions for practical changes that can be adopted or taken into consideration by all private donors. This set of recommendations are a treasure trove for those interested in ‘walking the talk’.

CHALLENGES

Giving criteria are exclusionary by nature: While many discussions about funding more proximate work address ‘how to find’ more high-caliber local organizations, several commission members called attention to the fact that, for most US-based foundations, this will achieve little without revision of their giving criteria. 501(c)3 requirements, strict overhead limits and default scale requirements very often prevent high quality organizations from connecting with the funding they need to mature, perpetuating a vicious cycle. Funders should develop criteria suitable to the operating contexts of organizations.

“**If you say you would like to give more equitably internationally, but you’re unforgiving in your 501c3 requirements, it’s hard for those two ideas to hold the same space. The most equitable approach won’t by default be the most convenient one.**”

—Hafeeza Rashed, Moore Philanthropy

Endowments that do more harm than good: For many foundations, equity practices can start with how their money is invested. If, for example, an endowment is heavily invested in fossil

fuels, it may be causing greater detriment to communities most affected by climate change in the Global South than it can remedy through grantmaking.

Prohibitive application processes: Most funding applications are designed to streamline work for foundation-side staff and their compliance with legal and policy frameworks. Often, details are requested from organizations in unique, time-consuming formats and usually, in a single language (most often English). In several cases, funders and organizations have called attention to application and reporting requirements that cost more to comply with than the grants they offer in return.

The 5% rule is a very low bar: With overlapping crises threatening global safety and well-being, several funders and philanthropy advisors have encouraged foundations to consider increasing their annual giving beyond 5% of their assets, to infuse organizations, communities, and movements with the resources necessary to tackle enormous problems.

SOLUTIONS

Intermediaries can offer more equitable opportunities: If a funder isn't quite ready to change their operations to fund more equitably or locally, there are many intermediaries (pooled and collaborative funds) that fill this gap in the sector by offering diligence, advisory services, and grantmaking offerings. While there are many to choose from, donors should pay close attention to how close of a relationship intermediaries have with the communities they serve and ask questions about their accountability practices. Several intermediaries have been founded by 'doers' themselves, to build new forms of opportunity to counteract the global funding gap for local organizations and BIPOC leaders. When working with a trusted intermediary, funders can learn a lot from ceding control of reporting and requirements to those more proximate to target communities.

“Pooled funds are a great option, but who manages the funds? So—being able to pool the funds and also step away from those funds and transfer that management to communities who are going to use the resources. Step away from defining metrics, because that should be defined by communities. Step away from defining who's going to do the work, because that should be defined by the communities. Step away from timelines. And allow the funds to be used for as long as they need to be used for.” —NEID Global Commission on Racial Equity in International Philanthropy member

Language justice in application and reporting: A common challenge with a straightforward solution is that the first language of funders is often not the same as it is for organizations. To promote reaching local communities, funders should be prepared to have applications translated in-house if they are submitted in the language of their place of work.

Peer referrals: For funders unsure of how to develop new connections in geographies where they do not have a consistent physical presence, peer referrals and recommendations from organizations are a helpful way to widen exposure to more local organizations. It can also open up opportunities to fund coalitions of complementary work, rather than pitting organizations against one another.

Develop less burdensome grant applications: For many experienced funders, an onerous application process not only prevents them from reaching a wider pool of collaborators, it can also make collaboration more transactional, and create challenges to trusting relationships. Several commission members noted positive changes in foundations that have piloted approaches that were more conversational and mutually participatory, including some that have done away with written applications altogether. Other funders offer to pay for equivalency determinations and fiscal

sponsorship arrangements to avail their grants to organizations without 501(c)3 registration.

Simplify reporting: Reporting in itself can often be a reflection of the level of trust and collaborative spirit between funders and organizations. Bias can often influence when funders take a partnerships approach to funding, versus requiring rigid, command-and-control reporting. Funders unfamiliar with an organization's operating context should be mindful of placing the burden of information on organizations rather than taking on the work of self education.

“How about you recognize that people doing the work need a break. Funders don't realize that they're high maintenance. There's so much ego and they're not aware of it. Dog and pony show demands of nonprofits during site visits; it should be funders who have to show their value and take the burden off organizations.”

—Laurie Franz, Five Together Foundation

Clear ethical guidance for endowment investments: Foundations have an opportunity to provide clear mandates to their fund manager to offer investment choices using an equity lens. Some, for example, might outline strict boundaries that prevent the flow of money to alcohol and tobacco, child abuse, labor malpractice, or fossil fuels. Some have instead turned focus to privilege investments in the green economy, or women-led ventures, for example.



Leadership + Decision Making

As with all systems change efforts, Commission members had much to say about the role of leadership in shifting towards greater racial equity. From the composition of leadership itself to transforming our understanding of skill sets and expertise, an adapted sector requires adaptations in leadership.

CHALLENGES

Homogeneity on family foundation boards: At family foundations in particular, leadership, more especially at the board level, tends to be homogenous. Efforts to diversify boards with members representing the communities those foundations work in have had extremely varying levels of success.

Struggles of BIPOC philanthropy professionals: Within the philanthropic sector, professionals of color or whose countries of origin are outside the US are burdened with intense pressure to serve as a bridge between communities, facilitate misunderstanding about bias and power, and do their jobs. All of this is commonly shouldered while enduring discrimination, unfair compensation and bias themselves in their workplaces and professional spaces.

“We are under intense pressure to choose words wisely—when women of color stand as advocates in the space, they’re treated as if they’re crazy”

—Purnima Thakre, Refine + Focus

“For nonwhite people, who often take the burden, it requires that we continue to carry the burden, to continue to advocate, to continue to be patient, to continue to have the conversations, to take on that leadership role, because if we don’t, it won’t happen.”

—NEID Global Commission on Racial Equity in International Philanthropy member



“I’ve finally learned that it is a long haul. It is long term work, and you just need to find times to pause, reflect, rejuvenate, and then get back in the ring, if you will. . .it’s bringing me back into the reality that it can’t all be done by one person. To some extent this is generational work, even within the field. I’m just trying to balance all of those things while wanting to help contribute to as much as can be actualized within my lifetime.”

—Hehershe Busuego, Essex County Community Foundation

SOLUTIONS

Emotion ≠ lack of logic or critical framing: For individuals with lived experience of racism and other forms of marginalization, their viewpoints are often dismissed in professional settings as ‘emotional’, rather than strategic. To incorporate these perspectives and utilize the valuable insights available, we should collectively promote a culture that recognizes lived experience as an important asset to expertise, rather than a ‘lack of impartiality’. In doing this, we will often have to receive messages of frustration or be called in to recognize harm that we are complicit in perpetuating. We can never respect others while diminishing or not acknowledging their emotions.

Reward labor with compensation, not exposure: In a sector that tracks action by the movement of resources, when centering marginalized voices, whether for grantees or professional peers, we must be willing to compensate people for their time and work. Exposure alone will never shift the realities of racially biased funding.

Transforming leadership in foundations and funds: Diversity in leadership should be approached from a multi-layered perspective - race, gender, nationality, economic background, and disability are just a few lenses to start with. Rather than viewing this as a one time policy overhaul, funders should constantly be evolving their search for new perspectives, and to consider whose voices they aren’t hearing that are relevant to their work. Very often, proximate expertise is poorly represented at decision making levels of fund and foundation management.

“People of different backgrounds are represented in our management. Because my organization was founded in the US, at one time most of the management team were in the US, but there was a deliberate effort to change this over time to integrate people from more diverse backgrounds to be in the highest decision making positions. There is still more to be done and more effort to put in—we have been very cautious as an institution, not to promote the dominance of any one group while still holding high standards of quality and expertise.”

—NNEID Global Commission on Racial Equity in International Philanthropy member

“I would love to see more diversity on foundation boards, most especially family philanthropy, not just based on racial identity, but the diversity of actual opinion or perspective.”

—Gracia Goya, Hispanics in Philanthropy

Reimagining convenings:

Traditionally, social sector convenings globally have taken place close to resources, most often in Western metropolises that are easily accessible for funders, but not necessarily for organizations. Both in person and online events should be reconsidered to allow access to populations across geographies, who speak different languages, and require different accessibility considerations for participation.



Visions of Accountability

Philanthropy is abuzz with conversations chock full of suggestions and values statements that commit to continuous improvement on racial equity indicators, but there has been a dearth of accountability mechanisms to measure progress. Commission members reflected on the significant challenges to holding each other accountable, and key opportunities to change that reality.

CHALLENGES

“Philanthropy has no natural predator”: This concept came up often in conversations about accountability for change. Though philanthropy has entire areas of specialization in holding organizations accountable for impact and performance versus commitments, there are few traces of the same practices for foundations and individual funders. Outside of tax regulations, funders are generally free to practice their philanthropy as they see fit, with little oversight.

Racial justice and HR in philanthropy: As is often said, change begins at home. In many cases, this means starting with a look at how inequity might find footholds in our workplaces. For underrepresented professionals, this has taken form in enthusiastic hires that are not then given the space to lead, or authority to inform policy changes. For others, it’s manifested as burnout and exhaustion, eventually leaving the sector. Without these presences in our teams, we are less likely to stay accountable to the changes we propose, no matter how well designed.

SOLUTIONS

Decision making process and points of authority: When asked what kind of transparency could help to make philanthropy more equitable, many discussions emerged about decision making. Beyond sharing details like % representation of marginalized identities within teams, a lot of interest emerged in who really gets to make grant decisions within a particular institution. A foundation could have, for example, local grant officers, while true strategic and grant decision power still rests with individuals who are unfamiliar with local communities. Beyond reaching a percentage target, more funders should consider whose perspective lies in the most senior roles related to resource allocation and grant approvals.

“Accountability can be looked at from a diverse perspective. First, transparency in the work that is being done. How decisions are arrived at, showing clearly the way decisions are made. Accountability goes beyond finances, which is where we tend to place more focus, but I would like to see more transparency on decision making processes, which tell us more about the structure of how things are done. It would make things more open.”

—Theophilus Odaudu, Disability Rights Fund

SOLUTIONS

Get specific about actions for racial equity: Since 2020, many foundations have come forward with values statements, DEI pledges, and other public commitments to equity in their work. But these commitments could be made much more useful if they shared the specifics of what they plan to do, and not simply what values they espouse. Some emphasized that values statements should not be offered unless they accompany tangible operational and resource allocation changes.

“Circa 2020, there were so many pledges that came out and for the vast majority of institutions, there were no accountability structures, from a reporting perspective—or even in terms of defining what the pledges really meant. A lot of the money is going towards marketing versus actually getting resources into on the ground community-led efforts. I think part of shifting our efforts can be more just transparency about what people actually mean by racial equity, racial justice, such as how they’re defining it, how they are measuring it, and if there’s any kind of time horizon that can be articulated. It also comes from a governance perspective, where the power lies and who’s holding whose feet to the fire. Having some kind of governance structure to make sure that people are holding themselves and holding organizations accountable.”

—Hehershe Busuego, Essex County Community Foundation

Commit resources to accountability and tertiary ‘watch dogs’: Several initiatives have been spearheaded to promote greater accountability on equity metrics in philanthropy. However, these projects have often been deeply underfunded and relied upon volunteer labor from already marginalized professionals. A simple but very important step more donors can take is to contribute unrestricted resources to these initiatives so that they can grow in scope and presence.





Opportunities in Private Philanthropy + Donor Networks

NEID's network holds great potential for collaborative transformation—not only via peer learning, but due to the key role of private donors in piloting new approaches to philanthropy. Commission members shared their optimism in the unique opportunities awaiting our community of practice.

Greater risk appetite for bold change: Risks have to be taken if people want things to change—inequity has drawn untold resources and opportunities away from the marginalized, and rebalancing the scales will take significant investment, which larger, bureaucratic institutions may be slow to move on or view as too risky. Smaller funders or private funder who have more freedoms and flexibility can take quicker strides in these areas of opportunity.

“Philanthropy should be able to accommodate a great deal of risk. Because that is the way the world works. It is risky. And to make a relational investment, you have to have some flexibility in there for things to go in a different way, and that's not how corporations behave. Philanthropy is not about avoiding risk, but building opportunities and creating space for communities-in-focus to wield change.”

—NEID Global Commission on Racial Equity in International Philanthropy member

Power of referrals and recommendations: Networks can help to increase awareness of local organizations and proximate experts with their broad influence.

“The great thing about the sort of community that NEID has is that it's so much easier to get things done. Decisions are made and implemented

faster. In relational spaces, we can inspire each other to forge new relationships together.”

—NEID Global Commission on Racial Equity in International Philanthropy member

Role in creating requirements or incentives for greater transparency: Networks and funder communities can offer options for mutual accountability in enacting equity considerations

“There is always a racial lens to international giving, no matter what. Networks should push funders to practice what they preach—this is the point of a learning community with good governance.”

—Laurie Franz, Five Together Foundation

Relationships change hearts and minds: For those more resistant to equity-informed change, there is no better place than community to address their concerns, questions, or possible resistance.



RESOURCES

Guides, Reports + Other Resources

African Philanthropy Forum + The Bridgespan Group | [Disparities in Funding for African NGOs](#)

Article Group | [The Direct Philanthropy Starter Kit](#)

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