



GIVING PROJECTS

Cultivating People of Color as Fundraisers and Donors

Across the country, community foundations have started a new movement to build power and capacity for philanthropic leadership among people of color. Community foundations, particularly those with an overt commitment to racial justice, are launching Giving Projects that position people of color as fundraisers for and donors to social justice work.

Giving Projects are designed to challenge the reality that most decision-makers in foundations continue to be white people. While more foundations have begun talking about the importance of racial equity, few have committed to significantly diversifying their boards and staff. This is particularly true at leadership levels. A 2012 study from the Nonprofit Quarterly found that around 90 percent of foundation executives and around 86 percent of board members were white. While no formal demographic data exists for racial-equity-focused community foundations, anecdotal evidence suggest that the majority of the staffs, boards, and donors of those organizations are white.

Headwaters Foundation for Justice believes that foundations who use a racial justice lens in their grantmaking should also use a racial justice lens in their hiring and recruitment, as well as in their grantmaking and fundraising practices. The Giving Project model is an important disruption to the status quo in philanthropy when it comes to how donors of color engage in giving. Each Giving Project brings together a small group of multi-racial, cross-class people who are passionate about social change and interested in fundraising, grantmaking, and community building.

Headwaters launched our first Giving Project in 2015, designed to be an innovative and inclusive philanthropic model to strengthen our grassroots fundraising from

people directly affected by injustice. Four other community foundations across the country are using similar models: Social Justice Fund NW, Chinook Fund in Denver, Crossroads Fund in Chicago, and Bread and Roses Fund in Philadelphia.

We wanted to know what lessons and best practices existed among the participants of all five Giving Projects that exist across the nation. We took on a research project, funded by the Global Fund for Community Foundations, to explore several questions:

1 - How does the Giving Project model and experience impact how people of color see themselves as philanthropists?

2- How might race and class factor into their philanthropy, as well as beliefs and attitudes about fundraising and giving?

3 - What attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and values did the participants hold in common?

This report summarizes our preliminary findings and identifies areas for further exploration. We hope it serves as a resource to foundations involved in Giving Projects, as well as for those considering how race and class impact donors of color and their giving habits.

METHODOLOGY

About the Interviewees

Allison Johnson Heist of Headwaters Foundation for Justice interviewed 43 diverse individuals for this research project. The interviews consisted of individual and small-group conversations conducted in person, over the phone, and via Skype.

Age: Most people interviewed were in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. That age range is generally representative of Giving Project participants.

Race/ethnicity: We asked participants to self-identify their race/ethnicity. Participants identified as: 28 percent Asian American/Pacific Islander, 21 percent Black, 21 percent biracial or multiracial, 21 percent Latino/a, 4 percent Arab/Middle Eastern and 4 percent Native American.

Class background: 88 percent of interviewees came from middle-class, working-class, or low-income backgrounds. Many participants have changed their class status over time and said that in their adulthood, they identified more solidly as belonging in the middle class.

Occupation: About half of the interviewees identified that they work in philanthropy or fundraising for nonprofit organizations. Several have moved between organizing and philanthropy, and 16 percent worked as a community organizer at the time of the interview. The remainder of the interviewees included a small business owner, a medical student, a tech worker, a business/finance professional, a public health worker, and a government staffer.

Beliefs and behaviors about money: Most participants interviewed described formative class experiences from their childhood upbringing. Our analysis is that beliefs and behaviors around money, class and giving are formed before the age of 12.

To create and build community in a social justice community that really does center people of color—I think has a lot of value.

— Social Justice Fund member



How we define the term ‘people of color’

“People of color” is a term used in the U.S. for people who share the common experience of being targeted and oppressed by racism. “People of color” does not refer to a biological or scientific distinction between people; it is a political term sometimes useful for building relationships and solidarity between groups of people with the shared experience of racial oppression. The term “people of color” has movement-building potential. (Definition adapted from the Western States Center.)



Photo by Naomi Ishisaka

Giving Project Alumni Esther Littlelove and John shares a moment with a guest at the SJP POC-luck, a regular gathering of Giving Project members, alumni, and guests.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Viewpoints and Takeaways From Our Interviews

VIEWS ON PHILANTHROPY

Most people of color we interviewed did not see themselves as philanthropists, even after participating in a Giving Project. Many perceived that the word “philanthropist” meant someone who was wealthy, white, male, upper class, and privileged. They thought of philanthropists as people who have been giving money for a long time, compared to their own newer entry into the field. Some also held a perception that philanthropists take credit for their financial gifts and want to be recognized for their giving, which did not resonate with them. Giving Project participants who did view themselves as philanthropists had a radical interpretation of what that word means—or a desire to transform the meaning behind the term.

Despite their disconnection from the word “philanthropist,” participants did envision themselves making an intentional, long-term commitment to funding nonprofit work and taking action on issues that matter to them. They described their role in Giving Projects as gathering resources for social change. Rather than using the term “philanthropist,” they preferred a broader term that encompassed both giving and taking action. The term “donor organizer” resonated with many of the participants interviewed.

Our takeaway: The term “donor organizer” could be embraced by social-justice-driven community foundations to better describe how people of color see their role in the philanthropic community.



Photo by Naomi Ishisaka

Grantee Aimee Josianne, Co-director Seattle Young Peoples Project, shares a laugh with SJF Program Director Yasmeen Perez

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“I see myself as a donor...I want to be a disrupter in philanthropy—raising my own resources and organizing other people and their money.” – Crossroads Fund member

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HOW GIVING PROJECTS WORK

1

A cross-class, multiracial group of up to 25 individuals commits to 6 months of training and hands-on fundraising.

2

Through workshops and trainings, the group develops a shared understanding of race, class, and power in society.

3

Each person commits to fundraising from their friends, family and community to support the financial goal of the group.

4

Each person makes a meaningful financial gift, whatever that means for them.

5

Participants are trained in a democratic grantmaking process. As a group, the cohort uses their skills and power to grant money to inspiring, effective social change work.

“
What grabbed me was the fact that it was centered around racial and economic justice and that was going to be how we were gonna raise this money.
 ”

– Headwaters member



Photo by Anna Min

HFJ Giving Project participants and grantees share stories and experiences of social justice grantmaking.

VIEWS ON RACE, CLASS & PRIVILEGE

The curricula of each Giving Project emphasize race, class, and privilege. Giving Project participants are asked to explore their personal experience regarding race and class, and to think about how their experience has influenced their views on fundraising and donating.

Giving Project members of color reported that having a space to discuss race and class with other people of color was crucial. People of color reported that they had few spaces where they could discuss race openly. In other areas of their lives, participants said that even spaces designed to talk about race were often dominated by white people.

For most people, class was unexplored or unexamined territory before joining a Giving Project. People examined their own attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs about money as they raised funds from others and as they considered their personal donations. People of color who did not come from a background of wealth and class privilege had to—many for the first time—think about what level of a donation would be “meaningful” to them. They also had to explore their feelings about asking people in their social network, many of whom came from low-wealth backgrounds themselves, to make donations to the Giving Project.

For people of color with wealth and class privilege, the Giving Project provided a practical opportunity to address some of their own biases about giving and fundraising. These participants reported that their Giving Project gave them space to work toward greater understanding of their own history, experience and personal narrative about money.

Part of every Giving Project model is that the money raised is donated to community organizing efforts. People of color noted often that this commitment to funding social change work drew them to the Giving Project model. They innately understood from their own life experiences how much

those dollars were needed and what a difference they made in their communities.

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You can’t talk about economic justice without talking about race.
 ”

– Bread and Roses Fund member

Our takeaway: People of color desire more people-of-color-led spaces and conversations. They see the intersections between race and class, and value the opportunity to have open discussions about those issues. They are motivated to raise funds and organize with fellow donors around a social justice vision.

VIEWS ON FUNDRAISING

All Giving Project members experience an in-depth fundraising training, including an analysis of their personal history with money. Program facilitators are thoughtful and intentional when talking about money, class, and giving. In this way, the fundraising experience gives participants time and space to explore their own class backgrounds and think about how their life experience contributes to their feelings about money.

Many participants reported a fear of fundraising because of their class background. In particular, people of color who came from a low-wealth background reported feeling uncomfortable asking family for money. Several participants provided regular financial support to their families, which made it awkward to ask those same family members to donate. Participants who held class privilege, on the other hand, had an expectation that their family members would contribute.

Participants reported not feeling like the “typical” fundraiser and that their targets were not “typical” donors. Again, their perception of fundraisers and donors consisted of white, middle-class people and they made a distinction between that norm and their experience in the Giving Projects. Giving Project members reported that strong training, a personal connection to the staff, a community of support, and practice helped them feel more comfortable asking for donations.

They always give the amount I ask them for because no one has really asked them for that much money before... – Social Justice Fund member

The small number of people of color with wealth and class privilege reported that their personal networks held untapped potential for social justice fundraising. Despite their relative wealth, they found that their peers had not been asked to make as many donations as those who had

I joined a board...For board members...you have to figure out a way to get them \$5,000. If you're rich you can give them \$5000 or [if you're not rich] you can raise it...I was able to fundraise that much...I would have never applied for that board position prior to doing a Giving Project. – Social Justice Fund member



HFJ Giving Project participant Julia Davis leads a discussion at an annual grantee panel event.

Photo by Anna Min

less class privilege. More class-privileged Giving Project members found their peers were open to making donations because they had not experienced “giving fatigue” from being approached by many causes. This is because people with less class privilege tended to be more closely involved in social movements. While the sample size of this population was small in this study, foundations focused on social justice may want to consider how people of color with wealth can help organize their networks for more long-term investment in social justice grantmaking.

Our takeaway: People of color of all backgrounds value the opportunity to talk about money and wealth. People of color are not asked to make donations enough, and want to be asked.

VIEWS ON GIVING

In a Giving Project, all the participants donate from their own pockets. Although there is no minimum gift required to participate, people are asked to make a gift that is meaningful to them, which often results in the largest gift they have ever given. For many people of color, it's the first time they've been asked to give a monetary donation to any organization.

Participants said that giving to multiple organizations as part of their Giving Project was inspiring, and they appreciated the privilege of gaining in-depth knowledge of community work through evaluating grant applications, conducting site visits, and learning directly from people doing the on-the-ground work. Many said that by making a gift that was meaningful to them, they had a starting point to think more intentionally about their long-term giving.

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I had never given a sustaining gift at all, so for me, it felt really powerful. Like, wow, this is the first time I've actually invested in social justice work...It actually meant something more. – Social Justice Fund member

Giving Project members with inherited or job-related privilege had to ask themselves different “giving” questions than others in the group. For some, making financial donations was outside of their family’s cultural norms, regardless of their financial privilege. As they talked with other, less wealthy members about their financial situations and giving priorities, some class-privileged members felt challenged to determine what amount of money would feel “meaningful” to them.

Regardless of their history with giving, all participants described their giving experience as meaningful.

Our takeaway: People of color value being asked to give their own money to build a better world, a healthier community, and a stronger social justice movement.

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There's this stigma about talking to people of color about giving, because there's this idea that people of color don't have wealth or money...Getting people to switch that thought is a conversation that needs to be had in communities of color.

– Headwaters member

VIEWS ON HOW JOINING A GIVING PROJECT TRANSFORMED PARTICIPANTS

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Part of what Social Justice Fund offered in that moment in my life was an opportunity for me to talk about things that mattered to me and to engage others in those conversations. – Social Justice Fund member

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Photo by Ryan Stopera

Headwaters' participants celebrate their accomplishments at the final celebration.

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I think more about how race plays out in my work and in the world. –Bread and Roses Fund member

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Participants joining Giving Projects reported a mix of a desires to build skills and to find community. Some were in a career transition, and saw the Giving Project as bridge to a new field. Others wanted to strengthen their fundraising experience or to learn more about grantmaking. Many reported that the Giving Projects' focus on racial and economic justice drew them to the work. While nearly all participants joined a Giving Project seeking new skills, many came away with new knowledge and relationships that prompted what some described as a “personal transformation.”

Participants reported that they now think more benevolently after completing a Giving Project. Many have encouraged others to join a Giving Project and some have joined an additional Giving Project or contributed to other Giving Projects. Many now give to the annual fund of the community foundation they worked with. Acting and thinking as donors and fundraisers has allowed Giving Project members to develop personal criteria for their own giving. While they may not describe themselves as a formal part of the field, most Giving Project members now say they have a deep commitment to philanthropy.

Our takeaway: Giving Projects deepen people's identity as donor organizers and, more importantly, as empowered people of color.

CONCLUSION

What the Field Can Learn From Giving Project Participants

This research exposed important lessons about engaging people of color as donors and decision-makers in philanthropy. Many people of color who joined a Giving Project recognized the model as being outside the mainstream of philanthropy, and saw potential for community foundations to integrate lessons learned into their fundraising and grantmaking processes.

One clear takeaway is that centering people of color as leaders of the work and holding explicit discussions about racial justice were essential to the success of all the Giving Projects we studied. People of color want to give, and they know their communities can give, but they need to be positioned to lead the work for it to succeed.

Despite the overwhelming success of the Giving Projects we studied, a disconnect remains between participants' language and their behavior as donors, fundraisers, and activists. Giving Project members participated in a thoughtful philanthropic process, yet they continue to distance themselves from the established language of the field. Many don't want to be called philanthropists.

To continue the success of the Giving Projects, and of engaging people of color in general, community foundations must use more inclusive language and practices. If people of color do not resonate with the image of philanthropy, we should consider developing new language and practices that connect with the communities that are important to us. There is untapped potential for donor organizing and activism in communities of color that can be reached if community foundations are ready to listen and invest in a new way of working.



Photo by Anna Min

HFJ participants of the New Majority Fund Giving Project celebrate the end of their grantmaking experience.

People of color want to give, and they know their communities can give, but they need to be positioned to lead the work for it to succeed.

THANK YOU to *Giving Project* participants and foundations who participated in this research project:

