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Editorial

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Editor Introduction

Philanthropy, long known for its boldness and innovation, is at a pivotal moment where it must reassess its role in promoting genuine inclusivity for communities to determine their own futures. Recent developments, particularly the legal settlement of a pioneering initiative to support women of color entrepreneurs, have ignited fervent discussions about equity, access, and the implications for philanthropic practices. As the sector confronts the intricate challenges of social justice and funding disparities, the stark reality of historically marginalized communities struggling for vital resources comes into sharp focus.

The complex legal landscape has heightened awareness of the systemic barriers that stifle the growth of diverse communities, emphasizing the need for intentional funding strategies. This situation raises a crucial question: how can philanthropy not only rectify historical inequities but also equip communities to foster sustainable structural change?

In this special 15th anniversary issue of *The Foundation Review* on Democracy, Equity, and Power, we explore the implications of the current climate at the intersection of philanthropy, social justice, and nonprofit support. We invited scholars, practitioners, and advocates to reflect on their research and experiences, illuminating innovative pathways toward a more equitable philanthropic ecosystem that champions social change. The authors delve into three interconnected themes:

Equity and Power Sharing: Authors, including Reed et al., Salehi and Infante, Jacobs et al. Easterling et al., and Dean-Coffey and Casey, underscore the urgency of equitable practices and power-sharing in philanthropy. They advocate for a 'power with' mindset, urging funders to dismantle unequal power dynamics and genuinely engage with those most affected by systemic issues. Salehi et al. highlight the necessity of long-term, flexible funding for POC-led nonprofits, moving away from short-term models that perpetuate inequity. Building supportive partnerships with community organizations is essential for fostering power-sharing and enhancing responsiveness to community needs. Advocacy and activism emerge as vital tools for advancing democracy, connecting citizens to civic engagement while challenging entrenched norms.

Democratic Engagement and Accountability: Ralph, Shalehi and Infante, Murray et al., Darling and Pankaj, Easterling et al., Dean-Coffey and Casey, and Apgar et al. emphasize the critical role of participatory practices and accountability in creating equitable philanthropic frameworks. Ralph encourages viewing organizational tensions as a healthy reflection of democratic complexities, while Shalehi and Infante highlight the importance of relational accountability between funders and nonprofits. Centering marginalized voices and building grassroots movements are essential for achieving lasting equity and democratic engagement. Transparency in decision-making fosters trust and collective understanding, vital for promoting

democracy and equity. Inclusive grantmaking practices that involve diverse voices enhance a democratic approach to philanthropy and bolster equity. Foundations are urged to support institutional leaders committed to equity, as their influence can drive meaningful change.

Systems Thinking and Transformation: Patton and Richardson, Darling and Pankaj, Apgar et al, Patawaran, Salehi and Infante, Murray et al., Easterling et al., Jacobs et al, Reed et al., and Dean-Coffey and Casey, advocate for transformative approaches and systems thinking to tackle complex social issues and advance equity within philanthropy. They argue that philanthropy must evolve beyond traditional grant-making to address interconnected crises, fostering collective action and alliances for power-sharing. Patawaran emphasizes the need for multistakeholder innovations that challenge assumptions and enrich public discourse. Darling and Pankaj argue that emergent learning practices facilitate authentic conversations that disrupt the status quo, break down silos, and build trust—essential elements for equity and democracy. Apgar et al. stress that evaluations of systems transformation initiatives should be contextually designed and culturally responsive. Ultimately, Jacobs et al assert that achieving transformational change necessitates adapting organizational practices and funding strategies to support long-term power-building efforts.

This second 15th-anniversary issue proudly marks the inaugural support of the Ricardo Millett Equity Fund. In December 2023, we lost a remarkable philanthropic and evaluation leader, Dr. Ricardo Millett, whose ability to build relationships and direct resources was transformative. In his honor, the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy has established the Ricardo Millett Equity Fund, aimed at advancing our commitment to racial equity and diversity in philanthropic research. Supported by Dr. Millett’s family, this fund seeks to amplify diverse voices and perspectives, enriching our understanding and equity practices in philanthropy. We celebrate Dr. Millett’s legacy and work toward a future where every voice is valued.

Through this curated collection of insights from leading thinkers and researchers in philanthropy, we aim to inspire you, our readers, to engage in meaningful dialogue, debate, and action. Let us broaden our understanding of equity and interrogate the governing structures that frees philanthropy and communities alike to shape their own democratic practices and self-determination.



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