Inside Philanthropy

Funding Racial Equity and Justice in the COVID-19 Era and Beyond

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Black people and other people of color are disproportionately harmed by COVID-19. We recently covered some early funding responses in support of people who are black, Hispanic, Indigenous, or Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI). The Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE) and its founder and ED, Lori Villarosa, are well-versed in racially focused funding. We spoke to Villarosa about her organization's work over the past two decades, their newest guide, and how funders can best respond to the coronavirus.

"This current global crisis really brings into focus how the cumulative impacts of structural racism generate awful racial disparities in who is getting the virus, who is being hospitalized, and, tragically, higher rates of death... Sadly, these [trends] were too predictable for any of us attuned to our communities," she says.

With the U.S. still in the grips of a deadly pandemic and facing a long road to full recovery, how can funders advance the needs and leadership of communities of color in the COVID-19 era and beyond?

Exceeding Expectations: Reflections on PRE and Racial Equity Philanthropy

PRE formed in 2003 with a board of racial justice advocates and a goal to help philanthropy advance racial equity. It was originally housed at the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund. In 2007, it became a project of the Tides Center, an incubator run by Tides, which is a key clearinghouse for progressive money centered on

donor-advised funds (DAFs). In 2018, Tides granted about $291 million. In 2017, it managed greater than $150 million in support of more than 150 social ventures, including PRE.

PRE works in the realms of capacity building, education, and convening for funders and grant seekers, and it has engaged hundreds of foundation reps. It is well-known for its seminal work, "Grantmaking with a Racial Equity Lens," which it co-produced with GrantCraft in 2007. And among its other publications, in late 2018, it released "Timeline of Race, Racism, Resistance and Philanthropy, 1992-2014," which we discussed here. A short while ago, it published "Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens," which offers practical steps for foundation leaders who want to move from racial equity to racial justice funding strategies (Villarosa co-authored the publication with PRE Senior Fellow Rinku Sen).

Villarosa is a veteran of this branch of giving, having served as a program officer at the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in the 1990s, where she managed its U.S. Race Relations portfolio. PRE has received support from Mott, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Ford Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Open Society Foundations (OSF), California Endowment and Akonadi Foundation, among others. And PRE receives support from the Racial Equity in Philanthropy Fund, which was launched in 2018 by Ford, Kellogg and Borealis Philanthropy.

In 2017, PRE produced an infographic illustrating that between 2005 and 2014, the percentage of domestic foundation funding for communities of

color did not exceed 8.5%. In 2016, the percentage of funding for communities of color rose to about 10%—a change Villarosa characterized as coming "on the heels of the protests in Ferguson, the broader Black Lives Matters movement, the protests at Standing Rock, and the organizing around and by Dreamers."

Looking back over the last few decades, Villarosa identifies several funder practices as some of the most promising developments, including grantmakers being "explicit about a structural racism analysis" in their theories of change and grantmaking. She says earlier adopters of this lens included smaller progressive groups like the Haymarket Foundation, Z. Smith Reynolds and Social Justice Fund Northwest, and larger ones like Annie E. Casey, Ford, Kellogg, Marguerite Casey and OSF, among others. Recently, she's also seen the Meyer Memorial Trust, Field Foundation, "and many more community foundations and family foundations" use this strategy.

Villarosa has also been glad to see funders "being far more targeted about populations leading their own work" during her time in this sector. She says leaders in this realm include the Hill-Snowdon Foundation, Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock, and General Service Foundation, and others that "intentionally" name and support work led by a particular group of people, such as black-led, Latinx-led, Native American-led, AAPI-led or AMEMSA-led (Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, South Asian) work. She also uplifts grantmakers who are "thoughtful and explicit about intersectional approaches," including groups like the Arcus Foundation and Astraea Foundation, and "lesser-known foundations in regions like the

South, such as the Amy Mandel and Katina Rodis Fund or Laughing Gull Foundation."

Villarosa says PRE has met and exceeded the board's original expectations, which is apparent in the significant growth of the funding movement's size, range and sophistication. "Of course," she says, "all that significance is due to the [work] of the field of racial justice leaders... And there's so much more to do."

Moving From Racial Equity to Racial Justice

While some people use the terms racial equity and racial justice interchangeably, in the new report, PRE presents them as having a tiered or chronological relationship. Equity is seen as more of a first step (as part of DEI) for funders and organizers who want to address racial disparities. Equity work includes actions like recognizing, tracking and discussing that disparities exist, and it may seek to address the symptoms of disparity. Justice work goes deeper—among other things, PRE states it centers power-building by those most impacted and works to change core societal systems.

The publication states, "[One] can design a service-delivery or community-education system to reduce racial disparities, which could constitute 'racial equity,' without ever engaging the recipients of that service, whose lives and leadership are crucial to effective solutions, which would be critical to 'racial justice.'" Drawing on anonymous interviews with organizers and foundation staff, the report states it will be "most useful" to funders who are already engaging with racial equity and/or are interested in

pursuing "more ambitious" power building and structural change (justice).

PRE's publication covers how to align internal foundation practices with a racial justice vision, and how to invest in racial justice. In developing and implementing a justice vision, PRE advises funders to use explicit, shared and tested language around racial justice, among other approaches. It offers tips on testing for shared meaning between team members and responding to internal resistance.

When it comes to investing in racial justice, building power through multi-year, general operating support is, not surprisingly, a core suggestion. We see these approaches gaining more attention and adoption as the coronavirus wreaks havoc. Streamlined processes and "reasonable" reporting requirements are also upheld in PRE's publication, in conversation with Villarosa, and in many discussions of best practices taking place in response to disaster these days.

PRE notes that a disproportionate amount of racial justice funding still flows to predominantly white organizations, and offers guidelines to help grantmakers move away from this paradigm. PRE also warns against grantmaking that is too narrow in its issue focus, which may stifle funders' effectiveness in supporting the broader racial justice "ecosystem." It champions intersectional, collaborative, multi-pronged strategies and a perspective that considers the entire movement. Villarosa previously weighed in on the vital synergy between community organizers and civil rights lawyers in our story on the OSF's support for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. "Holding power-building strategies or the

movement ecosystem as the 'center' allows some foundations to address multiple issues and needs," the report states.

The Potential of the Current Moment

When responding to the pandemic, Villarosa encourages funders to follow the new report's recommendations and support grassroots groups led by people of color. In a recent article for *Nonprofit Quarterly*, she pointed out that there are many groups that can help funders with this, like ABFE (formerly Association of Black Foundation Executives), Native Americans in Philanthropy, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, Funders for LGBTQ, Funders for Justice, and the Solidaire Network, among others. She also advised funders to include power-building strategies in their portfolios along with essential direct services. She said COVID-19-specific examples of power-building include "litigation, policy advocacy, and community organizing for paid sick leave and other protections for low-wage workers, and increased funding of public health infrastructure, especially in rural and urban low-income communities."

As the coronavirus continues to cause widespread harm, Villarosa says, at this moment, the "potential for transformative change is enormous… We need to invest at exponentially higher levels than current rates in the power of the people who have the most experience with the brokenness of our systems." And looking forward through the next decade, she hopes there will be "huge investments in the power of local, organized communities of color." She says racial justice advocates and organizers test the viability of new methods "that often sound too

radical to many funders, but often eventually get recognized as the needed answers."

Villarosa also tells us that tracking and upholding racial equity and justice funding at this juncture is personal for her, like many other people of color, because she comes from a multiracial family (mixed Filipino, black and white). "With this current [crisis], we have family members who have been hit earlier and hospitalized, essential workers ranging from grocery stores to the ER, others whose workplaces are shut down with no sick pay, and others who could be the target of anti-Asian violence. So the work is not simply about facts and figures; it is real, it is urgent, and it's for the long-haul."

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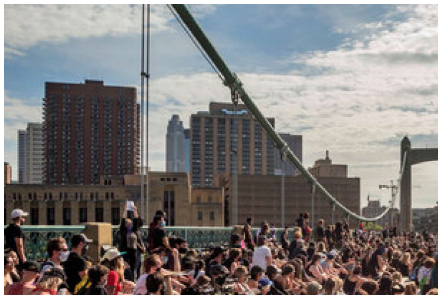

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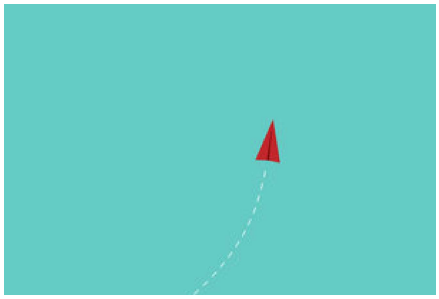

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