

OPINION

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For Philanthropy, Trump Era Is Time to Double Down to End Injustice

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Foundations need to fight regressive policies aimed at people of color and other minorities.

As people across the country prepare for the White House transition next week, foundations and other nonprofits are grappling with the consequences of change for our collective future, especially as we have witnessed how deep a grip misogyny and racism hold over America.

With the country's leadership, priorities, and legislative agenda now in flux, grant makers understandably feel compelled to explore new strategies to fulfill their missions and advance their values. However, we are troubled by the potential for a retrenchment from much of the

promising advocacy, activism, and organizing work that foundations have increasingly supported in recent years.

Even before Election Day, foundation dollars dedicated to social justice were falling well short of growing demand. According to a new report by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, from 2003 to 2013, groups working to curb the root causes of injustice and inequality commanded a meager 10 percent of funding from the nation's largest foundations. During this same period, less than half of grant dollars went to benefit the chronically underserved.

More specifically, funding aimed at promoting the human rights of girls and women is in short supply. For the last decade and a half, foundations have earmarked less than 8 percent of their overall giving for girls and women. Of those limited funds, less than 3 percent goes toward ending violence against girls and women.

Nevertheless, the last few years have brought a wave of encouraging progress in grant making.

A number of large foundations have begun to shift more of their decision-making power to the people most affected by injustices, trusting and investing in their grantees' leadership and advocacy. More institutions are providing general operating support, which gives nonprofits and organizers authority and control to distribute philanthropic funds where and how they choose.

We also have seen a growing willingness among philanthropic leaders to explicitly call out and reject racism, misogyny, xenophobia, transphobia, and other forms of discrimination. This has helped increase support for social-justice movements — from Black Lives Matter to the Dreamers — that have gained traction across the nation.

Doubling Down on Support

Today, amid a resurgence of hate speech and violence, the work of transforming our broken systems is more urgent than ever. It is imperative that we maintain the momentum of the last few years, trusting our grantees and rejecting calls for micromanagement as a form of risk management.

It is the nonprofits foundations support that bear the brunt of regressive policies targeting people of color, Native Americans, immigrants, Muslims, blacks, LGBTQ people, women, and their allies. They must have the confidence, security, and long-term flexibility to answer these threats as they emerge.

If ever there was a time for grant makers to be responsive and accountable to these communities, it is now. Far from scaling back our ambitions, we should double down on support for and solidarity with those facing injustice, including marginalized people outside the United States who also face repercussions and uncertainty.

Philanthropic institutions have a special opportunity — and a responsibility — to lead with courage. Foundations should recognize that we are privileged to have a freedom many others do not — and take risks with our investments and structure our giving in creative and unconventional ways. Together, we should use this independence and flexibility to ramp up our support where some organizations may be forced to cut back, particularly in advocacy, organizing, and movement-building, especially the critical work led by girls and women — particularly girls and women of color.

Trickle-Down Doesn't Work

Amid the cacophony of post-election analysis, some have suggested that this type of work is part of a zero-sum game, where a focus, for example, on women of color somehow comes at the cost of work with white working-class women and men.

That's a dangerously incorrect takeaway.

Truly addressing structural inequality requires foundations to help people deal with multiple forms of oppression. And if that work is successful, it helps us all. Focusing explicitly on the wage gap facing black women, as one example, advances structural change that is very likely to raise wages for white women as well as men of color. The reverse is simply not true. Trickle down equality is a myth.

As grant makers committed to social justice and long-term social change, we have a responsibility not only to stick with this work but to proudly champion it to others. Especially now.

No doubt, there will be trying times ahead for foundations and for the communities to whom we are accountable. But we see cause for hope all around us. We draw courage from nonprofits, at Standing Rock and elsewhere, who are mounting a heroic stand against greed, violent bigotry, and injustice and who show us that activism is still the most powerful tool of resistance.

While some of those now ascending to power have threatened to undo the steady progress of the past half-century, the work of decades cannot be wiped away so easily. We are deeply committed to continuing the march forward — away from a culture of domination and exploitation and toward a community based in partnership and love. And we know we're not alone.

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This article is part of:

TRUMP'S FIRST 100 DAYS AND THE STAKES FOR NONPROFITS

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