



THE

EXIT →

INTERVIEW

Perceptions on why Black professionals leave grantmaking institutions

Paper authored and written by LM Strategies on behalf of ABFE

May 2014

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THERE IS NOTHING THAT
POINTS OUT INEQUITY
MORE THAN WORKING IN
PHILANTHROPY.

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Former executive director, A Celebrity Foundation



3 PERCENT OF PHILANTHROPIC INSTITUTIONS ARE LED BY BLACK CHIEF EXECUTIVES.

Introduction

Most would agree that in recent years, the field of philanthropy has begun to take seriously the need to increase diversity within its sector—and particularly among its leadership. Indeed, we are a long way from the days when the founding members of the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE) stood up at a Council on Foundations meeting to advocate for more equitable representation among Council leadership and in grantmaking institutions more generally.¹ In most major foundations today, it is now commonplace not just to track but to require diversity of staff and leadership both within their own organizations and externally among their grantees.

Earlier this year, even the Chronicle of Philanthropy marveled at the progress that American philanthropy has made toward these goals, highlighting the diversity reflected by several major foundations' recent senior hires. "The new executives are very different from the people who held these elite jobs even a decade ago," the Chronicle reported. "They are much more likely to be black, gay, or female and to come from modest backgrounds."²

Yet, emerging data suggest that the experiences of many Black professionals in grantmaking institutions may challenge the current thinking on the field's increasing commitment to diversity. Currently, only 3 percent of philanthropic institutions are led by Black chief executives,³ and the percentage of Black individuals holding trustee positions at philanthropic foundations remains stagnant at 7 percent.⁴ Meanwhile, there have been slight declines in the percentage of Black professional staff (from 10 percent in 2010 to 9 percent in 2012) and Black program officers (from 17 percent in 2010 to 16 percent in 2012) working within grantmaking institutions.⁵

When the D5 Coalition recently declared that "philanthropy is not keeping up with the changing face of America," it could have been talking about these troubling declines.⁶ Indeed, the experiences of many Black professionals in grantmaking institutions may challenge the current thinking on the field's increasing commitment to diversity and its attendant success.

Over the last few years, ABFE and the Black Philanthropic Network—comprising eleven regional affinity groups whose focus is to support philanthropy in Black communities—have increasingly taken note of a disturbing pattern: an uptick in the number of Black philanthropic professionals leaving the sector.

At first, this pattern seemed purely anecdotal. Goodbye emails from Black colleagues with new contact information started popping up more frequently, and news that a key member of the network had taken a job elsewhere began to feel more routine than surprising. Then—as the above statistics suggest—the data began to support the pattern. Not only were Black philanthropic professionals not joining the field in large numbers, but many of those who had joined were leaving the field and heading elsewhere.

This decline in overall representation by Black philanthropic professionals in the sector is disturbing not just because it is happening—but because until now, there has been little data on why it is happening. Why are Black philanthropic professionals leaving the field, and where are they going? Is this trend at its beginning or nearing its end? Most importantly, is there anything that ABFE and its allies can do proactively to address this issue?

EXIT INTERVIEWS OFTEN YIELD VALUABLE INFORMATION THAT CAN HELP AN ORGANIZATION REDUCE TURNOVER.

In the fall of 2013, to answer some of these questions, ABFE partnered with members of the Black Philanthropic Network to develop this Exit Interview Study. This study represents a unique effort to learn more about why Black philanthropic professionals are leaving the field—as well as what their experiences suggest about how to both retain and support those who are currently working within the sector. Specifically, this study aims to inform the grantmaking field overall so that these institutions can: (1) track and better understand the experiences of Black professionals in grantmaking institutions to identify ways to recruit, retain, and maximize talent; and (2) use the data shared in this report to better structure programs and professional development opportunities to meet the needs of Black philanthropic professionals across the country.

This study is patterned after a traditional “exit interview”—a brief conversation conducted with an outgoing employee for the purpose of helping an organization assess its own performance and understand why the employee is seeking opportunities elsewhere. Exit interviews often yield valuable information that can help an organization reduce turnover, increase employee engagement, and improve human resource procedures. Gathering the perspectives of employees after they leave their positions—and thus no longer need the approval of their supervisors—allows them to be more candid about their experiences than they might be otherwise.

By sharing these candid reflections, this report aims to build the field’s collective knowledge of how to attract and retain diverse talent in grantmaking institutions, and how to fully leverage the unique skills and commitment that many Black professionals bring to the sector.

Methodology

In partnership with the Black Philanthropic Network, ABFE engaged LM Strategies Consulting to develop a research protocol that would gather the perspectives and experiences of a wide sample of Black professionals in philanthropy. Along with a review of published materials that tracked employment diversity in philanthropy, the research methodology included a series of focus groups and interviews with present and former Black philanthropic professionals:

One virtual focus group with 11 Black Philanthropic Network (BPN) members

Two in-person focus groups with Black philanthropic professionals in Chicago (seven current and former employees of grantmaking institutions)

One virtual focus group with Black philanthropic professionals in Boston (five former employees of grantmaking institutions and one current director of a regional Black philanthropic affinity group)

Individual phone interviews with current and former Black philanthropic professionals from several regions: the Far West (3); the Mideast/Mid-Atlantic (8); the Great Lakes/Midwest (3); the South (1); and New England (2).

Both the focus groups and individual interviews were designed to uncover the personal experiences of Black professionals in grantmaking institutions and their perceptions on the field overall. Specifically, the conversations—whether in focus groups or individual interviews—were organized around the following questions:

What are the experiences of Black professionals who have recently left the field of philanthropy as these experiences relate to (1) inclusion in their former organizations and (2) advocating on behalf of Black communities?

What are the current employment trends for Black professionals in grantmaking institutions (entering the field, retention, advancement, and leaving the field, etc.)?

THIS REPORT AIMS TO BUILD THE FIELD'S COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN DIVERSE TALENT.

What are the implications of these employment trends for advancing a Black philanthropic agenda?

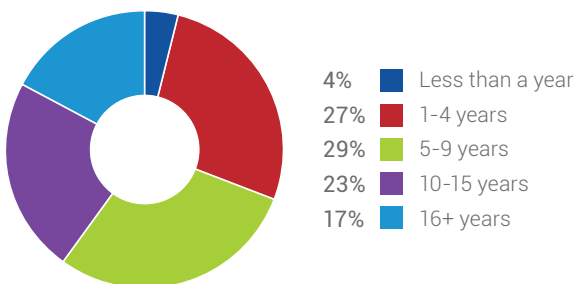
To provide a broader analysis of these questions, LM Strategies Consulting also developed a survey to test perceptions across a larger sample of the Black Philanthropic Network in seven regions. The survey ran from December 9 through December 17, 2013, and was distributed directly through the Black Philanthropic Network affiliates to their respective members and close-in allies. The survey received 215 responses.⁷ However, analysis of the survey results only included the responses of individuals who (1) currently work or previously worked at a grantmaking institution, not including affinity groups, and (2) identified themselves as Black/African American. The number of individuals matching both criteria was 139.

These survey respondents varied widely by job type, tenure in the field, geography, gender, and age. A snapshot of key respondent characteristics follows in Chart 1.

Most respondents had significant experience in grantmaking institutions; very few had been in the field less than one year, and more than two-thirds had five or more years of philanthropy experience.

CHART ONE

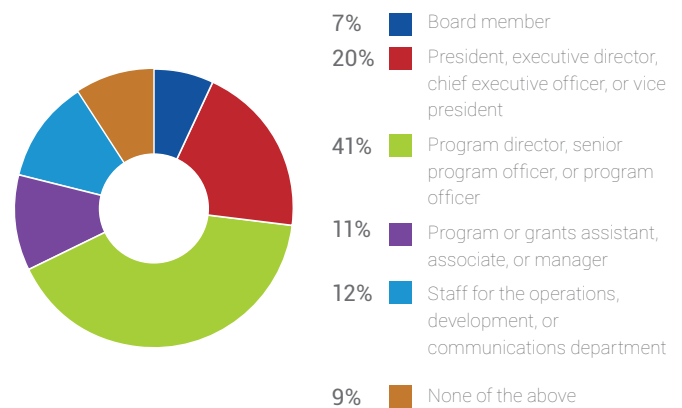
PREVIOUS OR CURRENT TENURE IN A GRANTMAKING INSTITUTION



Nearly two-thirds of respondents have held leadership positions at grantmaking institutions—as a board member, president, executive director, or program director/senior program director (see Chart 2).

CHART TWO

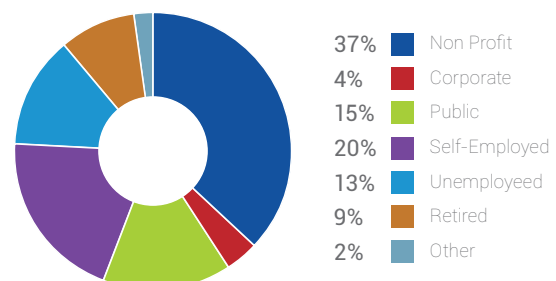
CURRENT OR MOST RECENT ROLE AT A GRANTMAKING INSTITUTION



As shown in Chart 3 below, of those respondents not currently employed by grantmakers, more than half were now employed in the nonprofit or public sectors, and 20 percent were self-employed.

CHART THREE

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT FOR RESPONDENTS NO LONGER AT GRANTMAKING INSTITUTION



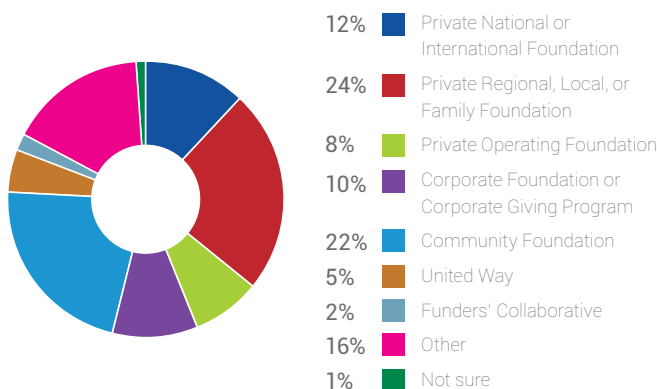
BLACK PHILANTHROPIC PROFESSIONALS DO NOT BELIEVE THEY HAVE REAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL LEADERSHIP ROLES.

Respondents also represented a diversity of regions:⁸

- Mideast/Mid-Atlantic: Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania (28%)
- Great Lakes: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin (30%)
- New England: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont: (30%)
- Far West: Alaska, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington (8%)
- All other regions received less than 1 percent of total responses each
- Those surveyed were currently or previously employed at various types of grantmaking institutions, as shown in Chart 4.

CHART FOUR

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT FOR RESPONDENTS NO LONGER AT GRANTMAKING INSTITUTION



KEY FINDINGS

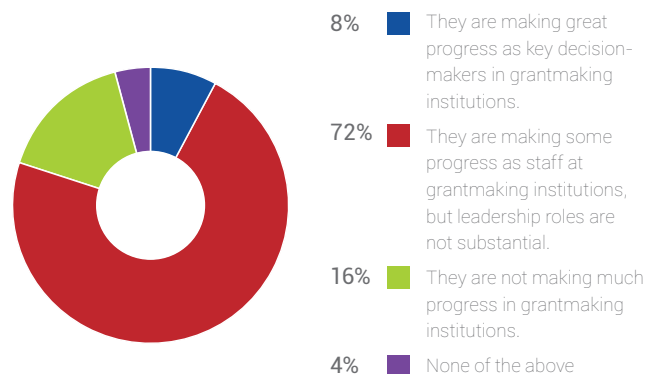
The following are key findings from the Exit Interview Study:

.01 Black philanthropic professionals do not believe they have real opportunities for meaningful leadership roles in the field, although they do see some general progress as staff at grantmaking institutions.

As shown in Chart 5, the majority of survey respondents (72 percent) believe that leadership roles are not substantial for Black professionals at grantmaking institutions. Sixteen percent believe they are “not making much progress” in grantmaking institutions, and just 8 percent believe that Black professionals are making “great progress as key decision-makers.”

CHART FIVE

WHICH STATEMENT BEST CAPTURES YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF CURRENT EMPLOYMENT TRENDS FOR BLACK PHILANTHROPIC PROFESSIONALS?



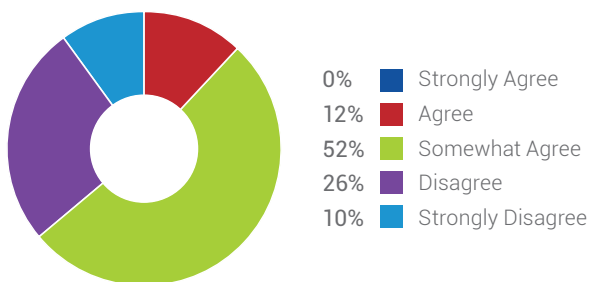
The Exit Interview: Perceptions on Why Black Professionals Leave Grantmaking Institutions

65 PERCENT SAY THEY FOUND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES ELSEWHERE.

However, Chart 6 also shows the majority of respondents (64 percent) believe that the employment landscape has improved for Black philanthropic professionals over the past decade. This finding, viewed alongside the fact that 72 percent feel that leadership roles at grantmaking institutions are not substantial for Black philanthropic professionals and 16 percent feel they are “not making much progress in grantmaking institutions,” both shown in Chart 5 above, suggests varying experiences among professionals in the field.

The difference in perception could be due to differences in workplace cultures from institution to institution or region to region. (See Perceptions on Regional Differences in Philanthropy for further observations.)

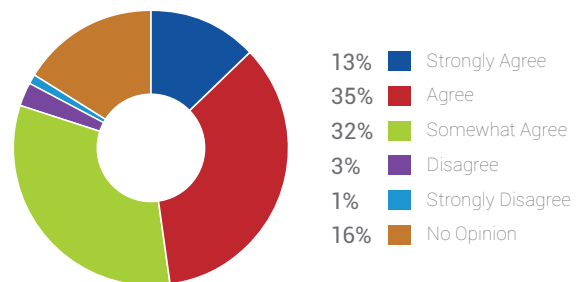
CHART SIX
 IN THE PAST DECADE, EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES HAVE GOTTEN PROGRESSIVELY BETTER FOR BLACK PHILANTHROPIC PROFESSIONALS.



.02 Black philanthropic professionals who leave grantmaking institutions often move into positions where they are more directly engaged in creating community change.

While exiting from a grantmaking institution is often a strategic career move for an individual, the fact that so many Black professionals exit philanthropy suggests that the field is not offering satisfying careers for Black professionals interested in creating community change. Most survey respondents who have left grantmaking jobs, for example, said they left because employment outside of a grantmaking institution provided more opportunities for on-the-ground work (80 percent, shown in Chart 7 below).⁹

CHART SEVEN
 EMPLOYMENT OUTSIDE OF A GRANTMAKING INSTITUTION PROVIDES MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ON-THE-GROUND WORK



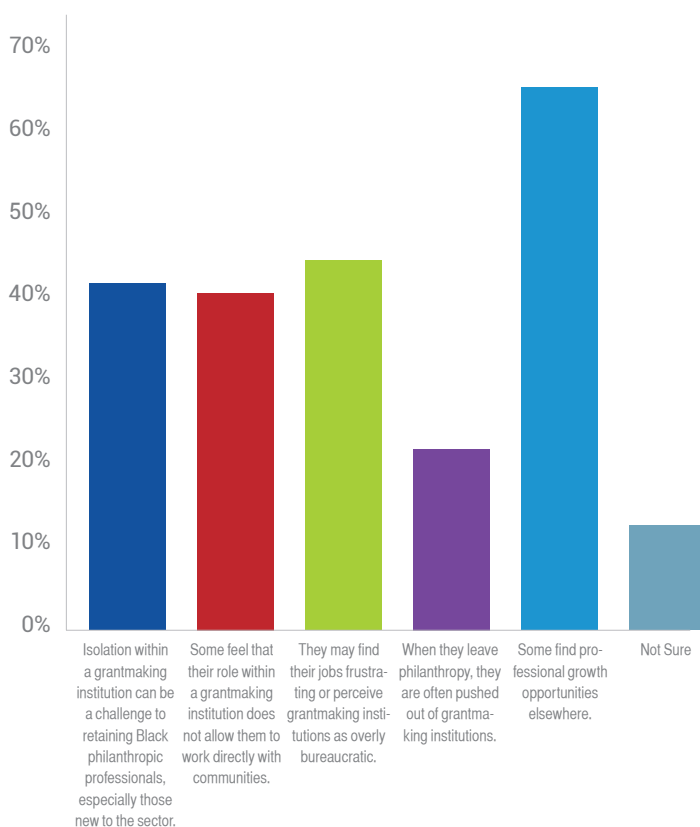
PEOPLE OFTEN LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN TO RETURN TO A GRANTMAKING INSTITUTION IF THE RIGHT OPPORTUNITY ARISES.

In fact, many survey respondents believe that other sectors are simply more appealing to Black philanthropic professionals in search of career opportunities that focus on community change. Forty-one percent say their role within grantmaking institutions does or did not allow them to work directly with communities, and 65 percent say they found professional growth opportunities elsewhere.¹⁰ These responses suggest that when Black philanthropic professionals go to work outside of a grantmaking institution, they have the freedom to work more closely with community groups and more directly on community issues.

Black philanthropic professionals leave their jobs at grantmaking institutions for a variety of other reasons as well, including finding a more transparent career roadmap or more diversity in other sectors. Some feel isolated in their jobs or feel frustrated with what they perceive to be bureaucratic procedures.¹¹ While these responses do not reveal any additional trends, they do suggest that these high-level professionals have good employment opportunities elsewhere—because grantmaking institutions are selecting from among candidates with many career opportunities, because foundation experience creates new professional opportunities, or most likely for a combination of both these reasons.

CHART EIGHT

EMPLOYMENT OUTSIDE OF A GRANTMAKING INSTITUTION PROVIDES MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ON-THE-GROUND WORK



However, anecdotal information from the interviews and focus groups reveals that there is an ebb and flow in and out of philanthropy. Just because a Black philanthropic professional leaves a grantmaking institution does not mean that s/he will never work for another grantmaking institution again. As the featured profiles of former Black grantmakers highlight (see *Stories from the Field: Personal Perspectives from Five Former Black Professionals in Grantmaking Institutions*), people often leave the door open to return to a grantmaking institution if the right opportunity arises. This suggests that Black philanthropic professionals may return to grantmaking with even greater knowledge and experience in creating desired community change.

.03 The current culture of philanthropy is perceived as nudging Black professionals to go elsewhere to find more satisfying careers, and some actually feel pushed out. Black philanthropic professionals do not believe they have real opportunities for meaningful leadership roles in the field, although they do see some general progress as staff at grantmaking institutions.

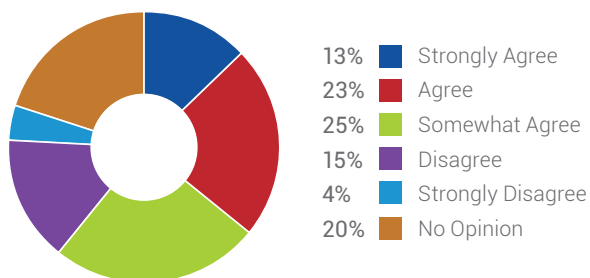
Many leave due to feelings of isolation or frustration with the culture of grantmaking institutions. Many also do not believe their expertise is valued by peers at their place of employment.

BLACK PHILANTHROPIC PROFESSIONALS MAY RETURN TO GRANTMAKING WITH EVEN GREATER KNOWLEDGE.

While the majority of respondents believe that Black professionals are finding professional growth opportunities outside of philanthropy (65 percent, shown in Chart 8), it is notable that a frequent (and often accurate) opinion given during the focus groups was that Black professionals are sometimes pushed out of philanthropy. Survey results concur, with responses to two different questions indicating this opinion. Chart 9 shows that 61 percent of respondents strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree with the statement that former Black philanthropic professionals choose other sectors as career alternatives to philanthropy because “they are pushed out of philanthropy, so other sectors become career alternatives by default.” When asked why Black philanthropic professionals leave grantmaking work, 22 percent of respondents gave being pushed out of philanthropy as the reason for leaving, as shown in Chart 8.

CHART NINE

FORMER BLACK PHILANTHROPIC PROFESSIONALS CHOOSE OTHER SECTORS BECAUSE THEY ARE PUSHED OUT OF GRANTMAKING INSTITUTIONS, SO OTHER SECTORS BECOME CAREER ALTERNATIVES BY DEFAULT



Survey responses also suggest that many are likely leaving their jobs due to some form of dissatisfaction. Forty-five percent of survey respondents indicate that Black philanthropic professionals may leave due to feelings of frustration or because grantmaking institutions are overly bureaucratic; 44 percent said they leave due to feeling isolated; and 41 percent said it was because they feel they are not allowed to work directly with communities.¹²

The following perceptions regarding retention emerged as key headlines across interviews and focus groups. In many cases, the survey results also supported these findings.

Isolation within a grantmaking institution can be a challenge to retaining Black professionals, especially those new to the philanthropic sector. This sense of isolation may be due to politics, a complex organizational culture, lack of diverse staff, and/or a glass ceiling that becomes apparent at an organization's mid-level. As mentioned, 44 percent of survey respondents indicate that isolation is a cause of leaving a foundation job.

Limited professional-track training, pipeline networks, and support systems may challenge efforts to engage and retain qualified Black professionals who have an affinity for a career path in philanthropy. Without prior working knowledge of philanthropy's culture, processes, and dependence on relationships (past and present), Black professionals may find their jobs frustrating or perceive that institutions are not committed to issues disproportionately affecting Black communities.¹³ As mentioned, 45 percent of survey respondents feel that Black philanthropic professionals leave due to feelings of frustration or because grantmaking institutions are overly bureaucratic.

Black philanthropic professionals sometimes feel their expertise is not valued by colleagues during internal grantmaking conversations. Program officers in particular often feel discouraged by how heavily their grant docket is scrutinized. For those who work strategically to include a racial justice or equity lens in their grantmaking, they sometimes feel that they are required to lift up external resources and authorities to make the case for their decision-making—and that the depth and breadth of their own expertise is not trusted.

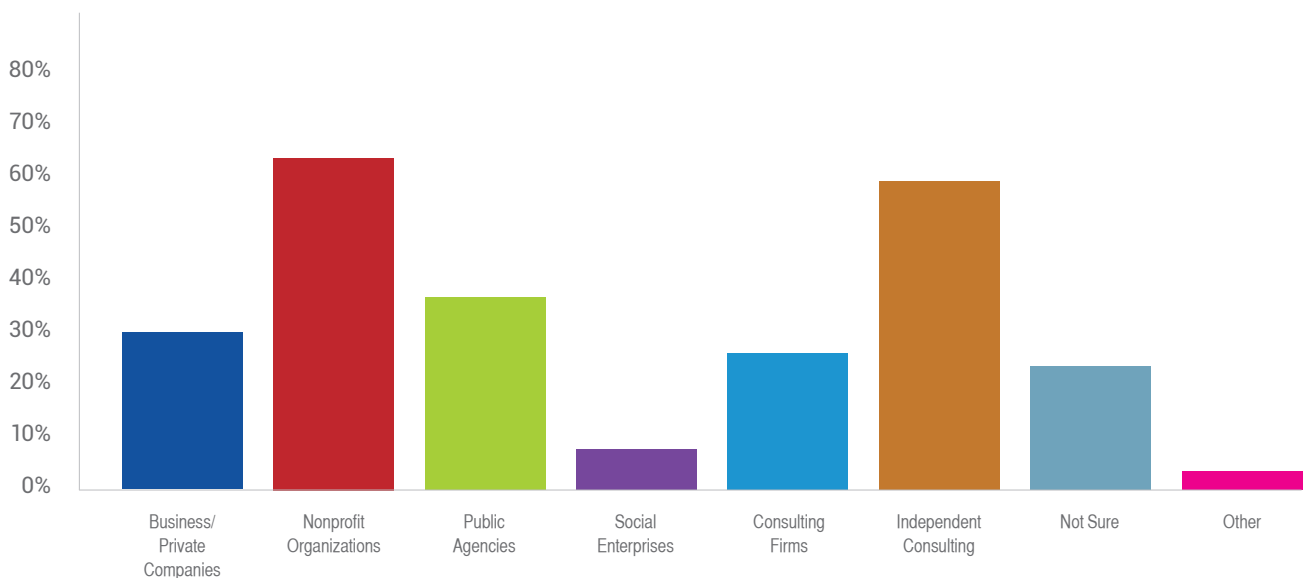
THE NEW EXECUTIVES ARE VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE PEOPLE WHO HELD THESE ELITE JOBS EVEN A DECADE AGO.

.04 Black philanthropic professionals who leave grantmaking institutions often move to nonprofits, the public sector, or consulting.

These professionals, especially younger professionals who may identify more with a mission or cause than with a sector, seek employment where they can work on issues about which they care. Their passion and issue expertise become the main drivers for the next career move—whether they leave a grantmaking institution by choice or are pushed out. Survey responses support this, as shown in Chart 10; nonprofit organizations, consulting, and public agencies are the most commonly indicated landing spots for Black professionals leaving philanthropy.¹⁴

CHART TEN

EMPLOYMENT OUTSIDE OF A GRANTMAKING INSTITUTION PROVIDES MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ON-THE-GROUND WORK



Working within a nonprofit or the government may present a more appealing or rewarding option for Black philanthropic professionals, offering on-the-ground work with people and communities. The same could be the case for consulting around key issue areas, providing opportunities to focus on strategy development and implementation.

.05 Many Black philanthropic professionals in grantmaking institutions are concerned that rather than expanding the number of diverse professionals on staff, foundations may simply be reallocating or opening up their “designated minority” positions to other groups.

Further, several Black philanthropic professionals worry that the field may be experiencing what some have called the “Obama Effect or Backlash.”¹⁵ With a second-term Black president in the White House, Black philanthropic professionals are concerned that they are facing the “you’ve had your turn” mentality. They report that this mentality is not exclusive to philanthropy but evident in other sectors as well.

THERE HAVE BEEN SLIGHT DECLINES IN THE PERCENTAGE OF BLACK PROFESSIONAL STAFF WITHIN GRANTMAKING INSTITUTIONS.

Some Black philanthropic professionals feel that there are only so many positions for people of color within the foundation community, and as other minorities gain well-deserved access, Blacks may be losing ground. While the number of minorities in philanthropy may be the same, the number of Black professionals (both mid-level and in the executive suite) may be on the decline, as suggested both by emerging publications on this topic and by the Black philanthropic professionals interviewed for this report. Many of these professionals want to figure out how to focus attention on Black community issues while simultaneously building bridges and alliances to address issues of mutual interest with other historically marginalized communities.

Further, several interviewees suggested that the recent hire of Black philanthropic leaders to head two major foundations—the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Ford Foundation—may mask the realities of what is happening to other Black professionals at the majority of grantmaking institutions. For example, Black professionals, as already mentioned, are not gaining significant ground in key leadership positions. While these new leadership announcements should be celebrated, the field must continue to pay attention to the larger exit trends.

Perceptions on Regional Differences in Philanthropy: Examples from Four Metro Areas

According to interviewees, the ethos of the region in which Black philanthropic professionals live and work can influence the level and length of their participation in grantmaking—and the way they perceive both their potential and their effectiveness.¹⁴

CHICAGO: Chicago philanthropy is perceived as very closely tied to Chicago politics and the priorities and influence of City Hall. While public/private partnerships, at their best, can speak to “collective impact,”¹⁶ any pushback to City Hall-supported issues (school closings, the Olympics bid, etc.) is seen as challenging the status quo—even when Black community organizations have legitimate concerns about City Hall policies negatively impacting majority Black neighborhoods.

BOSTON: Boston is emerging as a global city, and new hires in grantmaking institutions may reflect that demographic change. Minority groups other than Blacks are rising in prominence in local government and civic activities. This shift may have implications for how recruitment works in philanthropy, with non-Black philanthropic professionals assuming key leadership positions within the sector. In Boston, there are very few senior Black philanthropic professionals, and they are sometimes described as “those who have lasted.”

PITTSBURGH: Philanthropy in Pittsburgh is often characterized by a key feature: collaboration. According to interviewees, one of the best assets of Pittsburgh philanthropy is the willingness on the part of local foundations to work across organizations and share in joint funding opportunities. While the city's foundation community is small, it has a long and robust history; some of America's oldest foundations and philanthropic families established charitable projects in this rust-belt town. Because the foundation community is both small and established, it has the advantage of leveraging a network of grantmakers where staff members know one another and there are cross-institutional ties.

SAN FRANCISCO: Philanthropy in San Francisco is influenced by the spirit of entrepreneurship. The “startup” mentality permeates organizational culture in San Francisco, even in organizations ostensibly far removed from the technology industry. In philanthropy, there is a mix of old money and new money, with much of the latter coming from technology entrepreneurs. These donors influence grantmaking in San Francisco with active involvement and an emphasis on technology, for-profit/free-market principles, metrics, and social enterprise. This approach to philanthropy—especially in communities of color—is sometimes at odds with how Black philanthropic professionals work with communities to define problems, support community-based organizations and “untested” nonprofits, and think about community building over the long term.



Perceptions on Regional Differences in Philanthropy

An analysis of survey responses by region shows some interesting differences in perceptions of Black professionals in philanthropy and their position in the field. Due to statistically small sample sizes, these observations are preliminary at best and may merit further exploration.

Of the Black philanthropic professionals who leave grantmaking institutions, those located in New England, the Southeast, and the Far West are more likely to move to positions in nonprofit organizations. Black philanthropic professionals in the Mideast and Great Lakes regions land in more diverse sectors, but among those surveyed these are weighted toward nonprofits and public agencies.

In the Great Lakes region, the perception that Black professionals in philanthropy are “not making much progress” and “leadership roles are not substantial” is even greater than in other regions.

Compared to other regions, more respondents in the Great Lakes, the Southeast, and the Far West regions believe that the employment landscape for Black philanthropic professionals has not changed over the last 10 years.

When leaving philanthropy, fewer respondents located in the Far West and Southeast become self-employed, compared to other regions.

More respondents located in the Mideast and the Southeast, when compared to their counterparts in other regions, think that employment opportunities for Black philanthropic professionals have become progressively better over the past decade.

More respondents located in the Southwest, Great Lakes, Mideast, and New England regions believe Black philanthropic professionals find growth opportunities outside of grantmaking institutions.

PERSPECTIVES FROM FIVE BLACK FORMER PROFESSIONALS IN GRANTMAKING INSTITUTIONS.



RUTH WILLIAMS

Regional Director – West Coast,
Single Stop USA
(San Francisco, CA)

Ruth Williams has a deep understanding of what works for nonprofits as well as what works

for the grantmakers who fund them. She has spent her career helping nonprofits achieve their goals—as a board member, a city employee, a consultant, and as a former program officer for ZeroDivide, a San Francisco-based technology foundation where she worked for eight years. Her varied experiences as a funder, a nonprofit leader, and a community development professional add insight to all her work.

At ZeroDivide, Williams worked with a wide-ranging clientele, from the Hip Hop Initiative to Travel Digital Village (comprising 20 Southern California Tribal communities) to the Social Enterprise Initiative, helping each nonprofit identify revenue-based programs to diversify funding streams. “There aren’t many jobs that allow for that type of diversity and experience,” she explains.

When ZeroDivide phased out its social enterprise program to focus on e-health, Williams made her own strategic move—one that took her out of philanthropy and into consulting. She took a position as a strategic advisor to the BAE Company for nonprofit and philanthropic clients, helping them grapple with how their policies or practices work in communities and how to execute those policies and practices to the best effect. Most recently, she took a position as Regional Director, West Coast, for Single Stop USA, a national nonprofit that works with community partners to provide screening for, and access to, a wide range of government resources and cost-free legal, financial, and tax preparation expertise.

Williams sees an eventual return to philanthropy. But for now, she is enjoying participating more directly in work on the ground. She feels this is important, because “sometimes senior leaders in philanthropy get so accustomed to philanthropic culture that they risk losing touch with real-world community problems. It is important

to keep perspective.” But Williams makes clear that her future lies not in what she calls “old philanthropy”—which she defines as hands-off charitable giving—but in what she sees as a more adaptable “new” philanthropy, with a focus on impacting three bottom lines: the environment; engaged political work in communities with “active” money; and social enterprise, which is not just about maximizing profit but developing sustainable financial strategies for nonprofits.

To bring more professionals like herself into philanthropy, Williams suggests more flexibility from grantmaking institutions. “People are attracted to careers in philanthropy from their hearts, and talented people will move on quickly if they find other, more fulfilling ways to bring their hearts to work,” she says.



GLEN O'GILVIE

Chief Executive Officer, Center
for Nonprofit Advancement
(Washington, D.C.)

Glen O'Gilvie came to Washington, D.C., in 1997, soon after graduating from college, to work for the

Robert F. Kennedy Memorial's RFK Fellows program. While there, he developed a youth leadership model that placed college students within nonprofit organizations, eventually becoming the program's national coordinator.

The child of West Indian immigrants, O'Gilvie's interest “has always been to get to the highest seat to allow me to have the biggest impact and greatest influence.” Throughout his career, he has focused this ambition on youth development and capacity building for nonprofits.

After his time at the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial, O'Gilvie moved to the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, where he was responsible for growing the organization's youth development grant program and for building the capacity of youth-serving nonprofits throughout the region. He also built the foundation's youth philanthropy program, which teaches youth how to give by forming regional Youth Advisory Councils, offering them

PERSPECTIVES FROM FIVE BLACK FORMER PROFESSIONALS IN GRANTMAKING INSTITUTIONS.

grantmaking training and an annual giving budget, and allowing them to make grant awards.

When he was selected for the position, O’Gilvie had no prior grantmaking experience. “But the focus on youth development warranted someone with a deep understanding and ability to manage young people,” he explains. “I learned grantmaking through one-on-one training with my supervisor, conference attendance, and reviewing prior year materials.”

O’Gilvie stayed at the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region for two years before moving on to lead the Earth Conservation Corps, which engages unemployed youth in D.C. in restoring the Anacostia River. While he hadn’t planned on leaving philanthropy, he explains, “as I thought about it, the position began to speak to me.” As a grantmaker, O’Gilvie had often told practitioners what they had to do with their programming to receive funding. Now, he wanted to be sure he was capable of working the direct service side. “Being young, ambitious, and enthusiastic, I decided to apply.”

Like many longstanding and successful nonprofits, the Earth Conservation Corps needed some redirection and capacity building of its own. Never daunted by a challenge, O’Gilvie spent the next three years working 12-hour to 16-hour days putting new systems in place, redesigning the program model, and ensuring long-term funding. “It was one of the most challenging endeavors I had ever encountered in my life,” he admits. “Being at a front-line, direct service organization is nothing like philanthropy.”

Today, as CEO of the Center for Nonprofit Advancement, O’Gilvie has found a place to create the big impact he seeks, applying his expertise to building the capacity of roughly 800 member nonprofit organizations. “While my work in philanthropy helped prepare me for this role, my term as president and CEO of the Earth Conservation Corps made my success in this role possible,” he says. “It provided the hands on experience necessary to relate to and advocate for our member executive directors and others.”

But he also believes that his work in philanthropy launched him into the leadership positions he has since held—and he can see a return to the sector in his future. “I see

myself returning to philanthropy at some point, perhaps corporate philanthropy,” O’Gilvie says. “I believe my diverse experience has prepared me with the insight and relationships to make the wisest investment decisions for the greatest impact.”



JULIUS E. RAINEY, JR.

Technology Director and Project Manager, Parents for Public Schools (Jackson, MS)

Julius E. Rainey, Jr., developed a passion for social justice while serving as an intern at the Foundation for the Mid South—a community foundation for Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi—during his first summer after college. “I was introduced to a whole new world—of philanthropy, foundations, and nonprofits,” he says. “I loved the work.” Rainey had completed a degree in computer science with the expectation of working in corporate America, but took the internship, offered to him through the Southern Education Foundation, to gain work experience. When the summer was over, the Foundation offered him a full-time job. “My entry into philanthropy was not intentional,” he says. “But as a recent college graduate trying to decide what to do next, it was a great opportunity to continue work I had already come to appreciate.”

During his four years at the Foundation for the Mid South, Rainey worked with two programs: the Raised Up Right Fund, which connected southern expatriates living in Chicago to philanthropic opportunities back home; and the African American Philanthropy Fund, which made small but important grants to a wide variety of Black service organizations across the three states the foundation serves. “We were able to support important work in high poverty areas,” he says. “The only frustrating thing about it was there wasn’t enough money to go around. We had so many worthy proposals and we couldn’t fund them all.”

While he enjoyed and valued his work in philanthropy, Rainey left because he wanted to integrate his two passions—technology and social justice—into one job. He found the perfect position as Information Technology

PERSPECTIVES FROM FIVE BLACK FORMER PROFESSIONALS IN GRANTMAKING INSTITUTIONS.

Director and Project Manager for Parents for Public Schools (PPS), a Jackson, Mississippi-based organization that strengthens public schools by engaging, educating, and mobilizing parents. At PPS, he helps parents better understand their children's education and outcomes so they can become better decision-makers and influencers in the realm of public education. He is also responsible for helping the organization's many chapters develop and implement strategies for using technology to understand and change public school issues in their communities.

Rainey is open to returning to philanthropy, but his focus would be corporate philanthropy, because he considers it a wealthier environment. "Corporations have so many resources," he explains, in contrast to his previous experience at a smaller foundation where he had to raise money to give grants. "After experiencing the fundraising side of grantmaking and not having as much money to share as the community needs, I would like to work for a grantmaker with more independent resources."

To retain talented program staff in philanthropy, Julius suggests senior staff "help more junior grantmakers to identify their personal passions and develop ways to blend those into their jobs." He also thinks that philanthropy could learn valuable lessons from corporate incubators and accelerators, using these approaches to create new opportunities for grantmaking and programmatic initiatives.



ANGELA RUDOLPH

President, Think. Plan. Do.
Consulting
(Chicago, IL)

Throughout her early career in policy and advocacy, Angela Rudolph noticed that most of her work had been supported by philanthropic investments. Ready to broaden her experience and curious about funders' decision-making processes, she joined the Joyce Foundation as a program officer. While at the foundation, Rudolph managed an education portfolio, supporting charter schools, early childhood education, and education

reform. She brought years of experience in education (as a teacher and policy advisor) and in criminal justice policy (as a member of former Chicago Mayor Daley's staff) to the job.

While she learned a great deal about philanthropy and its role in developing, supporting, and directing policy work during her four years at the Joyce Foundation, the job "ultimately was not enough to sustain my interest and passion," Rudolph says. "I really missed being more directly involved in public policy work." So Rudolph left her position to "pursue work that allowed me to have more hands on involvement in the field."

As Rudolph points out, sometimes leaving a grantmaking institution has little to do with the institution itself and more to do with the individual and what drives her. "Sometimes [your] passion calls you back and pushes you to re-engage on the ground," she observes. In short, what often attracts someone to a foundation—policy knowledge, work in communities, credibility among stakeholders—can ultimately pull them away toward other career paths.

Rudolph formed her own consulting firm, Think. Plan. Do. (T.P.D.), where she now focuses on the intersection of her two policy passions, education and justice. "It is rare to find opportunities to work on both areas, and through T.P.D. I can maintain a portfolio of clients who are not only doing work I feel passionate about, but can benefit from my experience in the public policy, political, and philanthropic arenas," she explains. Rudolph now works with a wide variety of nonprofit, political, and governmental entities, providing them with support in strategic planning, fundraising, policy analysis, and program management.

Rudolph sees a future in helping to elevate the voice and engagement of Blacks in the policy and advocacy sectors. "The vast majority of what happens in the Illinois legislature does not involve African Americans in deciding what happens in our communities, specific to our struggles," she says. She would like to help change this, as a leader at a nonprofit or possibly even as an elected official. "I want to stay on the front lines doing the work that excites me. I am a policy and advocacy nerd. I feel like this is what I am supposed to do."

PERSPECTIVES FROM FIVE BLACK FORMER PROFESSIONALS IN GRANTMAKING INSTITUTIONS.

Rudolph doubts that she will return to grantmaking, though she won't rule it out. She sees a bright future for funding policy and advocacy through the new 501(c)(4) organizations and PACs, and is eager to see foundations remain current with and invest in these innovative organizational structures. For foundations to maintain the interest of young people who see themselves as change agents, she observes, they need to keep up with how the field is changing.



MARCUS LITTLES

Founder and Senior Partner,
Frontline Solutions
(Brooklyn, NY)

After Marcus Littles met his term limit as a program associate at the Ford Foundation, he thought seriously about his next move. He had already spent time in government at the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

While he enjoyed his experience at the Ford Foundation, especially under the tutelage of his mentor Linetta Gilbert, he did not feel quite ready for another job as a grantmaker. "I had offers from other foundations, but I passed on them," he admits. "I wanted to beef up my experience in engaging communities, framing problems, and crafting solutions before pursuing other opportunities to steward resources in communities."

After working for a year for the TCC Group—an organization that develops strategies and programs that enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of nonprofit organizations, philanthropies, and corporate citizenship programs to achieve social impact—and then freelancing for a year, Littles started Frontline Solutions, a national consulting firm with a mission to support positive change in local communities. "I am interested in connecting institutions and individuals to opportunities that strengthen their positive impact and leadership capacities, particularly in Black communities," Littles explains.

During his tenure in philanthropy, Littles often heard that there simply were not enough backbone organizations led by or comprising people of color that had the capacity to provide the depth of services foundations needed. But he didn't believe it. "When I left philanthropy, I wanted to combat that narrative—it is totally off," he says. "At Frontline Solutions, we are 15 employees and 13 of us are people of color. We are PhDs, activists, researchers, scholars, and practitioners who bring all the skills these foundations said they could never find."

Littles believes that philanthropic investments should be informed by practitioner work on the ground. An important focus of Frontline Solutions is to bring this perspective to its philanthropy clients, which include the Executives' Alliance to Expand Opportunities for Boys and Men of Color, Marguerite Casey Foundation, and Grantmakers for Children, Youth, and Families, among others.

While Frontline Solutions has a long client list of grantmakers and funders' networks, the firm also works with public agencies, nonprofits, and higher education institutions. Its services include strategy, assessment, and project management support. Frontline also applies a critical understanding of race, place, and gender to all of its work.

Although Littles can see himself going back to a foundation if the right opportunity arises, his perspectives on philanthropy have shifted since he left the field. "Philanthropy has to be the venue to work in your field of interest, rather than wholly be the field of interest itself," he says. "It is not compelling enough unless it is connected to the issues or change we are trying to create."

The Black Philanthropic Network

The Black Philanthropic Network can play a unique role in both building awareness around the challenges facing Black philanthropic professionals in grantmaking institutions and providing professional development supports and technical assistance to help retain Black talent. The following interventions are recommended, especially if implemented at the regional level:

Make sure that Black philanthropic professionals are networked to ABFE and regional BPN affiliates as soon as they are hired. Human resource professionals should include up-to-date ABFE and BPN information in new employees' welcome packages. Given the relatively small universe of Black philanthropic professionals in grantmaking institutions, each new hire should also receive a personal welcome or "touch point" from a Black grantmaker in the field. Human resource professionals should also be encouraged to provide membership for each new hire for a one-year minimum (without that membership fee going against the new hire's annual professional development budget).

Do not wait until your signature annual event to have a new hire—that is, a Black professional who is new to a foundation—experience in-person or virtual programming. The conventional belief is that by 90 days, an employee feels settled (or not) in a new job. Black philanthropic professionals who are new to a grantmaking institution should receive adequate networking opportunities during that time; these opportunities can be by phone, webinar, or email. Even if an individual feels that s/he does not need the help, it is important that they have access to these kinds of supports.

Create a minimum of four networking opportunities per year for Black philanthropic professionals. If possible, at least one of these should be in person. While in today's world, people often do not have to see one another regularly to feel networked, trust building and mentoring opportunities often start in person. The programming of regional networks, such as BPN affiliates, is critical here, especially if grantmaking institutions do not support frequent travel.

Identify the most cost-effective, transferrable features of leading diversity and pipeline programs, and provide similar (if barebones) programs for Black philanthropic professionals at the local and regional levels. ABFE and BPN affiliates need to figure out how to make similar programs work on a smaller scale and with a broader reach.

View Black philanthropic professionals who were formerly in grantmaking institutions as a brain trust possessing a wealth of knowledge and talent—and as close-in allies who can help to advance community change. As philanthropy evolves and takes on new forms, conventional boundaries between the private, public, and nonprofit sectors are breaking down and new kinds of cross-sector partnerships are taking form. Even without an encore in philanthropy, Black professionals' deep knowledge and commitment to community issues can be leveraged in other ways.



TRAINING SHOULD FOCUS ON HELPING THEM BUILD THEIR LEADERSHIP CAPACITY AND ARTICULATE THEIR LONG-TERM GOALS.

Recommendations

The findings discussed above suggest several opportunities to improve career pathways for Black philanthropic professionals in grantmaking institutions and to ensure their perspectives are brought to grantmaking decisions. Recommendations are as follows:

Organizational Leadership

Board members (and donors, in the case of community or operating foundations) need to become involved in understanding and addressing the issues driving Black professionals to leave philanthropy or participate in a “revolving door” cycle. As key decision-makers, board members have the power to affect organizational culture, track issues, and help organizations identify ways to better support Black philanthropic professionals in their institutions.

Executive team leadership is critical to helping retain Black philanthropic professionals. The culture of a grantmaking institution is defined not only by the board but by the executive team. If an organization is seeing high turnover and attrition among the Black philanthropic professionals it employs, then its executive leadership team should make it a goal to seek out and implement solutions to these issues.

An organization’s board members, executive team, and staff need appropriate training to help them understand potential roadblocks to maintaining staff diversity and work within their institutions to promote a culture that values the unique and diverse skill sets of employees. Sometimes, given the day-to-day grind of grantmaking, philanthropic leaders are simply unaware of intercultural dynamics, unintentional biases, and how those realities impact organizational culture and career pathways. Awareness and action need to be built into the way an organization operates.

Accountability

Human resource staff should be encouraged to support an exit interview process that seeks to understand why Black philanthropic professionals are leaving grantmaking institutions. Doing so will allow them to incorporate lessons learned into future trainings, professional development programs, and staff meetings. These lessons learned should also be reviewed and analyzed by leadership at the executive and board levels to ensure that every level of the organization understands the key issues.

The collection of data on Black employment trends in grantmaking institutions is critical and should be longitudinal. Not only should the data be collected, but it should be used to engage the sector, both locally and nationally, to develop ways to recruit, retain, and empower Black professionals in philanthropy.

Professional Growth and Career Pathways

Organizations should pay particular attention to professional development for aspiring or second-career Black professionals who may have limited experience in the philanthropic sector. Also, major grantmaking institutions should strategize regarding how they plan to develop a pipeline for these professionals, especially since philanthropic leaders may come from non-grantmaking backgrounds.

New Black philanthropic professionals need training on how to navigate philanthropy, as well as mentoring and coaching to inform how they approach the grantmaking craft. The training should focus on helping them build their leadership capacity and articulate their long-term career goals. Although there are several notable programs in place that could help with these tasks, access to them is often limited due to time and resource constraints. The field needs to think about ways to make these programs more cost-effective and far-reaching.

GRANTMAKING INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT INCLUDING BLACK-LED SEARCH FIRMS FOR MAJOR OPENINGS.

Executive searches for positions in grantmaking institutions need to include more qualified Black candidates, and Black candidates need better exposure to mainstream executive search firms. In addition, grantmaking institutions should be intentional about including Black-led search firms as vendors for major openings. If Black professionals are indeed moving in and out of philanthropy, then firms should be aware of these candidates and their diverse work experiences when opportunities arise.

Network Building

National and regional associations of grantmakers—whether identity based, issue focused, or mainstream—can play an important role in supporting the retention of Black philanthropic professionals. In addition to collecting and sharing data, grantmaking institutions need technical assistance on ways to mitigate internal issues that challenge efforts to retain Black philanthropic professionals. Also, some type of anchor group should support pipeline and networking opportunities for Black professionals with an interest in philanthropy or philanthropy-related issues, so that they become part of a support network that helps build their skills, relationships, and visibility over time.

Regional affinity groups are well positioned to keep track of Black professionals who leave philanthropy. Taking this responsibility on is not just about data analysis. It is about helping Black professionals who have left philanthropy stay connected to grantmaking institutions and thus connected to potential opportunities for future stewardship of philanthropic resources. Keeping former Black grantmakers involved as associate members, guests, and close-in allies can help the field leverage their talents and diverse skill sets. It can also nurture relationships across multiple sectors tackling community challenges.

Conclusion

The information gleaned through this Exit Interview Study is disconcerting, but not suggestive of issues that cannot be addressed through strategic intervention. While some might argue that the experiences of Black professionals in philanthropy are not very different from people of other races and ethnicities, attention needs to be given to how philanthropy truly taps the talents and commitments of Black professionals dedicated to community change. Without their presence, there is greater potential for Black communities to be underserved by the sector.

If Black professionals who enter philanthropy are driven by a mission to serve, how do we get them to stay—or even return? This question is especially relevant given the perception that most Black professionals who leave philanthropy are in no better position to influence the distribution of resources to Black communities. If this is so, then how do we get them to stay put, become effective leaders and key influencers, and grow to truly influence how philanthropic dollars are targeted? As is the case with most issues of diversity, adequate attention must be given to these questions, and a commitment must be made to finding solutions that are both intentional and thoughtful. By changing the face of philanthropy, we overcome an important hurdle on the way to changing how philanthropy goes about doing its work.

THE CURRENT CULTURE OF PHILANTHROPY IS PERCEIVED AS NUDGING BLACK PROFESSIONALS TO GO ELSEWHERE.

Endnotes

1. Those eight professionals became the founding members of ABFE, launching an affinity group movement that now includes 34 groups affiliated with the Council.

2. Donovan, Doug. "New Breed of CEOs Is Poised to Reshape Philanthropy in 2014," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, January 13, 2014.

3. In "The Possible Philanthropic Response to Trayvon Martin," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, August 19, 2013, Rick Cohen presents data from a self-report from 900 foundations. See original source data at: Council on Foundations, 2012 Grantmakers Salary and Benefits Report, Table 2.8; Council on Foundations, 2010 Grantmakers Salary and Benefits Report, Table 2.10.

4. See D5 Coalition, *State of the Work 2013: Inspirations & Ideas for Advancing Diversity, Equity & Inclusion*, p. 7, retrieved 20 January 2014, http://www.d5coalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/D5_State_of_the_Work_2013.pdf.

5. See endnote 3, above.

6. See D5 Coalition, *State of the Work 2013: Inspirations & Ideas for Advancing Diversity, Equity & Inclusion*, p. 7.

7. Since survey links were emailed directly from the Black Philanthropic Network affiliates, LM Strategies Consulting did not have a definitive count of the number of people who received surveys and the membership category of each person. Correspondence with BPN affiliates revealed the following regarding who received the survey: New England Blacks in Philanthropy – 92 people; Black Philanthropic Alliance (D.C.) – 1,015 people; New York Blacks in Philanthropy – 158 people; Bay Area Blacks in Philanthropy (CA) – 52 people; and Chicago African Americans in Philanthropy – 104 people.

8. This survey was sent through affiliates and did not necessarily reach and receive responses from all regions equally.

9. This survey question allowed respondents to express whether or not they agree with four statements in response to the question, "Why do former Black philanthropic professionals choose other sectors as career alternatives to philanthropy?" Therefore this response does not exclude other reasons for leaving grantmaking institutions.

10. This survey question allowed respondents to mark as many responses as apply, so these responses are not mutually exclusive and do not total 100 percent.

11. These reasons were identified in interviews and focus groups and confirmed through survey responses.

12. Respondents were asked to provide their top three choices, thus the total does not add up to 100 percent.

13. This analysis is gleaned from a review of focus group findings.

14. In this survey question, respondents were asked to identify the top three reasons they or their peers leave philanthropy; therefore responses will total more than 100 percent. The question was designed to get a broader picture than would be possible by just asking these particular respondents why they left philanthropy themselves. Also note that often there are multiple reasons for any career change.

15. These terms were used frequently enough in the focus groups to merit mention here.

16. Defined here: <http://www.fsg.org/OurApproach/WhatsCollectiveImpact.aspx>, retrieved 15 April 2014.



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