

CENTERING OURSELVES

The first in a series of reports about the leadership impact
of Black women working in the philanthropic sector.

COMMISSIONED BY

Toya Nash Randall, Curator & Catalyst



VOICE. VISION. VALUE.

Black women leading philanthropy



PRODUCED IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH
FRONTLINE SOLUTIONS

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About Voice. Vision. Value.

VOICE. VISION. VALUE. Black Women Leading Philanthropy is a multimedia narrative platform created to elevate, celebrate, and document the historic leadership impact of Black women in professional philanthropy. It honors the trailblazers that paved the way for the historic representation of Black women as the largest BIPOC community across the talent pipeline of professionals in the philanthropic sector today.

Launched in August 2020, **Voice. Vision. Value.** is committed to:

- ▶ Honoring the legacy of Black women who transformed professional philanthropy to address issues of social justice, gender justice, racial equity, and anti-Black racism.
- ▶ Commissioning and disseminating research that documents the leadership contribution and impact of strategic efforts developed and led by Black women.
- ▶ Developing customized tools and curricula that center the personal and professional opportunities and barriers unique to Black women working across the sector.
- ▶ Curating experiences that strengthen opportunity pathways for professional advancement; provide holistic leadership development; prioritize personal health and well-being; and facilitate strategic network building.

“There is a deep leadership legacy of Black women in the field of professional philanthropy. Voice. Vision. Value. honors this legacy and is committed to elevating the brilliance and beauty of our authentic stories and experiences.”

Toya Nash Randall

CURATOR AND CATALYST
VOICE. VISION. VALUE.
BLACK WOMEN LEADING PHILANTHROPY

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all of the incomparable Black women who extended their time, wisdom, and participation to this project. We honor your collective genius, which is integral to building strategies to enhance our communities and to push the philanthropic sector to live into their values.

Thank you for the way you lead, the lives you live, the gifts you give, and the dreams you dream.

I would also like to extend a special thanks to Linetta Gilbert and Bettina Umstead for your collaboration and thought leadership throughout the data collection phase. Your contributions were instrumental in elevating the brilliance of these stories.

—**JESSICA BARRON, PhD**
Lead Researcher, Centering Ourselves
Senior Consultant, Frontline Solutions



VOICE. VISION. VALUE.

Black women leading philanthropy

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Centering Ourselves is dedicated to the hundreds of Black women who paved the way for the historic representation of leadership present in the philanthropic sector today.

These are some of the foremothers who have retired, no longer work at a philanthropic institution or have transitioned to other careers.

JOYCE ADGER

KAREN KELLEY ARIWOOLA

ANGELA GLOVER BLACKWELL

JACQUELINE BOUVIER COPELAND

GLORIA PRIMM BROWN

JACQUI BURTON

GAIL CHRISTOPHER

CARROLLE PERRY DEVONISH

AMINA DICKERSON

TERRI FREEMAN

VALAIDA FULLWOOD

LINETTA GILBERT

RUTH GOINS

CAROL GOSS

SUSAN HAIRSTON

SYBIL JORDAN HAMPTON

MARVA HAMMONS

DEBORAH HARRINGTON

ERICA HUNT

NIKE IRVIN

FRAN JEMMOTT

ANNA FAITH JONES

REATHA CLARK KING

VALERIA LEE

RUTH MASSINGA

ROSE MAYS

HARRIET MICHEL

WENDA WEEKES MOORE

SUSAN MOTLEY

WENDY PURIEFOY

ALVERTHA PENNY

AURIE PENNICK

CONSTANCE RICE

GWEN RICE

SHEILA ROBINSON

HARRIET SANFORD

ISABEL CARTER STEWART

GLADYS WASHINGTON

PAT WHITE

CLEO WILSON

DIANA WILSON

KAY WILSON

Beloved sisters who are no longer with us.

ALLISON BROWN

CHARMAINE CHAPMAN

JEAN FAIRFAX

DEBORAH HOLMES

LYNNE WALKER HUNTLEY

SHARON KING

LESLIE LOWE

GLORIA R. SMITH

MARTA WHITE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“It seems simple and revolutionary.
A moment to pause and celebrate Black women.”*

Voice. Vision. Value. Black Women Leading Philanthropy seeks to celebrate the breadth and depth of the impact of Black women’s leadership in philanthropy through the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial reckoning of 2020. Voice. Vision. Value. enlisted the assistance of Frontline Solutions to elevate the stories and leadership perspectives of Black women in the sector and address practical tactics to support and sustain the leadership of Black women in the future. This report outlines the wisdom and effectiveness of doing things differently. We show the readiness, fortitude, sacrifice, and humanity of these women who stepped up in the most challenging times of our current history and are currently reshaping the field.

METHODS

We conducted a landscape review of gray literature coupled with 37 interviews with Black women leaders who hold a director position, occupy the C-Suite, and/or are board and trustee members. Our sample was diverse across age, tenure in their position, and tenure in the field. The size, location, and type of foundation varied as well. This is the most robust and diverse interview sample to date. We gathered data from August 2020 to January 2021.

KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Leadership Agility:** Black women are responding to a very specific and historical moment in time flanked by COVID, BLM movement, 2020 Election, and the Insurrection of January 6, 2021. This timeframe put on display decades of innovation and fortitude of Black women leaders that continues to shape the way the field responds to our current reality and the future. Black women will continue to transform the sector and foundation leadership would do best to clear the path.
- ▶ **Personal Sustainability:** This moment gave Black women time to do a wellness check. It was a time to interrogate their own practices of self-sustainability and wellness. Black women addressed ways to decolonize their own leadership by engaging in intergenerational conversations to discuss issues such as class, colorism, professionalism, and liberation. Like the broader field, Black women took the time to look inward in an effort to become more equitable and inclusive toward the next generation of Black women coming behind them.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ **Power Analysis:** Black women view philanthropy as best positioned for risk and transformation because of the field's proximity to power. This unique power analysis informs a solution-based framework that is inextricably linked to Black women's leadership style. The ways in which Black women pursue power-building in their leadership strategies and practices challenges the discourse around the ways we define leadership and organizational success. Their power analysis also informs workarounds for the consistent retrenchment of the sector.
- ▶ **Networks of Leadership:** Black women's leadership is communal and collaborative. Black women describe their networks as a "kitchen cabinet" (e.g., grantees, community folks, other Black women leaders, etc.) as a nod to the broad ways Black women approach support. Networks work to support the professional efforts of these women as well as sustain leadership pathways for Black women moving through the sector. Further research should address the ways in which Black women are leveraging networks for transformational impact rather than individual-level transactions.
- ▶ **Architects of Innovative Strategies:** Black women leverage a structural analysis to move the sector from a charity mindset to compensation for oppressive harm. Black women use their "long memories" to retool their experiences from Katrina and develop long-term solutions to move capital to Black businesses. Internally, Black women invest in off-loading the education of their white peers to advocate for fast-tracking board readiness to support Black women as leaders. Black operations directors utilize their positions to build and sustain internal equity efforts.

IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES

Pay Black Women –

Compensate Black women for their work and their time. Pay should be equitable in amount and process. Negotiations should no longer be a multiyear battle ground.

Get Ready for Black Women -

Invest in targeted, strategic, and sustained pathways to elevate Black women into leadership positions throughout their career. Prepare boards, leadership, and staff to have Black women in leadership positions through formalized education. Consider developing a separate curriculum to fast-track board readiness. Every organization should have a wellness strategy to sustain their Black women leaders.

Celebrate Black Women -

The practice of publicly celebrating a Black woman not only legitimizes her leadership but also raises her profile, leading to career advancement and competitive compensation. We need to develop platforms to address the broad and distinctive handprint Black women continue to have on the sector, rather than tokenize a few.

Research Black Women -

We should all become students of Black women's leadership. Black women challenge us to reframe traditional ideas of philanthropic leadership, readiness, and ambition. We would do better to dedicate more resources to develop a research agenda dedicated to the strategies, frameworks, and practices of Black women in this field.



BACKGROUND



Greater New Orleans Funder's Network -
photo by Danielle Miles

“COVID allowed the generational genius of Black women to be put on display.”

One of the unique opportunities of this research was to examine the leadership impact of Black women during a national crisis and global pandemic. We were able to capture, in real time, the strategy and insights that have proven necessary to move forward the field, communities, and society writ large. It was important for us to capture this moment in time as a unique contribution to the work that precedes Voice. Vision. Value. Our inquiries and findings capture a response to this very specific moment, yet are situated in a broader context of studies focused on the leadership of Black women.

A scan of previous work shows that this research is one of the most robust studies examining Black women's experiences as executive and director-level leaders within philanthropic organizations. There is a dearth of studies dedicated to the experiences, strategies, and pathways of Black women leaders in philanthropy. Most studies focus on BIPOC women broadly, recruitment strategies, or the leadership experiences of Black women abroad. Only a few have examined the experiences of Black women holding leadership positions in philanthropy, and these focused on only a handful of participants.

Our research builds on those studies by offering a more comprehensive review of Black women's leadership, including a larger interview sample and a

more expansive discussion of issues beyond hiring and retention, as well as consideration of our current historical moment—specifically COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement.

PATHWAYS TO THE PRESENT

Before diving into a discussion about the present moment, it is important to look back at how our respondents came to philanthropy. Black women's leadership ambitions are often driven by their visions for equity and justice, for their communities and for the field overall, which often run counter to current narratives of leadership readiness and skill.

In general, Black women have not come to philanthropy through recruitment or deep knowledge of the field. They had few, if any, resources, pathways, preparation, or support as they took on their positions. Only a handful of our interviewees discussed moving up in the ranks at their current foundation, transitioning from board/trustee to executive leadership, or being recruited directly from headhunters. Many of the women interviewed happened upon philanthropy after careers in other fields. The frequency with which they named certain other fields may suggest opportunities for targeted recruitment efforts and development of pathways to recruit more Black women to leadership positions across philanthropy.



BACKGROUND



Greater New Orleans Funder's Network -
photo by Danielle Miles

- Health** ▶ Social Services
- Government** ▶ Research & Evaluation
- Federal Programs** ▶ Graduate School
- Public Service** ▶ Education
- Law** ▶ Civil Rights Advocacy
- Criminal Justice** ▶ Political Organizing/
Grassroots Advocacy
- Political Science** ▶ Former Grantee
- Policy** ▶ Former Board Member

The majority of women we interviewed were not sought out by recruiters. Rather, they created their own pathways through relationships and networks with other women and/or with grassroots organizers. Black women have mobilized to get other Black women in the door, get them promoted, or to keep them from leaving.

As we track the current contribution of Black women in this historic moment, it is important to understand that the pathways, infrastructure, or commitment needed to recruit and retain Black women are underdeveloped. Black women are a vital component of the sector, and we can do better to develop sustained pathways to cultivate their leadership.

“After about 4 years in the trenches, I stepped into a new position that was centered on race and racism because the foundation was struggling to address these issues. I got the position because Black program officers organized and advocated for me. They got me in the door and really went to war for me. I got that position solely because of the Black women who organized in my favor.”



RESEARCH DESIGN

Landscape Review – We reviewed previous journal articles, case studies, research reports, and op-eds that focused on the experiences, strategies, and pathways of Black women leaders in philanthropy. (For further discussion, please see [APPENDIX A](#).)

Interviews – We conducted 37 interviews with members of a multi-generational set of Black women leaders, past and present. At the time of the interviews, these women held positions that were director-level or higher, sat on boards, and/or held trustee positions. Our respondents ranged from 32 to 68 years of age. They varied in their tenure in their current position and in years of experience in philanthropy overall. However, our respondents had rarely been in a C-suite position for more than 7 years.

We developed interview protocols in a narrative format to allow optimal opportunity for interviewees to share experiences and insights.

INTERVIEW LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand what factors Black women consider when deciding to participate in philanthropy.
2. Explore the ways Black women are leading and leaning into equity at this moment (specifically with regard to COVID-19 and racial reckoning).
3. Discuss the recommendations Black women would give the philanthropic sector to make it more inclusive, equitable, and just.

Demographic Organizational Overview – The demographic cohort of organizations was diverse; however, we did not have a representative sample of foundations writ large. The foundations varied in the following categories:

- ▶ **Place** – There is at least one foundation represented in each of the 6 census regions. These organizations were a mix of regional and national organizations. They were also situated in different political regions of the country that shaped the ways women were able to enact their strategies with different privileges and constraints.
- ▶ **Type** – Interviews represented nearly every foundation type: family, community, corporate, religiously affiliated, and private. These organizations ranged in their ideological and fiscal conservatism.

Black women must traverse dynamics such as gender politics in the South, conservatism in the Midwest, religious contexts, political landscapes, and other constraints that shape their leadership style and organizational strategy.

The organizational diversity adds to the robustness of this study.

journal articles,
case studies,
research reports
& op-eds

37 interviews
LEADERS, PAST & PRESENT
director-level or higher
age 32 to 68

6 Census Regions
REGIONAL & NATIONAL
politically different
privileges & constraints

Representing
FAMILY community
corporate PRIVATE
religiously affiliated

KEY FINDINGS

These findings document and elevate the unique components of Black women’s leadership that have transformed the field of philanthropy as well as their own approaches to the way they lead. We discuss the how’s and why’s of Black women’s leadership during one of the most challenging moments in modern history. We organize the findings into three categories:

Personal Sustainability

Architects of Innovation

Making Structural Changes

PERSONAL SUSTAINABILITY: SELF & COMMUNITY

“Black women, take care of yourselves.”

Wellness. Of all of the battle cries, this one was the loudest. Every single interview discussed **wellness** in some capacity. These women spoke of wellness in the way Audre Lorde spoke of self care—not as an act of self-indulgence but as an act of self preservation and political warfare. As one VP from a Midwestern private foundation stated,

“This is personal. In a field that values excessive working, we don’t have to kill ourselves. Our bodies and minds matter. Over the years, I’m thankful to my networks, I have begun to incorporate a sort of wellness guide for myself. I have tried to also instill that in my team. This looks like accountability and intention with my time. I have invested in—meaning I made the foundation invest in—a coach, therapist, and time off. We have to be careful and intentional.”



Greater New Orleans Funder’s Network -
photo by Danielle Miles

She went on to discuss how having a support group of other Black women leaders helped her develop the blueprint for what she needed and what she didn’t know she needed to sustain herself. She took this information to her CEO as well as to her team to socialize the importance of wellness, which then opened up a conversation about gendered labor. A consequence of not having a wellness strategy is succumbing to the unrealistic and unnecessary demands of a field driven by the excessive expectations put on Black labor. Many other women mentioned the need to socialize taking time off, setting boundaries, and finding a champion or coach to assist them in holding themselves accountable to their own wellness goals.

“Sisters in the network put community and justice before self and that is our biggest challenge. How do we stay healthy and strong when doing the work and staying in front? That is a conversation we have to continue to have. It is ok to be honest about this. We can say no and that is ok.”

—VP OF OPERATIONS, FAMILY FOUNDATION

KEY FINDINGS

In addition, Black women made a point to address the generational trailblazers as a resource to have open and honest dialogue about the cost of not prioritizing their own health and wellbeing.

“We can talk to the ones who came before and even if they don’t know balance they knew the cost of not having balance. We have to take this moment when everyone is raw and have an honest conversation about where we have been and where we want to go. This doesn’t always have to be the same story that we put ourselves last. We can learn from our foremothers who paid a mighty price.”

—MANAGING DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Our respondents understood that now was not the time to be silent about their needs. The mental, spiritual, physical, and professional health of Black women was now a conversation that was on the table, and they seized the moment to adapt their leadership accordingly.

“First thing is grace—that has come to my mind. I have been a student of Black women’s leadership in many spaces in my life. That is how I was raised. There is so much expected of us, but I am seeing a shift in how we are talking about ourselves in the public. We are expressing our boundaries and our limitations. We are saying no, and that is an evolution. With COVID, I am creating grace for my team and ways to navigate the weight we carry. I offer grace in how we show up, grace as we digest the trauma to our bodies and our community, grace as we want more space than what is given to us and feel the frustration that builds up as a result. We need more grace as a central strategy to lead.”

—DIRECTOR, PRIVATE FOUNDATION

So many of the women opened up about the difficulty of this historic moment and the toll it has taken on

them. There was a vulnerability that lingered in all of our conversations that pointed to the importance and value of taking care of one’s self.

“It scares me that every so often you see posts from one of your sisters telling you to get mammograms and go to your OB-GYN, and I know there is something behind that, because if you are sending those messages you are dealing with something, and that is what scares me. We put community first and not ourselves. I have started to slow down when I see messages like this and think to myself, how can I care for myself better? What am I missing or letting go to the wayside?”

—CEO, FAMILY FOUNDATION

Many women were in agreement that COVID was also a time to take a wellness check with the rest of the country. It was a wake-up call to invest more time and resources into their own wellness strategies so they can be present for themselves and their communities. Now more than ever, Black women are committed to their own healing, wellness, and rest.

Decolonizing Leadership. COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter allowed entry into conversations that were much needed but previously untouchable. Philanthropy is finally confronting their longstanding relationship with white supremacy. This moment also created fertile ground to interrogate their own decolonizing efforts.

“I had to pause for self-reflection. Internalized racism is real. We tryin to survive—not thinking about how we uphold some of these systems of oppression. We are out here trying to meet deadlines and keep up pace and then we look up and we are just as bad as these white folks. Our expectations are so high because we are responding to the tension of that moment but we have to pause and say, wait a minute, girl, you movin too fast. *Slow down.*”

—FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



KEY FINDINGS

Intergenerational conversations were one of the many tactics Black women used to interrogate their current knowledge base and approaches to leadership. Many of our respondents stated it was “millennial women” who really challenged them on what it means to be professional and values they bring to the concept of professionalism. These millennial women interrogated many respondent’s ideas of how one should wear their hair, what dress is appropriate, and how to show up as their full self to work.

Respondents wrestled with the ideas they have bought into their careers about leadership and what has held them back from the type of leader they want to be.

“Millennial women have helped me, and other women more tenured, ask for more in this time and challenge what it means to be professional. These women have helped us push through on issues like hair. They force the rest of the world to adjust and not the other way around like we have done for so many years. I see many more conversations shifting this way. We have bought into certain ideals, and we have stayed there. I wasn’t fulfilled, and these conversations with these younger women have led to freedom and liberation for me.” —EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

During the height of the pandemic, many of these women called on their networks and the mothers of the field to virtually create listening circles, informal “fellowships,” book clubs, and other knowledge-sharing endeavors to organize complicated and nuanced conversations around the ways they may bring white supremacy into their work. The respondents pushed back strongly against the perception that, just because you are Black, you are free from harmful ideology.

“We have to organize ourselves and have these sister-to-sister conversations. These younger millennial women are calling things out that I wouldn’t dream of calling out, but I was hurt by



other Black women who internalized this stuff. I don’t want the same thing for them, and they don’t want it for themselves. We need to evolve and have these important conversations with COVID and other conversations at the forefront, we can’t hold ourselves back with harmful behaviors. We have to lay everything out.”

—TRUSTEE, PRIVATE FOUNDATION

As one former VP of a corporate foundation stated,

“we are at a critical moment where we have to ask ourselves, are we having the critical conversations needed to move ourselves forward?”

These conversations included topics such as **classism**, **colorism**, and **femme performance privilege**. As one former VP stated,

“There are less Black women who have politics around Black liberation and [are] from a working-class background. There are not a lot of “Isha babies” and those from a working-class background in philanthropy. I have felt this is a mandate for me. We have to grow in our understanding of inclusion and value within our own community.”



KEY FINDINGS

Black women are actively seeking out ways to lead differently and evolve in their approaches by directly addressing intergroup dynamics. These conversations are not always easy.

“It’s complicated, right? We like where we are and where we have gotten. We have made names for ourselves and settled in. We get comfortable and that is where we can backslide, as the church folks would say. But we also know better, right? We all know what it feels like to be under the thumb of a toxic person, and we don’t want to be that. But, we can get complacent and not want to do that internal work.”

—DIRECTOR, FAMILY FOUNDATION

However, Black women offer a type of compassion to each other during these moments of tension and growth. Black women understand the expectations placed on them: to simultaneously solve problems, educate, support, hold together their families or communities, and be capable at work. Indeed, people with intersectional identities face some of the most difficult barriers to advancing and succeeding in the workplace. Black women want to guard against subjecting other women to more of the same.

“I am compassionate because I have been there. I know what it is like to have ambitions but have no support or pipeline to get you there. And then when you are there, you are worked to death to prove your worth, and you are the main caretaker for your family. That is not the leader I want to be. I am not asking anyone to prove anything to me. I am providing a runway, and I’ll see who takes off. Black women don’t need to prove anything; they need us to remove the barriers and get out of their way.”

Respondents referred to participation in leadership programs led by BIPOC women, mentorship, and networks as additional lifelines to decolonizing their leadership,

particularly those centered around pausing for self-reflection. These women seek to move beyond leadership as something foreign they “turn on.” Instead, they choose to cultivate a way of leading that centers their vulnerability, diversity of life experiences, and desire for equity.

Networks of Sustainability. Black women are collaborative and communal, and they lead from that vantage point. Thus, a woman’s leadership is highly influenced by her networks. How Black women approach networks and networking is very different from how it has been addressed in network analysis research. Black women approach networks in a more familial and transformational way. This is in part because of the way in which women approach their work. They see their work as life work, as transformational work that is not separate from their personal life. In addition, the historic absence of Black women in positions of leadership has made these networks a lifeline.

“I have felt alone and often in my head at my foundation. I am the only Black person who has ever held this position and the only woman. I was a part of an AFBE fellowship for program officers years back, so I had to replicate that fellowship feel with other women. My new ‘fellowship’ of sisters are needed on the intellectual part of my journey. They offer problem-solving support and need help strategizing behind the scenes.”

—COO, FAMILY FOUNDATION

“I don’t have ‘work networks’—these women are my friends. They are women that I am in community with throughout all the different phases of my life, not just in my professional life. That’s just how Black women are. We know that there isn’t a lot of us in these positions. We also know that the work doesn’t stop when we leave these doors, and Black women understand that. There isn’t a “work-life balance”



KEY FINDINGS



ABFE - photo by Danielle Miles

when this is your life's work. So I need these women on this journey with me. It is a sisterhood and that is how I think of it."

—EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Our respondents spoke of their networks as collaborative sisterhoods of support rather than as formal, transactional networks. They looked to these women for genuine support in a space that was collaborative and not competitive. Such networks allow these women to bring their whole selves—as breadwinners, mothers, partners, community members—and be wholly cared for and supported. Networks are sisterhoods; they are built on trust, friendship, and mutual respect.

Professionally, networks are powerful tools to generate shared leadership, aggregate power, and troubleshoot problems that Black women uniquely face in these positions. The challenge of building networks comes from scarcity: only a limited number of Black women currently hold these positions or have held them in the past. Black women have needed to become savvy to create the support systems that are currently underdeveloped in the field.

"I have developed a 'kitchen cabinet' of support from women who are in my community, former grantees, some of the mothers of the field, and women in my current position. I have all of these women in my collective because there is no formal place to enter into developed networks or places of support that will nurture my leadership trajectory."

—CEO, REGIONAL FOUNDATION

Future research would do well to document this unique and meaningful approach to networks. Black women offer us a different way to think about networks as vital sources of community while fostering leadership readiness and sustainability.

ARCHITECTS OF INNOVATION: STRATEGIES & TACTICS

"Black women have not only been leading this work for decades; they have been the architects behind place-based philanthropy and structural strategies that have changed the course for many communities."

—EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, REGIONAL FOUNDATION



KEY FINDINGS

Moving from a Charity Mindset to “Compensation for Oppressive Harm.”

In nearly every interview, Black women spoke of the need to move the field from a charity mindset to a structural framework. With the retrenchment of the girls and WOC work at NoVo, many of the women are astutely aware of how fickle and hypocritical the field can be. Thus, Black women are clear about shifting frameworks to call out the link between a charity mindset and the “fads” of the field that are ultimately detrimental to long-term change.

“COVID and BLM opened the door wide open to expose how ineffective our work has been for decades, because when the time came and the cookie crumbled, it crumbled hard. Had we stayed invested in the things we were invested in 3 years ago, 5 years ago, etc., we would have seen it in the relief efforts. But we are fickle and on top of that we have to prove everything to make things happen. Now we can point to this moment and say, don’t ever have me prove anything or measure anything ever again. Instead, you can change your thinking to structural shifts, and that takes a whole different way to organize your resources. I had this conversation with our CEO and board. They actually listened this time because they had no other choice. This is the time to have these conversations.”

—DIRECTOR, FAMILY FOUNDATION

“We have a deep understanding of structural inequities and ways to use resources and budget to combat that. We can steward that process better than anyone”

—TRUSTEE, PRIVATE FOUNDATION

One of the ways Black women leaders facilitated these framework shifts was to shift the power dynamics and democratize their leadership.

“We view our grantees as an extension of the network and the strategies of our programs. This is not the way philanthropy understands its grantees. They look at them as charity. But as Black women we think about building power that our communities can use as they see fit. We are trying to democratize philanthropy. Democracy is hard but Black women have different ideas and energy around what should be funded based on that shared power with our communities.”

—VP, PRIVATE FOUNDATION

In addition, many of the women interviewed had grassroots and/or organizing backgrounds. They have leveraged their skills and expertise to transform their organization’s approach to grantmaking and investing.

“We have organized and started on the ground. We know how to be bridges. We are now bridges. I don’t move without cross class alliances with women in our communities, grantees, and folks from places I’ve been. They are all at the table to help inform our programs. They encourage me not to give up on this field but consistently transform. Black women know what it takes. We can develop strategies for actual change in our sleep. And we do it best when it is an inclusive group, so all of our sides are flanked, and we know how to move. It is a war strategy. We are war generals.”

—DIRECTOR, FAMILY FOUNDATION

“We have a certain confidence because of our lived experience. We have the ability to create and have courageous conversations. We know what it takes. We can develop strategies for actual change in our sleep. They just have to let us do it.”

—VP, REGIONAL FOUNDATION



KEY FINDINGS

Being clear about the consequences of a fickle field and leveraging their organizing backgrounds have proven to be effective strategies in moving their organizations from a charity mindset to a structural approach.

Operations and Pathway Sustainability.

The pandemic has fundamentally changed the way foundations are going about their internal practices and policies and their external work. However, as stated previously, retrenchment is still a hurdle. Thus, Black women have had to get creative with the ways they are mobilizing shifts toward long-term structural change.

One of the tactics these women use is to turn inward to the operations side of the house. Operations roles fundamentally shape who sits in the seats, who signs off on policies, and who internally can drive an equity agenda.

“There is not a network of Black women in the operations roles in foundations. But it’s imperative. We are fundamental to equity. We can feel disconnected from the community work, but our function is huge in making that work go off without a hitch. I meet with Black staff weekly to understand what is needed in their roles from an equity perspective. We have made more progress in the last 8 months than we have in the last 8 years. We can use operations to level the playing field for equity and to develop an equitable internal culture, so we don’t get so burned out. We can take care of each other on all fronts.”

—VP OF OPERATIONS,
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

“Black leaders are doing the most innovative work and have to work in institutions that don’t often fully embrace the inclusion of leaders who lead from the principles of equity. We can change that from the operations side of the house.”

—DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

“Operations is a Trojan Horse of sorts. We can get people in here who lead with equity and who know about structural change. We can open the door and get more seats at the table. We need to develop more representation in the operations field.”

—VP OF OPERATIONS, FAMILY FOUNDATION

During analysis, our research team noticed an interesting trend. When asked to describe their current position or role, many respondents rattled off at least 5 different titles. What struck us was the types of roles and positions they were naming. These were typically positions they created, or another Black woman developed in the



Greater New Orleans Funder’s Network - Photo by Danielle Miles



KEY FINDINGS

industry that they were now in. This is a subversive strategy that serves two distinct purposes. Firstly, Black women are developing additional titles as a way to create clearer pathways for the women coming behind them. They are creating and reforming positions as they see fit. These positions center equity, community development, and typically have direct ties to moving money to the organizations and communities that need it the most. Thus, these positions also ensure that the equity gains made in these positions are not tied to one person but rather develop a sustained pathway for equity work within the foundation. Black women are not only preserving and sustaining themselves but also the women coming up behind them.

We understand it is not ideal for one woman to hold multiple titles. This strategy is a result of women being overworked and in response to a field that has made remedial efforts to cultivate the pathways of Black women in leadership.

Retooling the Playbook: Lessons from Katrina.

Although COVID is a global crisis, Black women were quick to draw on their memory of Hurricane Katrina and its impact on Black communities.

“When COVID hit, I viewed it as similar to Katrina. The folks negatively impacted are the same. We use past crises and how we showed up or how we didn’t. We pulled out the old playbook from Katrina and mobilized quickly. This time we outpaced the field instead of standing back. We didn’t have to reinvent the wheel. We know who to go to to start getting resources to the ground. COVID is different because everybody has been impacted, but we knew what should have been done during Katrina and we have the chance now to do better.”

—COO, COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

As a result, this woman was able to mobilize direct financial assistance to households. Her foundation learned from Katrina and lowered barriers to resources

by offering assistance via CashApp, Venmo, and PayPal in order to include undocumented folks in their community. She was among the first to offer nonprofits led by BIPOC folks’ capacity-building tools for both rural- and urban-based organizations.

In addition, she called on her networks to mobilize her efforts and bring them to scale beyond her organization and region.

“There is a difference between knowing people and networks. Networks are usually transactional in this field. You have to be perfect and have to be the knower, not the person who needs help. They are one directional. But that is not the way Black women do networks. My networks are the people I know. I contacted those people to talk through the blueprint from Katrina. Knowing the right people should look like transparency, authenticity, collaboration not competition, and trust. I was able to call on the people I know to help me and be in a sisterhood for our communities. It is bigger than us. We can’t let Katrina go in vain, go unremembered. We owe it to all those who lost so much to learn and do better with that.”

—COO, COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

As Black women who have mobilized through a national crisis, they are equipped to move the needle and should be in the driver’s seat.

“Black women are the only ones fully equipped and ready to do the damn thing. When Black women lead, everybody eats.”

—BOARD MEMBER, PRIVATE FOUNDATION

Black women have always been the trailblazers in their approach to problem-solving and strategies. They know when to pivot while leveraging their past experiences and being responsive to the local context.



KEY FINDINGS

“Black women in leadership in the sector are the most courageous. Our leadership is necessary and always required.”

—VP, PRIVATE FOUNDATION

MAKING STRUCTURAL CHANGES: POWER & IDENTITY

“Institutions that have not fully recognized the talents of Black leadership have underinvested in communities of color.”

Shifting Power Through History. The Black women we interviewed have a unique power analysis uniformly informed by their identities as both Black people and women. Their ability to leverage their multiple identities launches these women into sophisticated and astute observations about power structures that define philanthropy and power-building possibilities to transform the field. This vantage point also uniquely equips Black women to call out inconsistencies in leadership and power structures, in an effort to find more robust and sustainable solutions.

Black women view philanthropy as best positioned for risk and transformation because of the field’s proximity to power. Black women pursue positions of leadership as a way to leverage that power to reframe ways of doing business. Building capital is one of the prime outcomes Black women seek as they shift the power back to BIPOC communities.

“Black businesses are closing, so what does it mean to get capital to these communities and not just philanthropic dollars? How are our dollars moving capital and unlocking other dollars so we can see our communities sustained? Philanthropy can truly be transformative if we move beyond ‘best practices’ and have these important conversations about power.”

—VP PROGRAMS, FAMILY FOUNDATION

Black women we interviewed always brought the conversation back to the origin story of philanthropy as a means to understand why building capital should be the next phase of philanthropy’s equity priorities.



ABFE - Photo by Danielle Miles

“Foundations are white wealth funds, and philanthropy’s origins are in money laundering. Let’s talk about those tensions. We need to put it in our public lexicon. We can’t have robust solutions without honesty. We won’t know the totality of the problem. We can’t pretend like the money in philanthropy is clean. If we don’t acknowledge it publicly, we can’t have the transformational change that is needed.”

—DIRECTOR, PRIVATE FOUNDATION

She went on to describe a scenario to discuss the possible opportunities if philanthropy is open about its origins and current state.



KEY FINDINGS

“Foundations are hedge funds. We spend so much energy on 5% of their money when the 95% is doing something totally different. What does it mean to steward an organization with so much financial might and so little accountability? If you name that as what you are operating, your unit of change is not just your grant but deconstructing the systems within your institutions that have prevented you from having the outside impacts that philanthropy purports.



North News – Photo by David Pierini

Our money is a fraction of capital markets, so I am convinced that we do have to be aware of how our dollars are unlocking other dollars that are moving the margins. We need a spectrum of solutions. We have to use different and tactical ways to unlock dollars. We are now having conversations with our corporate sponsors beyond the statements of support. We are looking at a

different marker which is about building capital and power for the communities we most care about. We are using our multi-year grantmaking strategy to resource multi-stakeholder coalitions that are centered around power building. We are unlocking corporate dollars as another resource to get around this retrenchment issue that is endemic in our field.

Philanthropy operates by testing something to bring it to scale. How is that helpful when our democratic institutions have weakened? Who is going to adopt models that are supporting or testing a scale that wasn't relevant then and surely isn't relevant now?

We need a new North Star, and Black women are the only ones who have been thinking this way for decades. We have seen our systems fail us and we have become students of structural change. We need the platform and the runway to lead at this moment.”

Solutions-based frameworks are inextricably linked to Black women's leadership style, primarily due to their acute understanding of structural oppression and inequality. Black women view philanthropy as a container for innovative interventions to these structural issues, particularly in this moment.

“The opportunity is that this year was so bad, people are willing to walk away from what they knew before. Mutual aid funds popped up in March, and that is a drastic shift in human behavior. We are having new conversations about what success looks like now, which Black women are ready to lead. With all that happened at NoVo, we saw decades-long work unravel. And it is not just them. If one person can unravel decades of work, something is deeply wrong with our system.



KEY FINDINGS

We have to examine power, how to share it, and distribute it differently. Black women are students of this kind of retrenchment, and we can talk about it and lead through it. We have the solutions because we know about power.”

—VP, PRIVATE FOUNDATION

The sector is changing, and honesty is required to move foundations forward. Shifting power and moving capital are strategies that have evolved from Black women leveraging their identity as a way to map their own power and dissension in the way they chose to lead.

Sector Change and Board Readiness. “Values are the bedrock of investments. I was about to get my board to agree to add in a racial component to our value statements for different grantee communities. Now I can make the case for investments toward racial equity because it is in our values that the board helped to approve.”

—CEO, REGIONAL FOUNDATION

In our interviews, Black women named boards as the number-one barrier or champion to equity-based progress within their organizations. If boards fast-tracked their

learning around an intersectional lens, both personally and organizationally, the impact would be transformational.

“We are fast-tracking our board and organizational learning around equity through racial identity caucusing. It just started at the board level, but it is already shifting the way they show up in the collective. Our hope is to disrupt some of their thinking but letting them do it together and not at the expense of my sanity and time.”

—ED, PRIVATE FOUNDATION

Board readiness was named as one of the main barriers to the success of Black women in their leadership roles (for more on barriers, see [APPENDIX B](#)). Specifically, pay equity is a battleground for many of the women interviewees. For example, one CEO of a private foundation shared a story of her ongoing battle with her board about her pay,

“My current contracts and payment are different from my white predecessors. By different, I mean lower. I currently have to negotiate every single year. I have been doing this for the last 5 years I have been in this position. I had to purchase my own research to understand the industry standards and the previous payment because the board would not give that information over to me, even though they had it and they provided it to my most recent predecessor. When I asked the board chair for assistance, he told me he would not be available. I have to do all this while I am asked to be at the forefront of this moment, do more work, and keep the foundation on pace with the rest of the field right now. I have to hustle and will continue to hustle, which is taxing and takes time. If the board could be educated by someone other than me, the person negotiating my salary, that would be such a huge difference.”



Pollen Midwest –
Photo by Marie Kedwig

IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES

Boards need to be prepared to bring BIPOC leaders into their organizations. They need to understand the effect of racism on the everyday lives of the BIPOC leaders they are bringing in and all of the intersecting dynamics that go along with it.

“The challenge that Black women forge through is that their leadership will be challenged every step of the way.”

—CEO, COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Furthermore, boards need to learn about their own whiteness and inherited views about the positionality of Black people in leadership roles (for detailed discussion of the barriers created by boards, see [APPENDIX B](#)).

“I am in the South. I have worked up the ranks. I am in the C-suite. These board members still treat me like the help sometimes. They ask me to do remedial tasks and get so offended when I assert my own power as the CEO. They are not used to the power of a Black woman or seeing a Black woman in power for that matter.”

—CEO, PRIVATE FOUNDATION

“As a field, we experience a lot of microaggressions. Philanthropy is mostly white. The do-gooders don’t check their own assumptions, their own racism at the door. They think they are doing the right thing but don’t understand the harm they are causing at the same time.”

—VP, PRIVATE FOUNDATION

“White men get a break on ambition. My ambition has been questioned: ‘You have time; why the rush?’ What they were really saying is ‘Stop ruffling feathers and trying to change things.’ But if I don’t do more than is asked, I am not pulling my weight.”

—ED, REGIONAL FOUNDATION

As stated previously, Black women must traverse dynamics such as gender politics in the South, conservatism in the Midwest, religious contexts, political landscapes, and other constraints as they develop their organizational strategy. Their intersecting identities, coupled with life experiences, make this group one of the most well-equipped and unique to lead a sector full of resources and possibilities. The following section discusses ways to support the continued development of Black women’s leadership in philanthropy.



ABFE – Photo by Danielle Miles



IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES

“90% of Black women supported Hillary Clinton. When was the last time that anyone supported Black women at 90%?”

Taking into account the landmark impact Black women have had during one of the most challenging times the world has seen, we have identified a set of proposed impact opportunities for the field to bolster and sustain the philanthropic leadership of Black women.

PAY BLACK WOMEN

- ▶ **Pay Equity** – Black women need to be compensated for their transformative work in the sector. COVID-19 and the social uprisings have proven the continued value and fortitude of the leadership of Black women. Pay should be equitable in amount and process. Negotiations should no longer be a multi-year battleground. Transparency with previous pay scales and resources documenting salary histories should be made readily available. In addition, a tracking system should be put in place to understand trends in pay for Black women leaders over time.

GET READY FOR BLACK WOMEN

- ▶ **Implement Wellness Strategies** – Foundations must invest in a wellness strategy for Black women leaders. This wellness strategy should contain resources dedicated to continuous professional development opportunities, executive coaching and mentoring, sabbaticals, learning agendas for staff and other leaders to reduce hostility, and investment in networking and collaborative opportunities, such as retreats and fellowships. Black women should be involved in developing these plans.
- ▶ **Prepare the Board** – Boards must be better prepared to bring BIPOC leaders to their organizations. Our respondents advocate for coaching, learning, modules, and curriculum

“We lift up economies and elections. They [philanthropy] need to start trusting that we are the ones to lead. That trust comes in the way of equitable compensation without pushback.”

—BOARD MEMBER, COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



Greater New Orleans Funder's Network – Photo by Danielle Miles



Greater New Orleans Funder's Network –
Photo by Danielle Miles

specifically developed for boards. Additionally, if boards respected moving up in the ranks rather than looking to the outside, Black women would have a greater chance of being selected for these positions. If boards were to fast-track their personal and organizational learning around intersectionality, they could monumentally enhance the experiences of Black women leaders and provide critical support.

“Traditional structures and hierarchy reinforce white supremacy culture and center white male culture, and that is baked into how we think about organizations. And these organizations were created in the 20th century, and so this is the groundwater. These boards are an extension of this culture. If you don't have an analysis around patriarchy and sexism or an intersectional lens, you have huge blind spots.”

—DIRECTOR, FAMILY FOUNDATION

- ▶ **Protect the Pathways** – Black women are calling for an ongoing investment in organized efforts to develop, support, sustain, and promote Black women leaders. Black women seek spaces to lead with strategy and honesty—a training ground to discuss the politics of philanthropy and how to maneuver while cultivating courage in their own approach. ABFE and Executive Alliance were organizations that were named as doing this replicable work.

Black women also suggest creating containers for mid-career folks to develop a race and gender-equity lens. Their hope is to have a cohort that will prepare women to lead with equity, offering practical tools for moving a board from point A to point B and implementing equity-based policies and programming. This container could also be a curriculum or fellowship. What is most important is that, for the first time, a critical mass of Black women are leaders. No one wants to miss out on preserving and propagating their wisdom.

“We need to help these women navigate the crazy, help them be strategic, get the most out of their experience while continuing to be a whole person. We need a safe community to brainstorm, troubleshoot, etc. We need to be able to maneuver and do it strategically.”

“By introducing Black women to the current scenarios of leadership that exist, you can shift those conditions and situations where they are pigeon-holed to only talk about one thing.”

“Philanthropy speaks in whispers. We need to keep each other safe. We need a more intentional way to flank each other.”

“Foundations are going to have leadership that is turning over soon and there is a 10-year window of, ‘Who has next?’ So, what does support look like now?”



IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES

CELEBRATE BLACK WOMEN

“We [Black women] will always have your back publicly. How do we capitalize on that loyalty?”

Celebrate Publicly, Celebrate Broadly –

Celebration is not just for show. It is a sign of value, legitimizing women as public figures and experts worthy of respect. Many respondents discussed the “secret society of support for Black women”—a pat on the back in the hallway but not the recognition, authorship, promotion, or celebration that their male or white counterparts receive. Publicly celebrating a Black woman raises her profile and can bolster her resume, leading to career advancement and competitive pay. It can also be a key factor in a woman being noticed and catapulted to the next level.

Foundation leadership should shy away from continuously using the “usual suspects” for all programming. Tokenizing one Black woman diminished returns on her contribution. The field assumes there are only a handful of Black women who can speak to an issue, which produces over-saturation.

“We have to deal with overcoming the cult of personality or the magical Negro. In their eyes, there is one of us who can do magical things but not a group of us. There is room for more than one. We have been doing the work but only one of us gets the recognition.”

—ED, COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Celebrate Trailblazers – Black women have always blazed the trail to hold the field accountable to the values it purports, while moving resources back into communities. As we honor the ingenuity and genius of Black women over the past year, we need to develop more platforms to address the distinctive handprint Black women have left on philanthropy for decades and the cost of that ingenuity.

“There are tough backstories to how those initiatives and positions came to be, and I personally lived them. The hits we take, the

challenges, are all kept in the dark, and now these foundations are touted as moving race forward for quite some time. Black women take the hits to actually transform the institutions in which we are working in—and there isn’t a platform to have that conversation.”

We can continue to provide a platform for conversations that were “kept in the dark” as well as to elevate the experiences, strategies, and barriers that define leadership for Black women in philanthropy.

RESEARCH BLACK WOMEN

We should all become students of Black women’s leadership. Over and over, our findings underscore the unique and effective ways Black women chose to lead. In order to fully appreciate this ingenuity, we must reframe traditional ideas of philanthropic leadership, readiness, and ambition. Black women leverage their structural lens, communal approach to networks, organizing and grassroots backgrounds, expansive professional experiences, and tenure as program officers to completely transform the sector. However, these backgrounds and approaches are absent in how we think about leadership readiness and ambition in the sector. We advocate for alternative framing to leadership readiness in an effort to capture the tactical, effective strategies and elevated frameworks enacted by Black women in leadership. Black women in philanthropy offer us a different way to think about networks, pathways, sustainability, and strategies of philanthropic leadership. Our research calls for the funding of researchers and scholars who focus primarily on the leadership experiences of Black women. These scholars can fill gaps in data and increase understanding of the leadership journeys of Black women. They also bring critical expertise on the intersection between race, gender, and leadership. ■



APPENDIX D: LANDSCAPE REVIEW

A landscape review of Black women's leadership found that most research was about organizations led by women of color and not about Black women in philanthropy.

We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible, by Melanie Brown

Black women are in the vanguard for social justice in the world and inside the field of philanthropy. In *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible*, Melanie R. Brown gathered the stories of 25 Black women leading and working across the philanthropic charitable sector to explore leading at the intersection of race and gender.

#WomenFunded2019: Women of Color: Reshaping Philanthropy

Women of color are challenging historical philanthropy. They are influencing Giving Circles and advocacy platforms as donors; and advancing new strategies in the field as leaders of foundations. Women at the intersection of race, giving and gender reflect on who's giving, how they're giving, and what's being funded.

Opinion | *Philanthropists Bench Women of Color, the M.V.P.s of Social Change*

The New York Times, V. Daniel 11/19/19

Vanessa Daniel, the executive director of Groundswell, a foundation that supports grassroots organizing by women of color and transgender people of color, writes this opinion piece in *The New York Times*, sharing how the standard practice of philanthropy leads to losses in 2020 and beyond. In this article, she highlights the work of women of color-led organizations in organizing and achieving success at social change yet receiving only 0.6% of foundation giving in 2016. Rather than funding women of color-led grassroots organizations who are leading this change, funders often look for large, mostly white-led, organizations who replicate the strategies of women of color. Daniel recognizes the role of funders, including herself, to shift a majority of giving to multiyear grants geared to POC-led groups. Daniel is a queer women of color.

The State of Change: An Analysis of Women and People of Color in the Philanthropic Sector

Council of Foundations 2015

This Council of Foundation report utilized data from the Council's Grantmaker Salary and Benefit Survey (which represents over 10,00 full-time paid positions) to examine the demographics of the philanthropic sector in the last five and ten years. This report focuses on women and people of color and provides specific statistics for women of color. Although this report does not specifically highlight Black women, it does provide an in-depth data analysis. Findings in the report include:

- ▶ The representation of women and racial/ethnic minorities decreases from the administrative level to the professional level, to the executive level.
- ▶ While racial/ethnic minority women in the matched set comprised 27.6 percent of administrative staff and 21.5 percent of professional staff, their representation among executive level staff fell to 7.5 percent. These numbers changed only slightly over the five-year period, with the biggest change being a 1.5 percentage point increase in racial/ethnic minority women among professional staff.
- ▶ Within our matched set, racial/ethnic minority women were 20 percent of full-time foundation staff members in 2015. This was an increase of one percentage point over 2011.
- ▶ Women and racial/ethnic minorities are not equally represented within different levels of participating organizations or across organizations in the sector.

In conclusion, the report provides recommendations to increase the opportunities for women and people of color in the philanthropic sector. Hiring practices (including job description, recruitment, hiring and employment policies) must be redesigned to remove bias and inclusively recruit and retain talent. Once in the sector, women of color must have mentorship, support, and advancement opportunities.



APPENDIX D: LANDSCAPE REVIEW

A targeted search of the Chronicle of Philanthropy resulted in many articles about how philanthropy can support racial justice movements and how it is important for nonprofits to work towards diversity, equity, and inclusion. These articles did not, however, reflect on the role that foundations can play in advancing racial equity, nor did they focus on Black women in the field of philanthropy. This is not to say that there have not been **events** focused on the topic of Black women in philanthropy, including conference panels and virtual events. However, not a lot of field research has been produced around Black women's leadership.

Conversely, other outlets have discussed elevating Black women's leadership within philanthropy. These are directed conversations with a handful of women to address specific recommendations for the field.

Elevating Black Women's Leadership in Philanthropy

Kenneth Rainin Foundation, L. Harris 9/25/20

Speaking with three Black women foundation presidents (**La June Montgomery Tabron**, president & CEO of W.K. Kellogg Foundation; **Lateefah Simon**, president of Akonadi Foundation; and **Dr. Sherece West**, president and CEO of Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation), this blog post focuses on their experiences in leadership and provides recommendations to elevate Black women in the sector. One challenge highlighted by Simon is the *"mammification of Black women's leadership"*: the expectation that Black women will fix the problems with limited resources. The reality is that Black women alone cannot fix systemic injustices, but they can responsibly leverage resources. West states, *"In this day and age not hiring, retaining, and advancing Black women in leadership roles is a conscious and deliberate choice."*

The five recommendations to elevate Black women in the sector include:

- ▶ Recruit interns and fellows from historically Black colleges and universities.
- ▶ Use your privilege to affirm the voices of Black women.
- ▶ Be honest about bias by analyzing Black women's progress in your organization.
- ▶ Lead by example and mentor Black women.
- ▶ Check in regularly with Black women in your organization to build professional rapport rooted in mutual accountability.

The Association of Fundraising Professionals launched **[Our Right to Heal](#)**, a project begun by a group of Black Canadian women fundraisers who wanted to tell their professional and personal stories about what it is like being Black in the field of philanthropy. Similarly, there is an overall international discussion of Black women's leadership in philanthropy but that has not trickled down to domestic conversations.

Anti-Blackness Is Global and Gendered—Philanthropy's Response Must Be, Too *Nonprofit Quarterly*

A. Mathew & N. Naylor

11/11/20

Authors Mathew and Naylor are both women of color who occupy senior positions in philanthropic foundations. In this article, they reflect on the events of 2020 and highlight how anti-Blackness in the United States and across the globe has contributed to the injustices we continue to see in our world yet, Black women, girls and femmes are at the forefront of the change movement. In this article, they ask philanthropies to change their funding models to highlight injustice against women of color, fund women-led movements in a deep and meaningful way and take a mirror to themselves.

"We know that those of us in the philanthropic sector must not just shake our heads, issue statements of solidarity, or even just release rapid-response funds. We can do the necessary work of moving major philanthropic resources for Black women and girls from the marginal place they have been in many foundation portfolios to the center of philanthropic strategy."



How to Get More Black Women in Philanthropy Leadership

Forbes, B. Chiu 3/6/2020

In interviews with four Black women active in philanthropy, this article provides three steps on how the field can obtain and retain Black women in philanthropy leadership positions. The first, include more Black women at the decision-making table and understand the barriers by listening directly to those who are affected the most, Black women. Second, recognize the potential and value of women in philanthropy not just as funders but also as decision makers and strategic partners. Third, recognize the lack of inclusion is a systemic challenge that will take continued creativity and collaboration to find solutions. By interviewing Black women internationally who work within philanthropy, this article provides recommendations from those who are most impacted.

Can we talk about the “P” word?

Medium N. Naylor 12/18/18

Nicolette Naylor writes this article in 2015 while serving as the regional representative for the Ford Foundation-Southern Africa Division based in Johannesburg, South Africa. While she does not mention Black women leaders in philanthropy specifically, she does put out a call to action to the private philanthropy sector. She asks for introspection from the sector to understand that although private foundations possess power through access to financial resources, money does not equal social change. Her posts end with five lessons she hopes to live by in the coming year:

- ▶ Shut Up and Listen
- ▶ Speak Truth to Power
- ▶ Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast
- ▶ Free at Last, Free at Last!
- ▶ If You Love Something, Set It Free

APPENDIX A: BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP

BARRIERS

While the vehicle of philanthropy is a promising vessel for change, it is also home to a host of barriers impairing the leadership of Black women in the field. The barriers Black women listed can be categorized in three ways:

Response and resistance to Black women's leadership;

Structures of oppression embedded in philanthropy that impair the recruitment and retention of Black women

The personal toll such barriers take.

RESISTANCE TO BLACK WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

“The challenge that Black women forge through is that their leadership will be challenged every step of the way.”

When describing the resistance they experience, Black women cited the violence of white skepticism, white mediocrity, white guilt, white anger, and the dangers of white women as components. These acts of violence occur at every stage of the leadership life cycle for Black women, from their recruitment experiences and interview processes to their exits (Black women rarely ever retire from these positions).

Pay equity is a clear marker of this resistance. Women spoke repeatedly of not being compensated for their work, of failing to receive even the same salaries as their predecessors when in fact they had more experience or higher credentials. Our respondents also spoke of disparate administrative support, lack of professional development, and being forced to negotiate for years on end to receive the salary given to their white predecessors at signing.

“My current contracts and payments are different from my white predecessor. I had to renegotiate my salary three times with the board over 18 months. I had to do my own research using surveys that I had to pay for when the board had access to them for free but would not hand them over.”

“I will have to negotiate with the board again in two years for my salary. This is not something that a white man before me had to do. It is taxing, and it isn't even the main part of my job.”

“Salaries, negotiations, all of that is an expression of value. They didn't value me, and I had to prove my workday in and day out.”

No one comes to these job positions without being at the top of their game – at least, no Black woman. However, many women say their staff, boards, and stakeholders spent a lot of time trying to convince them that wasn't the case and that they weren't as smart as they knew they were. Such skepticism and lack of support create insurmountable pressure on Black women to win right away – the stakes are higher and there is no room for error. These stakes are not the same for their white or male counterparts.

“Ambition and success look different for white men and Black men. They are held to a much lower standard and get away with mediocrity like it's in style.”



“Executive recruiters were very difficult. They have a style and rubric for how they do their work that did not jive with me, and they knew that. They critiqued my credentials, the way I talked about my work, every single thing. But my white counterparts are able to secure six or seven figures out the gate, and I am literally still negotiating my salary nearly two years after I have taken the job.”

“The challenge is being incredibly competent and overqualified and having to compete with white folks for things they have already gotten or always had. Black women always need to have extra. The insecurity that this brings to our white counterparts – especially white women – makes them uncomfortable, and it is dangerous for us.”

“I did a lot as vice president, and folks didn’t pay attention to it. People don’t believe I am who I say I am, even after looking at my resume. They don’t believe that I did the work. I was overlooked and underpaid, even with my credentials and successes.”

Another form of resistance is “dumping,” or blatantly overlooking Black women for leadership positions

“I have several friends who are in VP roles but are doing the work of a CEO. They are not getting the pay or the credit and may or may not be in consideration if the president role becomes available.”

but expecting them to do all the work of the position anyway. Many women discussed the pattern of “Always the #2 doing the work of the #1,” carrying the work but not the credit.

“I see it at all levels. The most creative and innovative sistas are program officers and will never move up but are the masterminds behind everything the president takes credit for. But they will be questioned and scrutinized every step of the way.”

“As a field, we experience a lot of microaggressions. Philanthropy is mostly white. The do-gooders don’t check their own assumptions, their own racism at the door. They think they are doing the right thing but don’t understand the harm they are causing at the same time.”

Structures of Oppression

Philanthropy is described as a traditional structure and hierarchy that reinforces white supremacy culture and centers white male culture. Given that many philanthropic organizations were created in the 20th century, these oppressive cultures are in the groundwater, inextricably entwined with how leaders think about their organizations. Black women are the opposite of whiteness and maleness, and thus face barriers to their incorporation, support, and ascension in the field.

Most institutions hire Black women because they have decided they need more diversity. They fail to understand that they also need equity and inclusion – their expectation is that now that they’ve hired Black people, their foundation’s work and culture can continue exactly as before. Black women are meant to be tokens, not agents of change. When they try to assert themselves, the consequences of taking up space are often weighty.



APPENDIX A: BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP

“White men get a break on ambition. My ambition has been questioned: ‘You have time; why the rush?’ What they were really saying is ‘Stop ruffling feathers and trying to change things.’ But if I don’t do more than is asked, I am not pulling my weight.”

Another barrier inherent to the structure of philanthropy is the flatness of the field, specifically the lack of pathways for Black women to advance. Many, many talented people in mid-level positions hit the infamous “program officer ceiling”. In addition, many Black women happened upon philanthropy rather than being actively recruited or even offered early career opportunities. This, coupled with the systems of oppression that undergird the field, creates retention issues.

Philanthropy has lost a critical number of Black women due to professional and emotional burnout. Many of these women were architects for change within their organizations, but the excessive levels of approval, restricted resources, and micro-aggressions proved prohibitively exhausting. When an organization tokenizes a person, they create a **curse of the only**: one Black person shouldering all of the microaggressions, sexism, racism, and other barriers to advancing their work. When a Black woman leaves due to burnout, she is typically replaced by a white woman, which creates the further frustration of feeling she has lost a foothold for her Black colleagues in the sector.

“When you leave, you are not replaced by a Black person and that is purposeful. They don’t want someone who gives them pushback.”

“We have folks coming into the sector where burnout is real – people are tired from the fighting, tired from the pressure point of philanthropy’s lack of willingness to change to be more equitable, and that is forcing lots of talented women in the field to want to do something else.”

“This work shouldn’t be this exhausting. We are doing a criminal disservice to the mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing of our sisters.”

“One of the main opportunities/challenges is the retention of Black talent in philanthropy – they are the innovators of many of the equity transitions that have positioned philanthropy to step into their values, yet the constant battlefield that is placed in front of them to make such necessary changes often leads to burnout, being pushed out, or hitting a glass ceiling unmatched by their white and male counterparts.”

Personal Toll

“Our biggest barriers are our own insecurities about our leadership and our potential. We inherited that from white supremacy, but we don’t have to stay there. We don’t have to believe them when they say we are nothing. We are more than they ever could be.”

Black women are battling insecurities and loneliness, overcoming internalized oppression and classist associations with leadership and preparedness, modulating themselves, and navigating the pressure to be successful, to “deliver.” Black women must have strength without appearing cold, demonstrate competence without appearing arrogant, and constantly shift conversations toward equity, all while tending to their own frustrations, hurt, imposter syndrome, and feelings of alienation.

“I just want Black women to believe in ourselves. If there were anything I would change, it would be our own internalized challenges that we bring out ourselves.”



APPENDIX B: BLACK WOMEN DEFINE THEMSELVES

DEFINING BLACK WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Respondents outlined a very specific professional development trajectory, that of leaning into their own voices, articulating their own truths, and trusting their own points of view. Their first need along the way was to define their leadership identity before others did it for them.

Black women are very clear on who they are as leaders. Amid the myriad assumptions made about them by white predecessors, the field, society, and, occasionally, even themselves, Black women clearly define their leadership styles and identities. To acknowledge this, we include a list of all terms interviewees used to define themselves throughout the interview process.

It is important to note that not once did Black women use the word “strong” to define their leadership style.

Visionary Change Agent NOT AFRAID Learner

Bridge Builder Black Feminist

Truth Teller Overqualified

Unapologetic The Best for the Job

TROJAN HORSE *Intentionally Disruptive*

Intentional TACTICAL

Courageous

Game Changer *Bad Ass Strategist*

READY Transformer WAR GENERAL

Disruptor

Compassionate Agitator

HUMANITARIAN *The First*

The Only Healer

Translator Intersectional



APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL QUOTES BY TOPIC

BLACK WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

- “Black women in leadership in the sector are the most courageous. Our leadership is necessary and always required.”
- “Institutions that have not fully recognized the talents of Black leadership have underinvested in communities of color.”
- “Black leaders are doing the most innovative work and have to work in institutions that don't often fully embrace the inclusion of leaders who lead from the principles of equity.”
- “The work that Black women have and the expectations for them are a mighty load to carry.”
- “I don't care if someone is uncomfortable. I don't care if someone doesn't like me, if someone feels that I'm angry. This is a chance to push my philanthropic peers toward freedom, liberation, and assessing their own power.”
- “As Black women, we can help our organizations move the needle on our commitments to racial equity. We can drive the work. We have learned experience. We have a certain confidence. We have the ability to create and have courageous conversations.”

DECOLONIZING LEADERSHIP

- “We can also uphold the same systems and structures that hold our people down.”
- “Internalized racism is real. We are trying to survive. We are not thinking about upholding some of these systems of oppression, and that is dangerous. One of the most valuable things is to slow down, reflect, and sit with other sisters to ask the hard questions.”
- “You can't do this work in an equitable way unless you do personal work, not just organizational work. How are we having complicated conversations with ourselves?”
- “White supremacist behavior is not restricted to white people. To what extent do we actually reflect, ask ourselves the hard questions, call each other out lovingly, ask folks if they need help lovingly?”
- “There are less Black women who have politics around Black liberation and from a working-class background. There are not a lot of “Isha” babies and those from a working-class background in philanthropy. I have felt this is a mandate for me. We have to grow in our understanding of inclusion and value within our own community.”



APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL QUOTES BY TOPIC

WELLNESS AND SELF CARE

“Sisters in the network put community and justice before self and that is our biggest challenge. How do we stay healthy and strong when doing the work and staying out front?”

“We are constantly trying to grind and produce as a response to a system that values excessive productivity. I participate and it wears me out. We would be better if we could take care of ourselves. If that internalized pressure didn’t tug at us to keep going.”

WAR STRATEGIES

“This is war. We have to lob shots to each other. We have to be strategic about positioning our power. We have to learn how to be impactful, how to lean back and when to push, how to show up and when to show out. It is the subtlety of war strategies that we arm ourselves with.”

“We have to have a certain level of internal fortitude because if we don’t, we will be out of those rooms.”

“In the strategic plan we included values which were not stated before. There were commitments before, but not values. We included DEI which wasn’t there before outside of a limited diversity statement. Then we were able to move more money in a more targeted way to the communities we claimed to serve before I came on.”

BOARD SUPPORT

“I asked our board chair for some coaching, and he told me he wasn’t available. That sent a very loud message. It was now a battleground when it didn’t have to be.”

“White women on the board are sometimes the hardest. I will just leave it there. They are hard – really, really hard.”

“Navigation cannot occur if your initial board president isn’t in lock step with you – we were co-captains together – and I was able to be really honest about what my experience was and places of resistance. He had my back and that was invaluable. The board dynamic and relationship and building board trust is an art that we need to have more preparation for. All these old white men who had been appointed for life were like the Great Wall of China. If I didn’t have the board chair on my side, I probably wouldn’t have lasted one year.”

“Values are the bedrock of investments. I was about to get my board to agree to add in a racial component to our value statements for different grantee communities. Now I can make the case for investments toward racial equity because it is in our values that the board helped to approve.”



APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL QUOTES BY TOPIC

ARCHITECTS OF PLACE

- “Black women have not only been leading this work for decades; they have been the architects behind place-based philanthropy and structural strategies that have changed the course for many communities.”
- “We have a deep understanding of structural inequities and ways to use resources and budget to combat that. We can steward that process better than anyone.”
- “We have a certain confidence because of our lived experience. We have the ability to create and have courageous conversations. We know what it takes. We can develop strategies for actual change in our sleep. They just have to let us do it.”
- “Places can be dangerous. There are places where you may be uncomfortable leaving your home. There are places that are deeply religious, and you have to know how to move in those places. The politics of place change the way we can move as leaders.”

OFF-LOADING EDUCATION

- “We funded a pilot with Camelback Ventures to develop a power cohort, explicitly for white people in philanthropy and impact investing to talk to other white people about how racism shows up in their systems”
- “I manage a fellowship program where we outsource facilitators to discuss how others in philanthropy grow their racial equity lens, grantmaking lens for low-income communities of color. It is a year long.”
- “We use a peer learning model in all of our events. This is a way to circumvent the messenger issue in which Black women are so susceptible.”





Toya Nash Randall is CATALYST & CURATOR OF VOICE. VISION. VALUE. BLACK WOMEN LEADING PHILANTHROPY. With over twenty years of executive experience in the philanthropic sector, Toya champions Black women and the honoring of their leadership impact in transforming philanthropy to be more equitable, inclusive and just. She leads VOICE. VISION. VALUE. in collaboration with a multi-generational network of partners and investors committed to documenting the historic leadership, experiences, ingenuity, and effectiveness of Black women across the talent pipeline in professional philanthropy.

In addition to leading VOICE. VISION. VALUE., Toya co-chairs the Greater New Orleans Funders Network Board of Directors, serves on the Executive Committee of Communities for Just Schools Fund and is a Board Trustee for the Nafasi Fund, The Giving Square, and Philanthropy Northwest. She is one of the founders of the ABFE Women in Philanthropy Leadership Retreat, an inaugural fellow for the ABFE Connecting Leaders Fellowship, and an alum of the Funders Network for Smart Growth P.L.A.C.E.S. Fellowship.

Since 2013, Toya has served in the role of Senior Director of Community Initiatives in the office of the CEO at Casey Family Programs, a national operating foundation based in Seattle. Before joining Casey, she was Program Director at Grand Victoria Foundation.

As a trained sociologist and demographer, **Dr. Jessica Barron, PhD**, is committed to advancing knowledge, research, and strategies to dismantle systemic barriers to racial and gender equity. Barron's research has been published and awarded across the academic and philanthropic sectors. She has contributed her expertise to publications such as *NPR*, *The Times*, *Nonprofit Quarterly*, and *The Guardian* as well as numerous podcasts. Nominated for the book of the year, Barron's *The Urban Church Imagined* (NYU Press) addresses contemporary diversity and inclusion efforts among one of the nation's most preeminent organizational structures-religious congregations.



Currently, Dr. Barron works as a Senior Consultant for **FRONTLINE SOLUTIONS** - a nationally based, Blackowned social impact consulting firm. At Frontline, Barron leads the DEi and research portfolios. Barron hails from Los Angeles, CA. She is a Pisces who loves the water and her very large, 7-month-old labradoodle puppy, Benny. Barron holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from Texas A&M University.



FRONTLINE SOLUTIONS is a Black-owned and Black-led consulting firm that helps organizations to plan, innovate, learn, and transform. Over the past 16 years, we've partnered with some of the country's largest foundations, offering strategic and business planning, research, evaluation, technical assistance, and community engagement. With headquarters in Washington, DC, and Durham, NC, our national team of 30 consultants comprises strategists, scholars, activists, coaches, advocates, and artists with decades of experience in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. We have led organizations, canvassed neighborhoods, and designed solutions ranging from grantmaking to public policy. We draw on our multifaceted perspectives and lived experiences to engage with clients in the journey toward bold, expansive visions for their work and for themselves.





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