Grant-making with an Intersectional Lens

May 24, 2018

Funders for a Just Economy

Neighborhood Funders Group
Connecting people, place and power
Welcome!

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Working at the Intersections Program

Alejandra Ibañez, Woods Fund Chicago
Anna Quinn, NoVo Foundation
Marjona Jones, Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock

Manisha Vaze, Funders for a Just Economy, Neighborhood Funders Group
Mari Ryono, Consultant
Speakers

Alexandra DelValle
Holly Bartling
Julia Beatty

Groundswell Fund
GenSVC Foundation
Borealis Philanthropy
Journey towards Intersectional Grant-making Report

Our working definition of intersectional grant-making is:

Grant-making that takes into consideration the ways in which multiple systems of oppression are interwoven in people’s lives, communities, cultures, and institutions and how they impact people differently based on where each person sits and their lived experience.
Best Practice #1

Have a historical frame—particularly regarding how the legacy of slavery, genocide, the settler state, imperialism, and heteropatriarchy shape our economy.

“The legacy of slavery is everywhere in our economy, and we do not talk about it. What if Forbes were doing their Fortune 500 and traced their companies back to their very inception and the legacy of slavery to the success of these companies? I think there is the potential for these conversations. When people go beyond the surface and address the stuff that’s been going on for centuries, that is when the work is intersectional and impactful.”

“Often we see in philanthropy that there is a refusal to look at how the economy keeps Black communities and immigrant communities out of the formal market.”

“The historical analysis leads to better solutions being posed.”
Best Practice #2

Center the experiences of Black people, indigenous people, migrants, queer people, and women of color, especially trans and queer women of color.

“Centering Black workers and centering Black people in the economy is fundamental. We need a broader analysis and understanding of what is happening in this country around racial justice and anti-Black racism: this question of economic violence and exclusion and the criminalization of Black folks in the economy and then what is the economic agenda broadly for the country that centers the solutions of Black workers in the economy.”

“We need to interrupt the habit of only talking about indigenous communities in the past and invest in and support indigenous leaders and their current efforts and campaigns.”
Best Practice #3

Take guidance from front-line community leaders.

“I wouldn’t be doing this work if I didn’t think there was a role for those in privilege to support, but it’s most important to have the leadership of those most impacted by injustice. It goes back to the Black feminist framework that those who sit at the intersections of oppression have more knowledge on how those systems work and how those systems can change.”

Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation ensures that 50% of their Board members are practitioners.

Liberty Hill Foundation grant-making is guided by a Community Funding Board.
Best Practice #4

*Invest in the ideas and strategies of Black leaders and women of color, especially trans and queer women of color, on the front lines.*

“Intersectional grant-making means funders need to re-strategize and see the assets of women of color versus seeing them as in conflict with achieving racial and economic justice outcomes...The largest civic engagement group is women of color, particularly Black women, but women of color are not how we design civic engagement projects even though they are the base. Because of how race and misogyny work, we are unable to acknowledge the group that pushes the most progressive and democratic agendas, so we will always be chasing the white working class even though that is not the base. If you had an intersectional framework that focuses on civic engagement, women of color and Black women would be your group.”

“There is a lot of conversation around what work is considered strategic to fund, and often the work led by women of color is not considered strategic by progressive funders. The dominant progressive understanding of strategic is short-term policy and electoral results...Winning short-term and long-term transformation of the economy are positioned as a zero sum game. I think this Working at the Intersections program can lift up intersectional grant-making and demonstrate how intersectional work is thriving.”
Best Practice #5

*Invest in the ideas and strategies of Black leaders and women of color, especially trans and queer women of color, within philanthropy.*

“Lots of racial justice organizations rarely talk about Black women. There is not the same sympathy and feverous pitch. I would even argue this for Muslim women. Rarely do we talk about Black and Muslim women. In my work in economic justice, immigrant women and Black women are stretched thin. We need to uplift the history of Black women’s organizing for economic justice. We need to know our history. Whatever issue it has been, Black women have always been at the center. It is the leadership of Black and Brown women that push this issue to the forefront within philanthropy. Their leadership in philanthropy has to be elevated.”

“One of the first things I learned when I came to my institution is that we do not do initiatives. We follow community. Our director trains us and says, ‘We’re not the experts. The folks on the ground are the experts. We are generalists.’ We have a culture of trying to guard against the ego and power that philanthropy can cultivate which is generally a good thing. Yet, what does that mean when you have an organization staffed by people of color and want to acknowledge their talents and skills? It’s complex.”

“You need the support of the people you are immediately accountable to.”
Best Practice #6

Understand people's experiences holistically (not through issue silos) and develop strategies accordingly.

“It makes me excited that organizations are looking at not just what happens at work, but also what happens in the home. This organizes around the needs of the entire worker.”

“It is difficult for grantees to change their work to how the foundation is seeing the work.”
Best Practice #7

**Support solutions that address root causes and seek systemic change.**

“Folks within the traditional labor movement are increasingly seeing the need to build solutions that have impact at these intersections versus seeking a more transactional change that gets less at systemic change or long-term infrastructure and power.”

“You can build worker and community power, but duplicate male and white supremacy. We are seeing more and more leaders who do not want to replicate exploitative and more patriarchal kinds of power. If you do not shift that, ultimately we do not achieve the change we seek.”
Best Practice #8

Help donors see how an intersectional approach advances their agenda.

“We have been super successful in helping funders see the connections—connecting intersectional grant-making and the issue priorities of those donors. Our capacity-building programs have played a big role. We have a clear set of metrics and a clear way to show our donors how groups are building power. Through our annual evaluation, we tell the story. For example, the people who are attacking reproductive rights in a state are often the same people attacking Medicaid. We show how our grantees are getting power at state tables and that what allows them to sit at those tables is their intersectional work.”
Best Practice #9

_Self-assess and adjust strategies and practices accordingly._

“There are structural barriers within philanthropy. We are not immune. If racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia were at play in the accumulation of wealth, then they are at play in the distribution of the wealth.”

“People within philanthropy will intuitively say they have racial justice values, yet there is a huge gap in translating those values into practice. If I don’t say ‘people of color-led racial justice organizations,’ funders often do not see or fund people of color...You will see people giving money to non-racial justice organizations to do racial justice work. That speaks to people’s discomfort around race. We have kind of starved the racial justice industry and community. Racial justice groups are only getting a fraction of the philanthropic resources, but the demand for their work is extremely great.”
Best Practice #10

Look to public and local foundations for guidance; build inclusive partnerships across traditional divides & hierarchies within philanthropy.

“This work is extremely difficult to do well by yourself.”

“There is an inherent hierarchy with private and public philanthropy. Private philanthropy tend to work together, sometimes with public philanthropy, sometimes not. Larger foundations can take an exclusive approach. While there can be asset disparities with private and public foundations, there are also a lot of benefits to having an inclusive approach. In some cases, public foundations know the community better.”
Best Practice #11

Make structural adjustments to grant-making practices.

• Multi-year commitments to and partnerships with grantees
• More funds directed to state and local work
• Streamlined applications that can be submitted in any format
• Asking questions to grantees informed by an intersectional approach, such as: Is the work led by those most impacted by injustice (especially women of color and trans and queer people of color)? Is your organization invested in cross-sector movement and approaches? Is your organization part of coalitions to advance gender justice? Is your organization focused on systemic changes and approaches that address the root causes of injustice? Is your organization working to build a base?
• General operating grants, paying true costs, being flexible with how the funds are used
• Creating new funds; examples of this include the Rapid Response Fund for Racial Justice (housed at Liberty Hill Foundation, in partnership with other funders in California) and the Liberation Fund (hosted at Groundswell Fund)
Best Practice #12

Show up for our philanthropy colleagues who are centering the leadership of women of color, especially trans and queer women of color.

“I think the one thing I want to underscore is that gender needs to be integrated in a powerful way that I do not see now. For example, with larger private foundations, you hear about racial and income inequality, and gender is nowhere....Gender is central. 7% of philanthropic dollars go to women and girls today (as compared with 1% in the 1970s). It has been sitting there for a long time. 1% of dollars go to LGBTQ communities. 0.25% go to transgender and gender nonconforming communities. You have to put the money where the solutions are. It is about addressing disparities and it is also strategic.”

“I would also love to see funders across movements and silos talking to each other. Our staff show up to our colleagues’ convenings, but they often do not come to ours. Reproductive Justice is the third rail. We need people to show they care. It cannot be a sideline thing.”

“It is not only the responsibility of women’s funds to bring gender to the table; it is everyone’s responsibility. The bigger institutions should be working harder at this.”
Break Out Groups

If you get a pop up on your screen, click the link to join your group
Thank you!

To learn more about Neighborhood Funders Group, visit www.nfg.org.

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