May 17, 2024

To: Philanthropic Leaders Across California  
From: The Undersigned Black-led-and-Empowering Organizations and Ally Organizations

An Open Letter to Philanthropy: Equity Can’t Be Erased

You’ve seen it now.

Two converging pandemics gripped the nation in 2020, with Black communities in the eye of the storm of both. COVID-19’s disproportionate impact on Black communities was directly tied to ongoing systemic racism. So, too, were the killings of several unarmed Black people, both by state actors and everyday vigilantes, that sparked a modern movement to understand systemic racism and anti-Blackness. What we witnessed with Ahmad Aubrey, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Mike Brown before them, and Trayvon before him; these are things you cannot unsee and knowledge you can't unknow.

Homelessness, disproportionately Black. Maternal and infant mortality, the same. Black people are continuing to suffer needlessly, get sick, and die unnecessarily because, like an uncontained virus, racism mutates. The disproportionate loss of life and livelihood from a global pandemic propelled our organizations to become first responders and frontline workers of a different kind, stretching us in new ways that cannot be overstated or soon forgotten. When Black-led organizations (BLOs) issued the call to philanthropy to invest in their work in 2020, many of you responded by not only moving resources to BLOs but also by looking internally to examine your own grantmaking and operational practices. We urge you: don’t hang up now. The humanitarian crisis isn’t over yet. If we’re not vigilant, it will only get demonstrably worse.

While initially met with praise and a big bandwagon, the wave of public declarations and commitments to racial equity that followed these events are now being systematically attacked and legally challenged, drowning in the age-old sea of American racism and general lack of courage to once-and-for-all, confront it. One place where courage continues to abound is among BLOs, shouldering the long work of systemic transformation.

We call on you to make eradicating anti-Blackness the new funding standard.

More than ever, infrastructure and institution building compel our focus and attention so the deep work of transforming systems and realigning cultural norms toward equity and justice for Black people can be sustained. We simply cannot have healthy Black communities without strong, Black-led nonprofits demanding social change. We need these organizations to serve as a voice for public accountability for dismantling the kind of anti-Black systemic racism we’ve seen unfold in the last two years, from the
attacks on critical race theory and silencing voices through book banning to the LA City Council scandal, the rollback of affirmative action in higher education, dismantling of DEI, and subsequent lawsuits challenging equity as unconstitutional.

Make no mistake: these targeted attacks are meant to kill the momentum of racial progress in America by having you (the funder) be the shooter. They’ve put a gun in your hand. Are you going to pull the trigger? Will you, too, kill the promise of a fully inclusive, multi-racial society?

**Once again, we call on philanthropy to be the sector of courage.** Don’t turn back (as so many of you promised in 2020). Don’t look away. Don’t let battle fatigue be the enemy of change.

Despite the rhetoric that equity is unfair, we know that race-neutral investments will never solve race-specific problems caused by race-specific discriminatory policies masked as equal opportunity. Equity doesn’t violate the Constitution. It fulfills it. Equity makes liberty and justice for all achievable. We simply cannot have a strong multiracial democracy if Black people are not protected socially, politically and economically.

We are still in a reckoning. The harm of underinvestment in BLOs has forced us to care for our communities at great risk to our own organizational sustainability and to the well-being of our own staff and leaders. The uptick in funding to BLOs that began in 2020 helped accelerate our collective work; however, it did not erase decades of underfunding and the ongoing sustainability challenges faced by BLOs. **According to the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, the underinvestment in Black communities totals more than $2 billion**.

To the funders who stepped up, thank you. For those who continue to step up, we need you now more than ever, and we need more of you. Among just a handful of California-based foundations, more than $1B dollars was pledged toward racial justice and Black-led causes. As of 2022, less than 20% of those pledge funds were awarded. These initial investments in our organizations helped us to activate, visibilize, and scale the kind of care we know our communities deserve.

To overcome the challenges and provocations of long-indentured and pervasive systems of inequity, the work must be funded. **Robustly.** Funders must set new standards guided by the principles of **Truth, Strength, Strategic Disruption and Love.**

We, the undersigned, **call on you to enact the Principles of Black Equity:**

---


1) **Truth**
   - Continue the conversations on race and refuse to be silenced during this time of denial and deflection.
   - Study the [CA Reparations Task Force Report](https://mappingblackca.com/project/the-black-equity-fund/) and use it as a framework for your philanthropic investments.
   - Use your voice and public platforms to speak about systemic harm to Black people and advocate for equity-based investments.
   - Build the muscle for race-consciousness in your philanthropic practices by listening deeply to the lived experiences of your grantees.

2) **Strength**
   - Follow the lead of funders like the Weingart Foundation and make an institutional commitment to invest in Black-led organizations for the next 10-15 years.
   - Hire staff and create a dedicated funding portfolio to Black liberation work and commit at least 25% of your annual grantmaking budget to fund it (see strategic disruption below).
   - Seed endowments into Black-led nonprofit organizations to support their sustainability and their ability to prepare themselves for the long fight for justice without worrying about short-term funding. Join foundations, like the [Schott Foundation](https://philanthropynetwork.org/sites/default/files/resources/BSCFN-Case-Statement_Feb%202017.pdf), in investing in nonprofit endowments.

3) **Strategic Disruption**
   - Increase the amount of your investments in Black-led organizations. Meet the challenge presented by ABFE in 2017[^3] to dedicate 25% of your grant-making portfolio to strengthening the infrastructure for Black-led social change.
   - Pay attention to regional equity—data show that funding per capita to Los Angeles and the Inland Empire combined is less than half that of the Bay Area.[^4]

4) **Love**
   - Provide flexible, unrestricted, multi-year funding like the Black Freedom Fund.
   - Allow organizations to build a culture of healing and rest by investing in their people, paying life-sustaining wages, and providing health benefits and retirement funds.
   - Talk about the ways in which Black-led organizations are innovating and contributing to the fabric of communities in impactful and inspiring ways.

We are proud of the work that our organizations are leading. We are advancing and bringing Black workers’ voices to the labor movement and driving new policies to advance worker rights; creating new pathways to sustainable jobs and work opportunities; expanding college access and college funding through both direct service and through policy changes; winning new policies to close the school-to-prison pipeline, transforming harmful juvenile justice system practices, reducing prison recidivism through advanced programming and services for returning citizens; moving legislation and programming to support infant and maternal health that saves lives; changing discriminatory housing

[^3]: https://philanthropynetwork.org/sites/default/files/resources/BSCFN-Case-Statement_Feb%202017.pdf
[^4]: https://mappingblackca.com/project/the-black-equity-fund/
policies and developing new solutions to address the housing crisis; winning policies and public resources to combat state and community violence; spurring entrepreneurship and removing barriers for Black vendors and organizations to compete for contracts and funding; registering and engaging new voters; and developing everyday folk as community leaders, to name a few.

There has always been an unfair expectation and burden placed on Black communities to pave the way for self-determination in the face of enormous odds. Yet, every day, Black folks are doing just that: defending democracy and serving our communities, all while navigating a slew of structural barriers. And we do it with joy, purpose, commitment, deep faith, and a sense of hope that our efforts will finally be affirmed by philanthropy as critical and necessary.

In the name of equity and justice for all, eradicating anti-Blackness must be philanthropy’s standard.

In community,

California Based Black-Led and Allied Organizations

###

The Black Equity Collective (BEC) represents the voices of over 47 Black-led and Black-empowering (BLOs) organizations that span three regions of southern California, including Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties. Since 2021, the Black Equity Collective has raised over $20M for grantmaking, operations, technical assistance, and other programming to support the sustainability of Black-led and empowering organizations in Southern California. We do this because BLOs are an antidote to anti-Blackness, nurturing and defending Black people, their families, communities, and their causes.
OPEN LETTER TO PHILANTHROPY SIGNATORIES

- A Mighty Mac Production, LLC
- A New Way of Life Reentry Project (ANWOL)
- A Step to Freedom
- Advance Peace Fresno
- African Soul International
- African-American Mental Health Coalition
- Akoma Unity Center
- AV- African American Leadership Coalition
- BHMPP
- Black Being
- Black Educator Advocates Network
- Black Equity Collective
- Black Maternal Health Center of Excellence
- Black Mental Health Task Force
- Black Thumb Farm
- BLU Educational Foundation
- Brothers of the Desert
- Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency
- CA Promise Village
- California Black Power Network
- California Black Women's Health Project
- California Coalition for Black Birth Justice
- Camp Journeys
- Catalyst California
- Center for Powerful Public Schools
- Centinela Youth Services
- Change The Tune
- CLAN Media
- Communications Consultant
- Community Coalition
- Community Health Action Network
- Community Now
- Community Reflections Inc
- Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement (COPE)
- Concrete Development Inc.
- Creative Acts
- CYFC
- Diversity in Leadership Institute
- Downtown Women's Center
- East Oakland Youth Development Center
- Educating Students Together
- EEP Foundation
- Eleanor Beasley Business Consultants LLC
- Empower You Edutainment
- EmpowerTHEM Collective
- EmpowHer Institute
- Engage R+D
- FIERCE Advocates
- First Community Capital Inc
- First Fifteen
- First Star
- Funded w/Lady K
- G.IRL | Compton G.IRLS Club
- Game Changers Leadership Institute
- Green Business BASE CAMP
- GRG Strategies
- Griswold Home Care for North San Diego
- growURpotential.org
- Hazel’s Hands
- Healthy Black Families, Inc.
- Henderson Professional Mentorship Group
- Hike Clerb Inc
- Hollywood Fringe Festival
- I Am Love
- iDREAM for Racial Health Equity
- In Due Time Coalition
- Inglewood Wrapping Arms Around the Community
- Initiate Justice
- Inland Empire Black Worker Center
- Inland Empire Rebound
- Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity
- LA Pride
- LA’s BEST
- Lamps of Light Project
- Legacy Bridge CDC
Let's Be Whole
Let's Make It Happen
Liberation By Design, LLC
LIFT
Little Seeds Matter
Livefree California
Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches (LAM)
Love Not Blood Campaign
Luna & Sol Community Healing Collective
Magdalena’s Daughters
Mapping Black California
Millionaire Mind Kids (MMK)
Mirror Memoirs
MomsHouse
Moretta Community Development Foundation
My Sister's Keeper Success Institute
National Black Grads Inc
New Life Christian Church of Fontana
Newblkwallstreet
Next Door solutions to Domestic violence
Next Shift Learning
Nonprofit Finance Fund
NVCFA
Ohana Center AV
Opportunities For Success(O.F.S)
Oxfo...