

28th May 2020

Future Foundations UK | championing a vision of a just future

We are a supportive network for minoritised racial groups working in the Trust and Foundation sector to connect, create and lead change within the space.

In this statement, we use the language of people/communities of colour (POC) which refers to people who are not white and who have a common experience of systemic racism. These are diaspora communities who have their roots in the global south.

The situation is constantly unfolding, but the evidence¹ shows that there is a clear relationship between COVID-19 and race and that the pandemic is having a devastating impact on communities of colour. Two months ago, Future Foundations UK released a [statement](#) setting out the urgent action required from our sector in light of the worst public health crisis in living memory. We set out the following five immediate steps for independent funders and foundations to take in order to ensure that the most marginalised communities are sufficiently resourced during the emergency and beyond.

1. Demonstrate a strong commitment to grantees.
2. Commit more resources to local sustainable infrastructure.
3. Provide direct funding for grassroots movements.
4. Be pragmatic and look at different models of funding.
5. Shift to a Social Justice Approach.

Unfortunately, eight weeks later and after numerous meetings, conversations and convenings, the sector has made limited progress. While it has been encouraging to see many funders demonstrate a deep commitment to their existing grantees through rapid responses, flexibility and financial support, the support for communities of colour has been lacklustre. Where there has been funding directed to these communities, it has been without a sense of urgency and with an approach that appears reactive rather than transformative.

We are seeing the onus being put on overstretched and hugely under-resourced organisations and groups to make the case for critical resources. The processes the sector is using to engage with marginalised groups and disseminate funding are extractive and show a lack of appreciation for the capacity of these organisations and the way that the grassroots operate.

We know that the POC sector entered the crisis vulnerable and already on its knees. There is mounting evidence of the growing demands on the sector, with the stark prospect that it will be further decimated in the coming months. Research released by The Ubele Initiative shows that 9 out of 10 POC-led organisations and services are unlikely to survive the impacts of COVID-19². Funders must heed this warning and take urgent action to protect and sustain this sector and the communities they represent and serve.

The continuing lack of progress is hard to accept, particularly in the light of the extractive actions and behaviours that have been present at many of the founder-convened meetings.

¹ See reports by the [Institute of Fiscal Studies](#), [Office of National Statistics](#), [The Lancet](#)

² [Ubele Research](#)

There have been many instances of POC groups and representatives giving their informed perspectives or advice, only to have these disregarded or repurposed to fit a different narrative. The power interplay in these relationships exposes the dynamics existing in the foundation world and underscores how already marginalised voices continue to be silenced.

Our experiences and observations of funders during the past eight weeks

Future Foundations UK members have rich insights into the responses of philanthropic and state funders to COVID-19. There have been numerous conversations, some of which Future Foundations has been a part of, about addressing the disparities experienced by communities of colour. We have welcomed the opportunity to engage in explicit conversations around race and philanthropy. However, we find that in the main these discussions replicate old patterns and power dynamics. Talking about race isn't enough - we need a commitment to transform the oppressive structures that permeate institutions, including those within philanthropy.

- **Ongoing Lack of Trust.** Future Foundations and other racial justice groups have made clear recommendations to funders to release funds directly to POC-infrastructure organisations to manage. These organisations have the on-the-ground experience and a deep understanding of race and other cross-cutting issues. In spite of this, many funders continue to retain control of the decision making and distribution of funds.
- **Lack of Expertise.** There is a demonstrable lack of expertise among funders about how to work effectively with communities of colour. This has been illustrated through discussions and chosen models for distributions. Our recent experiences with UK Community Foundations (UKCF) have revealed their lack of understanding of communities of colour and of equity-based approaches. For instance, it is uncertain whether UKCF has done education and dissemination work across its network on issues relating to structural racism, inequality or diversity. Another point to note is that there are funders who employ experienced junior staff who are POC but that experience has not been leveraged when developing strategies to respond to communities of colour in the crisis.
- **Power Dynamics and Burdensome Practices.** In the discussions between funders and marginalised communities, there appears to be minimal consideration of the power dynamics in these relationships. These groups are requested to engage with, advise and support funders, while urgently needing to seek funds for their own survival. This places them in a compromised position in terms of raising any concerns or objections about the process. Grassroots organisations that are already over-stretched and under-resourced are being asked to engage in activities which come with no guarantee of funding, or resources to cover this time and engagement.
- **Deficit Model to Communities of Colour.** Communities of colour have been repeatedly problematised. They are stereotyped into archetypes of incapable, unqualified people who have issues filling in application forms, let alone managing and monitoring grants.

This harmful narrative reinforces inequitable distribution of funding and reveals the biases, conscious or unconscious, that exist within the funding sector.

- **Lack of Transparency and Accountability**

There has been a lack of information about funders' decision-making powers and processes and we have found that minutes of meetings do not reflect the concerns raised by all in the room. Problematic power dynamics in key equity advisory groups have prompted leading POC to withdraw with minimal explanation or information as to why this has happened. Further, some funders have developed strategies to market funds to communities of colour that prescribe roles and responsibilities for infrastructure organisations without those organisations' input. In terms of accountability, a number of funders leading large national COVID-19 responses, including National Emergencies Trust (NET), UKCF and National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF), have published no information about any grants they have made to communities of colour.

A CALL TO ACT

We are renewing our call for foundations to challenge their hierarchical power structures and to trust the voices and actions of local marginalised groups. It is imperative that funding is distributed immediately to communities of colour. This must be core, flexible funding to enable communities to develop local infrastructure and grow grassroots movements. We require an urgent shift to a social justice approach that centres people with lived experience in decisions that affect their lives and that is underpinned by human rights, dignity and empowerment. Our hope is that foundations are not on the wrong side of history, protecting their assets and consolidating their power at a time of crisis.

SOME PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CRISIS RESPONSE

1. Redefine what 'expertise' and what 'good' looks like. These definitions have depended on using past models that favour a few. Look instead to newer frames that embrace ideas, approaches and solutions which embrace a wider cohort of people.
2. Diversify who you are working with. Do not resort to the echo chambers of the valued few or favour those who already have access to funders networks. Recognise that communities of colour have inequitable access to social networks that enable connections to funders.
3. Embed trust as a working principle across all that you do:
 - a. Release funding for grassroots POC groups directly to POC-infrastructure organisations to manage.
 - b. Resource infrastructure organisations to plan and strategise for the recovery.
 - c. Provide more core and flexible grants, as organisations know what their communities need. This approach allows agility in an ever-changing environment.

4. Don't waste precious time or resources scoping or mapping provision. Rather, invest the resources in sustaining and developing existing expertise, otherwise in the coming months they may not be around to be mapped.
5. Make the funding process as accessible as possible, including providing options to apply in different languages and formats and bringing in or funding others, to provide additional support. . Funders often-rely on what is familiar and do not take the time to explore more culturally appropriate methods.
6. Reimagine your definition of - and approach to - risk by applying an equity lens to your diligence processes e.g. rather than traditional governance reviews, ask more equitable questions such as: 'Is there an intersectional approach to the work, is lived experience reflected in the leadership/decision making etc?'

These are just a few practical recommendations that will ensure a just response by the philanthropic sector to communities of colour through the pandemic. As a collective of experienced grant-makers with lived experience of racism and other cross-cutting issues and with well-established links with and reach into communities of colour, Future Foundations UK can support funders to action these recommendations quickly and effectively. We welcome the chance to collaborate with, and support you. Please contact us at futurefoundationsuk@gmail.com to discuss.