



“We Must be in It for the Long Haul”

Black Foundation Executives Request Action by Philanthropy on Anti-Black Racism

“We are managing a pandemic within a pandemic. Police brutality is a scourge, it is a pandemic. The pre-existing condition before COVID, and it still exists, is racism.” -- Representative Ayanna Pressley

While COVID-19 is novel as a virus, the pestilence of anti-Black racism that dictates its disproportionate impact on Black communities is centuries old. Few things drive this point home more poignantly than the massive protests sparked by the recent killing of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Tony McDade at the hands of the police and white vigilantes. The inability to breathe for Black people stricken with COVID-19 and George Floyd’s last breaths being stolen from him by a white police officer’s knee on his neck are profoundly painful symbols of the intersecting threats to Black life caused by the ubiquitous plague of anti-Black racism.

For several weeks ABFE worked with over 60 Black Philanthropic CEOs in the US, including Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands, to craft a set of imperatives for ensuring the well-being of Black communities to guide the philanthropic community’s response to the COVID-19 crisis. As we set to release our statement, the country erupted in righteous rage at the brutal murder of George Floyd and the demand to defend Black lives from state sanctioned violence. As the Black community struggles to manage these overlapping pandemics, we challenge philanthropy to be bold and be inspired by the courage of the protestors who are risking their well-being for the sake of defending Black lives.

Our long-term goal is to free Black people from disparate treatment that result in the racial disparities we see in COVID-19, police brutality and on almost every indicator of well-being. To get there, we must dismantle the structures (institutional policies and practices) that disadvantage and marginalize Black people as well as the false narratives about Black communities that allow for continued inhumane treatment. This will lead to stronger Black communities. Philanthropy has a critical role to play and must step forward. In addition, a more robust partnership moving forward between philanthropy, government, businesses and Black communities is needed to address immediate needs and opportunities (targeted COVID-19 relief and police reform); as well as the longer-term strategies to address racial inequity. We need deep, transformative institutional change in this country; foundations and donors that support Black communities, in addition to those from other sectors (government, business, etc.) must commit to and deploy an equity analysis to investments moving forward. This is a marathon, not a sprint and all of us in philanthropy must be in it for the long haul.

Our imperatives for the philanthropic sector are follows:

- 1. BUILD AGENCY. Increase investments in Black-led organizations that connect individuals and families to a wide array of resources and build power in our communities to lead substantive change.**
 - Black-led organizations (e.g., primarily Black Board, executive leadership, staff and who primarily serve Black people) are the backbone of our community and are the “first responders” in times of crisis. The swift action to feed and support Black families impacted by COVID-19 as well as the promising advances regarding to police reform are a result of years of organizing and service by these groups. However, these organizations are under-resourced and do not have the capacity they need.



[Redlining by Another Name: What the Data Says to Move from Rhetoric to Action](#) (ABFE, 2019)

suggests that Black-led organizations have less staff, smaller budgets and less operating reserves than white-led organizations. These data are backed by [other current reports](#). A renewed commitment to investment by philanthropy and government at the level that is needed to spur success will help to invigorate Black-led organizations with the power to respond to the short-term and long-standing challenges facing our communities and the country. In addition to financial resources, investments are needed in social capital, technical assistance, and networking support.

- We distinguish between four types of organizations, all of which need investments relative to the well-being of Black communities:
 1. *Organizing and civic engagement organizations* (C3 and C4) that aim to build political power in Black communities. Our communities need to be engaged, organized and informed so that we can access forthcoming Covid-19 relief opportunities in the short-term and move swiftly on policing. In the long-term, we must ensure that Black communities have access to the vote, are fully represented in Census 2020 and have a voice in municipal budget conversations that will be impacted (i.e., reductions) by the economic recession.
 2. *Community and economic development organizations* that build economic power in Black communities that help us accumulate wealth, eradicate the long-standing racial wealth divide and address the financial crisis brought on by the pandemic. [One study published in May 2020](#), revealed that 45% of Black-owned businesses anticipated closing within six months due to COVID-19. Black-led groups that support business ownership, home ownership, cooperatives and connections to well-paying jobs should be high on the agenda for philanthropy and federal, state and local governments.
 3. *Arts, cultural and media organizations* to build social power in our communities. Black cultural, media institutions and journalists are trusted sources of information and truth-telling in our community. They are critical to shaping an accurate narrative about Black people, Black life and our contributions to society. The influence of these institutions extends beyond our immediate communities and contributes to American culture and the world.
 4. *Direct service and mutual aid organizations* that address the basic needs of individuals, children, youth and families. Particular attention must be paid to organizations that support Black LGBTQI people, seniors, disabled and immigrants as these institutions are supporting some of the most marginalized in our community. Organizations that provide quality early education and care in Black communities are critical as well to ensure that our children benefit from early learning opportunities and so parents can return to work.

2. PUSH STRUCTURAL CHANGE. Given deep-seated inequities, COVID-19 relief and police reform efforts must take a “long view” and consider policy and system reform needed to improve conditions in Black communities beyond federal and philanthropic emergency and response efforts.

- Given long-standing inequities on almost every indicator of well-being, Black communities recover at “slower rates” than other communities.
- In great part due the pandemic, Black unemployment has reached a [staggering 16.9 percent](#). A decade since the Great Recession hit, many Black families still have not fully recovered financially,



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and several were in a precarious condition prior to the pandemic. Similar scenarios played out after Hurricane Katrina and other disasters.

- All philanthropy must consider ways to use their funds to leverage public dollars to increase resources to Black-led organizations as well as for services and reforms in key areas for Black communities (e.g., policing, education, housing, criminal justice, health and mental health, etc.).
- Efforts to address the pandemic in Black communities need to extend beyond current relief efforts and look 12-months to three years down the road. In addition, efforts to address police reform must build on the immediate policy reforms happening around the country as well as change strategies that will take longer to address. We cannot focus on “quick fixes”; we must direct our energies towards systemic policy changes in all areas and consider the impact of leadership and/or administration transitions in philanthropy and at the federal and state level.

3. ENCOURAGE SHARED RESPONSIBILITY. Philanthropic funds, particularly those under the leadership of Black foundation executives are part of the solution. However, the targeted investment of all philanthropies as well as public dollars are needed to transform conditions in Black communities in both relief and long-term efforts.

- COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting Black people in the U.S.; however, all Americans share in the pain and suffering of the pandemic. As such, all Americans must work together to address its effects. Similarly, efforts to address COVID-19 and its aftermath cannot be the burden of Black foundation executives solely. We need all allies in the philanthropic sector to use the data on COVID-19 impact and invest in Black communities. While some will use this moment to push automation, minimize the role of the federal government, or restrict immigration, we must clearly articulate our own vision of an equitable post-COVID-19 economy that addresses structural barriers to health, education, and work faced by Black communities that were exposed by COVID-19.
- The uprisings across America in response to the police murder of George Floyd have demonstrated the power of multi-racial alliances, led by Black voices, to bring about change. This level of solidarity by allies is needed in philanthropy to create a movement that supports all communities.

4. USE ENDOWMENTS. The health-driven economic recession has negatively impacted foundation endowments. Therefore, there is increased need to prioritize spending on the most impacted communities. In addition, now is the time to utilize the full set of resources of philanthropy by increasing asset payout and employing various investment strategies to provide much needed capital to Black communities.

- At a time of volatile markets, grantmakers must demonstrate their explicit commitments to equity and investment in Black communities.
- Foundations can increase grantmaking by increasing payout to get much needed cash to nonprofits and individuals in crisis.
- Grantmakers should make use of program-related investments, social impact bonds and other related tools to compliment grantmaking relief funds in support of Black communities.

5. CENTER BLACK EXPERIENCE. Black leaders and communities must be engaged in the development of short and long-term philanthropic and public policy solutions to ensure that well-intentioned “helping” and reform efforts do not exacerbate existing disparities.



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- There are countless examples of “good policy” proposals that exacerbate racial inequities and do further harm to those “hardest hit” by crises (e.g., GI Bill, Payroll Protection Program).
- Proposed federal, state and local policy solutions must be viewed through a “racial impact” lens and must engage our communities. Philanthropy can play an important role by supporting processes for civic and public engagement to make this happen.

6. TRUSTEE ACCOUNTABILITY. Foundation trustees are accountable for the strategic direction, fiscal health and policies implemented by the institutions for which they govern. During this time of crisis, foundation boards should take stock of the level of grantmaking to Black communities, increase targeted giving and engage in racial equity assessments of their investments moving forward. It is necessary for national Boards to do so but critically important for foundation boards in the regions hardest hit by the coronavirus with sizeable Black populations (e.g., New York, Louisiana, Michigan, Illinois, Georgia, etc.).

- Trustees should have a working knowledge of the impact of COVID-19 on the communities in which the foundation supports, disaggregated by race and gender. These data, that will demonstrate the vulnerability of Black communities, are essential to drive short and long-term response and investment strategies.
- Foundation boards should set goals and track performance regarding increasing resources to Black-led organizations, particularly groups that are advancing policy reform in key areas including policing.
- Directors should ensure that response and relief efforts consider the well-being of Black organizations and Black businesses that are anchors in communities of African descent in the regions where they fund.

7. ENGAGE BLACK BUSINESSES. Foundations and the public sector should actively engage Black businesses in investment management, banking, and other professional services to address the pandemic’s negative impact on Black earnings and wealth.

- Black investment firms and other Black-owned businesses hire Black people at higher rates than white-owned businesses. Foundations and public systems can move beyond grant-supported relief efforts and tap their professional and procurement budgets to support Black businesses and financial institutions that generate wealth in our community.
- Black banks play a critical role in our community; they serve a constituency underserved by mainstream banks. In addition, several Black banks are registered as community development financial institutions (CDFIs) and re-invest their resources in Black communities. Now is the time for foundations to make deposits in Black banks nationally to ensure for the safe management of their funds as well as community economic benefit.

8. LIFT UP GENDER. The health and economic well-being of both Black people are under threat due to COVID-19; however, its’ impacts also differ by gender, gender identity and sexual orientation. Black women are suffering worse relative to job loss. Emerging data illustrates that Black men are at higher risk of death and racial profiling relative to COVID-19. Black LGBTQ communities are particularly vulnerable due to higher rates of suppressed immune systems and widespread housing and employment discrimination. Response efforts must take into account these differences, to ensure that all people of



African descent are connected to economic opportunities, healthy and are safe from personal and state-sanctioned violence.

- Women, especially Black women and other women of color are losing the majority of jobs in the coronavirus downturn. [Research shows](#) that women are more likely than men to worry that they will not be able to pay for housing, groceries, or healthcare for themselves or their families in the next few months — and Black women are the most worried. They are more than twice as likely as white men to be concerned about making their rent/mortgage (60% vs. 24%) or affording groceries (43% vs. 18%). Black women are often the sole breadwinner in their family and the loss of income as a result of the pandemic has catastrophic effects on our children.
- Black men are also struggling with the loss of wages and disproportionate rates of death. In addition, they are at higher risk of racial profiling. [Emerging data](#) from cities across the country illustrate that Black men are being stopped by the police for wearing (or not wearing) personal protective equipment (e.g., face masks). Police targeting of Black men is a long-standing American tradition and the use of police force in cities to monitor public behavior during the pandemic could be as deadly to Black males as the virus itself.
- While the rate of death may be lower than that of Black men, Breonna Taylor is one of many Black women who have died in police custody or at the hands of the police. Yet, these cases are not in the public narrative. Structural reform efforts to address police behavior and accountability must intensify in these critical times and the stories about police killings must include the experiences of Black women.
- [Past research has shown](#) that LGBTQ/SGL Americans also experience underlying health disparities that increase the likelihood of testing positive for and suffering because of COVID19. LGBTQ/SGL Americans are more likely to be smokers—a high risk factor—and work minimum wage jobs. Transgender people especially face widespread workplace discrimination, are more likely to be incarcerated, and more than 1 in 4 transgender people have reported being denied healthcare due to their gender identity. Black LGBTQ people also predominantly live in the South where it is legal to deny access to employment, public housing, and medical services on the basis of actual or perceived sexual identity, gender orientation, and gender expression. These are the states that are rushing to open while investing the least in targeted testing and treatment.

9. REACH TO THE DIASPORA. The racially charged impact of COVID-19 extends beyond U.S. borders. Black communities in the U.S. territories have been left out of many relief efforts and African immigrants are being targeted in both the U.S (as part of America’s Black population) and other parts of the world. During crises, we must remain vigilant of how anti-Black racism impacts people of African descent around the world and look for opportunities to unite our philanthropic efforts to save and support Black lives.

- While smaller in numbers relative to the contiguous states, there are active COVID-19 cases in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands – two territories with large Black populations. Families in the U.S. Caribbean are still recovering from the 2017 hurricanes and are extremely vulnerable to environmental, health and economic disasters. U.S. philanthropy, particularly national funders, must recognize that individuals, children and families in the U.S. territories are part of America and have not received philanthropic attention in proportion to need.



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- Disturbing reports out of the Guangzhou Province, which has China's largest population of African immigrants, suggest that Africans have been denied access to stores and restaurants, evicted from their homes by landlords and threatened with deportation in fear that they are the cause of COVID-19 community spread. These incidents have occurred even though there is no evidence that the disease is disproportionately represented in the city's African community. International philanthropies must remain vigilant on the experiences of Africans across the world.

10. ADDRESS DISPARITIES IN PRISONS. U.S. prisons are disproportionately filled with Black and Brown people and are breeding grounds for the spread of coronavirus, other infectious diseases, and, generally, hopelessness. COVID-19 relief efforts have reminded us that institutional custody should be reserved as a last resort when there is a risk of community safety or flight. That use of institutional custody must become a standard of operating in all instances. Current efforts must support the safety of those currently imprisoned, early release of incarcerated individuals and advance sustained investments in alternatives that reduce reliance on incarceration over the long-term to support Black communities.

- [Studies by the Federal Bureau of Prisons](#) in late April show that over 70% of prisoners tested positive for the corona virus. Data from some of the country's largest regional and local jail systems (Cook County, Los Angeles and New York) also raises alarm about the spread of COVID-19 in detention facilities. Crowded and shared environments and the potential introduction of the disease by staff members and new intakes are the key causes of jail and prison outbreaks.
- Immediate measures to reduce the prison and jail population, are being instituted around the country. In addition, select philanthropists (e.g., Jay-Z, Meek Mill, Jack Dorsey, etc.) are donating funds to provide personal protective equipment to prison inmates and staff.
- As federal, state and local officials reduce the numbers of people in lock-up in response to COVID-19, philanthropy has an opportunity to work with these systems on alternatives to incarceration. Now is the time to invest in community-based solutions that help keep Black families together and support the return of family members to our community.

SIGNATORIES

R. David Addams, W. C. Graustein Memorial Fund
Elizabeth Alexander, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
Ivy Allen, Foundation for the Mid-South
Tonya Allen, The Skillman Foundation
Jamie Allison, Walter & Elise Haas Fund
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John Jackson, Schott Foundation for Public Education
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Jacqueline Jones, Foundation for Child Development
Mark Lewis, POISE Foundation
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Liz Dozier, Chicago Beyond
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La June Montgomery Tabron, W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Peter Taylor, ECMC Foundation
Nicole Taylor, Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Darren Walker, The Ford Foundation
Sherece West-Scantlebury, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
Tonia Wellons, Greater Washington Community Foundation
Jay Williams, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
Nathaniel Williams, Hill-Snowdon Foundation
Starsky Wilson, Deaconess Foundation