

Philanthropy... can and must do better.



White Staff in Philanthropy



White CEOs in Philanthropy

Philanthropic staff is still majority white – especially in positions with the most power

White funders react:

I'm always somewhere between cautious optimism and outright rage about the progress we're making and how we show up. I see moments of progress and yet then catch myself or the org falling into familiar white savior mentality.

Too often we white leaders make decisions without the perspectives of People of Color. But most of us have not lived in the communities we serve, nor do we have a complete picture of the relevant experiences.

We have made progress: due diligence now includes input from parents, the proportion of our portfolio led by People of Color has increased, and the composition of our own senior team is less white than it was a few years ago. In other areas we have fumbled spectacularly: our team is frustrated with a lack of equity and inclusivity in internal policies, and we've offended potential grantees with awkward and inept attempts to assess their commitments to equity and proximity.

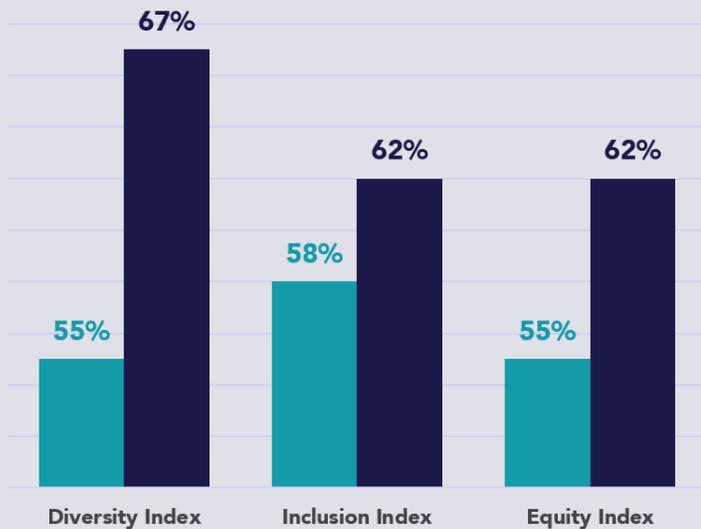
Funders of Color react:

We say we want to center the experience of Black and Brown communities, yet their representation on our leadership team is nonexistent; we say we want to center grantees, yet they have little power in how we develop strategy or determine what gets funding; we say we want equity across our work, yet are unwilling to resource and prioritize the requisite org shifts.

I face a constant uphill battle to engage (1) fellow funders who have exacerbated inequities yet have outsized influence in how we invest to support the communities that have felt the brunt of the impact and (2) colleagues early in their equity journeys who harm our community due to ignorance and privilege.

I have spent my career as an instigator and infiltrator. It's a role that I have both accepted and found power in. But lately, I feel hopeless. I am tired of sacrificing my body and mental health to lead equity work within a philanthropic organization. I'm tired of seeing how we run to heal white pain and stroke white fragility while leaving staff of color to seek mental health support to show up every day.

Philanthropy... can and must do better.



Funder respondents report less positive experiences across all three dimensions

RECOMMENDATIONS

Do the Work

Make changes internally that the foundation seeks to advance externally while offering transparency with grantees about the ongoing journey.

Orient Around Those Most Impacted

Orient decision-making to engage and center those most impacted. Create psychological safety, interrupt protection of white comfort, and mitigate the impact of hierarchy, privilege, and positional power to enable full involvement

Invest in Leaders From Communities Served

Invest in leaders who come from and represent the communities served. Shift the distribution of investments to disproportionately focus on leaders who come from communities served to help course-correct an inequitable system.

Set and Elevate the Standards

Establish a set of baseline DEI and antiracism indicators as prerequisites for funding an investment. Invest in maintaining and growing a healthy ecosystem of support for organizations driving progress on DEI and antiracism.