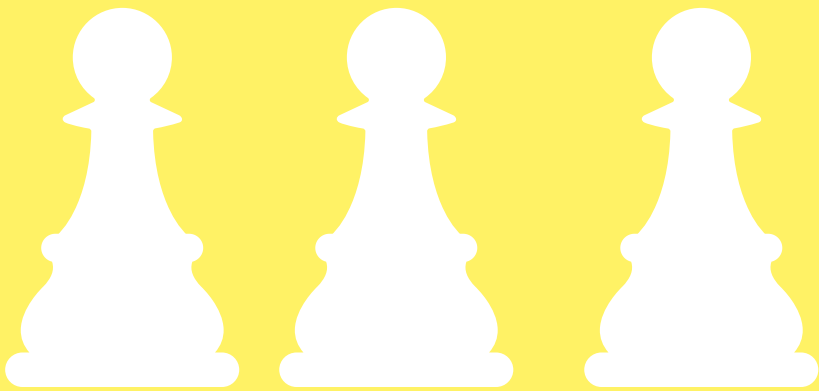


The
times
require
new

leader





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At this moment of crisis and possibility, philanthropy must change - and it will need leadership to do so

We are on the cusp of one of those profound tectonic shifts in our global society and economy, which occur precisely when significant events force widespread experimentation and consolidation around new ideas, norms and social relations. As fascism rises and as threats to rights escalate, movements defending justice and accountability inevitably grow with them, offering the opportunity for a new era. Across the world workers are demanding economic justice, women are demanding reproductive freedom, youth are demanding urgent climate justice and all are coming together in new forms of solidarity and methods of organising to advance innovative strategies and solutions.

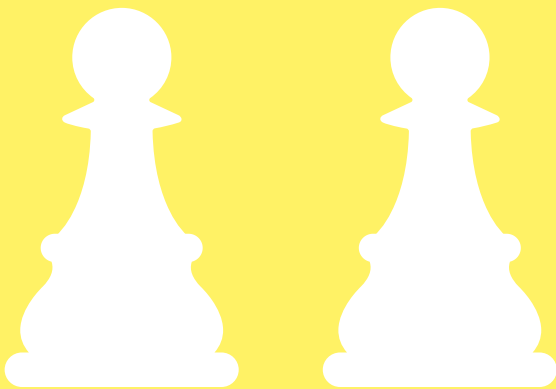
It is when the movements are tied deeply to community organising, to economic experimentation for community and collective ownership, to systems of mutual aid, conflict resolution, restorative justice, and healing, that new norms and new power arrangements can emerge.

New times call for new methods

Philanthropy, too, faces dramatic change. Levels of obscene wealth are creating major new flows of philanthropic resources. Leaders of movements and organisations on the front lines of social, economic and environmental change are calling on philanthropy to dramatically change historic practices of disproportionately funding large NGOs which spend more on self-perpetuation than systems change, of setting strategies within their boardrooms rather than ceding power to partners, and of being embedded in the very systems funders seek to change. Instead, they are calling on our sector to bring the advocates and movement leaders to the table as true partners to direct funding flows, get the money to the ground with transformative and sustained funding flows, and centre justice in all that we do.

And they are right. The best shot at having new norms and systems is if we support the forces of

ship



The best shot at having new norms and systems is if we support the forces of justice rising across the world.

justice rising across the world. We must get real money flowing to communities fighting the abuses of economic and political power, creating alternative models, and building deep power within and across movements. With so much at risk and so much opportunity for real change, philanthropy needs leaders who will sustain the commitment to justice and the agency of communities.

Ten questions

To do this will require leadership. As leaders in philanthropy, how do we ensure that we are agents of transformation not perpetuation of outdated and ineffectual practices that are tied to failing systems? We cannot be part of the change required to usher in justice-centred, sustainable and viable new systems unless we are willing to interrogate fundamental issues. If you have not done so to date, start a deep, authentic dive into the following 10 questions:

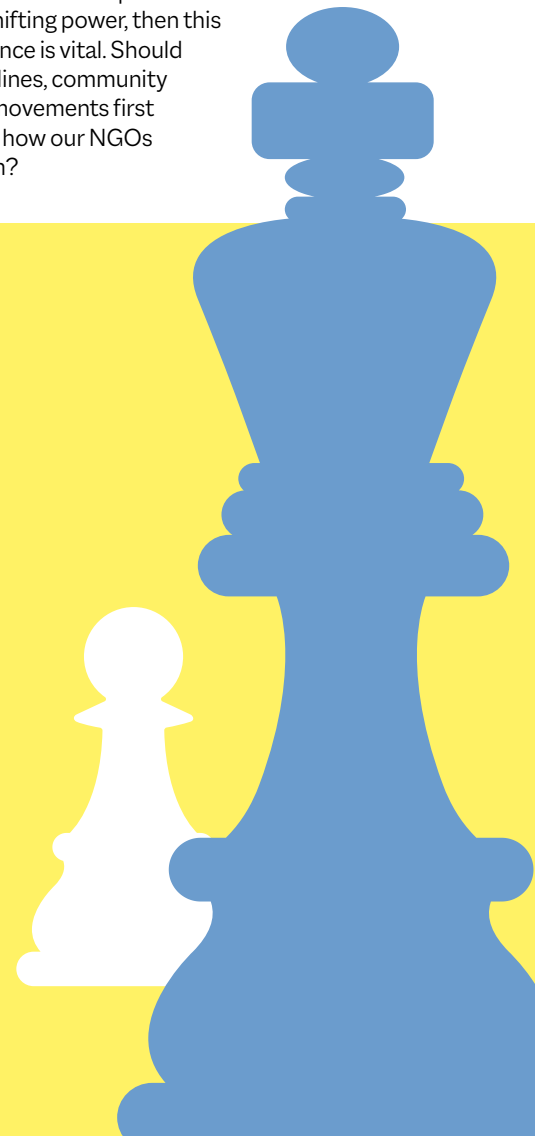
Who are we accountable to? Volumes have been written about philanthropy's near total lack of accountability to society, to government, to our partners, or the communities where we reside. Donors receive charitable tax status or are chartered in many parts of the world explicitly to serve the common good. While common good is open to wildly diverse interpretations, every donor and foundation needs to have clarity about who you serve, whether you are accountable to them, how you assess accountability, and whether those you 'serve' participate.

Do we have a power analysis? There are powerful actors that control and massively benefit from today's failing systems. Do you have an analysis as to what it will take to weaken or transform their power? What power is required to confront abuse of power and injustice and how are your strategies building that power?

Who sets our strategies and are we centring justice in them? These are not two different questions. If we do not have those engaged in advancing justice at the table or advising our strategies, how can they possibly be effective, legitimate or transformative? Boards should want to cede power to partners for no other reason than effectiveness, but must interrogate the ethics of doing so, as well.

Do we have the right balance between funding movements and large NGOs? All over the world, new types of organising and advocacy are emerging. Social movements and their leaders bear the greatest risk in increasingly violent and dangerous conditions in every part of the world, yet the lion's share of philanthropy's funding goes to large NGOs and increasingly they are being scrutinised for consuming resources disproportionate to their impact. If we are serious about shifting power, then this question of balance is vital. Should we centre front lines, community organising and movements first and then assess how our NGOs are serving them?

With so much at risk and so much opportunity for real change, philanthropy needs leaders who will sustain the commitment to justice and the agency of communities.



How much is invested in experimentation?

It is obvious that nothing new happens without risk and experimentation. Further, needed advocacy, organising, narrative shift, movement building and system change are really hard to measure. Are our reporting practices encouraging partners to set achievable and easily measurable goals but failing to achieve transformative change? How do we incentivise experimentation and encourage calculated and strategic risk taking? What does it take for our leadership to be comfortable with risk?

Are we collaborating at the level required?

Silly question, yes? We spend tens of millions on philanthropic collaboration – funder affinity groups, funder meetings and retreats, consultants to help us map the field. Should we be learning differently from each other’s experiences or interrogating if we are reinforcing what we want to hear? Should we be collaborating with other sectors? Are we truly collaborating with our partners on the ground? Should we spend more time and resources on being in the field than going to philanthropy meetings?

Are we optimising our social and political capital?

Do we use our advocacy voice on behalf of our partners? Do we use our unprecedented social capital and political power and influence to lift up the strategies, voices and needs of our partners? If we are just disbursing cheques, are we squandering the leverage and impact we can have as well by elevating the strategies and demands of our grantees?

Are our investments driving harm or serving the public good?

Are the investments that grow our wealth and our endowment advancing our mission? Are we invested in corporations that are driving the harm we are asking our grantees to solve? Could we use these assets to build equity and justice, create economic opportunities for our partners, help solve climate change or other mission-related problems? If we receive charitable tax status to serve the public good, should that apply to our investments? Can we generate fair and sufficient returns and use our investments as another tool in our tool box? How can we more effectively align grants and investments to support innovation that advances justice and offers solutions to local and global problems?

Are our giving levels enough and justifiable?

The previous interrogation inevitably leads to this profound question. Are we giving enough? Can we

give more? How much should we give?

If the world is going to hell in a handbasket, is perpetuity justifiable? And if we spend down, who would be negatively affected and how do we prepare for it? Who stands in the way of breaking down the wall between the investments and the grants? Is it those who benefit from the investments?

Are we working towards a world where there is less philanthropy and better government?

Is the level of wealth in our society acceptable? How does philanthropy fit into this picture and what are the implications for us? Should we advocate for higher taxes and for government programmes that serve the common good? And in the case of community foundations, how do we balance the long-term needs of the community against the short-term urgency?

The moment requires us to transform ourselves

Leadership at this moment requires that we have the tough and transformative discussions. These questions will undoubtedly generate rich and maybe contentious dialogue. Imagine if each donor institution embarked on this inquiry and we shared our analysis, learned from each other’s soul-searching, and then embarked on radical new collaboration. Not just collaborating from big to big foundation, peer to peer, or through funder affinity groups, but what if we also did this with our grantee partners and communities based on uncharacteristic transparency and accountability?

I do not propose these questions as new, comprehensive or sufficient. But they arise from over 20 years in philanthropy and are now much more urgent than before. And they honestly reflect my own imperfect experiential learning and uneven implementation of what I propose here. As I step down as the head of the Wallace Global Fund and hand the baton to the next leader that will drive the foundation’s work to new levels, I deeply hope these are questions we can debate widely and generatively in philanthropy. The challenges before us are enormous. We can and ultimately must transform ourselves consistent with what this moment requires of our very powerful sector. ●