

Responsive Philanthropy

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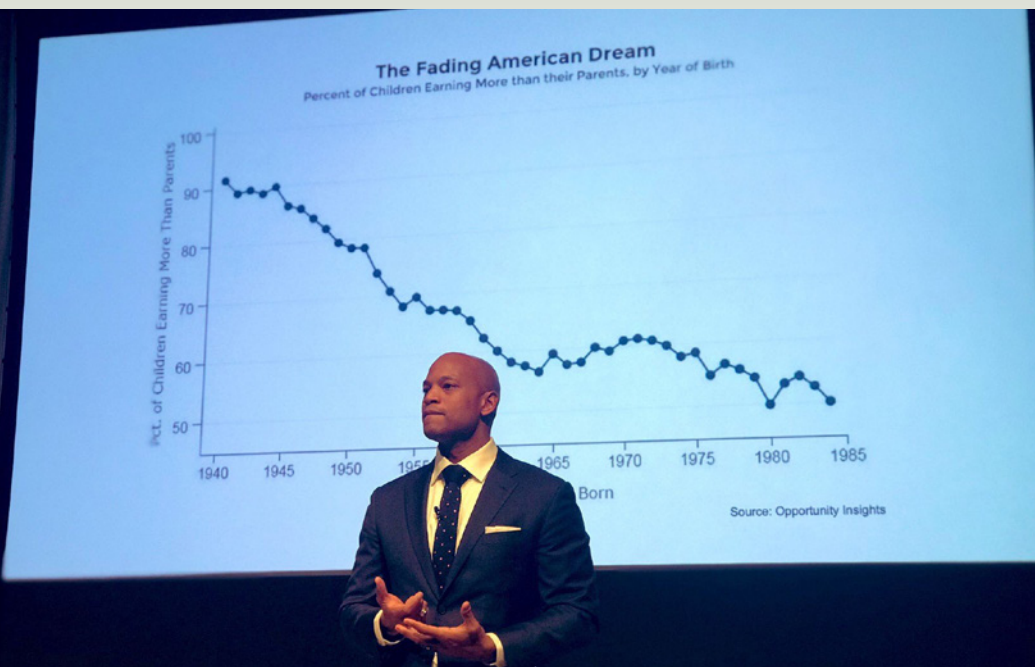
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Wes Moore speaks at the Philanthropy NY Annual Meeting on the crisis of economic mobility, May 16, 2019. (Image courtesy of Robin Hood.)



Philanthropy for change, not charity

By Wes Moore

For Robin Hood, community-grounded policy efforts are essential in its fight against poverty in New York City.

You don't have to look very far to see that we are in a critical moment in the poverty fight.

More than 40 million people across the U.S. live below the Federal Poverty Level – that is a household income of just \$25,100 for a family of 4. In New

York City, where I lead Robin Hood's efforts to fight poverty, nearly 1 in 2 New Yorkers – a city with a population of 8.5 million people – are living near poverty.

Confronting this reality and reflecting on our 30-year history drove a new strategic vision for Robin Hood – a process I led over my first 18 months as CEO. Earlier this year, we announced that Robin Hood must commit to moving households out of poverty in New York City measurably and sustainably.

This is a critically important progression for the organization, and a goal that will require our grantmaking to be at its best. We will rely upon the deep

relationships we have built with community-based organizations over the past 3 decades.

But grants alone will not get us out of this.

DISPELLING THE POVERTY MYTH

Data from our Poverty Tracker¹ shows that, while the poverty rate in New York City is about 19%, some 42% of New York City's residents have experienced poverty at some point over the past 3 years.

This data shows the pervasive and systemic nature of poverty and the disparities across (continued on page 9)



challenging grantmakers to strengthen communities

A message from the President and CEO



Dear Reader,

Now is not the time for business as usual. Frontline activists and organizations across the country and the world continue to fight for dignity, security, inclusion and a thriving future for all.

From the youth-led global climate strikes and Puerto Ricans' successful ouster of its governor to Indigenous Hawaiians pushing back the construction of a giant telescope on sacred ground and immigration activists continuing protest over ICE raids and family separation, I am inspired by the brave and steadfast people of color, Native Americans, LGBTQ+ people, immigrants and other marginalized communities leading the work for equity and justice.

I am thankful for the funders who have stepped up in support of their efforts. In this edition of *Responsive Philanthropy*, 3 philanthropy leaders share what they think are the mission-critical strategies that grantmakers need to embrace to truly partner with these efforts for transformative change in our society so that no person, no community is left behind.

For Wes Moore, chief executive of Robin Hood, policy advocacy that is grounded and informed by the people it serves is an important component of anti-poverty efforts in New York City. Read "Philanthropy for change, not charity."

In "How philanthropy can help us be better as a nation," Rick Williams, former chief executive of Sobrato Family Foundation, identifies 10 priority action items for grantmakers to help the country reach its full potential.

Taryn Higashi, Unbound Philanthropy's executive director, sat down with Anita Khashu, director of NEO Philanthropy's Four Freedoms Fund; Bridgit Antoinette Ev-ans, executive director of Pop Culture Collaborative; and Aleyamma Mathew, inter-im director of Collaborative for Women's Safety and Dignity, to discuss how funder collaboratives are playing an important role in breaking issue silos and enhancing grantmaker impact. Check out "The power of bridging issue silos through funding collaboratives."

In a recent post for *Candid's PhilanTopic*, I asked: "In a decade or two, when you look back on this time, a time when the fate of American democracy — indeed, the fate of many species, including our own — seemed uncertain, what do you hope to be able to say about your work?"

Be bold. Be brave. Take risks. Leverage your power in support of grassroots movements leading the way.

Yours in solidarity,

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President and CEO

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How philanthropy can help us be better as a nation

By Rick Williams

Rick Williams, Sobrato Family Foundation's chief executive, reflects on his 20 years in philanthropy and suggests 10 priority action items for the sector to help America reach its full potential.

As I announce my retirement and reflect on 20 years in philanthropy and 30 in the social impact community, I am in awe of the generosity and transformational acts I've seen from individuals from all walks of life.

Their collective efforts have alleviated suffering and created opportunities for so many. Whether building schools and libraries, battling polio, preserving open space, reclaiming communities, protecting our environment and natural resources, supporting social impact entrepreneurs or promoting racial, civil and gender rights, philanthropy has been instrumental in advancing and investing in the hopes and dreams of people working to create a better future.

I believe that philanthropy must use its leadership, creativity, positional power and resources to support the development of a vision for our country that focuses on promoting everyone's collective wellbeing. It's a vision that tackles the structural root causes of our social problems that we resist addressing as a nation.

EARLY LESSONS IN SOCIAL JUSTICE AND PHILANTHROPY

It was probably my destiny to have a career in philanthropy. Growing up as an African American in South Carolina, I was able to see all facets of this country's citizens' interpretation of the constitutional phrase, "All men are created equal." I grew up in a place



Rick Williams

and time still mired in the aftermath of slavery, segregation and racial oppression. It was a place and time where the hopes and dreams of my many neighborhood friends were either overtly limited or crushed by racist policies and practices, or insidiously through indifference and neglect.

Fortunately, I was born into a loving home with an ever-present extended family. My father served 30 years in the U.S. Army and another 20 building future military leaders as a member of Gonzaga University's ROTC staff. My mother was a licensed pediatric nurse. They both used their opportunities to ensure that doors that were closed to them as children would open for my sister and me.

Social justice lessons of my childhood not only sharpened my awareness of how tenuous a shared belief in a common good is, but also how challenging it is to advance the founding elements of our democracy on a daily basis. They taught me that there are caring, enlightened and committed individuals willing to invest their own resources into philanthropic causes; whether through vast fortunes or the change in their pockets, they worked toward improving the lives of strangers and pushing our country to live up to its principles.

So, philanthropy, large and small, through donated money, volunteered time and expressions of love, shaped me and continues to give me hope – though tested lately by our current national politics – for the future of our country and democracy.

STRIVING FOR PHILANTHROPY'S FULL POTENTIAL

Philanthropy is defined as charitable giving and altruistic acts motivated by the desire to promote the welfare of others, to better humanity and to make the world a better place. There is a growing preference for philanthropy to evolve into a science, focused on a clearly defined set of inputs that will lead us to a clearly defined result that can be replicated.

I hold a somewhat different view: To achieve philanthropy's true meaning, I believe we need to see philanthropy as

a combination of both science and art.

Our humanity and relationships with fellow humans and the planet are far too complicated to fit neatly within the scientific method. Some of our biggest philanthropic accomplishments would not have met the rigid test of a logic model because their specific outcomes resulted from the “unscientific” investments in the belief of a greater good for society and individuals.

Now, more than ever, we need the application of creative skills and imagination, reasoning, data and passion to change the social condition for a growing number of our suffering neighbors.

While philanthropy is praised for achieving some of the most amazing and life-changing advances in modern times, it is not immune to losing the public’s trust. Recently, philanthropic efforts have been criticized and challenged for focusing on the symptoms

of persistent and systematic injustice, discrimination and oppression rather than impacting the underlying political, economic and social structures at their roots – roots that perpetuate social injustice and massive wealth accumulation by a select few.

TODAY’S URGENT NEEDS

We are in a period in which inequality in all its forms is altering the fabric of our neighborhoods and communities.

The potential to realize the dream of climbing the economic and social ladder – a hallmark of our country’s core narrative – no longer feels accessible to a growing number of children and young adults. Too many of our neighbors are scared and frustrated that their hard work does not result in the certainty that they can afford a home and take care of their family. Too many are plagued with worry that one missed

paycheck or one unexpected family expense may cause financial ruin.

We are unable to address the root causes that create this sense of helplessness and frustration in a growing number of people across the country due to polarizing government and policy debates. I believe that philanthropy, as a field rather than as individual institutions, should and must play a role in framing, leading and providing resources to drive a new conversation and test promising new ideas that focus on bettering the nation.

The social challenges we seek to solve will require persistence, intuition, innovation, risk-taking and no small measure of faith and hope. And philanthropy is best positioned to bring those traits to bear.

However, this can only occur if philanthropy, which represents the voice of hundreds of leaders and influencers,

New and Renewed NCRP Members

A Black Education Network
Allegany Franciscan Ministries
American Jewish World Service
Black Voters Matter Capacity Building Institute
Black Voters Matter Fund
Borealis Philanthropy
Center for Popular Democracy
Community Coalition
Community Foundation of Tompkins County
Cricket Island Foundation
Charles K. Blandin Foundation
Con Alma Health Foundation
Consumer Health Foundation
Headwaters Foundation for Justice
Heising-Simmons Foundation
Kansas Health Foundation
Korean American Community Foundation

Liberty Hill Foundation
Lumina Foundation
Minneapolis Foundation
Ms. Foundation for Women
National Guestworker Alliance
Pay Our Interns
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Ruth Mott Foundation
Seattle Foundation
Southeast Immigrant Rights Network
The Annie E Casey Foundation
The California Endowment
The Heinz Endowments
Virginia Organizing
Voqal
Walter and Elise Haas Fund
William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund

is prepared to speak out against the systems that not only enable it to thrive, but also enable the unconscionable detention and separation of children from their families at our nation's border, the absence of justice for the killing of Black men and women, and the lack of punishment for the financial schemes and products that caused the Great Recession (which has been projected to cause a 40% decrease in the wealth of Black households by 2030). These are just a few of many examples.

10 MOST CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR BOLD AND ENTREPRENEURIAL PHILANTHROPIC LEADERSHIP

Now more than ever, members of the philanthropic community must collectively come together to ensure that our democracy and way of life regains its moral footing and operates in a manner that ensures benefits are accessible to all. The people behind philanthropy, the resources under their control and the tax benefits that foundations receive demand nothing less.

In a sincere attempt to provoke the discussion and action that I believe are urgently needed to help change the troubling direction where the country is headed, I humbly submit the following 10 priorities for the philanthropic community:

1. Acknowledge the inherent power, privilege and subsidies, which enable vast resources of philanthropic wealth to accumulate.
2. Commit to stewarding this wealth toward alleviating suffering, removing structural impediments to upward mobility and affording marginalized communities a voice in local, state and national policy debates.
3. Allocate resources to help the country engage in the long overdue discussion about race, segregation and discrimination and their persistent and current impacts. Seek to reverse class and racial segregation

in our neighborhoods, schools and churches.

4. Allocate resources to prevent the degradation and erosion of our democracy to ensure that all residents are represented, and that our governing institutions and the press commit to advancing human rights.
5. Focus on building healthy, diverse communities so that a child's life outcomes can no longer be predicted by their zip code or the price of the houses in their neighborhood.¹

6. Be a leading voice in talking about systemic barriers and oppression that have left too many communities behind. Ensure that community advocates know they are not standing alone because capitalism, while positive in many respects, is not a guardian of social justice and equitable opportunities.
7. Support efforts that enable all citizens to experience the benefits of art and the world's diverse cultural works that low-income and rural communities typically find inaccessible.
8. Advance our intellectual and scientific understanding of the facts related to who we are as a species and the world we live in.
9. Embrace your role as a venture capitalist for social good and social justice. Find and bet on social impact leaders and entrepreneurs, take risks, be willing to fail and learn, and be responsive and connected to the community you serve.
10. Maintain long-term commitment to your areas of focus and partner organizations through multi-year general operating support and flexible resources. It is only with long-term partnerships that we can drive lasting change.

The field of philanthropy must take a proactive role in helping America realize its potential.

Dream big. Because if you don't, who will? ■

Rick Williams is CEO of the Sobrato Family Foundation, which seeks to make Silicon Valley a place of opportunity for all its residents.

Notes

1. For more on the social determinants of health, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/index.htm>.

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The power of bridging issue silos through funding collaboratives

By Unbound Philanthropy

Unbound Philanthropy's Taryn Higashi interviews Anita Khashu of Four Freedoms Fund, Bridgit Antoinette Evans of Pop Culture Collaborative and Aleyamma Mathew of Collaborative Fund for Women's Safety and Dignity to discuss the role of cross-issue collaboratives and why they're important for grantmaker impact.

Unbound Philanthropy believes in the power of shared learning; the necessity of collaboration, alignment and coordination; and in using an intersectional lens to understand complex problems and relationships as the basis of thoughtful strategies. It is part of several funder collaboratives such as the Four Freedoms Fund (FFF), the Pop Culture Collaborative (PCC), and the Collaborative Fund for Women's Safety and Dignity. Taryn Higashi sat down with the directors of these collaboratives, Anita Khashu, Bridgit Antoinette Evans and Aleyamma Mathew, to share lessons and learn from one another.

Taryn Higashi (TH): *How do collaboratives, especially those working across intersecting issue areas, help play a bridging role among funders? What other benefits do you see for funders?*

Anita Khashu (AK): A collaborative fund that's well-resourced and has the right people at the table can hold the big picture of a movement or a field. It can supplement a program officer's capacity to track what's happening on the ground, what the trends are and where the gaps are. It can expand the program officer's body of knowledge and perspective that informs their grantmaking. A common theme we hear from funders is that they do better grantmaking now that they are at the table.

Working in collaboration also expands the collection of information, perspective and knowledge for the collaborative itself. And a collaborative ensures that grantmaking is better coordinated and that there's less duplication.

Bridgit Antoinette Evans (BAE): When we form collaboratives across an intersectional set of goals, we facilitate collaboration across fields and movements that is often not possible in direct grantmaking portfolios.

Collaboratives allow people who have spent their entire careers doing immigrant rights funding, for instance, to sit with others who have spent their entire careers doing reproductive justice work. Often, it surfaces not just common ground, but new ground.

When a funder collaborative is formed around a field that is nascent or largely unorganized, like in the case of the Pop Culture Collaborative, it also provides a space of rigorous learning for funders that's not really available elsewhere.

TH: *When I was an active participant in FFF, the LGBTQ funders transformed and made so much more intersectional our grantmaking for the immigrant rights movement. Other funders that support other movements joined FFF because they wanted to make a contribution to the immigrant community, but what they bring enriches the collaborative, too. For*

example, Luminate, which supports civic empowerment, data and digital rights, financial transparency, and independent media; The Kresge Foundation, which seeks to expand opportunity for low-income people so they can gain the tools and support needed to lead self-determined lives and join the economic mainstream; and the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation, which supports, among other areas, community building, collaboration and partnerships among Asian American Pacific Islander organizations.

Another function of FFF and PCC is to increase funding for the field through direct grantmaking by their members as well as through the collaborative funds themselves. This is important to avoid overconcentration of power and decision-making in one entity. The grantmakers at these tables are learning a lot from and are inspired by each other, and this helps develop confidence and skills to do direct grantmaking on immigration issues in addition to their funding through the collaboratives – and to use an intersectional lens.

Aleyamma Mathew (AM): Philanthropy is a place of power. How can philanthropy leverage its own power – outside of grantmaking – to also be an advocate that echoes the work of our grantees and the issues at hand?

AK: FFF does a lot of funder-facing education, informing, helping funders un-

derstand opportunities and advising. That helps to increase resources to the field.

During moments when funders have zero capacity to do rapid-response funding, such as amid the family separation crisis, they are able to do so because of the consultation and advice that we offer.

BAE: Aleyamma's point speaks to the range of roles that collaboratives can play in the process of growing fields and increasing resources. It depends on how much a field already exists. There may be a need for a communications strategy around the why, the what and the how of the collaborative. For PCC, this was incredibly important in the first couple of years.

Now, we've begun to pivot our strategy to showcase our grantees' impact. When you're thinking of starting a collaborative, a question to ask is, "What role can a collaborative play in formalizing or legitimizing a space in the eyes of your audiences?"

At PCC, we think of ourselves as a hybrid entity that has some grantmaking functionality that's common to other collaboratives, but also programmatic work, which is more unusual. This is such a nascent field; there's a lot of learning for us to support among grantmakers. Are we a member of the field or are we a funder of the field? That's something we're actively navigating

and interpreting for ourselves and others because of the many different roles we have initially played.

AM: Like pop culture, gender-based violence has been underfunded and undervalued. There's a need to connect with other funders and increase resources to the field. Donors want to integrate gender into their portfolio. They want to do it sooner than later, and they want to learn from a community of experts. For example, Unbound, which is interested in immigration, is engaging in the Collaborative Fund for Women's Safety and Dignity by looking at the intersection of gender, gender-based violence, refugee rights and immigration right now.

TH: *What are some successes you're proud of?*

BAE: I feel proud of the space we've opened up for artists, particularly artists of color and of immigrant and Muslim backgrounds, to be more on the leading edge of change in the systems and structures of the industry and also within their own creative processes.

The Pop Culture Collaborative is uniquely funding in the entertainment industry to invest in new creative processes, new incubator spaces and new production systems for artists to own their work, to create their work with different collaborators, and to innovate in how their stories are making their way to audiences.

One example is the work that Sameer Gardezi is doing with Break the Room. He came to the PCC with a fairly conventional request – support the production of a digital series. But through conversations and building a long-term partnership, he ultimately piloted an incredibly experimental way of developing new series content through collaboration between television writers from communities historically excluded from the American story and social justice activists.

His methods are now being institutionalized in a major production company and are being adapted by studios,



Taryn Higashi



Anita Khashu



Bridgit Antoinette Evans



Aleyamma Mathew

including a new series he is co-producing with Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson featuring an entirely Hawaiian/Polyesian writers room. That’s a really good trajectory in a short amount of time.

AK: I am proud of the way FFF can support newer projects and initiatives, which we are now seeing playing an incredible leadership role. This can lead to the launch of new organizations such as UndocuBlack Network, which we funded early on, the National TPS Alliance, Southern Border Communities Coalition and One Arizona.

We can take big risks when we see a gap in the movement or when the work is too nascent for larger funders. We not only give grants, but also capacity building support, technical assistance and peer-to-peer learning. That combination of support early on when these efforts are trying to emerge is important.

AM: We haven’t done grantmaking yet, but we’re reflecting on what the collaborative has done so far. One of the things I’ve heard from advisory members is that for some of them, it was the first time they were in such a feminist-created space. And for some of the

funders who were used to being inside their own institutions that are heavy on process, being part of this collaborative meant stepping out of restrictions and being part of a nimbler process.

I am also proud of the ways that the fund has integrated movement leaders in the initial design and thinking of the fund.

TH: *Are there any other points that you’d like to share?*

AM: Not only do I hope to support grantmaking efforts to the field of women’s safety and dignity, but I am also working to make sure that philanthropy is also walking the walk. How do we address behavior in philanthropy? That means having a set of policies and procedures around sexual harassment in HR manuals and bringing philanthropic leaders to the table and ensuring that they’re addressing issues around power dynamics among program officers and grantees as a step towards creating culture change within foundations.

We’ve seen a call to action in the entertainment industry, with Hollywood revisiting its policies and procedures; we also saw it in tech. Some of our tech

and corporate partners have challenged us in philanthropy to follow suit.

When I think about my participation in affinity groups, I value the networking and the spectrum of issues that we could engage such as immigration, economic justice, etc. It allows you to meet a huge span of players in philanthropy. However, it takes so long to coordinate resources because many program officers are not feeling empowered enough to move their institutions to contribute more.

I was speaking to a colleague recently who said that they have been funding more collaborative funds rather than affinity groups because collaboratives seems to go deeper in having a sustained dialogue and creating action around it because the resources are already at the table, which I thought was a great point. ■

Taryn Higashi is executive director of Unbound Philanthropy. Anita Khashu is director of Four Freedoms Fund and NEO Philanthropy. Bridgit Antoinette Evans is executive director of Pop Culture Collaborative. Aleyamma Mathew is interim director of Collaborative Fund for Women’s Safety and Dignity.

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racial, ethnic and gender lines. And it speaks to larger realities across the country. Black Americans are the only racial group in the U.S. making less than they were in 2000. More than half of Black workers are paid less than \$15 per hour; close to 60% of Latino workers make less than \$15 per hour.

The problem isn't that impoverished communities are not working, as prevailing (and misleading) narratives would have us believe. In fact, our Poverty Tracker paints a strikingly different picture: 45% of New York adults living in poverty worked more than 6 months out of the year based on 2017 data.

This data contrasts the narrative that, if you just work hard enough, you can pull yourself up and out of poverty to grasp that ever-elusive American Dream. This myth also elevates individual responsibility above the collective choices and intentional policies that leave people and families struggling to keep their head above water, not to mention how it degrades the social and emotional wellbeing of those families fighting for a better life.

CONFRONTING THE POLICIES BEHIND POVERTY

Over the course of American history, government policies have created, perpetuated or deepened inequality, poverty and neglect in communities across the nation.

Here is just one crucial example: As of 2017, 11.5 million children in the U.S. live in poverty. Yet the federal Child Tax Credit (CTC) – one of the most effective poverty-fighting policies in the past 40 years – leaves out approximately 1/3 of children and families who earn too little to get the full credit. The administration had the opportunity to reform this flaw, but 2017 tax cuts did not include improvements in the credit or a token increase. Instead it was households with incomes

as high as \$400,000 that received large CTC increases. The 2017 law also eliminated the CTC for about 1 million children in low-income working families because they lack a Social Security number. This overwhelmingly affected “Dreamers” with undocumented status whose parents brought them to the U.S.

That is a political choice that flows from narratives surrounding poverty around the so-called “deserving poor.”

Despite this reality, last summer the White House’s Council of Economic Advisers declared that President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty (launched half a century ago) is “largely over and a success.” The council issued this report to argue for new work require-

ments on those who qualify for federal safety-net programs, which perpetuates the current administration’s efforts to turn the War on Poverty into the war on *people* in poverty. These cruel policies target the most vulnerable neighbors in our society and range from child separation to denying food stamps to millions across the country.

We should be clear: This state of systemic and chronic poverty, hardship and disadvantage is a result of *choices* influenced by destructive and inaccurate narratives and political calculations. It has nothing to do with fairness, hard work or ambition. Nor is it because philanthropy failed to do its job.

CHANGE, NOT CHARITY

As a philanthropic force, Robin Hood is not interested in charity; we are interested in change. And to create real change, we must actively and aggressively leverage the role of philanthropy to combat these destructive policies head on.

Robin Hood has pre-thought and rethought philanthropy for a new generation of government action. It was one of the first organizations to fund needle exchanges at the height of the HIV/ AIDS epidemic during the 1980s. But, in addition to our renewed focus on creating sustainable mobility from poverty, we must support and leverage our grantmaking with efforts on policy, partnership and changing the narrative around poverty.

We must build on the deep relationships our program staff has developed through partnerships with city and state governments. We must ensure we learn from and add to the work being done by the many great organizations that have been in this space longer than us.

Most importantly, we have to continue deepening Robin Hood’s relationships and opportunities with our community partners and remain wide-eyed about the challenges that come with

This state of systemic and chronic poverty, hardship and disadvantage is a result of choices influenced by destructive and inaccurate narratives and political calculations.



Wes Moore (center) and Robin Hood's Chief Public Policy Officer Jason Cone (left), meet with Staten Island District Attorney Mike McMahon (right) to discuss his efforts to combat drug overdoses in Staten Island on July 29, 2019. (Image courtesy of Robin Hood.)

operating in the policy space.

To lead our progression into policy, we recruited Jason Cone – a dynamic and seasoned leader who previously led Doctors Without Borders in the U.S. – to serve as Robin Hood's first chief public policy officer. Cone is building our policy efforts at Robin Hood on the foundation of our rich history of rigorous, outcome-focused grantmaking.

WORK THAT IS GROUNDED IN DATA AND COMMUNITY

At Robin Hood, we see our programmatic work as the risk capital of society. But we are also aware that solid programs and high-impact outcomes aren't enough to drive government uptake of

these poverty-fighting interventions.

We will center the people closest to the problems in the design of the solutions – whether programmatic or political – that we are spearheading.

We know our policy efforts must support both grantmaking and the direct service work that our more than 250 community partners do every day.

Efforts must be grounded in data and backed by evidence. They must lift the voices of those who will benefit from policy change. They must have the potential for larger impact. And, when necessary, they must react to issues and protect the policy's beneficiary: our community partners and communities who live in poverty.

There must also be a clear rationale for Robin Hood's action: We are not adding our voice to policy work just for the sake of it; we know that Robin Hood has a distinct and additive role in creating opportunities for those we serve.

PRIORITIZING OUR PARTNERS AND COMMUNITIES

Earlier this year when New York City officials negotiated a budget of more than \$90 billion, we showed what Robin Hood's public policy work will look like – we staked out a fight that prioritized the needs of our community partners.

New York City relies almost exclusively on city-contracted, nonprofit human service organizations to deliver basic services to its residents, especially low-income New Yorkers. The city outsources these vital services to more than 1,000 of these organizations to operate homeless shelters, early child-care programs, mental health clinics, emergency food pantries and other vital services that 2.5 million New Yorkers deeply rely on every day.

But New York City chronically underpays and delays paying these invaluable nonprofits. In 2017 and 2018, New York City Comptroller Office reported that the city was an average of 221 days late in registering payments for contracts. An independent analysis by Sea Change Capital Partners, a nonprofit merchant bank, found that the city's delayed payments created a cash flow burden of approximately \$744 million on contracted

We are not adding our voice to policy work just for the sake of it; we know that Robin Hood has a distinct and additive role in creating opportunities for those we serve.

nonprofits. This burden directly affects these organizations' ability to pay even a modest cost of living adjustment to a predominantly female- and person-of-color-led workforce.

In response, Robin Hood raised our voice to confront this policy issue that affected many of our partners (more than half Robin Hood's community partners are city contractors). We wrote Mayor Bill de Blasio in May to ask the city to address this issue in its upcoming budget negotiations. We received no response, but local press coverage shed additional light on the issue. We convened meetings with key stakeholders, and spoke with the City Council members, the leader of the City Council, the city comptroller and New York City's budget director.

In an op-ed in the *New York Daily News*, I wrote: "We should not continue to see the financial burden of caring for the most vulnerable New Yorkers shifted to cash-strapped non-profits. But while we do, the least the mayor could do is pay them fairly and on time."

And we kept the pressure on: hitting the phones and taking to social media to keep this issue in the forefront of budget negotiations. Our action helped mobilize and support our community partners to share their voices on this issue as well, where they otherwise would have felt alone and afraid of losing government contracts for their services.

The result?

In their press conference announcing the budget, both the mayor and speaker of the City Council personally pledged to address the issue. Not only by having nonprofits file adjustments to their contracts to make up for underpayments and late payments, but the city government pledged to fix the problem over the coming year with budget adjustments.

In late August, the de Blasio administration announced improvements in

the contract registration process for several key human services agencies while not mentioning changes in others. We will continue to monitor progress and reserve our judgment for when our community partners and the low-income communities they serve experience the benefits of these actions.

Throughout this private and public confrontation, we continued to partner with the city on a wide array of programs, most recently as the seed funder for an initiative – ICARE – that provides legal services to undocumented and unaccompanied children facing deportation proceedings. In that very same budget, the city agreed to sustainably co-finance the program that had until then been largely supported by philanthropic organizations.

OUR COMMITMENT

All of our efforts on policy will continue to look like this because our goal is to move New York families out of poverty permanently.

We will achieve this by tackling issues based on their impact, not salience or sexiness.

We will deconstruct systems and narratives that stand in the way of mobility out of poverty.

We will stand with communities, focus on outcomes, fill a unique role and leverage data to drive our efforts.

We will partner with those who align with our community partners' interests, and boldly and humbly confront those in power, should they stand in our way. ■

Wes Moore is chief executive of Robin Hood.

Notes

1. Visit <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/poverty-tracker-data>.



Select Publications

The Case for Funding in the South August 2019

This 1-page brief intended for individual donors details how they can begin to fill the gap left by under-investment in the South by institutional philanthropy, as individual donors aren't beholden to the institutional barriers that prevent foundations from making timely pivots in funding.

State of Foundation Funding for the Pro-Immigrant Movement

by Timi Gerson, Ryan Schlegel and
Stephanie Peng April 2019

In this first brief from its new Movement Investment Project, NCRP uses the latest available grantmaking data and feedback from frontline immigrant justice movement organizations to identify how funders can invest more and in better ways in the rich diversity that fuels the success of our country.

Power Moves: Your essential philanthropy assessment guide for equity and justice

by Lisa Ranghelli May 2018

The only self-assessment toolkit centered on the role of power and privilege in advancing equity, *Power Moves* helps funders examine how well their practices and strategies build, share and wield power for lasting impact.

visit: www.ncrp.org/publications

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