

Acceptance speech for the Neighborhood Funders Group Award for Excellence in Philanthropy.

Delivered on June 6, 2018 at the NFG Raise Up Conference in St. Louis, Missouri.

Thank you so much for this incredible honor. When I look around the room, there are so many of you who have done so much important work together with me – thank you – you have consistently challenged my certainty, steadied my resolve and fortified my spirit.

When the board created this award, it was originally to honor the one and only Garland Yates, who is an exemplar of saying hard truths about our work with love and compassion. In that spirit, I've been asked to offer a few reflections and provocations from this precarious place between you and your dinner plans.

In a recent conversation with my daughter, she shared a fun fact from her day at school, which is that the triangle is the strongest geometric shape. At the risk of repeating unverified fake news from the 2nd grade set to all of my favorite people in philanthropy, I Googled it and geometry.com confirms that “a triangular shape is the strongest one.” So, inspired by my daughter, I want to reflect on three sides of our work we need to face with what the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. called the fierce urgency of now: trust, power, privilege.

TRUST

My first job in philanthropy was working with the North Star Fund. North Star and the Funding Exchange network pioneered the idea of community-controlled grantmaking. The model was based on the idea that those with resources could trust those with lived experience to make the best decisions.

This model came with its challenges: donors still advocated for things they cared about; it was hard to raise money to give to other people to give away; community board members occasionally had undisclosed conflicts of interest with groups applying for funds; groups on the ground did an enormous amount of work for a woefully small grant and many more groups were turned away than ultimately funded.

But when I think back on it – what made the model so radical was that it is a leap of faith. We can't control how change happens, who leads it and how long it will take. We can have faith and trust in people to come up with good ideas, to keep working hard for change, to make mistakes, to learn from them and to keep fighting.

My first provocation is to be more ambitious with what we can change in our grantmaking to put trust back in the center of our work.

Each one of us can ask where bureaucratic and programmatic practices have come from and begin to identify the low-hanging fruit we can change today. Maybe we don't need a mid-year report, a site visit every year or our own proposal format. We definitely don't need a fake funder budget. In short, how can we remove as many of the strings attached to our money as possible and trust in the self-determination and leadership of communities.

POWER

This brings me to the second side of my triangle: POWER. NCRP in their new *Power Moves* toolkit for advancing equity and justice shares a definition from Rashad Robinson of Color of Change. He says, "Power is the ability to change the rules." When you all head home and start to think about trust and how to build it in to your work, I think a key step is recognizing and embracing the power you have to change the rules within your institutions.

Vanessa Daniels of the Groundswell Fund also recently offered thoughts on using our power by sharing an Alice Walker quote: "The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."

To be honest, early in my career, I thought that real power was behind the doors of private suites at meetings and conferences like this where small groups sat around and made deals. I thought the key to being influential and powerful was to get invited into the rooms. After making it into a lot of these rooms, I started to feel like all we were really doing is remaking our own elites. Small groups of people with money deciding who should get it.

Regardless of where you came from before philanthropy, how big your endowment or portfolio is, and how challenging your internal institutional culture might be – we each have power.

For some of us it comes from our clarity of purpose built on a life of experience. For others of us, it is something we are made aware of quickly upon arrival in philanthropy, and still others of us really prefer not to think about it at all because we think it is a bad thing. We might find it deeply uncomfortable at first but eventually – after a few nice dinners, cushy conferences and quickly returned phone calls – our sense eventually becomes dulled.

However our power remains, and we do things like ask for feedback and take time to listen, while knowing deep down that we don't really agree and are just being polite; say yes and no all day; draw the lines around our program areas; frame our strategies to our boards; decide which calls to return and which meetings to take; decide who to invite to a meeting and how to design the agenda; determine the acceptable outcomes to merit continued support; decide who on our teams has the freedom to speak for themselves and who has to get permission.

My next provocation is to think about how we can build more distributed networks of mutually accountable leadership instead of controlled campaigns of influence and alignment. In other words – leadership development and organizing.

Vanessa also reminded us that the “boldest organizing – from janitors, to farmworkers, to foundation program staff – often happens from the ground up, not the top down. And that “Any system or institution run by human beings can be organized. There is absolutely nothing exceptional about philanthropy in this regard.”

Regardless of how we feel about it, we are in powerful positions, and those of us who shy away from it end up ineffective at best, and destructive at worst. In our isolated and unaccountable sector – the only ballast against abuse of power is collective and community accountability.

PRIVILEGE

Which leads to the final side of my triangle: privilege. I hesitated when outlining my thoughts on power, because for me to say these things without an explicit acknowledgment of white privilege, and the oppressive white institutional culture that dominates the philanthropic sector, my comments are still an incomplete thought.

So, for my final provocation I would like to talk directly to my white colleagues in the room. I say this with love and a spirit of reclaiming our collective humanity: We need to really step into what it means to be a white person in philanthropy at this moment.

We have never had more obvious opportunities to directly and openly confront whiteness, white privilege and white institutional culture. The everyday ugliness of this moment, and the incredible organized resistance, reveals just how much work needs to be done and gives us a chance, almost every day, to raise difficult issues and have honest conversations.

The abolitionist John Brown famously said, “I am eternally tired of hearing that word caution. It is nothing but the word of cowardice.” I truly believe we’ve got to risk more, we have to push the envelope, we can no longer just be supportive on the sidelines or let the hard work keep falling on our colleagues who are people of color to raise the topics that we know make our institutions and other white colleagues uncomfortable.

Once we acknowledge this privilege exists, we are obligated to challenge, subvert and dismantle it. This isn’t someone else’s fight we support. In order to truly advance justice – we have to put our own skin and privilege in the game.

So, I want to close by saying that developing TRUST, embracing our POWER and dismantling PRIVILEGE are not mastery activities. In fact, I’m pretty sure I got all three of them wrong today and probably at some point during this speech. But I’ll wake up tomorrow and keep at it.

I believe that NFG is one of those rare spaces where we can truly see and find one another on this journey and I want again thank Dennis and the NFG Board and staff for this award.

Being recognized this evening at NFG is an incredible honor and while we enjoy this reception, just a few miles from Ferguson, it is also a humbling reminder of MLK's charge to us that "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there 'is' such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action."

Thank you.

Molly Schultz Hafid is associate director at TCC Group where she leads, manages and advises projects in foundations strategic planning and strategy development; learning and capacity building; landscape analyses and grantmaking portfolio review; and multi-party partnerships and funder alignment. She also works closely with TCC Group's portfolio of managed family foundations, providing advice and support for approximately \$25 million in annual grantmaking. Molly contributes to the design and execution of TCC Group's philanthropic sector research agenda and thought leadership, with a specific focus on social justice philanthropy and on exploring how strategic equity commitments and internal institutional practices can align and reinforce each other.

AWARD DESCRIPTION: *The NFG Award for Excellence in Philanthropy honors individuals who exemplify NFG's values and willingness to engage in shared leadership, power analysis and principled struggle as they navigate what it means to be a changemaker in philanthropy. These philanthropic leaders are often working under the radar – operating as true allies of community organizers, disrupting siloed approaches to grantmaking and collaborating with their philanthropic peers to increase impact.*