

Responsive Philanthropy

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*Trans Day of Action (New York) in 2015.
Photo by Jurek Wajdowicz*



Join Us on the Leading Edge of Social Change

By Roz Lee

“Long shot,’ ‘street protests,’ ‘violence,’ ‘legislation,’ ‘elections’ – too many foundation executives, more concerned about avoiding controversy than achieving mission, shied away from these words.”

—Freedom Funders: Philanthropy & The Civil Rights Movement 1955-1965¹

Any time we stand with those who are the most marginalized and who are often viewed as being controversial, we agree to take on a certain degree of risk. But if not philanthropy – which is largely free of the constraints that have afflicted our gridlocked public sector over these last few years – what other part of society is capable of supporting a risky venture that is initially perceived as being a long shot? Quite frankly, I can see no greater role for foundations than to be involved in the critical effort to, in the words of Martin Luther King, bend the “arc of history” toward justice.

This ethos has been the impetus behind much of our work at the Arcus Foundation, and has propelled us to

launch the Global Trans Initiative. This initiative is a commitment to the transgender community that will significantly increase the amount of grantmaking and the availability of other philanthropic resources to not only improve, but also increase access to basic protections and opportunities for a community that has experienced an intolerable degree of violence and discrimination.

“Nobody’s free until everybody’s free.”

— Fannie Lou Hamer

The philanthropic sector is large and diverse in terms (Continued on Page 12)



challenging grantmakers
to strengthen communities

Join Us on the Leading Edge of Social Change

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of the types of funders, what crucial priorities they aim to tackle, and the approaches that many employ to support bold and radical changes for the most pressing issues of our time. At Arcus, we are dedicated to the idea that people can live in harmony with one another and the natural world. We center our vision on two key mission areas – social justice and conservation, specifically lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) justice on a global level and the conservation of the great ape species.² Just as important as what we do is how we go about doing it.

Going into this process, we knew that despite the transgender community being included in the LGBT acronym, transgender people have been largely left behind in the wake of the acceptance and support of gay and lesbian people in the U.S. This is particularly true as the larger LGBT movement became deeply immersed in the fight to achieve marriage equality. In short, as Arcus board member and media personality Janet Mock has put it, “the T in LGBT is often silent.”

A national survey of nearly 6,500 transgender people³ found that respondents were nearly four times more likely than the general population to

have a household income of less than \$10,000. More than half had experienced harassment in a public accommodation, including restaurants, hotels and government agencies. Take Meagan Taylor, a black transgender woman who was arrested last year at a hotel in West Des Moines, Iowa, simply because of her gender identity.⁴

It remains perfectly legal in 30 states to not hire, deny housing to or decline to serve a person based on their gender identity. North Carolina and Mississippi have recently passed “license to discriminate” legislation denying transgender people the most basic of protections, and lawmakers are considering similar draconian measures in a number of states at this very moment.

Perhaps what remains the most sobering reality are the staggering rates of violence committed against transgender people. In the past seven years alone, more than 1,900 transgender people around the world have been murdered *that we know of*. The actual number of homicides is likely higher, as many of these cases are either inaccurately reported or go unreported altogether.

When Arcus looked at the landscape of funding transgender issues, we saw

that a paltry 7 percent of all LGBT funding⁵ (itself constituting a very small portion of foundation grant dollars) awarded in 2014 was explicitly focused on improving the legal status and living experience of transgender people. In fact, we were shocked when we discovered that Arcus itself was part of the problem.

In 2013, Arcus had increased its transgender funding from a mere 2 percent of our total LGBT grantmaking to its current 11 percent. However, even that increase was far from adequate to meet even the most basic needs of a population that remains largely poor, jobless, housing insecure and at significant risk to experience violence.

We knew we had to do more, and that the only way to impact the situation was to partner with other funders.

“If there is something we are going to do, we have a responsibility to learn and be humble. This puts us in a collaborative stance even as we consider impact first.”

—Chris DeCardy,
Lessons in Funder Collaboration⁶

Arcus’ strategic framework, developed by our senior team and approved by our board in 2012, articulates three key roles that we need to play to achieve our mission: strategic grantmaker, leader, and listener and learner. As a private of foundation, grantmaking naturally is our central activity. Within that role we have chosen to focus our support on a set of long-term goals and shorter-term outcomes⁷ that we are seeking to achieve with our grantees. We lead with great humility and extensive consultation in the field. We deploy that role where and when we can add value, through convening activists and thought leaders, providing new research and knowledge, and leveraging new resources. In reality, all of Arcus’ work is upheld by our third defined role



Trans Day of Action (New York) in 2015. Photo by Jurek Wajdowicz.

of listening and learning, which we carry out by deeply immersing ourselves in the fields in which we work and with the people who are most impacted.

In an effort to gain an even greater understanding of the pressing needs found among transgender communities, Arcus kicked off its discovery process in 2013 by organizing a two-day convening that involved more than 70 transgender activists and organization leaders from across the country. Over the following two years, we further informed our approach by attending a series of conferences, such as Gender Odyssey and the Philly Transgender Health Conference; hosting smaller-scale feedback sessions to sharpen or refine our learning; and taking part in a number of meetings with transgender activists from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and Europe.

One of the primary takeaways from these discovery efforts was that the newfound and increased visibility of a few transgender celebrities, such as “Orange Is the New Black” actress Laverne Cox and Olympian athlete Caitlin Jenner, had not translated into greater levels of acceptance and support for transgender people. A recent public opinion poll commissioned by GLAAD⁸ found that only 16 percent of Americans have met someone who is transgender (compared to the 58 percent who know a gay or lesbian person), leaving opponents of equality to counter the fearmongering and the active promotion of discriminatory laws that harm an already vulnerable population.

“How wonderful that no one need wait a single moment to improve the world”

—Anne Frank

Last December, Arcus and the NoVo Foundation announced the creation of the Global Trans Initiative,⁹ a five-year effort to deploy grants and philanthropic

resources totaling at least \$20 million worldwide to increase understanding and acceptance of transgender people, strengthen the capacity of the transgender movement and significantly improve the quality of life for transgender people. This first-of-its-kind initiative is not only a powerful outcome of more than two years of listening and learning, but was also conceived and developed in consultation with transgender stakeholders who provided the

guidance and feedback at every step of the process.

Now that we have completed this legwork, we are positioned to support an incredibly talented and resilient but underresourced movement. But we can’t possibly do this work alone.

The door to partnering with Arcus and NoVo on the Global Trans Initiative is wide open. I hope you will view funding transgender communities as similar to a prism, with each facet representing an area of focus already supported by the philanthropic sector.

It is significant that the NoVo Foundation, a funder whose mission places women and girls at its center, has agreed to join us. In deciding to be a founding partner, NoVo looked through their facet of the prism and saw the compelling role they could play to improve the life experiences of a long-neglected population of women who are also transgender.

So consider joining Arcus and NoVo in this endeavor. If your mission is workforce development, help advance the needs of transgender communities that experience unemployment at twice the rate of the general population. For funders invested in education and youth, support transgender young people who experience disproportionately high rates of bullying and who are more likely to leave school and experience homelessness. If you seek to improve health care and tackle health disparities, be on the frontlines of building a health care system that is both competent and responsive to the needs of transgender people.

The Global Trans Initiative is a long-term effort to achieve the type of change that improves the lives of transgender individuals while working toward the day when we can all accept and celebrate each person’s aspiration to live an open and authentic life. We invite you to look through your own part of the prism. We guarantee you will find

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the place where you can make a difference. Once you do, we look forward to working with you. ■

Roz Lee is director of social justice initiatives at the Arcus Foundation. Learn more at www.arcusfoundation.org.

Notes

1. Sean Dobson, *Freedom Funders: Philanthropy & The Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965* (Washington, D.C.: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2014), <http://www.ncrp.org/campaigns-research-policy-sp:1492/36-campaigns-research-a-policy/1081-freedom-funders-philanthropy-and>.
2. Learn more: <http://www.arcusfoundation.org/what-we-support/social-justice-lgbt>.
3. Jaime Grant, Lisa Mottet and Justin Tannis, "Injustice At Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey," (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Transgender Equity, 2011), <http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/national-transgender-discrimination-survey-full-report>.
4. Meagan Taylor, "I Was Arrested Just for Being Who I am," ACLU Blog, November 10, 2015, <https://www.aclu.org/blog/speak-freely/i-was-arrested-just-being-who-i-am>.
5. Naa Hammond and Kristina Wertz, "Trans Formational Impact: U.S. Foundation Funding for Trans Communities" (New York: Funders for LGBTQ Issues, February 2015), http://www.lgbtfunders.org/files/TRANSformational_Impact.pdf.
6. Judy Huang and Willa Seldon, "Lessons in Funder Collaboration," Bridgespan

Group and Packard Foundation, July 2014, <https://www.packard.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Lessons-in-Funder-Collaboration.pdf>.

7. See <http://beta.arcusfoundation.org.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/01/Arcus-Social-Justice-Program-Brochure.pdf>.
8. Zeke Stokes, "New Poll: Number of Americans who report knowing a transgender person doubles," GLAAD Press Release, September 7 2015, <http://www.glaad.org/blog/new-poll-number-americans-who-report-knowing-transgender-person-doubles>.
9. See <http://www.arcusfoundation.org/arcus-novo-foundation-announce-groundbreaking-philanthropy-initiative-to-improve-lives-of-transgender-people>.

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small grassroots organizations, leading to greater capacity, program support for data use and opportunities for additional dynamic research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PHILANTHROPY

The multidimensional impact of the RISE-NYC! Initiative supports conclusions about how grantmakers can most effectively partner with underresourced communities. Here are three takeaways for foundations:

- **Step in quickly to support dynamic needs in alignment with how each community uniquely defines solutions.** In the midst of complex challenges and great economic hardship, we witnessed the resiliency of small community organizations as they adeptly responded to the diverse and evolving problems confronting low-income women and families.
- **Invest in ways that demonstrate that the very process of investing is generative and catalytic for community growth versus impeding growth by our need for externally defined and prescriptive solutions.** We must recognize grassroots community partners as owners of the vision and direction of work. Responsible funding requires that we consider what the scope of funding can create for women and embrace community-driven investments that resonate with communities and disrupts rigid and externally defined visions of "success."
- **Fund not only to strengthen outcomes for women served, but to also improve the structure and capacity of organizations.** Such holistic attention ensures that, when funding ends, communities are left in resourced, rather than weakened, positions. ■

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Notes

1. Joseph C. Morreale, "The Impact of the 'Great Recession' on the Financial Resources of Nonprofit Organizations," Wilson Center for Social Entrepreneurship, 2011, p. 8, <http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/wilson/5>.
2. John M. Bridgeland, Mary McNaught, Bruce Reed and Marc Dunkelman, *The Quiet Crisis: The Impact of the Economic Downturn on the Nonprofit Sector* (Washington, D.C.: Civic Enterprises, 2009), p. 10, http://www.ncdsv.org/images/WKWF_Quiet-Crisis_3-2009.pdf.
3. Ibid, p. 6.
4. Nonprofit Finance Fund, "2010 State of the Nonprofit Sector Survey," 2010, http://www.nonprofitfinancefund.org/sites/default/files/docs/2010/NFF2010_Survey_Findings_Website032210.pdf, p. 11.
5. Ibid, p. 5
6. Morreale, op cit.