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Innovation: Creating Culturally Responsive Fundraising Campaigns

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The United States is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. According to Pew Research Center's 2019 American Trends Panel, the majority of Americans say this is very good (57 percent) or somewhat good (20 percent) for our country.

As we enter a Census year, it is important to note that Census data indicates that the year 2030 will be a demographic turning point for the United States. Baby boomers will all be older than 65, and with an aging population, it is anticipated that immigration will outpace natural increases as the primary driver for population growth. While the U.S. population will continue to grow, the non-Hispanic White population is projected to shrink, and multi-racial, Asian and Hispanic/Latinx communities will be the three fastest growing racial or ethnic groups.

Though demographics are changing, the nonprofit sector does not yet reflect these changes across its boards of directors, employees, volunteers or donors. If we were only to compare nonprofit board diversity to the U.S. population, we would find that racial and ethnic minorities are under-represented and boards have a higher average age than the population at large.

Unfortunately, most of the research in this area does not consider diversity of cultural, religious, gender, ability, education or other interpersonal identities in its methodology, so it is difficult to assess these characteristics across the sector. But it is not a stretch to hypothesize that if we are lacking in racial, ethnic and age diversity, then these other identities are not well-represented across the sector either.

Most of us can agree that we want to see more diversity and inclusion in our nonprofit workplaces. But there is little consensus on how to successfully accomplish this work within our own organizations.

There is no magic elixir to repair a system that has prioritized the hiring, board recruitment and fundraising of the non-Hispanic White community. Even the most well-meaning organizations fail to engage diverse communities because they haven't addressed their specific organizational culture and how it impacts the engagement and retention of the best talent, the ability to build bridges and social networks, and effective communication strategies for specific audiences.

What we do know is that a one-size-fits-all engagement model is obsolete, and we need to exist, however uncomfortably, outside the norm. A first step is recognizing philanthropy outside of its Westernized context.

Across the world, in different countries, cultures and communities, charity emerged with its own set of unique traditions. In 1552, a charitable complex opened in Jerusalem to support orphans, widows and the poor. In 1580, private benefactors surfaced in China and twenty years later, at the turn of the century, philanthropy entered the English language.

The 1600s saw Islamic leaders endowing schools, and the Zulu people, from what is now South Africa, promoted a concept of horizontal philanthropy, in which the giver and receivers are equals. From that concept came the traditions of ukwenana, in which a gift is made without the expectation of something in return; and ukusisa, when the giver lends a piece of his or her property, the recipient eventually returns the gift but keeps any byproducts or offspring.

As a sector, we need to identify philanthropic values and acts of charity ignored by mainstream, Western philanthropy.

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For instance:

- Latinx communities in the Southwestern U.S. have created mutualista (mutual aid) organizations to help newcomers get settled, provide burial plans, serve as a community insurance pool and fight against racism they encounter.
- Historically, African American communities founded black churches, fraternal orders and mutual aid societies to provide places to worship, pensions for

widows and aid to the poor. Their purpose was three-fold: humanitarian, self-help and social change.

- Asian American communities have a range of philanthropic traditions since each community possesses a wide array of languages, cultures, traditions and religions. For Koreans and Japanese, a significant amount of giving is tied to Christianity and Buddhism. In Filipino culture, *pasalubong*, a gift given to someone is practiced through *balikbayan* boxes—sent home to families in the Philippines—containing an array of goods ranging from chocolates, canned goods, toiletries, clothing, household items and other things that can't be bought in the Philippines. *Pasalubong* is not only a gesture of goodwill, it also contains expectations for overseas family members to share their wealth.
- Women's roles in charitable giving are important since single women are more likely to give than single men. Married couples are more likely to give than single people, with wives playing major decision-making roles. Currently, about one in five U.S. women's philanthropic organizations operate like giving circles, providing a collective approach to fundraising and philanthropy. This tradition allows people across a variety of income levels to participate in philanthropy and support causes that are important to their social identities like race, gender or religion.
- The color of a person's skin, age, education, economic class or how long they have lived in this country is not a significant predictor of giving amount. In fact, non-white communities suggest they would give more if they were asked more often. In addition to financial support, approximately one in three will donate their time as a volunteer.

Once the foundation is laid, an organization can begin to identify communities with whom to further engage. This step should not be taken lightly—non-white and diverse faith communities are not a monolith, which is why developing a deeper understanding of the numerous cultural identities within the community is a priority. This practice can help build trust within the community while developing donor asks that conform to unique giving traditions.

An example from Islam and part of the Arab world is the idea that giving discretely carries more rewards, though, in some situations, a public display of charitable donations may be preferred to encourage others to follow suit. One might see an individual clasp a donation tightly in their right hand so no one can see the dollar amount given and put it into a passed basket completely before letting go. On the

other hand, during the time of the Prophet (PBUH) it was written that women started giving their ornaments (earrings and necklaces) in charity. This led to current day practices of women taking off and giving valuable jewelry during a fundraising opportunity for an issue about which they feel passionately.

The nonprofit sector must embrace our country's increasingly diverse donor pool in order to effect change. There are many considerations when building a culturally responsive philanthropic model, and an organization must be prepared for mistakes and failures alongside the successes.



Rachel Branaman, principal of Talem Consulting, provides nonprofits the tools they need to build capacity, fundraise and dismantle systems of inequity. Talem helps grassroots organizations use their thriving networks to tackle critical work while strengthening their movements through institutional sustainability, fundraising strategies, storytelling, coaching and training. Outside of her work with Talem, Rachel serves on the City of Takoma Park's Grants Committee; is a member of AFP's Greater Washington, D.C. chapter and the Association of Philanthropic Counsel (APC); and is a local activist with ACLU, Council on American Islamic Relations, Center for Popular Democracy and National Peace Corps Association. She cross stitches and watercolors in her spare time.

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