



Celebrating Our 40th Anniversary in 2011

The ABFE Story: 1971 to today, Our History in Philanthropy

The Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE), a membership organization that *promotes effective and responsive philanthropy in Black communities*, was founded in 1971 in Montreal, Canada as a working group and later became an independent membership organization. Founding members did not simply organize a like-minded group of people in philanthropy; they did so because they recognized and acted on the urgency to bring diversity, inclusion and equity in philanthropy.

Sign of the Times

The 1970s emerged as an era of intense political conflict, dramatic economic transformation, and pivotal developments in American race relations. Abroad, the 1970s saw the end of the Vietnam War, the beginning of more peaceful relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the recognition of China. As people of color adjusted to their newly won independence, Blacks in the United States adjusted to the dictates of a new political order, shaped by increasing unemployment, “ghettoization,” and a shift in the American outlook toward civil rights.

Dedicated to supporting Black professionals in the philanthropic community, ABFE ***worked to improve the status of Black communities in the United States.***

In the 1980s, an age of conservatism, broad economic investment and expansion, backlash against the Black pride of the 1970s, the beginning of the internet boom, and increasing recession, ABFE confronted the challenges of a new era. ABFE’s programs were inevitably influenced by the changing political climate. In “The Evolution of Black Philanthropy” (*Carson, October 1987*), many Americans, believed that Blacks did not do enough to help themselves, a view reflective of the prevalent conservatism of the day. Moreover, the **Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life** (1988) declared that the U.S. was “Moving Backward,” with regard to securing equal rights for minorities. ABFE moved forward despite these developments. It sponsored membership retreats, affinity groups sessions and annual meetings. ABFE also continued to support numerous Black causes. Administered by its board of directors, which often underwent changes in leadership, ABFE maintained its focus and momentum.

The changing dynamics of race and class made the 1990s a vastly different decade than the 1980s. The demographics of the Black middle class shifted considerably. During the Clinton years, Black wealth increased, yet the gap in earnings between Blacks and Whites remained acute.

Moreover, incidents of racial violence ravaged the country. At the same time, the persistence of poverty in Black communities remained a constant conundrum for public policy makers nationwide.

ABFE and the Council on Foundations

ABFE claims its influence in the field of philanthropy as the first affinity group affiliated with the Council on Foundations (COF). The Affinity Groups are autonomous organizations officially recognized by the Council to provide support for grantmakers and philanthropic initiatives. Today, there are 34 groups that provide a range of educational and technical assistance services to thousands of individuals and institutions within the philanthropic sector in the United States and abroad.

ABFE Today

Magnified by the nation's current economic crisis, today, Black communities across the nation are in greater crisis than mainstream communities. High unemployment and home foreclosure rates, disproportionate healthcare, excessive incarceration rates, a widening wealth gap, the daunting achievement gap and the disparity in child and family well-being are many of the issues facing Black communities. Consider these findings in a recent study by **Rick Cohen**, Senior Policy Fellow with Community Service Society:

Grantmaking for minorities has declined as a proportion of grants awarded by the largest 1,000 or so foundations regularly surveyed by the Foundation Center.² In 1998, 9.9% of the grants of these foundations were designated for ethnic or racial minorities, a proportion that declined to 7.6% in 2004, increased to 8.2% in 2005 and fell again to 7.4% in 2006. For African-Americans/Blacks, the proportional decrease has been more significant: 3.8% of these grant dollars went to African-Americans in 1998, but only 1.9% in 2005 and remarkably only 1.5% in 2006.

ABFE remains active, engaged, relevant and essential in philanthropy today. On behalf of our members and supporters and through our leadership, programs and staff we remain unwavering in being the voice in philanthropy that highlights the urgency of diversity, inclusion and equity in the field toward our mission *to promote effective and responsive philanthropy in Black communities.*



*Please join us for our 2011 Conference to celebrate
ABFE's 40th Anniversary!*

Source: ABFE Archives, ABFE Communications

For more information about ABFE, please contact Sharon D. Toomer, Director of Communications and Membership at stoomer@abfe.org.