



# ABFE

A Philanthropic Partnership for  
Black Communities



A SELF-REFLECTION TOOL  
for Black Trustees on Foundation Boards

*A Companion to ABFE's*

## **RESPONSIVE PHILANTHROPY IN BLACK COMMUNITIES:** A Framework and Agenda for Change

**Leverage The Trust** 2014

## *Background*

In November 2011, on the 40th anniversary of the signing of its articles of incorporation, the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE) announced the launch of Leverage the Trust; a campaign to support Black foundation trustees in their efforts to promote effective and responsive philanthropy in Black communities. By 2015, the multi-year Campaign aims to engage 100 current and future Black foundation trustees across the country in a robust set of activities and opportunities designed to maximize the strengths and assets of Black trustees.

To carry out this Campaign, ABFE is partnering with the Black Philanthropic Network (BPN) - a group of 11 regional Black philanthropic associations. In the Campaign's first year, an effort to identify by region Black foundation trustees willing to engage in this work is underway; a core group of 30 Black trustees participated in a customized set of discussions at ABFE's 41st Annual Meeting in Los Angeles April 26-29, 2012; followed by a similar set of activities at ABFE's 42nd Annual Meeting in Chicago April 4 – 7, 2013. Momentum is building among Black trustees in support of this effort to provide definition and support to their unique role as Black trustees.

*LEVERAGE THE TRUST* is embedded in ABFE's "Responsive Philanthropy in Black Communities: A Framework and Agenda for Change."

ABFE expresses its deep thanks to Karen Kelley-Ariwoola, former LTT Co-Chair and Chief Officer of Strategic Alliances for the Harvest Network of Schools for authoring the original whitepaper that led to the formation of the "Leverage the Trust" initiative and for her authorship of this Tool for Trustees. Thanks also to Leverage the Trust Co Chairs Anita Brown-Graham, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation trustee and Karen Kelley-Ariwoola for leading this initiative. Finally our thanks to the many Black Trustees around the country whose experience and ideas were shared with ABFE for the development of this tool.

# RESPONSIVE PHILANTHROPY IN BLACK COMMUNITIES: A Framework and Agenda for Change

ABFE's mission is to promote effective and responsive philanthropy in Black communities. Our agenda for change utilizes a set of tools and resources to specifically address the role of philanthropy in supporting Black communities, and to provide expert and strategic counsel to help advance this agenda. ABFE's Responsive Philanthropy in Black Communities (RPBC) framework and set of tools are designed to increase the capacity of all of philanthropy -- grantmaking entities, collective giving models and donors -- to do their work more effectively.

The approach emphasizes a careful and conscious analysis and application of strategies that result in opportunities for grantmakers to support Black communities and, in a broader sense, the greater society. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and others promoted the vision of the "beloved community" where all of our destinies are integrally interwoven -- that all boats rise on the tide of prosperity, equality and justice. That aspiration compels us to look at each individual community as a part of the whole; thereby, ensuring that as Black communities are strengthened, other communities, and the nation, gain a set of tangible social, economic, and political benefits.

When we speak of responsive grantmaking in Black communities, ABFE's goal in this approach is to increase philanthropy's ability to learn, acknowledge and comprehend the diversity of the Black Diaspora represented in the United States. This nuanced approach will increase our understanding of diverse cultural norms across the range of communities of African descendant (African Americans, Continental Africans, Afro-Caribbean's, Afro-Latinos, etc.). Additionally, our reference to increased investments in Black communities includes grantmaking made to specific sub-populations (Black men and boys, Black LGBTQ populations, etc.), communities or geographic regions that include a large population of Black households (40% or more) and/or grantmaking to reduce disparities between Black and other communities - either nationally or in regions where Blacks are not the majority (it should be noted that even in places where Black people are in the minority, we often suffer the worst disparities. As such, we are more vulnerable). In all of this work, we advocate a form of grantmaking that builds on the values of self-help, efficacy and overall strengths of Black communities. It is important to note also that responsive philanthropy does not mean "re-active" philanthropy -- ABFE advocates for a form of grantmaking that is forward thinking and considers the projected experience of Black communities in the future.



## LEADING WITH EXCELLENCE

The first step in being an effective Black Trustee of a Foundation is simply being an excellent trustee. Experienced Black trustees note that their success on Foundation and other Boards has been facilitated by their commitment to knowing and understanding the mission of the organization, building a positive working relationship with the CEO, having regular attendance, fully participating in the life of the Foundation, taking time to deeply understand the work of the Foundation and the community served, becoming knowledgeable about Foundation finances and investments, and investing time in relationship-building with other members of the Board. There are many resources for trustees who want to understand good Board Governance. Board Source has identified 12 Principles of Good Board Governance. Adherence to these principles must form the basis for the work of any Foundation trustee.

# 12 PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNANCE

## That Power Exceptional Boards

- 1** **Constructive Partnership** Exceptional boards govern in constructive partnership with the chief executive, recognizing that the effectiveness of the board and chief executive is interdependent. They build this partnership through trust, candor, respect, and honest communication.
- 2** **Mission Driven** Exceptional boards shape and uphold the mission, articulate a compelling vision, and ensure the congruence between decisions and organizational values. They treat questions of mission, vision, and core values not as exercises to be done once, but as statements of crucial importance to be drilled down and folded into deliberations.
- 3** **Strategic Thinking** Exceptional boards allocate time to what matters most and ensure the congruence between decisions and core values.
- 4** **Culture of Inquiry** Exceptional boards institutionalize a culture of inquiry, constructive debate, and engaged teamwork that leads to sound and shared decision making.
- 5** **Independent-Mindedness** Exceptional boards are independent-minded. When making decisions on behalf of the organization, board members put the interests of the organization above those of the chief executive, themselves, or other interested parties.
- 6** **Ethos of Transparency** Exceptional boards promote an ethos of transparency and ethical behavior by ensuring that donors, stakeholders, and interested members of the public have access to appropriate and accurate information regarding finances and operations.
- 7** **Compliance with Integrity** Exceptional boards govern with full recognition of the importance of their fiduciary responsibilities, developing a culture of compliance through appropriate mechanisms for active oversight.
- 8** **Sustaining Resources** Exceptional boards ensure that the organization's resources are balanced with its strategic priorities and capacities. Individual board members extend the reach of the organization by actively using their own reputations and networks to secure funds, expertise, and access.
- 9** **Results Oriented** Exceptional boards track the organization's advancement towards mission and evaluate the performance of major programs and services.
- 10** **Intentional Board Practices** Exceptional boards make form follow function when it comes to their own operations. To provide stable leadership to the organization, they invest in structures and practices that transcend individuals and thoughtfully adjust them to suit changing circumstances.
- 11** **Continuous Learning** Exceptional boards embrace the qualities of a continuous learning organization, evaluating their own performance and assessing the value that they add to the organization.
- 12** **Revitalization** Exceptional boards revitalize themselves through planned turnover, thoughtful recruitment, and intentional



*The Source: Twelve Principles of Governance That Power  
Exceptional Boards, BoardSource, 2005, (Print)*

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## *The (Unique) Role of Black Trustees*

Once the context of excellence has been established, many Black trustees will choose or will be called to navigate a dual identity on their Foundation board. Like most Blacks in America that live in both the world of the mainstream society and in the context of their Black family and community, this reality can often translate into the Board room. On one hand, hopefully, Foundation trustees regardless of race are selected for their expertise in providing stewardship, leadership and policy oversight for their Foundation; perhaps bringing particular skill in finance, development or knowledge of effective programmatic strategies. "Many Black trustees discuss their experiences of being chosen for foundation boards as a designated "representative" of the Black community and find questions and issues regarding our people directed towards them. We know that the Black community is diverse in its ethnicity, experience and points of view. As such, no one Black person can or should "represent" such a diverse community. Nonetheless, many Black trustees bring a personal commitment to positively influencing outcomes for Blacks in their

community through their service on the Foundation board." ABFE's *Leverage the Trust* wants to better understand the dynamics and nuances of the role of Black trustees as perceived and experienced by Black trustees serving on various types of Foundation boards across the country.

ABFE brings a point of view: Black trustees, who sit at tables of power and influence, have a unique opportunity to significantly influence outcomes for Black communities by "leveraging the trust" that they hold as trustees. During our 2012 ABFE Conference Professor John Powell, Director of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at U.C. Berkeley encouraged trustees to stay grounded in their role as a member of the Black community while also viewing their trustee role as an opportunity to "serve as a bridge for the Black community with other communities." He shared his model of "targeted universalism" in which all can benefit from strategies that specifically focus on the needs of a target group. He urged trustees not to invest in old ways of doing things that have not worked; but rather to "seek new approaches to combat structural racialization." He inspired trustees to embrace the concept of "transformative leadership" whose tenants are: a commitment to continual change; flexibility and adaptability; a focus on new ideas; and a commitment to improving those around them. These concepts provide important food for thought as Black Foundation trustees reflect on and explore their role and responsibilities to their Foundations and the Black community.





## REFLECTIONS for Black Trustees:

1. How do I play the bridging role of serving as a Foundation Trustee with broad accountabilities for the community and that of a Trustee with unique and special concern for the Black community served by my Foundation?
2. Does my Foundation practice “targeted universalism” in its approach to serving the Black community?
3. How do I reflect the qualities of “transformative leadership?” Does that positively impact outcomes for the Black community?

As trustees reflected on these questions, many have noted the importance of “timing” in terms of how and when issues of race and diversity are raised in Foundation discussions. Understanding the culture of the Board is critical to knowing when and how to raise and push issues consistent with ABFE’s framework. Trustees encouraged looking for bridging opportunities that are bi-directional like a bridge itself; opportunities to ally with other Board members on issues of their concern that are aligned with the mission. Sometimes too they note, bridges can be built silently.

# STARTING ASSUMPTIONS:

- Race matters; Blacks fare worse than whites on almost every indicator of child and family well-being. On many indicators, Blacks fare worse than other communities of color even within class groupings.
- The only way to close gaps in racial disparities for Black communities is to be intentional about this work.
- Grantmaking specifically targeted to Black communities by large foundations is declining at a time when outcomes and disparities for Black children, families and neighborhoods in many areas are getting worse. Advocacy is needed to reverse these trends.
- Trend data on population growth suggest that U.S. grantmaking organizations will increasingly be challenged to work in concert with Black communities and nonprofits serving those communities.
- Given the right tools and technical assistance, we can direct more effective and responsive philanthropy to Black communities.

## REFLECTIONS for Black Trustees:

1. How does my personal philosophy align with ABFE's starting assumptions?
2. How does the mission and operating philosophy of my Foundation reflect/align with these starting assumptions?
3. Do I have a working knowledge of the % of my Foundation's grantmaking that benefits the Black community in comparison to other groups and in light of the needs in our community?

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<sup>1</sup> ABFE's starting assumptions and tools are designed after the Race Matters Toolkit by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. See [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org) for a full description of this work. ABFE wishes to thank Casey for their gracious support in building this new framework for change.

<sup>2</sup> There is evidence that grantmaking for minorities has declined as a proportion of grants awarded by the largest 1000 foundations. For Blacks, the proportional decrease has been more significant. 3.8% of these grants went to African Americans in 1998 but only 1.9% in 2005 and 1.5% in 2006. Source: *Dimensions of Racial Equity in Foundation Grantmaking*. Rick Cohen, Community Service Society. May 2009

<sup>3</sup> *Donors of the Future Scan*. Millennium Communications Group, Inc. 2006





## *Defining ABFE'S Approach:*

### Constituency Engagement

**Philanthropy engages the specific constituency/target population of Black communities in which it ultimately aims to support in the design and evaluation of grantmaking, policy and/or programs.** Black communities face daunting challenges, some of which include generational poverty, high unemployment, low education rates and violence. Racism, in its many forms – structural, internalized oppression and personal bias – is the driver of many of the issues we face. However, we also have strengths. With an increased understanding of the strengths and assets of a diverse Black diaspora, grantmakers will provide more effective tactics in their grantmaking. This will inform a range of culturally appropriate engagement strategies that should ensure authentic and inclusive participation of constituents who can voice and act upon their community's strengths and unique challenges.

## REFLECTIONS for Black Trustees:

1. While the challenges and issues facing Black communities are stark and more well known, do I (and does my Foundation) have a working knowledge of the strengths and assets of the Black population in the communities served by my Foundation?
2. Does my foundation have a strategy to engage the Black community in informing the Foundation's strategies and approaches?

## Policy Change, System Reform and Program Delivery

**Philanthropy focuses on influencing the root causes of disparities to primarily include the federal, state and local policies and program practices and regulations that disproportionately and adversely impact Black communities.** ABFE will emphasize increasing constituents' capacity to identify root causes and their effects, and develop policy strategies that ultimately eliminate those primary causes. This will influence the development and implementation of more effective philanthropic strategies that address Black communities' needs while advocating for positive policy change.

## REFLECTIONS for Black Trustees:

1. Do I have a working knowledge of the underlying causes of the issues that my Foundation seeks to support?
2. Am I knowledgeable about the local, state and federal policies that impact my Foundation's areas of funding and how they impact Black communities?
3. Does my Foundation demonstrate knowledge of these issues and are they reflected in our strategies and decision-making approaches?

Philanthropy addresses the interaction and relationships between systems and programs (child welfare, corrections, workforce development, homelessness, health, education, etc.) and their interconnected and cumulative effect on Black communities. Inequitable outcomes in Black communities are aligned and reinforced by detrimental policies and direct services across systems. ABFE will develop and share tools and processes to increase the capacity of grantmakers and other change agents in their respective communities to understand the cross-sectional issues relative to their work.

Trustees note that while discussions of policy may occur in their Foundation, not enough time is spent deeply considering the issue of impact. Asking the right questions in response to the problem to be solved is critical. Pushing the envelope to ask "what more can be done" to create impact may open up new avenues for change.

## REFLECTIONS for Black Trustees:

1. Have I taken time to learn about the complex systemic issues that impact outcomes for Black communities?
2. Do the programs and strategies promoted by my Foundation reflect a deep understanding of the systemic context in which effective solutions to issues facing Black communities must be addressed?

Trustees report that most Foundations are on a path to understanding systemic issues, “headed in the right direction but not there yet.” Because of the deep and complex level of these issues, understanding the work of the staff in implementing the strategies approved by the Board is critical. Continuity of board leadership also plays a role, because of the long-term nature of community change, sustaining effective strategies over time is important.

### Leadership and Infrastructure in Black Communities

**Philanthropy aims to build the leadership capacity of Black communities and strengthen the infrastructure of its core institutions.** Black communities are disproportionately impacted by the current trends facing the nonprofit sector: a transition in leadership from baby boomers to a new generation of managers as well as the economic recession. ABFE is particularly concerned with the lack of Black leadership in large nonprofits that tend to attract more dollars as well as the low investments made in Black-led nonprofits overall. Giving that builds on the strengths and assets of Black leaders and core institutions that support our community is critical.

## REFLECTIONS for Black Trustees:

1. Does my Foundation have Black leadership at the staff and board level?
2. Has my board developed an approach to staff and board recruitment that engages Black professionals and provides a leadership succession pipeline of Black representation?
3. Have I actively engaged on this issue to help ensure that Black talent is represented on our board and staff?
4. Does my Foundation provide specific leadership and infrastructure grants and opportunities for Black organizations and/or organizations serving Black communities?

## Research/Data

**Philanthropy is built on, and supports activities to compile, data sets disaggregated by race to inform how the Black community fares.** Accessibility to comprehensive, disaggregated data is essential to the support of services and funding to Black communities. To ensure the field uses data that is more specific and accurately reflects the Black community's demographics, needs, assets, deficits, etc., ABFE advocate's for access to data disaggregated across the Black Diaspora that lifts up our strengths as well as our challenges.

**Philanthropy supports evaluation activities that rely on the use of varied data sets and is transparent and clear about the impact of investments on Black communities.** ABFE advocates for the use of a range of quantitative and qualitative data that emerges from a variety of methods and sectors. To ensure it's recognizable to a varied audience and informs actionable solutions, ABFE will promote the translation of data into user-friendly information which can guide action. In addition, it is critical that evaluation activities to assess program and policy grantmaking tell the full and candid story of its impact on Black communities.

## REFLECTIONS for Black Trustees:

1. Does my Foundation consistently use disaggregated data in "making the case" to our board about needs and opportunities impacting Black communities?
2. If this data does not adequately exist in our community, is there an effort underway to create this resource?
3. Is the evaluation data used by our Foundation and required of grantees, reflective of both quantitative and qualitative information about Black communities?

In today's "data-driven" environment, trustees note that some Black nonprofits can be left behind without the resources to collect and report on their program's impact. As Foundation's rely and depend more on data, trustees must also ask questions and propose the creation of resources for grantees to have the capacity to meet expectations regarding data collection and reporting. Building the capacity of Black nonprofits is a theme that runs throughout all of the considerations in this document. How do Black trustees help these organizations continue to be positioned to play a role in the rebuilding of their community and the healing of their people?

# COMMUNICATIONS

Philanthropy minimizes the dominance of negative images in Black communities. Negative images of Black communities are counter-productive and even impair policy creation and implementation. Foundations are uniquely positioned to help provide the support needed to articulate a more balanced and authentic representation of Black communities. ABFE encourages philanthropy's proactive use of varied tools and mediums in strategic communications. Meaningful investments in carefully crafted public information can influence a shift in programmatic focus, community behavior, and long-term change. It will attract allies who can be convinced that Black communities possess a set of assets to be developed and invested in. ABFE will support philanthropy's strategic communications to utilize the full range of media outlets, social networking platforms, and community-accessible media to communicate to a broader audience a richer and empowering narrative of Black life.

## REFLECTIONS for Black Trustees:

1. How are members of the Black community reflected in my Foundation's communications?
2. Are grantees funded by my Foundation reflective of both the needs and strengths of the Black community?

# *Creating a Personal Plan*

While there are universal elements to the Trustee experience, the context and mission of the Foundation, the culture of the board, and the expertise and personal qualities of the Trustee all influence the impact and influence of a Trustee's tenure on a Board. As you reflect on the information and reflection questions in this document, ABFE urges you to make a plan for how you will have the most impact on your board. The plan can be simple and may change over time, but we encourage an intentional approach. Here's a framework for a plan that may be helpful:

**I. Goal: By the end of my term on this Board my goal is to:**

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**II. Objectives: I have chosen the following 3 elements of ABFE's RPBC Framework to guide my efforts on this Board:**

- 1) 

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- 2) 

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- 3) 

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**III. Approach: I will achieve this goal/meet these objectives on my Board by engaging in and/or providing leadership in the following ways:**

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**IV. Resources: In order to be successful, I believe I need the following resources (could include information, expertise, coaching from another experienced trustee, and support from ABFE):**

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**V. I'll know that I have achieved this goal when I see the following impact:**

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## CONCLUSION

ABFE brings a point of view: Black trustees who sit at tables of power and influence have a unique opportunity to significantly influence outcomes for Black communities by “leveraging the trust” that they hold as trustees. We encourage your use of this tool as a way to make a difference for Black communities. We hope you’ll stay in touch with ABFE and share your tips and lessons learned. Good luck.





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