

## Statement on Advancing Equity Through Philanthropic Strategy in Polarized Times

### Marga Incorporated

On February 27, The Race and Equity in Philanthropy Group (REPG) and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation (WRF), represented by Cory Anderson, WRF's Chief Innovation Officer, convened a group of foundation executives and representatives of philanthropy serving organizations from the South in person in Atlanta at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and virtually for an important dialogue on foundations in the current social and political context. This discussion, entitled *Advancing Equity through Philanthropic Strategy in Polarized Times* addressed how these institutions have been experiencing increased social and political opposition to racial equity, racial justice, and DEI.

The conversation employed REPG's learning exchange format to enable participants to learn from and support each other regarding philanthropic policies and practices. The discussion was also strategic and forward-looking on how to re-accelerate and re-invigorate expanded commitments to racial equity, racial justice, and DEI within foundations in the philanthropic field, at community and statewide levels, and nationally.

Based on this discussion, there are a few approaches that a substantial percentage of foundations with common interests should pursue.

1. *Agree upon a north star* - an ultimate macro goal to be achieved generally and in particular regions. Aiming toward a functional, equitable, and inclusive diverse multi-racial democracy would be an example;
2. *Pursue and invest in long-term movement building*, including a multi-faceted architecture that protects and advances racial equity and DEI, including connecting people across the country who are actively committed to racial equity and racial justice in philanthropy;
3. *Combat false narratives about race and place*, especially to transcend zero sum thinking that suggests the progress of one group is automatically to the detriment of another – equity is progress for all racial groups. There must be attention to forging consistent messaging in service of common goals;
4. *Support affinity needs, including rest and renewal*, of those in philanthropy and in the field who have been advancing equity (with some particular attention to those who have been doing so without significant support in their institutions);
5. *Be more imaginative and abundant* about philanthropy's role and potential – its financial capital including and beyond grantmaking, along with social, intellectual, moral, reputational and other forms of capital in service of transformative goals;
6. *Move funding closer to communities*, and learn from effective strategies in which larger national foundations have partnered with locally-based and focused foundations with transformative results;
7. *Build and sustain capacity*, including helping local leaders working toward a multi-racial democracy to understand and influence the electoral and policymaking infrastructure in their geographic settings, including training and support systems.

The conversation both crystallized the particular dimensions of present-day opposition and recognized the long-term strategic steps, involving philanthropy, that have spanned decades that led to new policies and an overall hostile climate. We have seen the impact of this emboldened anti-DEI and anti-racial equity strategy, which has spanned fields and sectors. Whereas the events of 2020 and a national racial reckoning accelerated the development and expansion of some DEI and racial equity programming, the current backlash has had the opposite effect - not only diminishing some very recent gains, but setting policies, programs, and policies back generations.

What is the role of the majority of foundations in this context? We certainly know that all foundations do not agree; but we also know that a segment of philanthropy – institutional and individual donors – invested with a long view in mind. This ultimately influenced the composition of the Supreme Court and subsequent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and affirmative action. We know that long term investments in big ideas and think tanks helped craft intentional messaging and set goals and ultimately influence policy and culture.

So, what are the foundations that believe in values such as equity and inclusion going to do? This is a substantial percentage of philanthropy. Is there anything that this segment of philanthropy can agree upon that could inform some semblance of a united strategy that would counter the tremendous backsliding that has been underway?

It is increasingly urgent that a significant enough critical mass in philanthropy courageously unite around a common transformative agenda and commit significant resources and other forms of capital continually and consistently. For some, the aforementioned strategies are not new. However, they have not been pursued at a sufficient enough scale to have enough impact or to prevent the degree of backlash that we have been experiencing. If we do not take new action, we will drift further away from a diverse multi-racial democracy.