

Diversity will make women's philanthropy more impactful

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Women are changing the face of philanthropy, and with that, the world.

For the first time in history, women hold more than 40% of worldwide wealth. One place where that's made huge waves is in charitable giving, a field that, much like technology or politics, has long been dominated by men.

Women are fueling the rise of organized collective giving, which was founded here in Seattle 25 years ago by the [Washington Women's Foundation](#). Collective giving groups, which accounted for more than [\\$1.2 billion](#) in giving last year, tend to be organized locally and to give to community causes and groups. They are providing crucial pathways for more people to become connected to where they live and are helping to [change the imbalanced power dynamics](#) associated with large-scale giving.

But even as women have made their way into philanthropy's old boys club and changed it for the better, most of us are white. And that's a problem.

Far too often I find myself in rooms dominated by white women and men, many of whom have good intentions, but are lacking the knowledge and experience necessary to solve problems where issues like racism, ableism or transphobia intersect with the problems they are trying to solve. Our life experiences haven't prepared us to offer real solutions to the problems that face historically marginalized communities.

And the reality is most of the majority of society's most intractable problems lie at the thorny intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, socioeconomic status and more.

Philanthropic institutions with predominantly white staff and white leadership often set about trying to solve the problems of marginalized communities without those communities' involvement or input in crucial decisions. When that happens, we inadvertently recreate the harm that we seek to undo. The power and know-how to solve complex challenges exist within communities. Donors should be in the business of lifting up those community-driven solutions, not imposing fixes to problems we don't fully grasp. We should be creating more seats at the table and exploring how to cede power.

I am a white, straight, affluent woman, and I know that my identity creates blind spots for me. It influences what problems I see in the world and how I prioritize them, as well as my approach to

solving them. People with diverse, [intersectional identities](#) — like a Black teenager who identifies as transgender or a Latina who identifies as queer — experience the world differently. They will see and prioritize different problems, and they're most likely going to approach them differently. While that might seem painfully obvious, much of the philanthropic world still operates as though diversity, equity and inclusion within their organizations is nice, but not necessary, to meaningful change.

One of the clearest examples of this is the education system. For decades, private donors and philanthropies have struggled to make a dent in the opportunity gap. Race and class remain the surest predictors of academic outcomes in America. We've tried everything from smaller class sizes to more rigorous standards to changing the way we evaluate teachers, but along the way we never fully engaged communities, students, their families and their teachers in a conversation about what they felt like they needed to be successful.

The Oakland Unified School District tried something different. Upon realizing that Black boys had the lowest academic outcomes of any demographic group in the district, they created the [Office of African American Male Achievement](#), now known as [Kingmakers of Oakland](#). The district worked closely with the Oakland community, including students, their families and teachers, to create the "Manhood Development" Program, which focuses on mentorship, social-emotional learning and African American history. The program addresses the impacts of institutional racism on students head on, countering negative stereotypes and helping Black boys develop a greater sense of belonging in school. A [recent study](#) showed that the program cut dropout rates for Black boys by a whopping 43%, and now school districts across the county are exploring adopting this promising program, which already has [taken root in Seattle](#).

Kingmakers is a huge success story. It's also an organization the philanthropic world could easily have overlooked because of our blind spots. Diversifying philanthropy is essential to building a sector that can both see and meet society's biggest challenges. And diversifying the field is only the first step. It's critical that we move beyond diversity and become more equitable and inclusive.

There's no question that women have and are changing philanthropy for the better, but there's work to be done if we're going to make philanthropy into the force for justice that it can and should be. It starts by educating ourselves about inequity and power dynamics, and having necessary, often uncomfortable, conversations about race, gender identity and ability status. It starts by always asking ourselves who is at the table, why they are there and who gets to make the decisions.

As women, we're uniquely suited to take on this challenge. We've navigated the male-dominated world long enough to have picked up a thing or two about challenging the system and making change. Women-directed giving represents a sea change for our field — it's our responsibility to make sure it's not the last.

***Tricia Raikes** is the co-founder of the Raikes Foundation and a member of Washington Women's Foundation. She will be the opening keynote speaker at the Catalist Conference on Feb. 23, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the women's collective-giving movement in Seattle.*