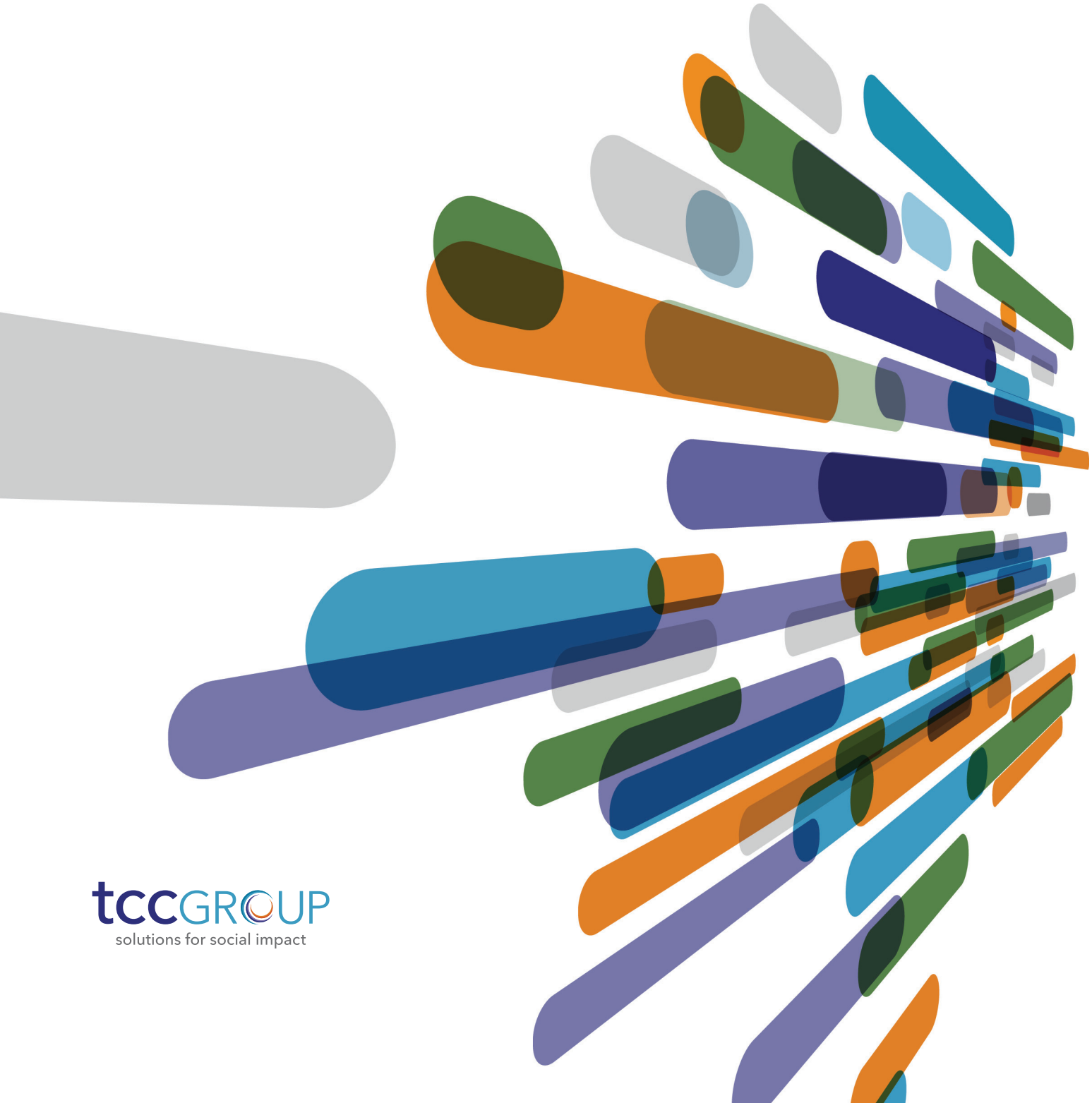
(Un)precedented

Philanthropy Takes Action in the First Year of a New Political Reality



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Executive Summary

In the rapidly evolving political environment that has unfolded since the "unprecedented" 2016 presidential campaign, the philanthropic sector—including both funders and the many organizations and collaboratives that serve them—has demonstrated flexibility, nimbleness, and a willingness to collaborate that can serve as a model of creative adaptation for the field going forward. Critical to this responsiveness has been philanthropy-serving organizations (PSOs) and funder collaboratives. They have enabled the grantmaking community as a whole to be responsive in ways that are often challenging for individual institutions.

(Un)precedented: Philanthropy Takes Action in the First Year of a New Political Reality, prepared by TCC Group, explores the impact of the changing political landscape on philanthropy through interviews with 27 leaders of PSOs and funder collaboratives. As frontline partners for grantmakers, these entities function as close observers of trends across the sector, making their perspectives invaluable in what may prove to be a pivotal moment for philanthropy.

Following are key insights on how the funding community has negotiated the first year of this new political environment:

PSOs played a critical role in enabling funder learning, dialogue, and action.

Regardless of political affiliation, the speed of policy change in the new political environment intensified the need for funders to be well-informed. PSOs were often the first call for funders and have engaged in:

- **Supporting funder learning.**
  A primary role for most PSOs post-election has been to provide opportunities for funders to learn from their peers, as well as experts and affected communities, about the potential implications of the changing national policy environment on their current grantmaking priorities. This role has sometimes included serving as a bridge between local/regional and national activities.

- **Facilitating funder networking and aligning support.**
  The rapidly changing political environment appears to have encouraged more funders to consider collaboration. PSOs and funder collaboratives provided ready-made structures for grantmakers to convene, communicate, and coordinate in ways that would be challenging for individual funders to organize. Several interviewees also spoke about increased funder interest in pooling grantmaking—the deepest level of collaboration—especially in areas of focus that fell outside of their established priorities.

- **Enhancing opportunities for collective response.**
  The perennial question of when and how to leverage an "institutional voice" gained attention as greater numbers of funders considered how to align their voices to maximize impact in the current political environment. Several PSOs took the lead in crafting and coordinating shared funder statements, creating a measure of "strength in numbers" and undoubtedly contributing to the willingness of funders to lend their name to a public position.

- **Supporting efforts to help bridge divergent perspectives among staff and boards.**
  According to interviewees, some funders were surprised at the differing responses to the election among their organizations' leaders. At least a couple of PSOs have initiated training and support focused on how grantmaker staff with differing political views can engage to ensure that these institutions can remain responsive to policy changes affecting their strategic priorities.

The new environment accelerated important funder conversations.

At least three ongoing conversations in the field of philanthropy have received an explicit boost from the current political environment, including:

- **Strengthening the focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).**
  The increasing commitment to promoting DEI in the sector has only grown in the post-election environment. In fact, close to half of leaders interviewed referenced their growing prioritization of DEI work.

- **Encouraging thinking beyond issue "silos."**
  The breadth of policy changes proposed and already enacted by the new administration have reinforced ongoing conversations about moving beyond a narrow focus on single issues and adopting an increasingly "intersectional" approach to funding. For example, the implications of recent policy changes for immigrants touch on funder priorities ranging from healthcare to education to child welfare to human rights.

- **Creating space for dialogue across divides.**
  The 2016 presidential election highlighted the continuing polarization of the country's political discourse, compartmentalization of news consumption, and knee-jerk vilification of opposing views by politicians and the public. In this climate, an increasing number of funders are seeking out opportunities to support nonpartisan civic engagement.

Some funders remained cautious.

According to PSO leaders, not all funders expressed a need for immediate engagement in the new political environment. A few interviewees described funders who had taken a "wait and see" approach to the impact of national political changes on their grantmaking priorities. Of course, as the administration's agenda continues to unfold, funders in various issue areas may choose to become more engaged.

What will it take for the momentum to last?

One year into the new presidential administration, the critical question for leaders of funder collaboratives and PSOs is whether grantmaker interest in immigration, civic engagement, and other priorities that have come to the fore will be sustained. These leaders also wonder about the extent to which changes in strategic approach made by funders during this time—e.g., embracing aligned and pooled funding and showing greater willingness to take public stands and support policy-related activities—will persevere.

(Un)precedented

Philanthropy Takes Action in the First Year of a New Political Reality

Melinda Fine and Steven Lawrence, TCC Group

"Unprecedented" ranks high among the terms most frequently used to characterize the 2016 presidential campaign. From the first female candidate nominated by a major party to a political newcomer chosen by the other leading party to public scandals and foreign meddling that may have influenced voters, this election stepped well beyond the bounds of the nation's recent political experience. The outcome of the election also surprised many in the political class and beyond, leaving them unprepared for the radical policy shifts that would ensue and uncertain about the underlying cohesion of U.S. society.

Since taking office the new administration has initiated challenges to norms for American political discourse, longstanding policies in areas such as immigration, international relations, and the environment, and more recent evolutions in thinking on health, LGBTQ rights, reproductive rights, criminal justice reform, and other critical priorities. Regardless of political affiliation, the speed with which this administration has reversed course from earlier policies has intensified the need for affected populations and their advocates to stay informed and ahead of the minute-to-minute swings in policy directions.

For the philanthropic sector—including both funders and the many organizations and collaboratives that serve them—the continually evolving political environment has precipitated a level of rapid learning, collaboration, adaptation, and response that seems itself unprecedented.

For the philanthropic sector—including both funders and the many organizations and collaboratives that serve them—the continually evolving political environment has precipitated a level of rapid learning, collaboration, adaptation, and response that seems itself unprecedented and challenges blanket criticisms of funder parochialism and caution. This political moment also appears to be elevating ongoing conversation in the sector around addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), increasing understanding and engagement across issue areas, and bringing funders into renewed deliberation on subjects such as the role of their own voice in the public arena.

PSOs and funder collaboratives are often the first call for funders with questions outside of their immediate expertise or seeking to respond to unanticipated challenges.

The current political environment may be unique; however, the response of the philanthropic community during the first year of a new administration reflects the numerous precedents for engagement and collaboration that have been tested and refined in service to the sector over many years. To identify common philanthropic themes and distinct trends in the context of the changing political landscape, the authors reached out to 27 current and former leaders of philanthropy-serving organizations (PSOs)[1] and funder collaboratives during summer and fall of 2017 (see "Acknowledgments" on page 11). As frontline partners for grantmakers of all types, sizes, and areas of focus, PSOs and funder collaboratives mediate between long-range grantmaker priorities and the ever-changing contexts in which they work, enabling the grantmaking community as a whole to be responsive in ways that are often challenging for individual institutions. They also function as close observers of trends across the sector, making their perspectives invaluable in what may prove to be a pivotal moment for philanthropy.

PSOs Propel the Philanthropic Response

The outcome of the November 2016 presidential election presented an unanticipated challenge for funders who expected an overall continuation of policies and priorities established during the prior administration. Paul DiDonato of the Proteus Fund observed that in the initial months after the election "people were running around pulling their hair out to a certain extent." At the same time noted Ronna Brown of Philanthropy New York, there was a small group in the sector who either supported the new administration's goals or who, despite their differences, thought there would be areas where they might still make progress around their missions.

Across a broad array of issue areas, funders needed to be able to connect quickly with peers to assess possible implications for their funding priorities and identify potential responses. Some funders also sought to provide rapid-response support related to their focus areas or for complicated issues they knew little about, such as immigration, that were an immediate target of the new administration. This required having the means to marshal and disseminate funds outside of their typical, deliberative grant cycles.

How has the funding community negotiated the first year of this new political environment? Following are key insights.

PSOs enable funders to be responsive and timely in ways that often differ markedly from their institutionalized approaches to grantmaking.

[1] For the purpose of this analysis, philanthropy-serving organizations include "national" PSOs, including those focused on a funding issue, population group, philanthropic practice, or type of funder; and "regional" PSOs, including those serving funders in a defined geographic area. Our discussion also encompasses funder collaboratives, whether housed at PSOs or intermediary organizations that primarily serve to host funder collaboratives.

Foundations of varying size, reach, structure, and issue priority are grappling with common questions in the new political context, such as:

- What is our appropriate leadership voice?
- How can we more effectively support vulnerable populations in the communities we serve?
- What additional giving strategies, roles, or leveraging opportunities might we seize to amplify our impact?
- How can we support staff that may be directly affected in this moment, strengthening our institutional culture and climate?
- How can we manage differences in perspective among our staff and board?
- How might collective action with peer funders strengthen our work going forward?

PSOs played a critical role in enabling funder learning, dialogue, and action.

The existence of a ready-made infrastructure of PSOs and funder collaboratives proved critical in facilitating an informed and intentional funder response. PSOs and funder collaboratives are often the first call for funders with questions outside of their immediate expertise or seeking to respond to unanticipated challenges, whether they are localized and/or issue-specific concerns, natural disasters, or national political change. These entities have the infrastructure and networks in place to:

- Convene interested parties;
- Coordinate with other PSOs and funders to leverage peer expertise;
- Gather knowledge from the broader field;
- Disseminate learnings to a diverse audience;
- Facilitate aligned grantmaking;
- Provide access to voices on the ground; and
- In other ways, assist funders in engaging in strategies and roles that go beyond their direct grantmaking.

In short, PSOs enable funders to be responsive and timely in ways that often differ markedly from their institutionalized approaches to grantmaking.

Most of the PSOs and funder collaborative leaders interviewed for this article began coordinating calls, webinars, and other opportunities for funder sharing immediately after the election. For example, Human Rights Funders Network organized a strategy-sharing call one week after the election and had nearly 150 participants, compared to a usual average of 30 call participants. "Members felt blindsided and unclear about what to do and needed a place to share," noted the Network's leader, Mona Chun. Specific ways that PSOs and funder collaboratives have supported funders in the new political environment include:

Supporting funder learning.

A primary role for most PSOs post-election has been to provide opportunities for funders to learn from their peers—the single most trusted source of practice knowledge for grantmakers[2]—as well as experts and affected communities, about the potential implications of the changing national policy environment on their current grantmaking priorities. "This has been our number one request," said Daranee Petsod of Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR). "Foundations truly want to understand how public policy changes affect families and communities." The work of PSOs and collaboratives has included being able to tap the expertise of outside experts and other PSOs and collaboratives working in areas of interest to funders and mapping funder and grantee relationships, as well as serving as a bridge between local/regional and national activities. "We had already shifted strategy from national organizations to regional and local

[2] Harder+Co Community Research and Edge Research, *Peer to Peer: At the Heart of Influencing More Effective Philanthropy: A Field Scan of How Foundations Use and Access Knowledge,* prepared for the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, February 2017, available at https://www.hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hewlett-Field-Scan-Report.pdf.

organizations," remarked Shireen Zaman of the Security & Rights Collaborative. "But it's ended up now being more relevant for getting traction." Collaborative funds and PSOs working in local areas "are critical for sharing information," noted Ted Wang of Unbound Philanthropy. "If you're thinking about working in Texas, you need to connect national funders, civic engagement funders, and local contacts." Carly Hare of Change Philanthropy added that they are "seeing more work at the local level, but it's not necessarily all about geography—it could also be about supporting specific communities."

Facilitating funder networking and aligning support.

Grantmakers are not inherently oriented toward relying on one another to learn, establish priorities, or make grants. Funders choose to engage in collaboration, and determine in what ways and to what degree they may want to work and coordinate with other grantmakers. The rapidly changing political environment appears to have encouraged more funders to consider collaboration. "One thing that seems to be gaining traction is funder alignment. Along those lines, we've started inviting funders who are not members to come into the room and share in the learning, which is a mutual win because it opens new ideas and possibilities for engagement for them, and for our members and us as well," observed Kristen Cambell of Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement. PSOs and funder collaboratives provide ready-made structures for grantmakers to convene, communicate, and coordinate in ways that may not be possible for individual funders to organize.

Several interviewees spoke about increased funder interest in pooling grantmaking—the deepest level of collaboration—especially in areas of focus that fall outside of their established priorities. Whether separate entities or operating under the auspices of a PSO, funder collaboratives have been uniquely helpful to grantmakers who want to offer timely support for priorities outside of their current areas of focus.

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>
> **– Shireen Zaman, Security and Rights Collaborative**

"We've seen new large and small funders join the State Infrastructure Fund and the Four Freedoms Fund because collaborative funds are an easy way to enter a field they don't know much about," said Michele Lord of NEO Philanthropy. These funds can also support 501(c)4 organizations and lobbying. However, whether this support presages increased engagement with pooled funding in grantmakers' longstanding areas of focus remains uncertain.

To support additional grantmaking during this evolving political moment, some funders are creatively going beyond their usual operational norms. "We've been pleasantly surprised by the number of funders who said their board has increased payout for the next few years so they can fund vulnerable communities and rapid response," noted Shireen Zaman. "A number of funders were able to fund through new funds. Others have fit this in by reprioritizing within existing portfolios. A third way is one-time rapid-response grants made with some funds left from the end of the year. It's been a little bit of a mix. But, definitely, foundations are increasing funding in these spaces." Adriana Rocha of the Neighborhood Funders Group noted that, "There's been an urgency for coordinated action. For example, Funders for Justice and Grantmakers for Girls of Color brought 130 funders together to talk about addressing community safety and justice and the impact of political changes on Black and Brown communities. We've mobilized $10.4 million in new money to support community safety and justice for these populations." Marcia Coné, Chief Strategist for Women's Funding Network observed, "Whether in good economic and political times or bad, the environment

for advancing women's rights is never easy. Despite this, Women's Foundations are tenacious in their efforts to ensure the safety, security, and well-being of women and girls. Our membership data indicates a significant increase by women's foundations in funding advocacy and consistent commitment to advancing economic security for women and their families." Eric Braxton of the Funders Collaborative for Youth Organizing shared, "We had been planning to launch a learning and exchange fund and added a component to include funds for organizations that are adapting their strategies to respond to the changing political environment. We ended up being able to give out twice as much funding as we had anticipated."

Increased or strategically refocused funding for these and other priorities arising in the new political environment does not appear to have jeopardized established grantmaking priorities. Mona Chun remarked, "Human rights funders know they need to stay the course. I don't get a sense that larger funders are making major changes to their five-year strategies. They are looking at their priorities and making adjustments based on the new environment. But funders that spent a lot of time developing their strategies aren't going to completely revamp." Instead, funders are identifying ways to enhance or leverage existing priorities or expand giving strategies to accommodate the new circumstances.

The perennial question of when and how to leverage an institutional voice has gained greater attention in the current political environment.

Enhancing opportunities for collective response.

Given the impact of rapidly changing policies on an array of issue areas, a greater number of funders have been considering how to align their funding and "institutional voice" with other grantmakers to maximize their potential impact. At one end are funders who feel their priorities and perspectives are best expressed through the work of their grantees, while others see position statements by their institutions serving as another lever for advancing their agendas. Somewhere in the middle are funders who view their role as being a neutral convener or bridge builder. All of these funders must consider their willingness to face possible criticism from grantees, government officials, or the public. This has also been true for PSOs. After issuing a statement to its membership with an explicit point of view on the new administration, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) made clear that "all people are welcomed in the GEO community" and held a series of open calls to solicit their members' reactions and perspectives, noted GEO President and CEO Kathleen Enright. Some participants were enthusiastic, arguing that "we are the resistance, and this shows how we are backing our grantees," continued Enright. Others felt differently, suggesting that "what foundations need to be doing is investing in pluralism" rather than taking an explicit stand.

The perennial question of when and how to leverage an institutional voice has gained greater attention in the current political environment. "People are struggling with how much they should be the opposition… and how much they should be the bridge builder, community builder, adult in the room," observed Aaron Dorfman of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. According to several PSO leaders, the post-election environment has moved more funders to consider taking a public stance. "It's the number one thing we've been hearing from leaders," said Dave Biemesderfer of the United Philanthropy Forum. "What is our voice as a PSO or as a foundation? How can we

> **It's the number one thing we've been hearing from leaders. What is our voice as a PSO or as a foundation? How can we and should we be speaking up in a way that we haven't necessarily done before? What are our values? How do we stay true to them? And how do we stand up when these are not being reflected in the public discourse?**
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> **– Dave Biemesderfer, United Philanthropy Forum**

and should we be speaking up in a way that we haven't necessarily done before? What are our values? How do we stay true to them? And how do we stand up when these are not being reflected in the public discourse?" Several PSOs referenced taking the lead in crafting and coordinating shared funder statements. For example, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees has organized joint foundation statements and had more than 200 foundations sign on—two-thirds of which were not members. This leadership by PSOs creates a certain measure of "strength in numbers," which has undoubtedly contributed to the willingness of funders to lend their name to a public position.

Nonetheless, the stepped-up role of PSOs in a charged political environment has undoubtedly alienated some members. As Dave Biemesderfer noted, "There's always a balance of how much PSOs step out and how far they can go without losing members." At the same time, he has heard increased confidence from PSOs expressing, "if they lose members, maybe they shouldn't have been members. There's less handwringing than perhaps five years ago about the possibility of losing members."

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>
> **– Chris Gates,**
> **Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (former)**

Supporting efforts to help bridge divergent perspectives among staff and boards.

Beyond the election results themselves, some funders were also surprised at the differing responses to the election among their organizations' leaders—especially given their general alignment on priorities for their institutions. For these funders, identifying ways to talk and negotiate across the political divide will be essential for ensuring that their institutions can be responsive to policy changes that may affect their strategic priorities.

At least a couple of PSOs have initiated training and support focused on how grantmaker staff with differing political views can engage. And this interest in bridging the political divide extends outside of funder walls. The importance of finding common ground among funders of all political leanings was highlighted by Daranee Petsod. She noted "even foundations in conservative areas recognize that the attacks on immigrants and refugees are about people not politics. We've seen conservative foundations that won't join GCIR provide support to local immigrant organizations, in one case without being asked to do so."

This need to conduct intentional efforts to engage and find common ground extended beyond the foundation community itself. Chris Gates, former director of Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement, commented that funders "must listen better, reach outside existing networks, hear unheard voices, and recognize that what drove the election outcome was not just that some of us weren't hearing other voices but that people who had different perspectives felt invisible."

New Environment Accelerates Important Funder Conversations

The willingness of grantmakers to go beyond their existing funding priorities and engage with funding mechanisms—e.g., aligned and pooled funding—outside of their usual toolkit may reflect a momentary blip in an unusual time or could be a harbinger of increased experimentation in the field. Regardless, at least three ongoing conversations in the field of philanthropy have received an explicit boost from the current political environment.

The new political environment strengthens philanthropy's growing focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

The increasing commitment to promoting DEI—encompassing the analytic frame that undergirds funding priorities, the organizations and individuals supported, and the composition of the philanthropic sector itself—has only grown in the post-election environment. According to Lori Villarosa of the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity, post-Ferguson there was already "significant momentum on aspects of racial equity in philanthropy around structural racism or DEI. The election just created a greater sense of urgency." "Given the administration's tendencies and unleashing of a racialized atmosphere," concurred Denise Shannon of Funders for Reproductive Equity, the focus on DEI "has become more pronounced." In fact, close to half of leaders interviewed for this article referenced their increasing prioritization of DEI work.

Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy (EPIP) has reoriented its entire strategy around DEI. "For EPIP, the time to focus on equity is now," stated the organization's leader, Tamir Novotny. "This is deeply personal for our members, many of whom hail from marginalized communities. They want to have confidence that their organizations are taking equity issues seriously and pursuing real change inside and out." Kathleen Enright remarked that this can be "uncharted territory for many CEOs." Events taking place in society are "creating additional friction" within foundations that needs to be addressed through "expanding definitions of what foundations are willing to do—how to grant differently; and how to make more space for staff dialogue about these issues and the experiences of staff who are people of color or immigrants and feel directly threatened. And there is new learning taking place about how to create a healthy working environment in these times."

However, these conversations may be complicated by differing perspectives within foundation leadership. "Program officers and CEOs across the country are in agreement about the importance of equity," remarked Faith Mitchell of Grantmakers In Health. "Where there may be tension is where trustees may not agree and not want to acknowledge that equity is a problem, or equity is interpreted politically rather than as a social value." "This environment could empower conservatives on boards, and centrists could question its importance," added Lori Villarosa. Some are even using the phrase "identity politics" to dismiss or undermine DEI work. "We shouldn't underestimate the danger of this moment."

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>
> **– Lori Villarosa**
> **Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity**

Ironically, the philanthropic response to the range of policy changes currently taking place may also inadvertently divert more recent philanthropic attention on achieving racial equity for African Americans, according to Nat Choike Williams of the Black Social Change Funders Network. The spotlight on structural racism, systemic violence against the Black community, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement resulted in "an historic upsurge in interest within philanthropy" prior to the election, he observed. Efforts like Funders for

The breadth of policy changes proposed and already enacted by the new administration has served to reinforce the philanthropic conversation about moving beyond a narrow focus on single issues and adopting an increasingly "intersectional" approach to funding.

Justice arose out of Ferguson, providing a vehicle for funders to address police accountability and racial justice. "I hadn't seen anything like this before. But after the election the winds shifted a great deal." Topics such as immigration (which overwhelming affect communities of color) have drawn philanthropy's attention away from police brutality and racial equity for African Americans.

"The Black community is always waiting because there's always an issue that's more important; Black issues are always there." To address the potential for a loss of focus on racial equity as the evolving political environment places new urgent priorities in front of funders, Change Philanthropy's Carly Hare indicated that they are partnering with PSOs across issues and identity communities to embed DEI into their practice. "If we can get their funder members to understand that racial equity is best practice and it's normalized through them," noted Hare, "it will reach more funders" and keep funders focused on this priority.

Thinking beyond issue "silos" becomes even more critical for funders.

The breadth of policy changes proposed and already enacted by the new administration has served to reinforce the philanthropic conversation about moving beyond a narrow focus on single issues and adopting an increasingly "intersectional" approach to funding. The implications of recent policy changes for immigrants, for example, touch on funder priorities ranging from healthcare to education to child welfare to human rights. As a result, funders in no single issue area can hope to affect these issues alone. "Immigration is an intersectional issue," said Michele Lord. "Funders are smart about thinking in terms of what intersects with their portfolio but need support to make the case internally." Denise Shannon noted that "there's an increasing understanding that this is what it will take to have success." Still, while there is a lot of intersectional collaboration happening among organizations at the state level, "the funding community hasn't yet fully embraced this model."

Creating space for dialogue across divides is increasingly on funders' radar screen.

The 2016 presidential election highlighted the continuing polarization of the country's political discourse, compartmentalization of news consumption, and knee-jerk vilification of opposing views by politicians and the public. This has resulted in an environment of seeming intolerance for the discussion, understanding, and compromise that are essential to a healthy democracy. "We've lost the ability to disagree in a civil way," observed Chris Gates, "It has become personal and mean, and this is bad for the country. How can philanthropy play a role in turning the boil to a simmer?"

In this climate, an increasing number of funders are seeking out opportunities to support nonpartisan civic engagement. Kristen Cambell remarked, "For a long time, many saw civic engagement as the 'nice' thing to do if we have extra money, but funders are coming to understand that healthy civic engagement undergirds everything we want to achieve. Civic engagement is being repositioned not as a piece of the pie, but rather the pan that the pie sits in. Without it, the pie can crumble away." Ronna Brown added that the current political environment is "spurring the kind of community activism that some funders have wanted to see for a long time, and they're thinking about how to sustain that work for the long haul."

In an Evolving Context, Some Funders Remain Cautious

The preceding sections have illustrated how funders have sought to increase learning and engagement in response to the 2016 presidential election and intensified their focus on DEI and removing barriers to intersectional funding. Some have urged still greater action. Yet it would be inaccurate to suggest that all funders expressed a need for immediate engagement in the new political environment. A few interviewees described funders who had taken a "wait and see" approach to the impact of the national political changes on their grantmaking priorities. Faith Mitchell noted that several health funders had a call with a leading health reform expert after the election who advised that they "stay the course until we can figure out the lay of the land." Of course, as the administration's agenda continues to unfold—e.g., the elimination of the individual mandate for obtaining health insurance—funders in various issue areas may choose to become more engaged.

Also contributing to this more cautious approach may be staff who want their foundations to engage more directly in addressing the changing political environment but feel uncomfortable doing so. "Part of the concern is the price they might have to pay professionally to try to change organization-wide strategy," commented Ana Tilton of Grantmakers for Education. "People are weighing what they can actually get done within their institutions."

What Will it Take for the Momentum to Last?

In responding to a rapidly changing political environment, the philanthropic sector has demonstrated flexibility, nimbleness, and a willingness to collaborate that can serve as a model of creative adaptation for the field going forward. Critical to the responsiveness of the sector during this time has been the existence of a sometimes underappreciated and underfunded array of PSOs and funder collaboratives—backbone entities for philanthropy always at the ready to support funder learning, networking, and grantmaking. "There's been a question among some funders about whether there are too many PSOs," remarked Kristen Cambell. "But PSOs really help funders deepen their understanding and investment, which necessitates there being multiple organizations and focus areas." PSOs can also help to bring along donors not currently engaged in institutional philanthropy. "This political moment has also activated people who are in the next ring of giving—individuals who do not call themselves 'philanthropy' but who want to invest to make a difference," noted Cora Mirikitani of Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy. "We must help support and lift up these resources that have not been activated in the traditional philanthropic space before."

Critical to the responsiveness of the sector during this time has been the existence of a sometimes underappreciated and underfunded array of PSOs and funder collaboratives… always at the ready to support funder learning, networking, and grantmaking.

One year into the new presidential administration, the critical question for leaders of funder collaboratives and PSOs is whether grantmaker interest in immigration, civic engagement, and other priorities that have come to the fore will be sustained. Much of the new funding is coming in as one-year grants. Nat Choike Williams observed, "When you have a surge in interest, the thing to do is to build infrastructure and support key activities and organizations and a broader ecosystem. Because the money is eventually going to dry up and what you've built can sustain you until your issues are hot again." These leaders also wonder about the extent to which changes in strategic approach made by funders during this time—e.g., embracing aligned or pooled funding and showing greater willingness to support policy-related activities—will persevere.

A lasting strength of institutional philanthropy has been its relative stability compared to other sources of support, especially individual giving. Yet stability can harden into rigidity without regular infusions of new learning, genuine listening, and a willingness to reconsider institutional practices to make a difference when it matters most. Since November 2016, more funders have shown themselves to possess the adaptive abilities necessary to make a difference in the twenty-first century, supported by the PSOs and funder collaboratives at the heart of the sector. Ongoing political change will likely reinforce these qualities. "People feel like something has to change if we can find ourselves where we are now," concluded Mona Chun. "Program officers and others at all levels are feeling the imperative that everyone needs to rally around a new way of doing things and are motivated to think collectively about what this might look like."

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Acknowledgments

TCC Group would like to thank the following leaders for their perspective on the impact of the changing political environment on philanthropy. The authors reached out to a broad array of philanthropy-serving organizations and funder collaboratives, and the following leaders agreed to participate. We are grateful for their willingness to contribute their time and insights.

Dave Biemesderfer
United Philanthropy Forum

Jason Born
National Center for Family Philanthropy

Eric Braxton
Funders Collaborative for Youth Organizing

Janet Brown
Grantmakers in the Arts (former)

Ronna Brown
Philanthropy New York

Kristen Cambell
Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement

Nat Choike Williams
Black Social Change Funders Network

Mona Chun
Human Rights Funders Network

Marcia Coné
Women's Funding Network

Paul Di Donato
Proteus Fund

Aaron Dorfman
National Center for Responsive Philanthropy

Sarah Eagle Heart
Native Americans in Philanthropy

Kathleen Enright
Grantmakers for Effective Organizations

Chris Gates
Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (former)

Carly Hare
Change Philanthropy

Rachel LaForgia
Peace and Security Funders Group

Michele Lord
NEO Philanthropy

Cora Mirikitani
Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy

Faith Mitchell
Grantmakers In Health

Tamir Novotny
Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy

Daranee Petsod
Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees

Adriana Rocha
Neighborhood Funders Group

Denise Shannon
Funders for Reproductive Equity

Ana Tilton
Grantmakers for Education

Lori Villarosa
Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity

Ted Wang
Unbound Philanthropy

Shireen Zaman
Security and Rights Collaborative

About TCC Group

For nearly 40 years, TCC Group has partnered with foundations, nonprofits, and companies to tackle complex social problems through strategy, collaboration, and insightful evaluation. At TCC Group, we work to foster sustainable social change.

About the Authors

Melinda Fine, Ed.D., Director of Philanthropy and Strategic Partnerships at TCC Group, believes that foundations have an important role to play in collaborating with communities and each other to tackle today's tough challenges. For over two decades, she has guided foundations of all shapes and sizes in developing strategy, enhancing funder learning and collaboration, and building institutional and movement capacity.

Steven Lawrence, Senior Research Affiliate at TCC Group, partners with funders and nonprofits to develop the knowledge they need to strengthen the field and make well-informed decisions. He has led ground-breaking research on philanthropic support for priorities such as human rights, health policy, education reform, peace and security, and mission investing.

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