

An Open Letter From the Joint Affinity Groups (JAG)

In 1993, nine identity-based affinity groups¹, calling themselves JAG (Joint Affinity Groups), came together with the goals of increasing diversity and inclusiveness within the philanthropic sector and increasing resources to marginalized communities. Our decision to work together was grounded in our belief that we had more power to move the field of philanthropy collectively than individually.

Over the past 15 years, JAG has been the key philanthropic infrastructure vehicle working to educate grantmakers about the value of diversity in our foundations, to increase understanding of the interrelatedness of our multiple identities and issues and to advocate for greater equity in the distribution of philanthropic resources. Our collective constituents are grounded in this work at both national and local levels.

Our work together has included the presentation of too-many-to-count JAG sponsored sessions at Council on Foundations annual, community and family foundation conferences, the groundbreaking publication of a research study on “*Diversity Practices in Foundations*” (2001), organizing the *Unity Summit*, a gathering of more than 300 grantmakers in February 2007 exploring the intersectionality of issues and identities and how to work more effectively across our grantmaking silos. Most recently, we seeded the formation of a new entity - *Change Action Partners (CAP)*, a convening for funder networks committed to working on issues of structural inequities to share our work and to explore opportunities for new partnerships.

We have been witness to, and key actors in stimulating significant change within philanthropy. Some of these changes have been positive and some not so positive. We have seen two of our original members - the National Network of Grantmakers (NNG) and Women & Philanthropy - close their doors. We have seen the increased representation of women, some people of color, lesbians and gay men on the staffs of foundations while recognizing that our gains have not significantly reached up to the CEOs and Boards of our foundations. We have celebrated the recent embracing of diversity at the Council on Foundations as demonstrated in the hiring of Steve Gunderson, an openly gay man, as president and COF's creation of a senior management position for diversity and inclusiveness practices. We have welcomed the formation of the Diversity in Philanthropy Project which is engaging foundation CEOs and trustees around issues of diversity and the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE) that is bringing a heightened spotlight on issues of racial justice.

We are also deeply conscious that while much has changed within philanthropy for the better, JAG's work is not done. Deep institutionalized racism, sexism, homophobia and ableism continues to prevent our sector from reaching its fullest potential and perpetuates funding that inhibits our society from reaching its fullest potential. We have learned from our collective decades of relentless work that increasing diversity within foundations, while important, is merely the first step towards the larger goal of changing the cultural norms and practices of foundations that are structurally tilted towards the maintenance of inequality.

This is an important transitional moment - for JAG and for philanthropy. We are taking stock of what we have learned and what we have accomplished and planning for the future. What is the most strategic role for JAG in this political moment? What are the best formations to accomplish this work? How can we transform the practice of philanthropy toward equity and greater impact? As infrastructure organizations in the field, how can we continue to transform the manner in which we build our work regionally and nationally so we reflect the change we seek?

We are proud of the leadership role that JAG has played in moving our field towards greater diversity and inclusiveness and we are excited to play a role in advancing the philanthropic discourse in the months and years ahead, from a diversity and inclusiveness framework, to one that exemplifies in practice and impact, social equity and justice.

Our plan in the coming months is to be in “strategic engagement” with the goal to create a process that invites the participation of all interested colleagues who share our vision and values. Our intent is to develop a bolder, more ambitious, well resourced plan that will bring us closer to actualizing our vision. We look forward to both being in touch with you and finding mechanisms that inspire your participation. Stay tuned!

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Susan Batten, Association of Black Foundation Executives
Karen Zelermyer, Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues
Diana Campoamor, Hispanics in Philanthropy
Joy Persall, Native Americans in Philanthropy
Chris Grumm, Women's Funding Network

¹Asian American Pacific Islanders In Philanthropy, Association of Black Foundation Executives, Disability Funders Network, Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues, Hispanics in Philanthropy, National Network of Grantmakers, Native Americans in Philanthropy, Women's Funding Network, Women & Philanthropy