

Season 3 EP3

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SPEAKERS

Monique Curry-Mims, Valerie Johnson

Valerie Johnson 00:00

Hello, and welcome back to beyond philanthropy. It's March already

Monique Curry-Mims 00:06

It's march.

Valerie Johnson 00:07

And I'm here with Monique. I'm Valerie.

Monique Curry-Mims 00:10

Hey, guys.

Valerie Johnson 00:12

And today we're talking about grant making, and more specifically disruptive trends in grant making. So I think we've all probably heard of trust based philanthropy. But Monique has been doing a little bit of diving into some other practices that have been coming up. So, Monique, tell me more about what you literally, were just telling me before we hit record,

Monique Curry-Mims 00:42

I actually had the privilege or ability, not sure if it was a privilege, but I was able to participate in the very first cohort of the trust based philanthropy cohort this past spring, through our local philanthropy network. And it was a very trying process. And I think that as much as we try to move away from traditional grant making and the limitations of it, which really exists around imbalanced powers, I think that there's a level of that within trust based philanthropy because you know, philanthropy is a tool, and it's only as good as the people that are utilizing it. So within that cohort, there were a lot of micro aggressions that were happening that were never being addressed. And when we would call them out, it would be like, Oh, I could see that. All right, we'll do better, but then never do better. Like there was never like this, like, how are we going to fix this? There was, you know, one instance, in particular, where people's feelings were hurt, people were offended, there was a big conversation back and forth

about, you know, how, how things weren't working? And like, Okay, well, we hear what you're saying, we're going to send out a survey, we're going to see how we can do better how we really can make this more aligned, how we can really touch on those things, a survey never came out. And they just kept going on with, you know, the status quo. So and it was just interesting, because I mean, these were the leaders of trust based philanthropy who were implementing this cohort. So just to see the imbalance of power there, or even not understanding the different cultural competencies and differences amongst people of color, within a group. And it was a very diverse group. I mean, it was people from Philadelphia, from our philanthropy network, and then people from New York's philanthropy network, and even seeing like how New York was practicing up against what we're doing in Philadelphia, like, you know, wanting to do better, but not understanding how that work shows up on the ground. So there has to be more flexibility. And even when I think about trust-based, there's part of it that's participatory, but then there's also participatory grantmaking, right. So there's all these different things that are intertwined and all these new, like disruptive practices call out trust, as a key component, but not necessarily trust based philanthropy. So I just find it very interesting that there's all these new types of grant making, that are coming onto the scene that are all supposed to be disrupting traditional practices and yes, its calling for multi year grant making. And yes, it's calling for funders to do more research and work on their own and how to establish power. But a lot of people that have been doing traditional work, don't really understand how to re-establish power balances, I don't know, what are your thoughts?

Valerie Johnson 03:38

So I'm stuck on trust right now. Because the way you were describing the trust based philanthropy, Think Tank, learning group, whatever it was. If they truly trusted you, as a member of the community, and valued your feedback, then they wouldn't have done what they did. So are you really basing your philosophy on trust? Because if you are, you're doing it wrong? I don't know.

Monique Curry-Mims 04:09

That session or that experience that multiple anytime we bring up trust based philanthropy I'm like "HMMMMMM", its based on that experience, so I'm like there was a lacking of trust within that group, within that experience. And it's coming from the leaders of the group. So I'm like, if these are the leaders of trust-based, philanthropy, what are what are we following? What are we really doing? And I think that as much as we are all getting caught up in all these different terminologies and trends, it all comes back to like I said, it all comes back to trust. **And it all comes back to just understanding the systemic issues that people are facing, and how the work and dollars show up on the ground and how it's impacting them.**

Valerie Johnson 04:50

Yeah, so the limitations of traditional grantmaking that have been defined by the trust based movement are imbalanced power, and in your experience, it sounds like there was an imbalance of power between the participants of that workgroup and the leaders of that workgroup. So that was a horrible example of how to balance power. Transactional relationships is another limitation. So the way they define it is approaches that favor the convenience and the grantmaker often prioritize transactional processes over relationships. So it also sounds like they failed with you there, because they were more worried about getting what they wanted from you out of that session than they were about creating a safe space for you in those sessions. Another fail, and then inflexible systems. So, you know, grant making staff

aspiring to implement trust based systems have to individually work with consultants, colleagues, and vendors to actively change the default structures. You asked for a change in the default structure of how your group was operating, and you were turned down. So...

Monique Curry-Mims 06:11

I will say they did reach out, they did reach out to me personally to ask, it was myself and another colleague who kind of like spoke up or someone else that spoke up. So like, we were kind of like on a chain together. And at first, I was just kind of like, I need to calm down, before I respond back. So let it you know, calmed down. But after a while, you know, I did give a very thorough explanation as to why, where, where things weren't aligning, and it had a lot to do with, like I said, like, there are microaggressions that are happening here, you might understand them, but all the black people in the cohort see them because we're experiencing them, and we're bringing them to the forefront. And if you guys can't understand and combat the microaggressions, within this, like, Aren't we missing the whole part of this, like, if these other funders are, you know, pushing micro and macro aggressions onto people? Like how, and you were supposed to be their peers? So like, how, like, how is it showing up? I was just showing up on the ground. And it was a very, like, several paragraphs, you're like, let me just like clearly get it out. And then it was like, Oh, my gosh, like, thank you for this, you know, would you mind if you, you know, sat down with us to tell us how we can do better. And I'm like, well, one I already did, you know, in a five paragraph email, but also, like, I paid for you to teach me for me to not have to teach you, you pay for me to relive the traumas, again, of those sessions. And the one summit session that was very traumatic, where everybody just kind of blew up, like, I don't want to relive my pain so that you can learn like you just charged us to teach us this. So I feel as though you should know what you're doing and not creating the harm that you're causing.

Valerie Johnson 07:55

So I'm seeing the comparison then to how nonprofits tend to be siloed. In general, you know, like, in one area, you're really hyper focused on this and another area, you're really hyper focused somewhere else. And it kind of feels like they're doing the same thing. Like they're so hyper focused on how the grant maker grantee relationship needs to be that they're ignoring all of their own advice in other areas. And I think that's common, I think that's really common.

Monique Curry-Mims 08:31

It's really traditional, right? And we're we're supposed to be disrupting that. And the one thing that every session, we know, at the end of every session, transactional relationship, at the end of every session, there was a feedback form that we had to fill out. And every week, it was like, no, what is one question you would have? And I'm like, all, all we keep talking about is the trust between the grantees and the nonprofits? Where does the community come in, because there are a lot of nonprofits that the communities don't trust. But those are nonprofits that foundations trust, and they put all their funds behind. But those nonprofits can be causing harm, and the communities don't necessarily trust them. So what is the obligation of a funder to understand the communities that they're actually funding to support? Then what is the obligation of the nonprofit to build more trust with the community? And that was something that never got answered through any session? And I'm just kind of like, so that so the trust stops at a point is that something that is part of the whole system? It is like it's only trust between these two people, but if the people being helped don't trust those people, then what are we doing?

Valerie Johnson 09:40

So let's answer those questions. So what does the grantmaker need to do in order to build that trust? It needs to not stop just with the grant application and the site visit like they need to intentionally spend time getting to know their community and trusting the people in their community taking what they say at their word, not requiring any kind of proof and building a safe space for those people so that they feel respected. And they actually want to give their opinion. And that's not just saying we're going to give multi year grants, and we're going to take some questions off of our report like that, that's not trust based that is taking a couple principles from this philosophy, and then thinking you're done. And you're not done.

Monique Curry-Mims 10:34

Right, you're not done. And, you know, we all have our own biases. So when we look at the internal dynamics of trust building within our organization, depending on the organization structure, because I think that what we're not talking about is what the internal structure of those organizations look like, right? Like, if it is all a bunch of, you know, people with the same backgrounds and the same racial identities, but they're serving people of other racial backgrounds, and racial identities. You guys understand what you understand, but not necessarily understanding cultural competencies. You don't understand what, what actually needs to happen. And there are a lot of organizations that are going through this process. But you know, like, Okay, well, let's now hire a black ed or black program manager, but they're not setting them up to succeed. They're not putting trust in them the way that they should, they're trusting them up to a certain point, like, here are your parameters that we trust you around right now trust you

Valerie Johnson 11:35

We trust you in this box. But you step outside this box, we're threatened and then we're going to take you we're going to take everything away, we're going to make your box smaller, and smaller and smaller until you just leave because you're scaring us by stepping outside of that box.

Monique Curry-Mims 11:51

Right, exactly.

Valerie Johnson 11:55

Really, like, what, why do you do that? Think it's okay, like I don't understand.

Monique Curry-Mims 12:03

And it's, it has gone even though right, like, I think that, you know, it's hard because there's, there is a lot of so some, I think oftentimes when people think diversity, they think Black, they think African American, and that's not what diversity means. But also at the same time, you know, I as a black person would not feel comfortable being the executive director of a nonprofit that serves mainly the Latinx community because they, there's an understanding that I don't have there, and I'm sure that I could I could learn and grow and be the person that they needed me to be. But it would that would take a lot on my part to gain that cultural competency, right, to really understand what that community needs. We have these conversations about diversity, I think we really have to look at an internal trust building,

look at who we are serving and making sure that, you know, internally, we look like what we're serving, it doesn't have to be that, you know, if you're serving 90%, African American community, your board needs to be 90%. You know, that would be great and ideal, but most foundations are family foundations. So that might not necessarily happen.

Valerie Johnson 13:14

And then you always have to think about the, you know, black people are not a monolith. Gay people are not a monolith. They don't all have the same. And we talked about that before on the podcast a lot.

Monique Curry-Mims 13:25

Right

Valerie Johnson 13:26

but I think that's really where the disruption needs to happen. With the funders, sorry, I keep like being really aggressive about Fundee funder.

Monique Curry-Mims 13:40

No you have to just because everybody there, there's ownership between both of those parties, right?

Valerie Johnson 13:46

But the ownership looks different.

Monique Curry-Mims 13:49

It looks different

Valerie Johnson 13:50

for a nonprofit. Their ownership is to their community, and making sure they're building a safe space for their community. They're meeting their community needs like that should be the mission of and it's not always but that should be the mission and making sure their leadership reflects the population they serve their board, their staff, but for the funders, they should be doing that to like their constituents are the nonprofits, so they should be changing the way they are structured and their leadership teams to reflect the organizations that they're supporting. And that's the change that's not going to happen as a result of trust based philanthropy. Hmm. I'm on fire today.

Monique Curry-Mims 14:38

Yeah, I mean, so. So, the number one thing I tell all my clients is that not every funder is the right funder. And I think that, you know, depending on where you are, so like, I was talking to someone the other day and they were saying, Oh, we were getting money, but our community doesn't want to take money from the organization. And we're like, what? We're getting the money from them. And I'm like, But who are you serving? Right? Like if you're serving a community, and you're about the community, and the community doesn't want to be associated with guns, tobacco, whatever, right? But that's really taking money from, that's your own moral line, right? That's your own moral lines to cross to bear on your own cross to bear. But, you know, if you're about the community, and the community is like, is no, like I sit on a board of a nonprofit. And there was an organization that was they were like, the very first

dispensary in the area, and they're like, oh, my gosh, we're gonna get money from this. And I'm like, okay, so I just got to put a time out here, because we are helping families whose husbands brother son are in jail for marijuana distribution, drug distribution, not only that, when they went to do the applications, in the beginning, there were any people of color who were approved for dispensaries. And now we have this white woman owed dispensary firm that wants to be a sponsor of this inner city pro poverty program alleviation program. We're like, Yes, take her money. I was like, but she's making money off the same thing that that created the poverty in these in these homes. Like, I don't think that that's the right and then you've got to put their logo on everything. I don't think that's the right thing to do. And it became a big conversation on the board, where the rest of the board was like, Yeah, that does look, that doesn't look right. An the executive director really struggled with that, because, you know, she's like, look, the money and, and, you know, it came very easy. And where are we going to get? I'm just like, I don't I mean, you could take it, you know, at the end of the day, that's what you want to do. It just looks really bad. And I think that we have to start thinking about that. So when we think about trust, now on the nonprofit side, right? Because our constituents are the community. Where does that trust lie between the people that we're serving and the people that are supporting us, those foundations and those funders, right? Like there has to be that continuum of trust. And it doesn't just stop at a certain point in a system.

Valerie Johnson 17:10

So moving into disruptive trends that we like, because we've definitely talked a lot about what we don't like about some of these disruptive trends. So what are you seeing from either, you know, the nonprofit to grantor relationship, or the grantor to grantee relationship that is actually disrupting something that's more traditional? Do you have any examples?

Monique Curry-Mims 17:37

Theoretically, yeah. So one, I'm always for general operating multi-year. I think that being stuck on programmatic giving, does not lead to sustainability. And funders are always quick to ask, what's your sustainability plan? And it's like, well, I got a great program, but they'll have any operations behind it. So that is awesome in needed because it provides organizations with the flexibility. Now, the multi year matters. And, and I question what multi year means, because it takes a while for a nonprofit to really get footing, and to really make it to make impact. And if you're like, Okay, you gave someone a grant for a year that helped them, you know, built the foundation for that program. And then the next year is like, Okay, now we're really off to a good start. The third years, when they're like, Okay, I've got the impacts, I got my measurements down, I can now go wild and get more funding and things like that. And that make it like, Well, Joe gave me money, so you should get any money to or whatever. I mean, I think it has should be at least a minimum of three years, and I think some organizations are moving that way. I thought longer, like, I feel like maybe foundations should just bite down and just like I'm gonna own this, but that's just, that's not a practice. That's just me.

Valerie Johnson 18:52

No, but that is a disruptive trend that we can encourage, so dig deep get in for the five year multi year grant, like really commit.

Monique Curry-Mims 19:05

I think that the one trend that I love, I think is organizations moving away from a charity mindset to a philanthropic mindset. Now, stay with me. There is a difference between a charity and a nonprofit. There's a difference between being charitable and being philanthropic. Charity is those immediate needs right you know, basic needs support, things like that. Being more philanthropic in my opinion and this the hill that I will die on is that to be more philanthropic is to look at the systems right? So be more solutions based to be more anti systemic issue. Yeah, like yeah, we're looking at the issues and trying to combat disrupt and these issues and not just put band aids to charities the band aid, philanthropy is a solution. And I think that a lot of and I think that a lot of organizations are starting to look more towards the philanthropy and less of the charity. And I think that that is something that people are being more strategic. They're, you know, identifying the path you're going to take to really impact education and poverty and workforce, whatever the case may be. And I love that, I love that. And again, there's going to be there's a need for band aids, there are need for basic needs, because people are in need right now. And impact is regressive, it takes at least 10 years to measure impact, which is why the census is 10 years and all this stuff like that, that's something else to talk about more later date. So because it's regressive, and you need that time, that's why I'm saying if you really gotta bite down organizations to be buying, not for 10 years, they should be biting down. And they should be looking at those solutions, because that's a really a way to change in break cycles.

Valerie Johnson 20:57

Another way to break cycles, I think, is capacity building.

Monique Curry-Mims 21:05

And that is something else that they're doing a lot of too. .

Valerie Johnson 21:08

But I don't always see people doing capacity building in a way that I think is actually helpful. So a community foundation that I've worked with in the past contacted me probably like two or three years ago, and said, Hey, we're doing a capacity building grant for marketing purposes for nonprofits. And it's going to be a little different. I'm wondering if you would come in and do two presentations about communications. And I was like, Cool, who are the presentations for and they were like, well, the first one is going to be for the people who didn't get the grant, like anybody who applied and didn't get the grant is going to be invited in to get this series of educational presentations. And, you know, hopefully, then they'll be able to at least get some takeaways that they can implement, even though they didn't get the grant. And then the second one is going to be part of a series that is for the grantees who actually got the grant. But they are also getting mentors, assigned mentors from the community to coach them through developing their marketing and communication strategy and then implementing it. And throughout that process, they're also bringing in outside experts to talk about various topics. Yes. So that, to me was a helpful capacity building projects for the community organizations they work for, because they're not just saying, use this money, however you see fit. But they're also not like, there were no outcomes required. They're like, you show up, you receive the education, you receive the mentorship, and then you do with it what you will. Which is so different, because usually, it's like, you can have capacity, building money, but we want to know exactly what you're spending it on. And we want to know the outcome of that money. And we want to know how we made this possible for you. And we want you to basically brag about how important this was, and we made it happen. So that was the

first time I saw it in like, they designed it based on community feedback. They actually provided all the resources and resources to people who didn't get it. I liked it. It was a cool,

Monique Curry-Mims 23:25

yeah, no, that's a lot. I actually just was talking to a client about that, about doing that work for them. And they were looking at doing grant writing workshops for anybody interested in applying for particular grant, those that got denied, I would do like 20 minute one on ones and break down why they got denied and how they should improve. And then those that actually got awarded the grant, there was then two workshops afterwards, where we talk about those things like how to build capacity, how to, you know, all the things that are that are really needed to take your organization from this grassroots funding to become more sustainable. And then another foundation that I'm working with all of their grantees, because they do fund a lot of grassroots organizations. I do monthly workshops with their grantees on different topics they follow basically right now they're following our podcast, but then we do one on ones as well, where it's like, what's your meeting your organization? What are we working on that I can give support? That I really enjoy that work, but I also really like the fact that foundations are really looking at what's needed because I know that after 2020 A lot of foundations were like, Okay, we're gonna fund all these grassroots organizations want to fund all these, you know, black led organizations, and they were giving out \$50,000 grants and \$25,000 grants and that money was a lot for those organizations and allow for them to build on what they were already doing and hire staff or, you know, increase their services. But then the next year came, they were like, oh, no, we're going back to normal pandemics over. And then those organizations were like, well, now I've got staff that I have to be able to support, I've got programming and community, we, you know, you want us to serve more people in the community because of what was happening. So now we're serving them. But now we've got to go back to, you know, so that's why I'm just like, there's there's a component that still, that's still missing. And then those organizations that are focused on capacity building, and really focused on understanding the needs of the community, and not just, we're gonna give multi year grants and just trust that you guys are doing the work.

Valerie Johnson 25:36

I also really like about that, that it's almost like you're selecting your level as a nonprofit, like I'm at the level where I need this kind of support when it comes to capacity building marketing, communications, grant writing, whatever. Or I'm not because me and the position that I'm in now at my current nonprofit, that's not where we're at. We don't need that support. And we wouldn't even attempt to go after that grant. But somebody who does really need that support, regardless of whether they get it or not, they're going to get some kind of benefit out of that process. So that's totally worth it on their side.

Monique Curry-Mims 26:15

Yeah, it is. And I think that consultant hat on, but off, there's catchafire. And I forget what Philadelphia's, is now called.

Valerie Johnson 26:24

oh, it's still Catchafire. But it's sponsored by the Philadelphia foundation.

Monique Curry-Mims 26:28

No, key skills hub. So it's now key skills hub used to be Catchafire, because philosophy foundation actually was one of the originating funders of catchafire, and now they have their own one called key skills hub. And those things are great. But you have to already have your project in mind going into that. They're like, hey, you know, as a grantee, or maybe you didn't get the funding, but you know, here is access to catch a fire who has access to key skills hub, go forth and conquer. And then like, oh, it's been 30 days, I see you haven't used it. And it's like, but I have to put a proposal in for a particular project. And it's like, if I don't know what I need, if I don't know what, you know, there's the level of kind of strategic planning that needs to be done there. So I feel like, again, there's still a step removed.

Valerie Johnson 27:18

Exactly. I love the idea of Catchafire, which, if you're not familiar, it's connecting skilled volunteers to particular projects with nonprofits. It's great if exactly like you said, if you have something that you need, but the number of times I've had, like a board member, or an executive director, whoever say to me, we need to take advantage of this, this needs to be a thing that we participate in. I'm like, we don't need anything from a skilled volunteer right now. In the future. If we do, I will absolutely use catch a fire. But they're like, it's particular situations that they're really helpful for, and the amount of time it gets pushed on me, when I don't need them. It actually has turned into like the bane of my existence, which is saying nothing about the fact that the skilled volunteers are amazing, and they do a good job. But I'm just so sick of people saying, well, why don't you just catch a fire? No.

Monique Curry-Mims 28:16

I don't have a project right now.

Valerie Johnson 28:18

Yeah! or they're like, Do you have a marketing plan? Yeah, I have a full time marketing manager. And we write a plan once a year, and we write everything down. And we're very strategic. And still, I have people who are like, do you want us to write a marketing plan for you? No, no, I'm good. I got it. You know, what I really need, I need money to pay for staff.

Monique Curry-Mims 28:44

Great, yes, Catchafire, write a check, right, I need I donors to write me a check who wants to write a check, who just doesn't know where to write it to. That would be awesome. So there are limitations to traditional grant making, those limitations are rearing their ugly heads with in some of these disruptive practices. And we have to figure out a way to build trust through the whole continuum of philanthropy, from the foundations, the nonprofits, and the community, and that's the only real way that it's really going to work. And we have a trust based participatory democracy, democratize whatever, whatever type of grant making you're doing. It has to, it almost has to start from the ground up. And that these top down approaches where the trust is built at the top and determined by the top it has to come from the bottom up. And I think that nonprofits, I think that going back to our previous episodes, there has to be a level of education. Nothing's going to change if we don't talk if we don't build relationships, and we don't educate funders on the needs. So join us in our Patreon because we're going to talk a little bit more about that in our Patreon episode and grant making and relationship buildings up over there

Valerie Johnson 29:58

non traditional relationship building. That's what we're gonna talk about.

Monique Curry-Mims 30:03

Non-traditional relationship building. Definitely.

Valerie Johnson 30:05

All right, well, this was fun. Hopefully we'll hear you in our patreon for extra episode about effective applications and non traditional relationship building.

Monique Curry-Mims 30:15

Yeah. Thank you guys for joining us for March's episode. If you didn't know, now, you know this has been beyond philanthropy. Bye guys.