Social Justice Philanthropy
Kenya, India, Indonesia, Peru, United States

United States Report
'Draft'

Draft Report on The Challenge of Change
Social Justice Philanthropy in the United States

Paul Attewell, Leith Mullings, Juan Battle, Eugene Miller, and Claudine Pied[1]

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING OF SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY

For many years, philanthropy has responded to the needs of individuals suffering from material and social deprivation by assisting individuals directly, or by funding service agencies to aid them. However, there has long been a perspective that looks beyond the conception of philanthropy as charity, and beyond an emphasis on service provision to individuals. That viewpoint seeks to address the root causes of human suffering rather than (or in addition to) serving the immediate needs of affected individuals. One version of this practice has come to be known as social justice philanthropy (SJP).

In seeking the root causes of material and social deprivation, some scholars point to a lack of resources (inadequate access to jobs, housing, health care, education, and a healthy environment). However, the social justice perspective suggests that when a group or community lacks access to these resources, the deprivation often stems from that group's exclusion from important economic, social, and political institutions in society. Marginalized groups may lack certain legal rights, experience social or economic discrimination, or lack an effective voice in public affairs, making them highly vulnerable.

From the perspective of the disadvantaged group, their members' suffering is a consequence of injustices in the social and economic arrangements under which they live. In response, members of excluded groups form organizations, some dedicated to ameliorating deprivation by providing services to the community, while others take on the character of social movements, voicing the community's grievances, organizing the community around a change agenda, and seeking legal and institutional changes aimed at improving the group's position. In principle, SJP supports these kinds of efforts by excluded and oppressed groups to obtain social justice within their societies.

In theory, SJP grantmaking organizations underwrite organizing efforts and institution-building within groups that have been marginalized. Social justice philanthropy may assist social movements that promote social change aimed at reversing social exclusion or economic disadvantage. In addition, SJP grants may support legal efforts by marginalized groups to advance their rights.

Countries differ widely in terms of the type and extent of social exclusion and discrimination (Darity and Deshpande 2003). Despite those local variations, according to a study by Barry Knight (2003), staff members in philanthropic organizations worldwide share a high degree of consensus on the general kinds of activities they associate with the term "social justice philanthropy." These include:

- addressing shortages of basic needs (food, clothing, and shelter);
- redistributing power;
- transforming values in favor of diversity (race, gender, caste, etc.).
- building strong community capacity, so that people have the power to act; and
- increasing public participation in decisionmaking.

The contrast between more conventional philanthropy and the SJP approach is captured by two slogans: "change not charity" and "participation not patronage" (Milner 2003).

The SJP Focus of this Study

This concept of social justice philanthropy is coherent and clear, but it is an expression of an ideal or a vision, rather than a description of philanthropic practices that are actually happening. There is likely to be a gap between SJP in theory and SJP in practice. For example, Knight suggested, and our present research confirms, that organizations run by marginalized groups often mix service provision with advocacy, using the former as a springboard for community empowerment or social movements. Philanthropic activity that on first impression appears to have a traditional service-oriented purpose may, on deeper inspection, turn out to have a social justice dimension as well. Already, then, the clear-cut contrast between conventional philanthropy and SJP begins to blur.

Realizing that social justice philanthropy was a concept only partly realized in practice, the Ford Foundation commissioned several studies of SJP around the world, in order to understand the present extent of SJP, to identify barriers to greater SJP activity, and to identify factors that might facilitate more SJP funding. This document describes one of those research studies. It reports the results of qualitative research into social justice philanthropy among a limited number of grantmaking organizations located in the United States. Before presenting the analysis, it is important to note the larger context within which our study takes place.

The grantmaking sector in the United States is old, large, and well endowed. The modern foundation dates back to the first endowments of private funds for public ends undertaken by the industrial magnates of the early twentieth century. Currently there are approximately 65,000 foundations of varying and sometimes overlapping types (public, private, grantmaking, operating, independent, community, family, and corporate) with a total endowment of over $435 billion (in 2002). In 2004 foundation grants accounted for a little over 10 percent of all giving in the United States or $26.3 billion. Arts, culture, and education account for almost 40 percent of these gifts; health, human services, and religion another 33 percent; environment and international issues 12 percent, and the umbrella category public-society benefit slightly under 16 percent.[2] Social justice giving is calculated within public-society benefit and is estimated to be between 2 to 3 percent of total giving.[3] Despite the relatively small amounts involved in social justice funding, notable accomplishments have been achieved, underscoring its significant potential. This study does not chronicle those accomplishments, though some deserve mention: recent initiatives include the funding for grassroots organizations to attend the United Nations

[2] *Giving USA 2004*, pp. 72-883.

[3] Foundation Center's Statistical Information Service (www.fdncenter.org/fc_stats) "Aggregate Fiscal Data by Foundation Type, 2002 (National Level)." *Giving USA 2003*. Estimates on the size of social justice philanthropy come from a number of sources including Community Shares USA and Changemakers. See also remarks of C. Harris at CUNY Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, April 2002.

World Conference Against Racism, funding for the Living Wage, and the Coalition to Defend Public Education, among many others.

Social justice philanthropy, as understood in this report, is designed to address root causes of social problems and often represents the most progressive segment of grantmaking. Thus at the outset, in examining social justice giving by foundations, we are looking at a small piece of what is, in comparative perspective, a large pie. Our research is therefore focused on a rather unusual type of philanthropic activity, but one which we believe is important and worthy of special study. Our goal is simultaneously to study how social justice funding currently occurs, to examine the factors that limit its size, and to identify how SJP might be increased in the future.

However, SJP is not the only type of institutional giving with a clear advocacy agenda. Though a systemic examination of the operation of conservative foundations falls outside the scope of our work, it is necessary to mention their work around public policy and social change. Not only do conservative foundations articulate a clear political agenda, they, on a range of issues, have effectively framed the terms of debate. Explanations for the policy effectiveness of these foundations include their willingness to provide grantees with long-term support, often available for operating expenses; a cohesive funding approach focused on an agreed set of policy goals; and an integrated lobbying public relations strategy (Krehely, House, and Kernan 2004). Interestingly, the high priority placed on public policy work is as decisive a factor in the effectiveness of conservative foundations as the total amount of funds expended for these purposes (Rich 2005). It may be useful for SJP funders to carefully examine the long-term strategic vision under which conservative foundations operate.

The research at hand focused on a subset of funding agencies, those that appeared to be involved in SJP efforts in the United States *and that included some attention to racial and ethnic groups*. There are, of course, other pertinent dimensions of exclusion and marginalization in the US, including class, gender, and gender-orientation. However, we limited the present research to foundations that had some social justice engagement with issues of race and ethnicity because we judged that gaining an exploratory understanding of SJP in this one important area would be a valuable first step.

Although our selection of foundations required that each include some funding of racial and ethnic groups, this was not necessarily the main focus of funding for the foundations in our sample.

II. METHODOLOGY

The Object of Examination and Unit of Analysis

As in any study, this examination into the decisionmaking process surrounding social justice grantmaking in the United States has a particular focus and set of limitations. Foremost it is a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with foundation personnel including foundation heads, directors, and program officers. It is not a survey and makes no claim to incorporate the organizational operations of even a small percentage of the

over 65,000 foundation in the United States. Nor is it a review of the literature. Rather it is an analysis based on in-depth field research within a small but varied sample. Decisionmaking processes surrounding social justice are nuanced, and often problematic and conflictual. It was our intention to capture some of this complexity through qualitative methodological approaches. In addition to standing on its own, this data can also create the foundation for future quantitative studies.

Beginning with grantmaking organizations with some degree of SJP activity, we sought to identify how these organizations decide whom to fund, how they identify and evaluate potential grant recipients specifically within the SJP area, and how they assess the progress or performance of those recipients after funding begins. We were especially interested in identifying barriers or facilitators to SJP funding, and in discovering what factors currently limit the amount of philanthropic effort in this area, compared to more traditional non-SJP service provision. In sum, our emphasis was on decisionmaking processes within funding organizations, and how these facilitate or retard a social justice emphasis in grantmaking.

Given these goals, our unit of analysis is the grantmaking organization, and our universe consists of all grantmaking philanthropies based in the United States that do some funding that could be characterized as social justice and that to some extent fund racial and ethnic minority communities. This means that our description of the process of funding social justice projects will not be reflective of *all* foundations. In limiting our sample to foundations where program officers are able to do some social justice funding, for example, the report does not illustrate how a social justice grant is funded at foundations that resist all instances of such philanthropy. However, we were able to get some sense of how these issues may be handled at a broad range of foundations because study respondents also discussed their experiences at other foundations.

The Sample Design

Beginning with a list of over two thousand foundations identified by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, as making (to some extent) social justice grants the US team narrowed the list to thirty. We then obtained reports and mission statements from individual philanthropies, and supplemented them by examining foundations' websites. From this short list, ten foundations (and several alternates) were selected to participate in the study. Most were private foundations; however, we included three public foundations to see whether the legal distinctions between public and private foundations were associated with different orientations and practices towards SJP grantmaking. To avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest, the research team did not invite the Ford Foundation to participate in the study.

Specific criteria were used to determine the selection. They were:

1. Budgetary parameters (whereas no specific asset level was set, we wanted to include both large and small foundations);

2. Regional diversity (we wanted to include foundations that were based in the east, west, and center of the country);

3. A specific, but not necessarily exclusive, focus on SJP. In particular, as our research evolved, we felt it would be more useful to examine foundations across a range of social justice funding (some that saw social justice as their primary mandate; others that acknowledge the importance of social justice work and at the same time fund more traditional service provision programs; and still others that may not describe themselves as involved in SJP, but had funded projects we would define as social justice initiatives); and

4. Access (we felt that it was important that at least one member of the research team have some level of personal contact with the foundation).

Once foundations were selected, a letter inviting the foundation to participate in the research along with a project description was sent to the foundation president. A member of the research team would then follow up requesting permission to conduct interviews.

Point three above was of particular importance. Of the ten foundations interviewed, several were primarily, if not exclusively, social justice funders (and in effect the study over-sampled these organizations); yet the team felt that, given the small space occupied by these funders in the foundation community, it was important to understand the incentives and constraints of social justice grantmaking in larger and more mainstream organizations. Not to do so would have violated the mandate of the research, which was to examine the decisionmaking process surrounding social justice funding wherever it occurs, and it would have sharply limited the scope of the research, and the "generalizability" or applicability of the research findings.

We drew a convenience sample;[4] random sampling was unnecessary because our goal was to uncover and describe a range of organizational practices, and to undertake exploratory research, rather than to determine population parameters or make other statistical inferences.

We also focused on grantmaking organizations rather than on grant-receiving organizations during this first phase of our research. Again this was a pragmatic decision dictated by limited time and resources; ultimately one would want to understand SJP activities from both ends of the process, combining both the funders' and the recipients' perspectives. In fact a full analysis of SJP and a power analysis of community capacity require the incorporation of grantee perspectives.

The Method of Data Collection

The main form of data collection involved face-to-face interviews at the SJP organization between a researcher from the US team and a board member, executive director, program director, or program officer. In preparation for the interviews, each organization was asked to provide annual reports or other documents that described its grantmaking activities during the previous two years. These documents were used to gain a preliminary understanding of the philanthropy and its program structure and funding priorities. It was our intention, whenever possible, to gather a range of perspectives from different organizational levels in the foundation.[5] We interviewed one to three people per organization, each interview lasting between one and a half and two and a half hours. The researcher tape-recorded each interview and the tapes were later transcribed into documents between twenty and forty single-spaced pages prior to analysis of the data.

In interviews, foundation staff reflected on the goals of their respective foundations, the grantmaking process in their program, their success stories and biggest frustrations, and their perspectives on the current limitations and possible solutions to increased social justice grantmaking at US foundations. One important part of the interview asked the program officer to identify one or two projects that he or she had supervised that had SJP aims and where ethnic or racial minorities were the primary recipients. The interviewer then elicited a "life history" for each of these grants, asking how the recipient initially approached the foundation, how the foundation staff responded, and how the decision to fund came about. Thus in addition to eliciting the foundation's formal criteria for funding grants in SJP, the interviewer obtained a detailed narrative of how actual grants came about. This enabled the researchers to compare the formal decisionmaking process in the organization with the informal and sometimes unacknowledged processes by which SJP project grants were approved.

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[4] Convenience sample is defined as a type of non-probability sample in which the respondents have been selected because they are convenient for the researcher. This approach was necessary because of the relative inaccessibility of foundations particularly when there is no preexisting relationship.

[5] Interviewees were equally divided among program officers, on the one hand, and executive directors, directors, and board members on the other.

In conducting the research, all informants were promised confidentiality. This decision was made for ethical reasons and because it is a legal requirement of the research. It affords interviewees full protection against unauthorized disclosure of their identities and often encourages an unusual degree of candor. On the other hand it places the respondents and research sample behind a veil of anonymity, and it has presented challenges to the team in the clear presentation of data. This trade-off is unavoidable in the type of ethnography presented here.

III. FINDINGS

Organization Mission Statements and SJP Activities

No one model or strategy for social change or how to achieve social justice emerged from our study. The philanthropic organizations we examined have all supported some activities, which we as researchers judged to fall within the SJP concept. They also all share some level of commitment to facilitating social change. The phrase "social justice philanthropy," however, does not appear in their mission statements. Instead in printed materials they tend to describe their missions with more general language that reflects a spectrum of philanthropic motivations, using phrases like: "to improve the quality of life"; "to rebuild and reinvigorate communities"; "to promote the public welfare"; "to help people help themselves"; "to enrich the lives of people"; "to support a just and equitable society"; "to address matters of urgent concern to the community"; "to contribute to social transformation"; "to facilitate positive social change"; "to build community"; "to increase opportunities for the disadvantaged"; "to promote equity and inclusion"; and "to enhance and sustain the capacity of local communities."

One initial topic that we raised in all our interviews was how staff members in grantmaking organizations understood the term "social justice philanthropy," and how the activities of the grantmaking organization where they worked related to SJP. In the majority of cases, respondents articulated a well thought out definition of SJP. But organizations' mission statements tend to set a general or abstract tone, *but avoid expressing a specific philosophy of change*, or *a specific analysis of the causes of suffering and need*. They are descriptive rather than proscriptive. This use of abstractions, even when accompanied by more specific program objectives and current funding priorities, allows foundation personnel a greater discretion in defining their activities, and considerable latitude to change their priorities over time. We found that these philanthropies were continually forming and reforming their missions through their daily activities. Their commitments and agendas shift subtly over time, subject to influence from boards, from presidents of the organization, and from program officers.

For those foundations not explicitly committed to social change, because mission statements are broad enough to generate general support within the organization without making a commitment to a particular analysis of society or of the philanthropic enterprise, these organizations' commitment to social change is malleable. Sometimes the envelope of what is funded expands, and sometimes it contracts or shifts, and, based on our interviews, these modifications tend to result not from conscious dramatic changes of

direction, but rather incrementally, one grant at a time, through a process of advocacy, consultation, resistance, and accommodation within each philanthropic organization.

So when we asked influential persons within these less SJP-oriented foundations how they fund social justice grants that are particularly risky, they said their decisions can depend on how staff members framed the activity, how they portrayed an intervention, and how they characterized the grant applicant. Inside these philanthropies there is ongoing dialogue and persuasion about appropriate funding. For program officers working in those foundations that do not explicitly emphasize SJP funding, this process requires that the activities that she or he wants to fund must be packaged and presented as falling under agreed-upon missions and goals, and that novel activities have to be demonstrated to be logical extensions of past commitments and practices. From the point of view of people at various levels of the foundation, this means grantmaking is a process of negotiation: program officers and directors worry about "bringing the board on board" and, in setting the direction of the foundation, board members keep the program officers "on target." This approach is in contrast to program officers implementing an SJP strategy that has been designed by senior staff and approved by the board. This alignment of executive staff, board, and program officer was in evidence in organizations more fully committed to SJP, where board members may be engaged in processes of definition and redefinition as they come to embrace certain activities and resist others.

For example, when asked about the level of direct board involvement in the funding cycle, the program officer for philanthropy of a primarily social justice nature answered: "Zero. It's interesting. I was amazed by that… They see it, [but] what the board wants to hear from us is the general direction where we're going… and we … engaged them in … that bigger conceptual thinking about… our national policy work."

We are not suggesting that the decisionmaking process in the philanthropies we studied was necessarily egalitarian; On the contrary, especially in those larger foundations with less SJP-orientation, some organizational participants clearly have more authority and clout than others. For example, the biggest shifts in mission or programming may be associated with a change in the presidency of the organization. Several foundations that we studied, particularly those with a strong emphasis on social justice funding, had a commitment to an inclusive grantmaking process of consultation, persuasion, and influence. Even in these circumstances, however, program officers sometimes came to the process with anxiety, particularly when working on a risky social justice grant. When asked what characteristics make a program officer willing to push for social justice grants, a program officer of color said, "there's a real need for almost like steeliness."[6] She spoke particularly of why this is important for people of color at foundations: "It's not easy to know that, as a person of color, when you are making a statement about communities of color, that everyone in the room is looking at you and connecting your professional and grantmaking ideas to the fact that you're, that it's somehow personal." Still, despite the anxiety of trying to classify or construe applications that they favor as

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[6] Meaning: a strong commitment to persevere along with better-than-average communication and alliance–building skills.

falling under criteria that the organization has funded before, participants in these organizations with inclusive decisionmaking processes have a role in defining what the de facto mission of the organization is. In large organizations in which social justice grantmaking was not considered to be an explicit part of the mission and comprised only a small percentage of its grantmaking, program officers learned either to slip risky grants in discretionary funds or to stay well within the parameters of their program area.

What does this imply for SJP as an idea, and what does it imply for SJP as a practice? As an idea, as a phrase, "social justice" implies that injustices have been done and need to be remedied. It is a language for mobilizing, for demanding change. It implies a *power analysis* of the causes behind each social problem and a corresponding rationale for undertaking a particular intervention.

Foundations with a history and a commitment to social justice described a coming together of staff, and sometimes board, around this kind of understanding, forming a strategic alignment around a social justice mission. By contrast, in many larger foundations, the idea of social justice philanthropy makes some board members and some senior staff members uncomfortable, according to our research interviews. These large foundations contain people with diverse commitments and viewpoints. Divergent viewpoints can coexist so long as the common ground is a shared commitment to constructive social change. Those foundations emphasized the positive connotations of social justice (inclusion, reducing barriers, building a sense of community, empowering) while avoiding the critical edge

Does this mean that SJP does not exist except as an ideal? No, because even though the term was not widely used in the philanthropies we studied, in their general daily conversations about what they do, the concept exists in many people's minds, and in the case of some program staff as a commitment and an orienting principle. However, even those staff members who have a social justice view of the world, who believe that having a "power analysis" of the status quo is an indispensable part of their philanthropic decisionmaking, can *translate* effortlessly between, on the one hand, a language within which the goal of philanthropy is to bolster movements for justice and, on the other had, a language that emphasizes constructive social change, inclusion, and empowerment.

As long as one framework can easily be translated into the other, as a practical matter, individuals working within foundations who do conceptualize their work in terms of remedying social injustices can push for the kinds of programs and activities they deem meritorious, and they often succeed in obtaining those funds and programs. In addition, boards and presidents who might not fully accept the idea of social justice itself may be persuaded to fund projects championed by those who do embrace that perspective, because the projects are framed in a language with which they are comfortable and familiar. For example, the program officer might substitute the terms "democracy" or "community organizing," for social justice. A program officer in a medium-sized foundation described "translating" as an important skill for both internal and external communication: "translating of what may come across as radical ideas to some and just trying to translate that so that the integrity of the goals that you're trying to get to is

maintained, but at the same time you're trying to meet people where they're at, you know, in terms of [whoever is] reading or listening to what you're talking about."

The role of translator has limits. Although concern was often expressed that community voices be authentic and represented at the table, the social change agenda was not pushed further. We found little evidence of social justice funding linked in any substantial, let alone sustained, way to social movements or legal activism, or to efforts to build a broad constituency needed to support structural change.

Beyond this limitation, several people we interviewed characterize their role as educating their philanthropic brethren, as persuading, as widening the envelope of what their organizations will fund, as encouraging their organizations to be bolder. Those efforts sometimes work and sometimes do not; sometimes are free of conflict and other times are resisted; sometimes are amicable and other times cause frustration. These individuals are trying to shift the center of gravity within the philanthropic world toward a perspective that thinks about social justice, conceptualizes social change in a way that requires analyses of the causes of social ills, and is more willing to criticize the status quo. The need for a strategic vision was expressed on more than one occasion, particularly at the more senior levels (above program officer) of some of the more progressive foundations. Yet even here we did not see the elaboration of a strategy that in a systematic way identified structural remedies for social problems by effecting change in juridical, legal, economic, and political systems.[7]

Rather, the attempt to advance a social justice agenda caused frustration among some of those who were committed to a vision of social change and activism. The executive director of a small social justice-oriented foundation pointed out: "Philanthropy is still a product of the capitalist system. That is what it is. And … it's always going to reflect the problems of the capitalist system. These are privileged people who have power. That's what it is. Now, either we take that system down, or we recognize it. I don't know how you tinker around the edges and make capitalism a little nicer. And I don't know whether that's going to bring social justice. We need something a little better than a little nicer."

A program director at a large foundation pointed out: "Most foundations' boards are set up and managed by what I just talked about [primarily very rich men who on some levels benefit from the status quo] and their interest[s] are charity, are saying, for instance, we would rather fund scholarships that take bright minority kids out of the public schools and send them to Exeter than to ask the fundamental questions about why are our public schools so inadequate. The reality is, if we had more social justice, we would have less need for charity."

Another director, speaking of a large foundation where he had previous worked, noted: "That [foundation] is basically conservative at its core. It is basically… blind or averse to being explicit about race…. out of a sense that we're all God's children, we're all

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[7] For an example how juridical reform is being used to push a social change agenda, albeit a conservative one, see "Unregulated Offensive" by Jeffrey Rosen in the New York Times Magazine, April 17, 2005.

equal…. But we don't have to get ideological or racial about it...' – which severely limits, in my opinion, your ability to understand context and be... focused in terms of a strategy."

Each of these statements presents a strong critique of current sentiments regarding social justice with foundations. However, none articulate a strategy for making change.

Each foundation that we studied could be placed on a spectrum of activism. But no matter where a particular organization is located on that spectrum, it tends to contain individuals with different conceptions of social change. These agendas coexist; sometimes funding agendas expand and sometimes retract their scope. Self-imposed boundaries of philanthropies, their willingness to fund certain activities and an unwillingness to go into other areas, move back and forth according to the dynamics of the philanthropy itself, its staff, and the external environment. Because a central objective of the research is to identify the space where SJP can happen and how those spaces can be amplified to include larger, more mainstream foundations, we discuss some of the barriers and facilitators we found within our sample below.

This overview of how we see SJP existing both as theory and as practice makes intelligible the fact that even those that kept well away from the language of social justice still funded certain programs that were certainly compatible with a social justice perspective. We observed that in most organizations there was a mix of traditional service-provision philanthropy and philanthropy that falls closer to the definition of SJP we provided earlier.

It is worth considering why the funding organizations we studied undertook a mix of grantmaking, rather than hewing either to an SJP approach or to a more traditional service-delivery emphasis. Understanding the reasons behind this mixture is important for those who would like to increase the SJP share of funding in the US. We have identified the following reasons why many organizations combine SJP and non-SJP grantmaking.

Partly this mix of activities reflects the diversity of foundation staff members in terms of backgrounds and commitments. Some staff members pushed to make SJP grants, while others cultivated more service-provision philanthropy. We will return to this first issue about the philanthropic workforce below.

Second, several of the grantmaking organizations we studied define their mission partly in terms of a commitment to a particular community or group in society, rather than to a particular philosophy or theory of social change. The former commitment or goal outweighs the latter. Therefore, when new needs emerge in the focal community that result in requests for service provision, the funding agency feels obliged to respond to the new needs, whether or not the activity has a substantial social change component.

For example, an organization focused on women decided that it ought to respond with grants on women and HIV/AIDS because initial service provision by the government seemed to overlook this group. Or in another instance, an organization with a mission to serve a particular city felt it appropriate to fund a project involving new immigrants to

that city, because this was a group that it had not served before and the philanthropy felt its charter required it to embrace all constituencies within its boundaries. They saw their grant as building the constituency and organizational framework for what could *later* develop into a social justice project. In these and other examples, a new and compelling need within the focal community makes acceptable a blurring of the distinction between SJP and service provision in the minds of the funders.

A third reason why a lot of grantmaking doesn't cleanly fall into either a service-provision or an SJP mode is that funding organizations recognize that service provision is sometimes the hook or incentive upon which grantee efforts at community organizing depends. To return to the example of women and HIV/AIDS, a program officer explained that the immediate health crisis of women is what brought the group of women with HIV/AIDS together. The grantmaking agency was therefore comfortable with the notion of funding services, because in the process this support was empowering a group in the community, which the foundation viewed as part of a social change agenda.

Fourth, we observed that the funding organizations we studied employed a flexible SJP/non-SJP classification or terminology that can construe a very broad range of grantmaking activities as "social change," as "empowerment," as "giving voice," as "activism," or as "advocacy." A broad range of activities can be covered by or legitimated by these concepts. For example, bringing disadvantaged youth together at an after-school drop-in center might initially be considered as a type of service provision. Looked at differently, however, the experience of collective action empowers the youths. Because of their participation, they build social networks with one another and with adults, which can be construed as building "social capital" or "community capacity." When the organization that serves them seeks government or other funds, their work may be viewed as "advocacy," and seen as a social justice project.

This is not a hypothetical example. A program director at a medium-sized foundation had selected a grant for a drop-in center for youth to exemplify her best and most highly successful social change grant. She highlighted the fact that the center mobilized the youths and took them to lobby for funds in the state legislature, as proof that this kind of grantmaking was aimed at changing society and remedying social injustice. It is, however, important to note that this effort was not part of an overall strategy that included public policy, legal, and constituency-building components. Rather, a positive outcome was declared when a group of youths (apparently without support from other organizations) traveled to the state capital.

In sum, the language that grantmakers have at their disposal provides enormous flexibility in characterizing proposed activities as "social change" and "social justice" or not. Combined with the fact that some funding organizations assist grant recipients in modifying their proposals and in using the "right language" for their philanthropy (which we will discuss below), this flexibility leads to a situation where deciding what is and what is not social change or SJP is quite difficult. At the extremes, the distinction may be clear to all (lobbying government for a legal change is clearly social change; providing meals to the elderly is clearly service provision) but there is a huge gray zone in between, and it is in this gray zone that most of the grantmaking we observed takes place. This

gray zone and the flexibility in classifying proposals places considerable discretion in the hands of program officers, another topic we shall turn to below.

The fact that many grant recipients' proposals can be portrayed either as advancing social change and social justice or alternatively as providing services to the needy in a conventional manner raises a question: Are the activities of foundations committed to social justice and social change really distinctive, as a result of the SJP mission, or is this just a matter of perception and packaging? Does SJP imply new forms of philanthropic activity, and a different approach to grantmaking, or is SJP old wine in new bottles? Is SJP different in terms of the kinds of activities it supports, or is it distinctive insofar as it focuses on certain communities or excluded groups? Or does SJP require a comprehensive approach to problems that addresses symptoms and causality and does so through an array of coordinated projects?

The Legitimacy and Limits of Social Justice Goals

Social justice and social change are goals that appeal to many individuals within the grantmaking organizations that we studied. Most of the program officers we interviewed reported that they have been able to justify, if not social justice goals, social justice projects within their own organizations. They also reported, however, that they were among a small community of social justice foundations. Social justice funding does not have the same legitimacy within the general philanthropic community or with the general public. A program director at a large foundation explained his view:

> "You must remember American philanthropy is not [like this Foundation]. It is family foundations… regional foundations… American philanthropy… and the leadership of most American institutions are white men. And frequently [they] are, are not comfortable saying social change, or social justice."

Several different interviewees suggested that philanthropic organizations in general are very sensitive to negative publicity in the media or to earning a negative reputation among other foundations. This makes them cautious about funding potentially controversial projects. Most program officers did not report that their own organizations refused to fund controversial areas as a matter of policy; instead they suggested that fear of negative publicity acts as a brake on funding. To some extent, they seemed to be offering this as an explanation for why *other* foundations that they were very familiar with undertook less social change philanthropy than their own organization did. Some program-level staff described this concern with publicity and image as a preoccupation of foundation-level administrators. A program director at a large foundation described a tension between his program's concern with social justice and the foundation's concern with organizational image:

> "The head of the organization was … more concerned with not stirring up the political pot, and having it, again, reflect badly on the organization…. So their focus is on keeping a lid on things…. My focus is on social justice; theirs were tied… to… keeping things cool….If you want to achieve status in the foundation world… everything has to look like it (was) successful. Our [projects] created too

many questions of things that were not achieved. Ours pointed to too many holes in the logic of the policy…. Ours raised more questions than it answered. Ours was more controversial than nice, finished… cadence. And foundations of this size do not want to raise questions they want to pretend that they are providing answers."

Some of the foundations in our sample did resist certain social justice activities or topics. A program administrator at a large foundation, for example, indicated that his organization would draw the line at any project that supported litigation: that would not fit their perceived mission. (In some cases, the hesitation may be due to fear of crossing the tax line that forbids lobbying, etc.) The same administrator suggested that his organization would be unlikely to fund grants with a specifically gay or lesbian focus. He said his board would not be comfortable with this kind of activity.

One foundation staff member suggested that his organization wanted to avoid being seen as doing only one thing, in part because as a *public* foundation it was concerned about affecting the perceptions of future donors. This was his explanation as to why his organization supported other activities, as well as SJP projects, implying that his organization was comfortable, and indeed enthusiastic, about funding social change activities as long as it was not perceived as solely funding in that area.

In a different grantmaking organization, a senior staff member talked about reluctance on the part of board members of his philanthropy to fund activities that appeared too controversial or to imply a "liberal" political agenda. He did *not* say this prevented funding activities with a social justice aspect, but rather argued that board concerns meant that proposed activities had to be more carefully packaged and more elaborately justified, and had to be understood as non-partisan. It was necessary, to take one example, for the program officer to explain that even though a community group was pushing for certain social changes that echoed certain features of the Democratic Party's national platform, that this community group was not a partisan political entity, and hence supporting this local community group was not a partisan political use of philanthropy.

Another example was given in another interview where a program officer advocated a grant that the president of the organization did not want to fund because he felt it might result in criticism of the philanthropy. The program officer, by virtue of the decisionmaking structure or her relationships, was able to argue the case before the board. She was able to convince the board that the proposed activity did merit support.

While giving due credit to the spirit of inclusive decisionmaking evidenced by the organizations we studied, the apparent sensitivity of philanthropies to external criticism or bad publicity is something that causes us, as researchers, to view this as a potential barrier to a more extensive social justice agenda in the philanthropic world. The existence of social groups who support the status quo and are opposed to social change means that funding certain activities is likely to cause controversy. Opponents of the change agenda are going to complain.

As tax-exempt entities, philanthropies are required to avoid certain partisan political activities. However, they have discretion to support many activities that are political with a small p, that are controversial, and that include lobbying on issues rather than for a specific piece of legislation. One question our research raises is whether and to what extent US philanthropies censor themselves in terms of their social change agendas in order to avoid criticism, bad publicity, and political pressure. This lies beyond the main focus of our research inquiry, but it appears to affect the more immediate organizational dynamics that we focused on. Do philanthropies that support social justice projects operate at a scale and in ways that reflect self-censorship and avoidance of public conflict? If so, this is an important self-imposed barrier to expandind SJP.

The Community Focus of Most Social Justice Philanthropy

In conjunction with a social change or social justice philosophy, the majority of funding organizations that we studied defined their activities as focused on a community, characterized either as a specific place/area or by certain kinds of people, defined by race/ethnicity, by poverty, or other criteria. These philanthropies were committed to funding grassroots groups that both serve and are composed of people who live in the communities in question. This preference was expressed in the phrase "helping people help themselves," which is frequently found in the grantmakers' mission statements. An alternative formulation is that "poor and excluded people themselves should participate in researching, planning, and doing the work."

A commitment to supporting grassroots organizations, found particularly in the social justice-oriented organizations, has implications for the kinds and scale of activities that SJP supports. In the main, the community-based organizations that were supported by grants were small in size and relatively non-bureaucratic. This contrasts with other arenas of philanthropy, such as the arts, where considerable funding goes to theater groups, orchestras, and other large formal organizations with many professional employees. In a different example, many politically engaged foundations take the form of "think tanks," which employ in-house scholars and writers who advocate a particular agenda for social change, or they support external researchers, in universities and elsewhere. In a third example, some more politically engaged foundations support litigation as a mechanism for advancing social change.

Funding grassroots activism contrasts with these other types of activities, and to some extent constitutes a strategic choice about how to bring about social change. Although some of the larger SJP-oriented foundations that we studied did make a few grants for research or for litigation, these were exceptions to the rule. Most grantmakers, especially in the smaller foundations, were almost exclusively funding community groups: the SJP emphasis was mainly associated with supporting emergent small-scale organizations that were largely non-bureaucratic, that depended heavily on volunteers or a small staff, and employed few if any salaried professionals.

The importance of community authenticity emphasizes a particular set of skills. But it is not at all clear that these skills are in themselves sufficient to make social change. By contrast, conservative foundations have made a point of providing funds to a range of

organizations and individuals including those who can build constituencies, develop a public policy agenda and engage in lobbying. In this regard the definition of SJP as exclusively supporting local community organizations comes into competition with other approaches seeking social change and social justice. One notable alternative approach is legal advocacy, the use of litigation to overcome social exclusion. Organizations in this area, even if headed by racial and ethnic minorities, are not grassroots community organizations; they tend to be coalitions of professionals, often lawyers. Some of these legal activists view SJP philanthropies as very resistant to funding legal work because of their commitment to supporting community organizing and services. For example, at a 2003 conference on "Poverty, Wealth, Status & Inequality: Social Justice Lawyering in Theory and in Practice," James Bell of the Hayward Burns Institute, observed that "from a funding perspective direct services are often at odds with advocacy services." Another participant, Marion Standish of the California Endowment, agreed: "[A]dvocacy to most foundations is a dirty word. Community-organizing approaches are more favored. Litigation can be a part of a larger strategic effort, but is often considered problematic because of the uncertainty of outcomes, the lengthiness of litigation, and that the impact is limited to individuals" (see http://www.scu.edu/law/client/pdf/socialjustice_grillo_ retreat_2003.pdf). Again, the absence of a social change strategy is evident, and a coordinated approach could help overcome these tensions in the funding community.

Assessing Success in Meeting Social Justice Goals

Even though several of the funding organizations we studied place a positive value on promoting social change, and many think about grants in these terms, their staff members acknowledge that it is very hard to assess any grant in terms of its *success* on these social change dimensions, goals, or outcomes. The tools and criteria used to measure success of service projects are frequently not appropriate for social justice projects. As several program officers noted, it is relatively easy to demonstrate the efficacy of a service-provision grant in terms of numbers of people served, numbers of client visits, etc. It is far more difficult to assess and measure success for social change goals.

Several interviewees called for a revamping of foundations' systems of evaluating social justice grantees, looking for new indicators of success. One foundation executive director who is working on such an effort explained: "[L]et us re-examine these conventions…what is it about the logic of program evaluation, what is it about the methodologies that have evolved that we can tweak and make relevant to the practitioner on the ground?...We first have to create a space and an opportunity for grantees and people working on the ground to develop authentic measures of these kinds of implementations." The foundation then creates the context "where these clusters of grantees come together and make meaning about their aggregated set of assumptions."

We observed a number of organizational adaptations to this assessment problem. First, a grantee does not always have to document success at social change; it is often sufficient to attempt to bring about social change. One program officer gave the example of a grantee that took participants to the state capital to lobby. The lobbying activity itself, not whether the lobbying was successful, was what counted for this grantmaker.

Second, grants officers employ certain characteristics of funded programs as important indirect indicators of success. So, if a program had strong links to the community; if it drew in many participants; if it received public or media attention; if participants were enthusiastic and engaged; if the funded entity grew and moved on to new activities or a broader agenda – these were all read as signs of success given an empowerment/change agenda. These indicators don't measure social change outcomes *per se*. Rather they are intermediary steps that can substitute for assessment measures of social change itself.

A long-time executive director of a small foundation described this as a focus on progress rather than success: "We don't use the word 'success' because that could be understood in many different ways but *progress* toward what *they* propose to accomplish or the change that they were seeking."

Nevertheless there is a need for clear objectives, particularly in terms of outcomes (rather than outputs). Take the previously cited example of students lobbying for an after-school program. If the objective is to change the legislative environment, then having students travel to the state capital can be a measure of progress. However, it is not a measure of success, and the two should not be confused.[8]

An alternative way of thinking about this assessment or evaluation process borrows from organizational sociology. Scholars such as James Thompson have noted that organizations facing multiple goals or goals that are hard to assess often cannot provide hard numbers. Instead they are forced to emphasize the quality of inputs or use soft measures such as reputation. Similarly, quality control theorists, like W. Edwards Deming, have argued that it is much more effective to control quality through interventions in the planning and production phases than to measure and control quality after the fact by inspecting products created.

Applying these ideas to the philanthropy world, given the difficulty of assessing whether a grant meets social change goals after the fact, funding organizations shift their efforts to the beginning of the process, and make sure quality is built in from the beginning. Concretely, this means that organizations funding SJP projects invest very large amounts of staff time and energy early in the process into one or more of the following:

- evaluating projects thoroughly at the proposal stage;
- crafting or modifying proposals in collaboration with applicants;
- undertaking site visits to potential grant recipients; and
- providing ongoing technical assistance during the grant period.

Rather then assessing performance after the fact, then, at an early stage these grantmaking organizations are taking many responsibilities on themselves in order to ensure that projects succeed. In Deming's language, they are building quality in at the

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[8] For a discussion on assessing success, please see "Social Justice Philanthropy: A Framework for Philanthropic Organisations" (Setkova 2004).

front end rather than assessing quality after the fact. We will detail this process in the next section.

Organizational Processes for SJP Projects

(1) The Centrality of Program Officers as Grant Champions and Decision-Makers

In each of the funding organizations we studied, final decisions as to whether or not to fund a given proposal were undertaken by a group of people. Sometimes program officers reviewed proposals as a group to make a short list and recommend funding; in other instances donors and philanthropy staff discussed and decided on which projects to fund. In many cases, the governing board gave final approval to all grants.

Despite a variety of decisionmaking processes, all the people we interviewed stressed the importance and centrality of the individual program officer in decisions over funding. Only after a program officer had enthusiastically supported a proposal within his or her jurisdiction and had become a champion for funding a particular proposal in the later group discussions was the proposal likely to become funded. It is therefore appropriate to think of program officers acting as both champions/advocates and as gatekeepers in the grantmaking process. The extent to which program officers committed to social change were effective at getting projects through depended on a range of factors, including the commitment of the foundations, the decisionmaking structure, and whether there was a critical mass of SJP-oriented people at different levels of the foundation. The level of diversity of program officers also seemed to be important. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that in order to play this role, program officers have to act as translators and do so with stealth. This speaks directly to the current limits of funding for social justice change.

Though the centrality of program officer in the funding process may not be particular to social justice funding, as gatekeepers or advocates they could determine whether or not a social justice grant would be funded. We were struck by the fact that many program officers who oversaw SJP projects tended to have been social change activists themselves. In one organization, some of the program officers had previously worked in the same community organizations that the philanthropy itself currently funds. In another funding organization, a leader described the ideal profile for a program officer as someone who had a background both in community organizing and in government, the former because they would understand the nature and organizing work, the latter because they would understand the bureaucratic needs of funding agencies. The larger point is that SJP program officers are expected to have a very close understanding of what social change and social justice efforts look like at the community or grassroots level. In many though not all cases, they are more likely to be effective if they came from the same racial or ethnic communities that the funding organization was supporting.

(2) The Application and Funding Process

We began this research thinking that the SJP grants process might look similar to the way that grants for scientific research are processed by government agencies such as the National Science Foundation or the National Institutes of Health. In those kinds of

institutions, researchers prepare elaborate rationales for proposed research that contain innovative ideas. Non-partisan experts then review the ideas and rate proposals. Grants are then made according to those ratings and the pool of funds available. However, as our interviews proceeded, it became clear that the philanthropic grants process is quite different from the image we brought from scientific research. The contrasts tell us a lot about the particular demands of SJP and the dynamics of grantmaking.

In scientific research, it is expected that the applicant will bring new ideas and projects to the table. In SJP, grantmaking organizations always welcome innovative proposals from community groups. However, project officers and the granting organizations also identify new issues and areas for community action within the grantmaking organization. They then encourage applicants to develop and/or modify proposals to bring them into alignment with the grantmaking organization's ideas and priorities. In interviews, several examples were given of ideas that originated in the SJP grantmaking organization and were then "marketed" to community organizations.

In scientific research, the reputation and past grant history of the applicant is a critical determinant of whether an activity will be funded. It is a plus, not a minus, that the current proposal is a continuation or an extension of prior successful research. The situation is quite different in SJP philanthropy, because (with occasional exceptions) the funding organizations placed a strong emphasis on the importance of supporting new organizations and new causes. Since the goal is social change, there is a certain reluctance in the funding organizations to fund "more of the same," while funding start-up groups with novel agendas has cachet. A program director with more than fifteen years of foundation experience described this bias as philanthropies wanting to claim credit and wanting to be sure their funding makes a difference: "[I]t's really hard if you come in and you just fund a lot of good work that's already going on."

We see this proclivity as a serious barrier to affecting social change. One implication is that a really successful SJP community organization is likely to find its proposals become less attractive over time to funders, either because they have funded that organization before, or because other SJP funders have already supported that organization, so it is "theirs" not "ours." Sometimes established community organizers try to get around this by spinning off a "new" group to apply for grants to undertake a new activity. (We intend to explore this issue further in the phase of our research that looks at grant recipients.)

This taste for newness leads to a different weight being placed on the reputation of the people making the proposal. Program officers are likely to stress the *authenticity* of the SJP applicant(s). Authenticity, in this context, means several things. It does *not* mean that the applicant has been doing this kind of work for years and has a track record of accomplishment. Instead, authenticity asks whether the organization that is making the proposal is truly representative of the community that is to be served. In part, this is a matter of the race or ethnic background of the people who will play leadership roles in the grant activity. In part, it means that even if the applicants are members of the ethnic/racial community, it matters to the grantmakers whether the applicants have links

to other institutions in the community: to churches, to other service agencies, etc. Are they well tied into the community?

Judging the authenticity of the applicant is accomplished through information collected as part of the initial application, but most of the SJP granting agencies we studied went far beyond this. After selecting some applications as promising, program officers often make site visits to applicant organizations. (In one SJP funding organization, program officers make site visits accompanied by major donors to the SJP organization. Both groups want to see for their own eyes what the applicant organization is doing.) The visitors want to meet the main people involved in the proposal; to see the activities of the organization in progress; to get a sense of the kinds of people currently being served and their level of energy and involvement. All of these factors, which matter quite separately from the formal written application, prove very important in leading program officers to throw their weight behind certain SJP proposals and not others.

The fact that many SJP program officers come from community-organizing backgrounds themselves means that they may have already known about the group or organization that has made a proposal, and even if they haven't heard of them before, the program officers can use their own networks to find out about how other community agencies or organizers view the applicant. Program officers are not unduly worried about applicants they do not already know. They have ways of finding out whether new applicants are authentic or not. This is important since the emphasis on empowerment means that a positive value is placed on applicants who in other contexts might be viewed as stigmatized or marginalized (e.g., ex-felons, or drug-users, or mothers whose children have been removed due to abuse). If program officers can determine, through site visits and calls, that individuals from these groups are actively engaged in community organizing and have been able to generate involvement by others, they become good candidates for funding, and are viewed as authentic rather than stigmatized.

Because a high value is placed on local leadership, program officers do not usually have high expectations for initial proposals or letters of inquiry. They realize that applicants may not be skilled in the bureaucratic aspects of budgets and proposals, and may need help defining and expressing their ideas. Identifying new groups with meritorious ideas, and then helping those groups to define their activities in the right language and format to be funded becomes an important task for program officers.

The picture we are drawing is one where the program officer acts as a gatekeeper. If the program officer believes that an initial proposal has merit, the officer conducts a site visit and may help the applicant to construct a convincing proposal. If the program officer decides that the applicant organization is either not authentic or lacks capacity, then they are not encouraged or given the kind of assistance needed to obtain funding.

There is another implication of the program officer's gatekeeper role that we wish to emphasize. The commitment to SJP funding within philanthropy is often sustained and encouraged by program officers who have community-activism backgrounds and who are members of the racial or ethnic group being served. A young program officer and former activist expressed her frustration: "I think most program officers don't have an activist

background… A lot of people have no idea what organizing is.…from my perspective, I think of all of the houses I had knocked on, or dogs I had to chase off. Or… how difficult it is to do like each portion of the organizing. But I think if you don't have that experience, how can you even imagine what it's like." To the extent that a funding organization has hired a cohort of program officers with this kind of background, it has built an internal constituency for this type of philanthropy. We believe that the numbers of SJP-oriented program officers in an organization not only reflects its current level of commitment to SJP funding, but also affects the volume of SJP grantmaking in the future. In others words, the program officers help push an SJP agenda within their funding organization.

Although some of the organizations not oriented to social justice did have "long-term grantees," we did not find evidence of direct interference in directing funding towards insiders in the grantmaking process. In interviews we asked whether board members played an important role in grantmaking and whether they used influence to get favorite projects funded. We were generally told that board members mainly dealt with matters of general policy and direction, and did not favor particular recipients for grants. Committees of program officers (or in several cases joint committees of funders and officers) made the important decisions about which applications to fund. Boards ratified these decisions rather than making funding decisions of their own. One interviewee indicated that sometimes board members brought potential applicants to the staff's attention, but from then on applicants received similar treatment.

Similarly, although program officers were champions for specific grants, they had to convince several of their fellows and/or the organization's president of their choice. They typically could not succeed without making a good case.

(3) Extent and Length of Funding

Each of the program officers we interviewed reported that there were many more applications for grants than they could fund. No one suggested a shortage of appealing applications. On the contrary, the process they described was of making hard choices and winnowing down large lists of potential projects into a short list of a dozen projects that could be funded. Money is clearly the limiting factor, not ideas or applicants.

The large number of applicants relative to resources only partly explains the fairly small size ($10,000 per year was not unusual) and short period (up to three years of funding seemed usual) of grants being made by many of the philanthropic organizations we studied – both serious barriers to promoting social change. It indicates a "sprinkle dust" approach to grantmaking and an inability to develop a coordinated and focused strategy to promote social change. Program officers acknowledged that three years was a very short period for social change or community-organizing projects to yield results. Several also reported a reluctance to re-fund SJP organizations because there were so many deserving first-time applicants.

On this issue there appears to be an asymmetry between the orientation of SJP funding organizations and the needs of community organizations. Most funding organizations give short-term grants for relatively small amounts of money, and especially favor start-

ups and novel approaches. By contrast, successful social change organizations are likely to need reliable ongoing funding for SJP projects, including sustaining grants and grants for staff and infrastructure, not just start-up costs for new projects. We will examine this in more detail when we undertake the grantee part of our research.

On the other hand, one of the philanthropic organizations that did not describe itself as oriented to social justice and did not fund grassroots groups, but included some social justice funding, contradicted this short-term, small-funding pattern. This organization, which was an exception, showed a strong preference for funding organizations that had a substantial track record. It had a minimum dollar amount for funding, and it funded activities for longer periods of time (five years and up). It had developed some long-term relationships with grantees that were funded repeatedly, although for different projects. This foundation philanthropy was larger, in terms of endowment, than most of the grantmaking organizations in the sample.

(4) The Ongoing Relationship Between Funders and Recipients

Foundations place varying degrees of emphasis on ongoing technical support for grant recipients and have varying philosophies about how to provide this support. A program officer with experience in community organizing explained:

> "We're not always looking over their shoulder and saying, "Well, how's this going?" you know, "What are the numbers on that." We're not always involved in their activities. … We really try to give them as much autonomy as possible so that they don't feel that we are either interfering or that we're telling them how to run the program."

In other foundations, program officers take a major role from the onset in developing proposals. In the words of a program director who has worked at her medium sized foundation for five years:

> "One of the things we do is we spend a lot of time with groups developing their proposals... Helping people develop their proposals *because in some ways it's program planning* [our emphasis]. So we get these massive problem statements. Huge set of activities, tiny budget. So it's like, you can't do all this. ... Work with them on what's feasible, what's viable. Probably the biggest area is groups having difficulty articulating kind of their concrete objectives for a certain kind of work..."

Program officers make considerable efforts to cultivate applicants whose initial proposals are incoherent. The same program director explained,

> "We'll pick up the phone and call them. And just say 'it's a really interesting idea,' politely. 'Didn't get your proposal. Here are some of the questions we have.' And kind of give them a chance to send, often what we will ask them to do is just send an updated letter explaining.. answering questions that we have for them."

The technical assistance sometimes continues well beyond this initial phase and becomes quite elaborate after funds have been granted. A program officer at a large foundation described technical assistance and organizational capacity-building as part of the responsibility of the foundation:

> "You've got to dance with whose in the gym so if there aren't strong organizations to fund what needs to be funded we've got to find ways to make them strong organizations. And we're actually part of a funders' collaborative … that's focused on capacity-building for local—the whole point of it is, is technical assistance and capacity-building for local nonprofits."

A program director at a medium-sized foundation described sending staff to help a grantee with board development:

> "And I would say that the staff do most often fundraising work, work development.... They might do organizing training... or assistance. We also through consultants do a lot of strategic planning. Finance... kind of get financial systems in better order... media training... a wide range.... Virtually all of our groups get the money and technical assistance."

(5) Experimentation and Failure

Program officers who fund SJP projects recognize that, in general, SJP funding is at higher risk for failure than more traditional service-provision philanthropy. SJP grantees are often smaller and less mature organizations, and the organizations often undergo upheavals as people leave or enter. Some SJP grantees "invest so much in the program and not in the organization... they got all these great people and the institution falls apart around them.... You know basic things like there's no filing system, so they can't find where they put the grant reporting requirements."

Some SJP organizations are run by people who are very skilled at the community organizing or activism aspects, but are not skilled at running the organization. These two goals compete for their energies and attention.

Program officers acknowledge these problems among SJP recipients but argue that it is well worth taking the risk of failure. One officer noted that higher-level administrators in grantmaking organizations need to change their expectations that every grant will be a success.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS: IMPROVING THE PROSPECTS FOR MORE SJP FUNDING

We were asked by the Ford Foundation to draw out the implications of our research findings for practice, and especially to think about things that might increase the amount of social justice philanthropy being undertaken. We have the following recommendations, derived from our research:

Leadership Strategy

While a number of strategic frameworks to advance social change exist,[9] our research indicates that they are not widely disseminated or implemented. It would be worthwhile to build on these approaches, which include: supporting organizations, rather than projects; providing long-term funding; promoting community representation on foundation boards; and coordinating grantmaking and foundations around a social justice mission. These practices are limited to a small number of funders. Building on these points, key foundations and affinity groups (see section below, on *Sector-Wide Initiatives*) can play an important role as conveners to elaborate a strategy that has five main components.

1. convoking a series of meetings with the objective of developing a philosophy of change and a theory of how that change can be realized. We recommend that those meetings include foundation personnel, academicians, and nonprofit practitioners;

2. funding research to analyze inequalities to determine their juridical, legislative, economic, and political causality;

3. elaborating projects designed to address these inequalities at their structural levels;

4. developing an overall funding strategy across foundations, including mainstream foundations. This strategy would expand the range in which foundations could engage in social justice funding while staying within their mandates and provide cover for some of the risk-averse behavior detailed in this report; and

5. identifying the types of organizations that could serve as appropriate partners at the community, policy, legal, constituency-building, and lobbying levels, and in doing so marshal the range of organizational skills needed to make social change.

Program Officers

Most of the funding organizations that we studied drew some of their program officers from racial/ethnic communities concerned, and several had recruited program officers who had previously worked as community organizers in various community-based organizations. Program officers with this kind of background were among those most committed to a social justice perspective. They not only identified and encouraged grant proposals that had an SJP character, they pushed within their own organizations for more funding to be allocated for these kinds of grants, and they helped persuade their colleagues of the value and importance of an SJP approach.

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[9] For two examples, see Michael E. Porter and Mark R. Kramer, "Philanthropy's New Agenda: Creating Value," *Harvard Business Review*, November-December 1999, and "Understanding Social Justice Philanthropy," National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2003.

If one wants to increase an emphasis on social justice or social change within existing philanthropies, one approach is to increase the numbers of program officers who have these kinds of backgrounds. While it appears that a number of today's philanthropic organizations are nominally committed to diversity and to hiring a racially and ethnically diverse workforce, these efforts need to be strengthened.[10] Outreach efforts that looked for potential program officers among individuals who worked as community organizers or held similar roles would also be particularly effective, regardless of the individual's race or ethnicity. An interviewee with community-organizing experience found the lack of community organizers in foundations to be an obstacle to good social justice grantmaking: "A lot of foundation staff people were arrogant and had no clue about community organizations, what really constituted community change." Rather than leaving it up to individual philanthropies to search for such individuals, as tends to be the case at present, it might be fruitful to consider programs that could fulfill this role collectively for the philanthropic sector in general.

One can imagine a program officer training initiative with the goal of recruiting people with experience in community organizations who are interested in the possibility of finding jobs in the philanthropic world. Such a program could introduce those participants to the culture, expectations, and job structure of grantmaking organizations. It could draw on program officers and other individuals already in grantmaking sectors, to talk about their jobs and careers and to provide the kinds of concrete advice needed to make the transition successfully. The goal of such a program would be to increase the pool of candidates for program officer and related jobs, particularly among persons from disadvantaged communities who had experience in grassroots organizations for social change.

Another way to increase SJP activities within grantmaking organizations would be to facilitate the creation of professional networks and support groups for current program officers who are interested in a social change agenda. Such forums would provide a mechanism for sharing experiences and discussing best practices: How do you sell SJP? How do you make SJP compelling within your organization? Our sense from the interviews was that program officers would welcome the opportunity to network with like-minded individuals. This might be done as part of an existing national conference, or perhaps on a more local or regional level. In addition, there are many affinity groups that could be spurred to play a more active role in developing and disseminating ideas about SJP.

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[10] There is indeed some diversity among program officers and to some extent on boards and among CEOs. However, it is uneven and by some measures the foundation staffs are less diverse now than they were in the year 2000. According to data published in the Council on Foundation's *Grantmakers Salary and Benefit Reports* in 2000 and 2004, racial/ethnic diversity at the levels of chief executive officers, chief giving officers, and program officers *declined*. From 2000 to 2004, the proportion of minorities in CEO/CGO positions dropped from 5.3 percent to 5.1 percent and their share of program officer positions decreased from 33.2 percent to 29.6 percent. Furthermore, the term "diversity" is often somewhat ambiguous and expansive and may not be limited to historically underrepresented US racialized minorities.

Training about how to "sell" social justice funding would be an important function of this approach. A director at a medium-sized social justice-oriented foundation noted:

> "Social justice grantees…are seen by many funders as … threats to institutional order. They are seen as rabble rousers who are going to confront the system, who are going to agitate….I believe that social justice grantees need to understand when agitation is important and when it is not…. You've got to be able to share. You've got to be able to…be smart to put your social justice programming into context. What policy issues are affecting the situation that you're trying to deal with now? And you should be able to be very precise about the kind of outcome you're trying to effect within this context."

It is important to keep in mind that program officers operate within prescribed organizational structures, budgetary guidelines, missions, and priorities. They have some latitude to effect change, but this latitude occurs at the margins, in convincing colleagues, in the use of discretionary funds, in the mobilization of professional networks. "Selling" or, as described earlier, "translating" SJP has its limits and is not the same as setting organizational priorities or determining program areas.

Within Individual Funding Organizations

We suggested earlier that most funding organizations mix social justice projects with support for more traditional service approaches, and that the mix within any one philanthropy reflects ongoing dialogues between boards, presidents, and program officers. Increasing SJP funding is in large part a matter of expanding and intensifying that internal dialogue, of facilitating processes of education and discussion within individual foundations.

One feature that we observed in public foundations involved encouraging small numbers of board members to participate in site visits of projects that the foundation was funding or was considering funding. In the context of public foundations, which have to raise funds on an ongoing basis, these joint site visits by donors and program officers were intended to educate and build commitment among funders backing the project or initiative. However, the visits also served an educational function, informing board members of what local community organizations were doing and what their needs were. Reportedly, this approach was very important in building commitment. One respondent noted that communication between the foundation board, staff, and grantees "breaks down that barrier between the board and its board room and the grantees with their begging bowls, supplicants at the door of the foundation." Despite the danger of board interference in the workings of the grantee, this practice might be adopted more generally, and it might prove useful. In terms of educating those on the board about social change projects, regular site visits might be effective in building a greater awareness of those projects.

Encouraging a greater commitment to a social change agenda would also be served by increasing the number of people on philanthropic boards who live and work in the communities served by SJP activities. We recognize the barriers to increasing diversity of

foundation boards, since they tend to be self-selecting and are often relied on as financial managers or contributors, but we believe that this is one factor that affects a foundation's willingness to prioritize a social change agenda.

In several of the institutions we studied that had a track record of SJP activities, funding was very limited, leading to small scale and short-term support of SJP programming. In other foundations, where money was more plentiful, there was less familiarity with the SJP approach, and a more traditional mix of funding was found. The following table reports figures for foundations of different sizes based on the foundations within the research sample. Only average figures are reported in order to protect the confidentiality of individual philanthropies.

Foundation size	Total assets	Annual grantmaking	Average grant
Very small	$ 2 million	$200,000	$3,000
Small	$ 32 million	$3 million	$20,000
Medium	$102 million	$28 million	$26,000
Large	$ 3.5 Billion	$140 million	$76,000

The smaller foundations have far less to give out as grants and as a result make small grants. However, the foundations that focus on funding social justice grants are all small or very small. Consequently, there is a potential for partnerships and collaborations between philanthropies to overcome this problem of limited resources, but partnerships seem rare in practice. One kind of partnership might involve joint ventures between funding institutions, where each agrees to support one part of a project, or perhaps agrees to fund one phase of a program and then hand it over to another partner for funding. The idea is to increase either the scale of funding or the length of time funding continues, to allow more ambitious projects to take place. At present the typical SJP project is funded at a very modest level. This model would also allow foundations to fund at their risk/comfort levels, while contributing to an overall social justice effort.

The self-sufficiency and relative isolation of many foundations can discourage social justice funding. It would be easier to advance a social change agenda if there were greater coordination and more partnerships among philanthropic organizations. Collaboration might be especially valuable if larger philanthropies were to team with smaller ones for particular SJP projects. In addition to leveraging money from foundations that may not otherwise fund a social justice project, collaborative funding can work to reduce the stigma attached to social justice projects. In the words of a director with more than fifteen years of foundation experience,

> "The foundation world is in many ways a 'me too' world. Nobody wants to jump into the pool first but … you jump in it is warm, there are no piranhas you swim to other side of the shore then [other foundations] are more encouraged to jump

in. So that is the strategy of getting folks…Jump in, show an example, do the preliminary work [and] *share* that. Don't hoard information. Create all kinds of opportunities for dialogue, and letting folks know what you are doing …, You open up more minds and more opportunities for them to also to jump in."

Another possibility would be to increase collaboration between national foundations and local and regional philanthropies that are not involved in social justice work. In this model a national foundation would commit money to a local collaborative social justice project and seek a lead donor in that region who either matches the contribution or takes a lead role in encouraging other local donors to contribute: "What's going to incentivize … is going to be the national money that almost embarrasses the local funders into saying here's a pot of money right in front of you." A director of a large national organization underscored the importance of persuading local and regional foundations to become involved with social justice funding, "because at the end of the day, that's where it has to happen".

There were one or two foundations in our sample that had aggressively embraced collaboration and partnerships, for example in order to fund an education project that cost around $250,000 per year (which is very big by SJP standards). In other examples, funding agencies that could not support an application themselves were willing to recommend the proposal to other philanthropic organizations. Overall, however, we were struck by the small scale of most SJP grants and the relative isolation or independence of SJP funding institutions. This leads to a fragmented field of philanthropy and to grants that are small in scope, size, and duration.

The short duration of funding is especially problematic for SJP projects. As an executive director with more than twenty years of foundation experience put it: "I think a core challenge is that...the groups that we fund... what they are seeking to change is something that takes time. And I'm talking, often seven, ten years. And we as foundations, as funders, work in a much shorter time span of three years."

In order to remedy this, a small foundation we studied had begun to act as an intermediary organization. It lacked funds to support sufficient SJP programming in-house but it had many ideas and ambitions, a much larger agenda for activities it wanted to make happen. Alongside its more conventional grantmaking activities, this organization therefore began to develop ideas and position papers, and to pour much of its energies into building relationships with other philanthropic organizations within its general area of interest. It undertook several years of work, making presentations to presidents and boards, building interpersonal ties and trust, convincing others in the philanthropic world of the viability of certain kinds of programming. At the end of that period, they had succeeded in persuading several funding agencies within their area to collaborate and jointly fund projects. In addition, they had created a kind of affinity group among foundations within their area that was an important intellectual resource for that whole area of philanthropy.

The lesson we draw from this example is that greater coordination and more partnerships are possible across foundations operating in the SJP area, but this task becomes a major

commitment in time and energy for whichever organization decides to undertake it. It is probably not necessary for each foundation to make great efforts to build bridges or establish joint ventures, as long as one foundation does undertake this coordinating, coalition-building, mediating function on behalf of the larger group. The whole group can benefit from the organizing efforts of one, and our research indicates the importance of individual philanthropies taking on this mediating or leadership role.

Sector-Wide Initiatives

In our interviews and reading of documents we expected to find more strategic thinking about social change, and discussions about strategies for bringing about systemic change, and about the role of the philanthropic sector in this effort. Two of the foundations we interviewed did dedicate part of their mission and budgets toward increasing social justice grantmaking at other foundations, whether by sponsoring networking projects or leveraging money through collaborative funding projects. It would be valuable to support existing sector-wide discussions about strategies for SJP and social change, perhaps under the auspices of an organization like Independent Sector. Such a discussion could address the pros and cons of strategic funding strategies for social change – from supporting community organizations to supporting advocacy, legal interventions, and research. Discussions of public controversy and of limits to more activist philanthropy might also inform that agenda. Issues such as the size, scope, and duration of support should also be highlighted.

One director of a large national philanthropy suggested that these interventions could be facilitated by national trade organizations, like the Independent Sector and the Council on Foundations, taking an active and leading role in demanding that local and regional foundations diversify their boards: "Until there is pressure to change the boards and to diversify the boards of foundations – local foundations – you are not going to see any of them embracing these themes, these issues as a priority. It's just not going to happen."

Now may be the right time for these changes. The current political environment surrounding foundations is pushing umbrella organizations into leading roles and may help to foster coalition-building.

It is also the case that several respondents felt isolated because of their orientation and/or race and gender and expressed a strong need for support groups that provide both emotional support and information.

Future Research Directions

The first phase of our research effort looked at SJP in private foundations in the US. Additional areas of research have been suggested both within the research team and by experts in the field. They follow. [11]

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[11] We are thankful to our review readers for raising many of these questions.

There are a core group of social justice funders, some of whom we included in our sample. It may be useful to focus more explicitly and in greater depth on these funders. In particular we could examine: the theory of change under which they operate; how they structure their organizations and marshal their resources around a social justice mission; how they raise and/or leverage funds; how they identify and fund grantees; how they collaborate with more mainstream foundations; and how they engage, to the extent that they do, the public and business sectors in their work.

We have not examined how the recipients of foundation grants view efforts to promote social change. We do not know what particular implementation challenges arise with SJP projects. We do not know the impact of collaborative strategies and whether cluster grantmaking enhances organizational capacity or creates inter-institutional tensions. We do not know the consequences of the power differential between funders and grantees. And perhaps most importantly the *balance* between community authenticity and SJP foundation leadership strategies needs careful examination.

We need to know more about the role of the board and the CEO/president in setting organizational culture for SJP grantmaking, particularly in more mainstream foundations. What set of forces/circumstances might require a foundation CEO (or board) to decide to commit to the implementation of SJP? What are the operational functions that help promote and sustain effective "learning modalities" to inform SJP grantmaking? What role does an explicit articulation of an SJP "vision" play in aligning staff functioning and grantee functioning to optimize stated social justice outcomes?

Finally, the research perceives the importance of fostering more diversity within the foundation community. Yet the relationship between a diverse staff and social justice funding is undocumented and much more needs to be known about the relationships among diversity, foundation culture, and decisionmaking. This area of possible research also includes an examination of relationships within alternative funds, racial, ethnic/tribal funds, and home-town associations, and between these organizations and mainstream philanthropy.

These are the sets of questions that we hope to turn to in future phases of this research.

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