



# How Philanthropy Can Support Aligned Priorities in a New Administration: Building Partnerships For 2021 And Beyond



*A Briefing Series*



## VALUE-ADD STRATEGIES FOR PHILANTHROPY: PARTNERING WITH A NEW ADMINISTRATION

As the country embarks on its most ambitious economic and social recovery since the Great Depression, the philanthropic community can play a critical role with the incoming administration to advance shared ideas, implement policy, and build back better. Formalizing strategic private-public partnerships in 2021 will be key to increasing the government's capacity and its impact.

The opportunities for philanthropy mirror in many ways the transition to the Obama/Biden Administration in 2008 and 2009. In those years, there was a surge in interest, ideas, and even a growing infrastructure to facilitate strategic, intentional partnerships between the philanthropic community and the federal government. Like today, those partnerships in 2009 were solidified and advanced by the national economic crisis and the need to have business, philanthropy, and governments working in concert to rebuild the economy. Donors and federal and state agencies found innovative ways to work in partnership to deliver key services to families and communities as the nation struggled to recover from the recession. Drawing from these partnership lessons, we outline below a list of four key value-add strategies around partnerships for philanthropic donors to consider in the months and years ahead – **Leverage, Talent, Expertise, and Engagement**.

### **(1) Pooled and/or Matching Federal Resources Around Aligned Areas of Investment (Leverage)**

One approach that private philanthropy can take with a new administration is through direct efforts to match or leverage federal funds to advance key programmatic goals. In the Obama administration, one of the best examples of this type of partnership came through the creation of the Social Innovation Fund (SIF). Passed by Congress in 2009, the SIF was intended to leverage philanthropic dollars and grantmaking leadership to build evidence and scale promising programs in three key areas around economic opportunity, health, and youth development. The SIF model had several strengths and important outcomes—resulting in more than \$1 billion being invested in innovative projects, leveraging significant private capital, and investing in nearly 500 organizations.

Another example came through the stimulus legislation passed in early 2009 to address the recession. The law established a TANF Emergency Fund totaling \$5 billion, providing federal dollars at an 80% reimbursement rate on expenditures to provide immediate assistance to low-income families struggling during the recession. States could use their own funds to draw down these resources, but state budgets were also in free-fall at that time, leaving many administrators unable to access the full allotment for their state. However, states did have the flexibility to use private dollars to cover some or all of the match requirement. As one extreme example, one donor provided a \$35 million direct investment to the state of New York so it could access these federal funds and provide a one-time emergency Back to School payment to all NY children whose families were on TANF or SNAP.

This is also happening currently at the state and local level, especially during the COVID-19 recovery. One example is the billions of dollars<sup>1</sup> in philanthropic-public partnerships, led by California's first Senior Advisor for

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2020/11/24/socialinnovationimpactreport/>

Social Innovation, in specific areas such as direct assistance for undocumented immigrants and emergency housing for people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic.

## **(2) Addressing Staffing and Capacity Needs of Government Agencies (Talent)**

Funders can also help federal and state agencies with specific staffing and capacity needs, particularly in these early months as a new government is transitioning in. At the federal level, agencies have been “hollowed out” over the past several years of the Trump Administration, and staff capacity and morale is low.<sup>2</sup> Yet the pandemic and economic downturn continue to worsen, creating a huge demand for specific expertise in building back, addressing the current crises, and ensuring a strong and effective federal workforce in the future. It is unclear whether the Biden team will request emergency hiring authority from Congress, which would allow even more flexibility related to rapid hiring, but such decisions are likely to be clear in the coming weeks. To be sure, foundations can and should recommend talented staff to transition and agency review teams and to the newly incoming administrators within the Presidential Personnel Office. These recommendations are an allowable activity for C3 organizations, and unless the position is a Senate confirmed position, providing those staffing recommendations does not count as lobbying.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, philanthropy can deploy other federal staffing tools to address short term capacity needs by putting their own staff or those of grantees on loan to the incoming Administration. These often under-utilized staffing tools – either through the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) Mobility Program or “excepted services” appointments under hiring Schedule A, B, C or D – target immediate needs and workers who are willing to provide short-term service across the federal government. The IPA program, for example, “provides for the temporary assignment of personnel between the Federal Government and state and local governments, colleges and universities, Indian tribal governments, federally funded research and development centers, and other eligible organizations.”<sup>4</sup> Several philanthropic staff used the IPA program to go into the Obama Administration to work on specific issue areas where they had expertise and an ability to help advance policy priorities of the administration.

Even if funders are not engaged in direct staffing strategies, there are other ways donors can be helpful in addressing capacity needs. Donors can provide in-kind staffing or consultants to help with specific tasks that are hard to complete with decreased FTEs and increased workloads. For example, in some federal agencies, using volunteers, loaned staff or external partners who have taken a short leave of absence to help agency staff on particular tasks can be highly useful; donors can encourage grantees or philanthropic staff to look for these opportunities. Additionally, funders can provide resources to hire consultants or other technical assistance providers to help state agency staff draft proposals for federal competitive grants. These activities have in the past proven to be highly strategic, short-term investments to help increase capacity within the agencies and ensure that government resources quickly reach families and communities.

Much of this work, especially at the state level, has continued over the past several years but given the pandemic and the challenges public agencies currently face, such partnerships with philanthropy on aligned goals can take on outsized importance for government leaders and serve as a highly leveraged contribution from philanthropy. For example, one project involving national and regional donors, in partnership with the Administration for Children and Families’ New England regional office and other grantee intermediaries, has helped state agencies and other leaders coordinate around aligned services to families by providing consulting for coordination of state learning communities, technical assistance, and other supports. This project, and the

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<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/12/shrinking-workforce-can-hurt-biden-436164>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://bolderadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Preparing-for-Change-How-Nonprofits-Can-Shape-Policy-By-Engaging-Transition-Teams.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/hiring-information/intergovernment-personnel-act/>

partnerships that were built through it, were leveraged during the pandemic to help many state agencies better respond to the pandemic and ensuing economic crisis.

### **(3) Strategic Insights, Networks and Expertise to Tackle Public Sector Challenges (Expertise)**

In addition to the resources funders bring to the table, the philanthropic sector's expertise in investing, adapting strategies, and aligning partners around key outcomes to address complex social, economic, and environmental challenges can be a strong value-add to public sector partners, even if philanthropic staff are not going to work directly for government entities.

Funders are often positioned to help public sector leaders connect to both issue-specific and intersectional networks, and to identify leading thinkers, emerging movement leaders, and partners within and across sectors and communities. Donors can also be helpful in advising on lessons learned through pilots and long-term grantmaking in specific areas, and can help federal and state officials identify and tap leading organizations, thinkers, researchers, and innovators in the space. Donors may be able to offer key insights to help ensure that federal programs and resources are seeking out and engaging organizations and efforts that will likely achieve the desired outcomes and level of impact. For example, state leaders in Virginia consulted with donors ahead of issuing an RFP on two-generation approaches to alleviating poverty to learn which RFP questions were most salient, helping to ensure that the state found and selected the best, aligned partners.

### **(4) Supports for Convenings, Conversations, and Connecting Policymakers to Communities and Families (Engagement)**

Finally, donors can often assist federal agency staff as they are engaging in key policy conversations. Donors can be a bridge to a diverse set of stakeholders and community voices, ensuring equity in access to federal policymakers for those most impacted by a policy or program decision. Donors are often neutral conveners who can bridge disconnected sectors and different issue siloes at critical moments in the policymaking process when federal partners want and need to hear from a wide diversity of perspectives.

In the past, some of these opportunities came through providing lunch or breakfast costs for key stakeholders and then inviting federal policy staff to these conversations. Those conversations often led to the identification of additional gaps or needs that funders were in a unique position to fill, such as targeted research on particular topics or compiling reports and evidence for federal partners as they internally make the case for policy, systems and practice changes. Looking ahead into 2021, there are numerous opportunities to help set tables (albeit virtual ones for the short-term) on key topics. For example, foundations could help in crafting important federal level conversations on ending structural racism and addressing economic recovery with a racial equity lens. Additional opportunities can be found at the state and local level with donors convening cross-sector partners, business, grantees, and community leaders to ensure that community needs are being addressed.