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# Inside Philanthropy



## **“Support us as Problem-Solvers.”** **A Call to Include Girls and Women** **of Color in Racial Justice Funding**

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LATOSHA BROWN, COURTESY OF BLACK VOTERS MATTER FUND.

Will the new demands for racial justice include a surge of support for women and girls of color, and their organizations? This cause is grossly underfunded—the Ms. Foundation for Women’s recent “[Pocket Change](#)” report found giving to these populations accounts for just 0.5% of \$66.9 billion provided by foundations. The median size of grants made by foundations to organizations by and for women and girls of color was \$15,000, while the median size for all foundation grants was \$35,000.

LaTosha Brown is co-anchor of the Southern Black Girls and Women’s Consortium (SBGWC), co-founder of Black Voters Matter Fund, and leader of multiple other groups and philanthropic efforts. On the eve of Black Philanthropy Month 2020, we asked her some questions about this persistent imbalance and other trends in the funding space.

### **Promising Efforts**

When asked to point out a positive or exciting trend in funding for women and girls in recent years, Brown says she has observed some increased attention for funding girls of color. She says these efforts include Grantmakers for Girls of Color ([G4GC](#)), work by the Ms. Foundation (in 2018, Ms. committed \$25 million to invest in women and girls of color and gender equity), her own consortium, and others. She points to the #MeToo movement and related funding as another example of work primarily initiated and led by women and girls of color.

One notable large-scale, cross-sector endeavor in this realm is [Prosperity Together](#), a 2016 collaboration between the Obama White House, state-based women’s foundations and others to support women and girls of color with more than \$115 million. Also, a nationwide network of women’s funds is addressing the needs of young women and girls of color through the Young Women’s Initiative. This [effort](#), which was launched by the New York Women’s Foundation in 2016, engages both public and private sector funding and has branches at women’s foundations in Minnesota, Memphis, Washington, Birmingham and other areas.

Also in 2016, the NoVo Foundation made a \$90 million [commitment](#) to “support and deepen the movement for girls and young women of color” in the U.S. Some of this funding went to G4GC and SBGWC. As we covered, [NoVo](#) is now stepping back from this area of work. Earlier this year, to the dismay of many activists, the foundation announced that its Advance Adolescent Girls’ Rights team was departing. This followed other significant staff cuts, the departure of its longtime leader Pamela Shifman, and the abandonment of its ambitious Women’s Building project in Manhattan. It also eliminated a grantmaking program called Ending Violence Against Girls and Women, along with most multi-year grants, which had been a lauded trademark of its funding style.

Brown says that with its investment in girls of color, NoVo “catalyzed a whole new field of work to be supported that had been largely ignored and underfunded. They were trendsetters, and so, for them to not continue, that is really disappointing.”

MacKenzie Scott included several groups centering girls of color in her recent \$1.7 billion funding [announcement](#), including G4GC and Black Girls Code. Even with these notable efforts, support for girls and women of color remains markedly low. Brown says that along with Black girls, Indigenous and immigrant girls are severely underfunded. She also mentions girls who are disabled, who are battling mental issues and “have been in the system; in detention centers, in children's homes—that kind of thing.” She compares the funding scenario to trying to figure out how to divide up “half a cracker.”

## **Black Girl Dreams and Joy**

In 2012, the [Unequal Lives](#) report from the Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative found that of \$4.8 billion in philanthropic investments for the U.S. South, 5.4% went to programs focused on women and girls, and less than 1% focused on Black women and girls. These findings, in part,

inspired Brown to build the [SBGWC](#) with a focus on Southern Black communities.

The consortium's core partners include the Appalachian Community Fund, Fund for Southern Communities, Black Belt Community Foundation, and Truth Speaks Consulting. It hopes to mobilize \$100 million to create the infrastructure for regional grantmaking and movement-building for Black girls and women. In the fall, it will launch the Black Girl Dream Fund, a multimillion-dollar, 10-year fund that, Brown says, will foster the conditions for "Black girls to have dreams, and for those dreams to manifest."

Recently, this consortium offered grants for pandemic relief to Southern Black-girl-serving organizations. It also runs a Black Girl Joy Challenge. "We asked Black girls to create an idea that would bring Black girl joy to themselves and 10 other people. SBGWC would then give them a \$250 stipend to invest in their idea and put it into action," Brown recently wrote in *Essence*. In this article, she said Black girls' needs include better media representation, space to create and lead, and increased investment.

Brown says more funders should "build and support the capacity of grassroots and community-based groups that service and center the leadership and voices of Black girls." She says her organization wants "to support the mechanisms that affirm Black girls to be ambitious, innovative and expansive, so that they are seen, heard, believed and supported."

### **Funders: Learn to Follow**

We also asked Brown how philanthropy can best support the current racial justice movement. One idea she has is to support efforts led by women of color, which she says will also benefit the next wave of leaders. "It should be understood that when you support Black women's leadership and women of color's leadership, that's also a part of a generational shift, because we're who the girls will see."

Brown has some thoughts on how philanthropy can evolve away from practices “rooted in white social norms” and “learn how to follow” at this time. “Being a good leader is being a good follower... Dominance is not the same as leadership.” A few practices she says funders need to change are “making decisions for people without people” and setting priorities based on “what you think they need.”

Her points mirror what many leaders of color have been saying for years in the nonprofit and funding sectors: follow, trust and fund those at the heart of the communities and movements you seek to support, understand and join.

Brown also says grantmakers should fund in such a way that the “metrics will allow people to grow and develop, and people can mess up. Give Black girls and women the opportunity, space and grace to try new things and learn from failures... There’s a very short margin, there's very little breathing space given to Black-led organizations to be able to experiment.”

“Give us R&D dollars,” she says. And along with funding for “sustaining and filling the gap in our community, as a safety net,” she says there should be “resources that support our innovation and that support us as problem-solvers—not just for Black people, but problem-solvers for the world.”