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Power and Participation in Philanthropy: Human Rights as a Goal or a Process?

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Going Against the Grain

University of Dayton Human Rights Center
Social Practice of Human Rights Conference, Oct. 1-4, 2019

Power and Participation in Philanthropy: Human Rights as a Goal or a Process?

Presented by:

Katy Love

Diana Samarasan, *Disability Rights Fund*

Allistair Mallillin, *Common Counsel Foundation*

Session: Power and Participation in Philanthropy

Abstract:

In our capitalist system, exploitation leads to extreme wealth concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, who then reap tax benefits for their charitable “giving.” Philanthropic institutions are embedded in this paradox, benefitting from the economic system, while also attempting to mitigate its damaging effects. Foundations represent the economic elite, are increasingly viewed as part of the problem, rather than a part of the solution, even when they are human rights funders. In the last 4 years, a collective of participatory grantmakers have developed tools that prompt large funders to question and change traditional grant decision-making practices. The Disability Rights Fund, the Wikimedia Foundation, FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund, the Red Umbrella Fund, UHAI - EASHRI, and others, share innovative structures and processes, centralizing marginalized voices in decision-making about grants.

Our premise is that people affected by grants should decide, not those who have the money. We are inspired and guided by the motto of the disability rights movement: “Nothing about us, without us.” We believe that the journey and process — the reckoning with power and powerlessness — is a critical impact in and of itself. Large funders are listening. In 2017, the Ford Foundation published a paper “Participatory Grant Making: Has Its Time Come?,” and in 2018, the U.S. Foundation Center’s GrantCraft published a Guide to Participatory Grantmaking, featuring the work and voices of participatory grantmakers. Inside Philanthropy has named participatory grantmaking the “most promising sector reform effort” of 2018, underscoring the important shifts in power that come with this approach. This panel will examine why it is critical — when addressing human rights — to break down traditional funder barriers in favor of participation, transparency, accountability, and collaboration, and will present some beginning ideas towards a participatory audit framework that could be used to ensure that human rights philanthropy uses human rights in practice.

Presenter information:

Diana Samarasan is the Founding Executive Director of the Disability Rights Fund and the Disability Rights Advocacy Fund — which are pooled funds and participatory grantmakers

representing collaborations between the global disability community and donors to resource the disability rights movement in Africa, Asia, Pacific and the Caribbean. Diana has over 25 years of experience in disability, international health, and human rights. Previously, Diana directed the Mental Disability Advocacy Center, a legal advocacy organization in Budapest, Hungary, which litigates abuses of rights of persons with disabilities in institutions. She also worked with the American Refugee Committee and Doctors of the World, addressing issues such as access of vulnerable populations to reproductive health services, tuberculosis control, and deinstitutionalization. A graduate of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, Diana has advanced degrees in Public Administration and Psychology. Diana is also a member of the Steering Committee of Opportunity Collaboration.

Katy Love serves as the director of the grantmaking / Community Resources team at the Wikimedia Foundation, the non-profit organization that supports Wikipedia and sister sites.

Before Wikimedia, Katy worked as a knowledge manager CARE International on a large collaboration between six of the largest humanitarian agencies. She also served as an associate program officer at the Global Fund for Children overseeing grants to small grassroots NGOs. She has been a volunteer grantmaker with many philanthropic organizations. Katy is dedicated to civic participation and activism and has worked and volunteered with many NGOs, on issues as diverse as education, migrants rights, and environmental education. She serves on the Board of Directors for a Montessori school and on the steering committee of the Human Rights Funders Network.

Allistair Mallillin is a social change activist and senior program officer for the Common Counsel Foundation.