As part of our Commitment to Racial Equity and in light of the racial justice awakening in this country, Funders Together is sharing statements, articles, and other resources that highlight the voices of Black leaders in the fields of philanthropy, homelessness, and intersecting systems. While it’s important for white leaders to speak up, we can further our commitments to racial equity by listening to, learning from, and incorporating the recommendations of Black leadership into not only our grantmaking but also into the structures of our organizations.

Last year as our nation faced a racial justice reckoning, statements flooded our inboxes from foundations clarifying values and beliefs about philanthropy’s role in the movement for justice. While it is important for philanthropy to speak out about injustice and to commit to equitable funding practices, statements without action will keep us from systems transformation and justice.

In August, the Raikes Foundation launched the Black Leadership & Power Fund, which consists of $1 million in funding to support the dismantling of anti-Black racism. Lindsay Hill, Raikes Foundation's Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the time, shared the process of moving from statements to action in her blog post for Funders Together.
The Black Leadership & Power Fund

Black staff, regardless of title or grantmaking experience, led the creation of the fund which matched the urgency Black people and organizers were calling for. They identified specific areas to support, including grassroots power-building for policy change, fair and equitable elections, and Black leadership, and ensured that the fund would be untethered from the foundation’s current strategies, which allowed for new grantees that previously wouldn’t have been considered under Raikes’ current strategy. Lindsay makes clear how vital it is to consider how our funding practices either advance systemic racism or advance racial justice: “Because there is no neutral in racial justice—we either make decisions that quietly condone oppression, or we actively chose to dismantle systemic racism.”

Racial justice takes time. While this fund was created over the summer after the murder of George Floyd, it would not have been possible to create without years of groundwork at Raikes. Lindsay highlighted the foundation’s internal work over several years: more BIPOC staff members were hired, deeper conversations about systemic racism took place, brave Black staff members spoke up about areas for change, and staff and trustees participated in learning opportunities. These actions steered the organization toward deeper awareness and stronger commitment to funding racial justice in more equitable ways. Without committing to this work for the long-haul, funders will not be able to make as significant of an impact in the movement for justice.

Reflections for Philanthropy

In her post, Lindsay shared questions we should continue to ask ourselves in our work as funders:

- Who do we view as experts?
- Who do we view to be “risky” and why?
- What do we need to rethink and atone for?
- Am I perpetuating oppression or am I dismantling it?

The work of racial equity and justice cannot take place with deep reflection on our history as funders. We have to reckon with how and who we have funded in the past and be ready to commit to change.

Read the full blog post.