



## Housing Justice Recommendations for Philanthropy's Engagement with the Federal Administration

Over the past four years, we have witnessed numerous policy attempts to dismantle humane, effective, and equitable solutions to ending homelessness and housing instability. There were concerted efforts within federal leadership and agencies to rollback critical protections for historically marginalized communities, undo regulations grounded in evidence-based solutions, and set up conditions for new policies that actively fought against racial equity and justice. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic created new conditions in which people experiencing homelessness, particularly those who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color, were disregarded or intentionally left out of response and recovery conversations.

With the new Biden-Harris administration, there is hope but philanthropy cannot step back and allow systems to return to the status quo – because the status quo was unjust and inequitable. Instead, funders must focus on ensuring an infrastructure rooted in racial and housing justice is built with people with lived expertise and maintained using strong accountability measures. Based on what we have learned through the work to uphold best practices and advance racial justice, philanthropy has an obligation to support and resource efforts that will work outside the status quo of unintentionally or intentionally centering whiteness and upholding white supremacy.

As philanthropy looks to engage with a Biden-Harris administration, there are priorities to center and actions to take to ensure the first year builds a strong foundation for creating and implementing bold policies rooted in housing justice. Within all these recommendations, the conversations and designs must begin with a racial justice and equity lens.

### ***Support an Equitable COVID-19 Response and Recovery***

#### ***\*\*First 100 Day Priority***

As the country continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, philanthropy should educate the administration on what is happening in their community and the vast need for immediate relief to those who are disproportionately impacted through a comprehensive federal relief bill. Relief must include robust funding for rental assistance and people experiencing homelessness as well as connected policies such as strong eviction moratorium.

This is a continuation of what is already being done, but now with a commitment to go beyond the minimum and stress the importance for these funds to be equitably utilized and targeted to ensure they are reaching the communities most in need who are often left out of the mainstream funding.

By using its convening power, philanthropy can facilitate the hosting of community listening sessions that aim to address the urgency of resources needed for individuals experiencing homelessness or housing instability. These listening sessions can provide a baseline for future conversations by starting the relationships building process and expectation that communities and government entities should create feedback mechanisms on future policies.

Philanthropy has funded [frameworks for equitable recovery](#) and can urge the administration to consider the incorporation of these frameworks designed by grantee partners to be incorporated as requirements into emergency response funding and in other contexts such as disaster recovery. Funders can also use our [COVID-19 Response and System Redesign Recommendations for Philanthropy](#) to provide the administration with a view and understanding of how philanthropy is working to be a catalyst for racial and housing justice both in response to COVID-19 and for long-term systems change, while also stressing the need for the federal government to be an active partner in these efforts.

Funders can also host listening sessions with the administration to address the importance of actions to keep people experiencing homelessness healthy and safe, such as:

- Requiring the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to prioritize addressing the public health implications for people experiencing homelessness such as higher risk of infection due to congregate shelter models, preexisting health conditions, inability to “shelter at home” and isolate, and lack of access to necessary resources.
- Elevating the CDC guidance on no encampment evictions without individual housing to an order.
- Ensuring people experiencing homelessness are [prioritized in the vaccine distribution](#) by including them in the definition of vulnerable or critical populations that should be part of first tier vaccination efforts, as well as staff who support people individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Prioritizing mobile outreach servicing for testing and treatment, especially within encampments due to people experiencing homelessness being at an increased risk for developing severe cases of COVID-19.

## ***Fund Advocacy and Organizing Efforts to Build and Advance Bold Policy***

### ***\*First 100 Day Priority***

The federal government should not and cannot work in a vacuum and one way to ensure this is to create substantial pressure from the outside through advocacy organizations and activists. There is a great need to set the stage and foundation early in this administration for all policies and programs to developed with a racial justice lens and informed by those with lived expertise. Philanthropy can be a catalyst in creating this pressure by providing quick and

flexible resources that allow organizers and coalitions to build capacity and power to influence the administration's vision and policy proposals, as well as act as accountability partners.

One way to do this is through supporting the [National Coalition for Housing Justice](#), group of 14 national organizations, including Funders Together to End Homelessness, who have aligned behind seeking housing justice in order to end homelessness. Since its formation in the fall of 2019, the coalition has come together to coordinate advocacy efforts, develop policy recommendations, and leverage collective tools to garner the attention of both lawmakers and the public to meet the goal of housing justice. Supporting the coalition will allow it to both continue and expand components of its work, such as:

- working with [key federal officials](#) to inform and influence upcoming policy and program design and implementation through targeted community listening sessions and public comment opportunities tied to advanced copies of Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) outlines for on-the-ground feedback before it is finalized.
- aligning with [homelessness and housing narrative projects](#) to continue much needed messaging to change hearts and minds around homelessness and its solutions to influence federal officials to craft and design equitable policies and solutions to homelessness and gain public support for those solutions.
- engaging Black and Brown led organizers, activists, and people with lived expertise in the coalition's work by informing efforts and having leadership positions within the coalition.
- coordinating and aligning with [A New Deal on Housing Justice](#) on policy priorities to advance racial and housing justice.
- building capacity for implementation of [The Framework for an Equitable COVID-19 Homelessness Response](#).

Funders who are unable to support national efforts can focus on resourcing local grantee partners, organizers, and activists to better equip them with the capacity to work with the National Coalition for Housing Justice and by connecting them to each other. It is critical for voices and expertise at national, state, and local levels to be working in concert and create a strong network of influence and accountability that can drive and push this administration to engage in systems redesign that achieves housing justice.

## ***Engage in Relational Public-Private Partnerships Rooted in Justice***

### ***\*First 100 Day Priority***

Now is the time to re-engage in true partnerships, not just transactional relationships, with the federal government. Philanthropy [should not be expected to fill the funding gap](#) that is left behind by lack of or inadequate government action and educating the administration on the importance of that is critical groundwork. As [federal positions are being filled](#), private philanthropy should aim to reach out to agencies and departments to offer thought-

partnership and education around what we have learned in recent years around homelessness and housing best practice and evidence-based solutions that prioritize Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Funders should harness their convening power and expertise by offering access to evidence-based practices, trust and relationships within the local community, connections to those with lived expertise to inform programs and policies, and learnings from research funders have supported. This could be done through the exploration of on-going learning sessions led by grantee partners, specifically organizations led by Black, Indigenous, and people of color leaders.

Philanthropy can act as a broker of relationships between local communities and the federal administration. To ensure engagement happens before implementation, hold recurring listening sessions that feature community members such as grantees, stakeholders, and people with lived expertise and connect them to agency and department staff working to create and implement policies. This is most effectively done through an advisory role, which may require [establishing a Federal Advisory Committee](#). Foundation staff can also be lifted up as repositories of information who can compile, analyze, and communicate guidance around what works best within local communities to prevent and end homelessness and also connection to experts on the ground for local context.

For true partnerships to form, accountability must be in place. Through these partnerships, set the expectation of accountability mechanisms determined by communities to allow for candid evaluation about what is working and what is not. Talk with grantees and other stakeholders about what the accountability mechanism design should be, then facilitate the dialogue and implementation of that with government entities.

## ***Model How to Advance Racial Equity and Invest in Disenfranchised Communities***

### ***\*First 100 Day Priority***

Upon taking office, the Biden administration made clear in its agenda a [priority on advancing racial equity](#) and addressing structural racism within the federal government. This priority includes [promoting fair housing policies](#), [strengthening the nation-to-nation relationships](#) with Indigenous tribes and Native Alaskans, [ending the use](#) of private prisons, and [combatting xenophobia](#) against Asian American and Pacific Islanders.

Part of this priority includes an [Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#). Led by the Domestic Policy Council (DPC), it requires a whole government response by way of interagency work to “remove systemic barriers to and provide equal access to opportunities and benefits, identify communities the Federal Government has underserved, and develop policies designed to advance equity for those communities.” It also rescinded the Trump administration EO banning racial equity trainings for federal contractors and grant recipients, as well as the EO on the 1776 Commission, and opens the door for bold transformation within the federal government.

This presents unique opportunity for philanthropy who have been deeply engaged in racial equity and justice work to partner closely with agencies like HUD to share lessons learned and best methods for prioritizing this work successfully. As the department rebuilds with new staff and priorities, funders can utilize the relationship building through public-private partnerships to provide concrete examples of what has worked in the private sector (both internally within your organization and externally with the community), where there are opportunities to improve, and how the federal government can measure progress or success of this initiative. This can be done through racial equity review teams of philanthropy and federal officials as a mechanism of information sharing.

Philanthropy can be instrumental in pushing the administration to [reframe its messaging](#) around its racial equity initiatives because we know that language matters based on the [research philanthropy has funded](#). The EO references “underserved communities” when in reality, communities have been continually disenfranchised because of structural racism and the intentional lack of investment by philanthropy and government alike. Making clear the historical context and reality of why communities have been disenfranchised is part of racial equity and justice. Funders who have been engaged in this work should challenge federal agencies and officials to use language that accurately describes history and avoid white-washed messaging in order to make others feel comfortable.

In addition, funders should provide BIPOC consultant references to [HUD staff](#) and federal contractors to help facilitate internal learnings and assist in the development of strategic priorities around racial equity and justice identified in this order, especially given the impacts the Trump administration EO on banning racial equity trainings had on consultants and trainers.

Philanthropy can also facilitate racial equity working groups with HUD that include grantee partners and BIPOC and LGBTQ individuals with lived expertise who can consult on design and models for data collection, identifying barriers to access to government benefits and contracting opportunities, and development of equitable and just policies within HUD and connected agencies.

### ***Facilitate Transparency in Engaging Community Voices on the Ground***

Strategic philanthropic partnerships helped previous administrations move beyond the walls of government and into the communities to make an impact and feel connected. The new administration must have presence in the field to make sure the voice of the community is prioritized and reflected in programs and policies.

Through public-private partnerships, funders can push the administration to prioritize policies and practices that follow the lead of grassroots organizers and activists. Because of relationships philanthropy has in local communities, funders can partner with the administration to strategically go beyond community engagement and engage in co-

governance models and focus on racial justice together by using the expertise of those who have been doing this work locally for decades. In addition, fundamental to creating a culture of racial justice, examine how you can inform and create pathways for influence in the form of staffing, advisory bodies, task forces for grassroots organizations and people with lived expertise of housing insecurity.

Another focus is around creating a listening or feedback mechanism that requires the voice of communities, especially those who are most impacted, to be incorporated into any program or policy. Philanthropy can support and facilitate the ability to get real time feedback from the community around advanced notices or early-stage ideas of program design that can then be used to make necessary changes that center equity and justice prior to being implemented into near final versions.

### ***Build Relationships to Support Both Political and Career Staff***

Often times, relationship building within the administration is focused on political staff with the expectation that the influence can be leveraged to advance favorable policies and practices. As we look to reimagine the homelessness and housing systems, philanthropy should be utilizing its relationship building to craft strong partnerships with career staff as well. These individuals that align on values and priorities have knowledge and expertise of the most effective way to push policies and programs through the right channels to implementation.

Creating mutual support networks among both [political and career staff](#) and providing them with the backing to push bold policies generates the conditions in which they can strategically advance racial and housing justice internally within agencies and departments. In addition, building this support can result in long-term sustainability of allies within the federal government that can ensure progress made is continued and institutionalized.

Funders should convene with past and current career staff to build relationships and understand the most effective form of support networks and what mechanisms and resources are needed for the staff to gain support from leadership and follow through with implementation.

To accomplish this, philanthropy can:

- Push to meet with top political and career leaders responsible for specific programs to start the relationship building process and put it at top of mind for leaders.
- Engage in “match-making” and connect career staff within federal agencies and departments to philanthropic staff for follow-up and implementation assistance.
- Form committees composed of leaders at comparable levels (i.e. political leaders meet with senior philanthropy staff, program officers meet with career and program staff, etc.)
- Construct program and policy committees where best practices and evidence can be candidly discussed and conversations around public-private partnerships can bud.

- Work with and provide funding to grantee partners to host civilian employees of federal agencies for a temporary period of time through the [Intergovernmental Personnel Act \(IPA\) mobility program](#).

### ***Support Narrative and Messaging Efforts for Public Affairs Staff***

Philanthropy across the country is [funding research](#) on both a local and national scale to understand how the public views homelessness and housing, its connection to structural racism and opportunity, and how to frame housing as a common good rather than solely a commodity.

This narrative must be focused on structural racism (not just race), incorporating the voices of those with lived expertise, and sync with the work currently happening to help departments and agencies have a cohesive message and narrative. This is a clear way for philanthropy and the administration to partner and expand on what has already been done instead of re-creating something new. Creating open pathways to share this research and what has been discovered around housing justice narratives with HUD, USICH, and communications and public affairs staff at intersecting departments can help align how we frame housing and homelessness in productive ways with an intentional through line between the federal, state, and local levels.

Funders can convene together and consider what can be curated now around narrative and messaging that evidence proves works and can be utilized by public affairs staff to push and gain support for equitable and just homelessness and housing policy. There may also be an opportunity to share these learnings by engaging junior public affairs staff in a professional development/capacity building setting who often draft talking points and press releases to build a common language at the ground-level. Likewise, philanthropy can open the window of influence by providing the space and conditions for public affairs staff to convene with funders, researchers, people with lived expertise, and other community stakeholder to share lessons learned on messaging and who are the best individuals or groups to be the messengers.