

## WORKING GROUP



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## Necessary Conditions for Good Social Justice Philanthropy

The Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace takes an unapologetically normative approach to the question, “**What is good social justice philanthropy?**” Here we describe the values and practices we believe are imperative for social justice grantmaking. Our aim is not to cut off debate but to encourage it, to create a space in which our differences can be aired and we can all find ways improve our work.

**The Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace believes the following principles and practices are necessary for good social justice philanthropy.** The most difficult and most important practice may be to examine one’s logic model and ask, “Even if I do all of these things, what is the change I must see in order to know I am engaged in social justice philanthropy?”

Effective social justice philanthropy aims to end the injustices suffered by one group of people at the hands of another. These injustices often result in social, economic, and/or political inequalities. But rather than focus on the *effects* of unjust treatment, good social justice grantmaking attempts to undo the *mechanisms* of oppression. This can be best accomplished if the grantmaker’s work includes each of the following elements:

### 1. Sound analysis

(a) *Of the forces that contribute to injustice.* An effective social justice grantmaker bases her work on a sound analysis of the historical forces that contributed to shaping the current reality she wishes to change, the forces that help maintain the status quo, and the likely future evolution of these forces.

(b) *Of the effects of membership in oppressed classes of people.* She examines the current context and her own work through the lenses of gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, country of origin, and membership in other social categories that experience unjust treatment.

(c) *Of institutional structures.* Because the mechanism of oppression sometimes appears faceless, she analyzes the myriad ways in which institutional *structures*—the policies that govern institutions, their practices, their cultures, their relationships with one another and with the communities they’re meant to serve—contribute to injustice. The category of “institutions” studied is broad and might include, for example, the local school system, the church, the military, local and national governments, NGOs, the business sector or individual businesses, etc.

(d) *Of the distribution of power.* One of the goals of an effective social justice grantmaker is to shift power from those who perpetrate injustice to those who suffer it. To this end she examines how power in its various forms (wealth, political influence, etc.) is acquired, held, and brokered in the current context.

## 2. Effective choice of strategies and tactics

A good social justice grantmaker is able to translate a sound analysis into (a) an effective formulation of goals and objectives, and (b) a smart choice of strategies and tactics. Does the analysis lead to a clear sense of what should be changed and how? What are the best strategies for making the desired change happen? Do the strategies lead to a choice of tactics rich enough to initiate and sustain social change? For example, if funding an advocacy initiative were deemed a good strategy, would the grantmaker support the organizational capacities of activist groups; the building of a broad base of support; strengthening the alliances of participating organizations; improved data collection and analysis; more strategic communications; and the ability to mobilize additional resources over the long term? If the grantmaker seeks a particular policy outcome, does she also fund the organizations that would monitor implementation and enforcement? If a social change effort requires litigation, does she fund only the legal effort, or, understanding the nature of social change, does she also support movement building and other activities that, taken together, are more likely to succeed in removing the injustice?

Because people's lives often hang in the balance, good intentions are not good enough. The grantmaker's work should have a significant chance of succeeding. It will thus be important for her to attend carefully to such matters as the scale of her intervention and its time horizon. Social justice is not easily won, nor does it come quickly.

A social justice grantmaker will be most effective when she recognizes and uses all the tools and privileges at her disposal as a grantmaker: her power to convene, her ability to speak with the voice of her institution, her access to decision-makers, her ability to marshal significant resources, etc.

## 3. Solidarity and respect

**Solidarity.** An effective social justice grantmaker works in meaningful partnership with the communities she aims to serve. She recognizes that she is ultimately accountable to these communities. In practice this means that she will learn from them and, whenever possible, take direction from them. She will aim to make their voices heard, not hers. There should, in other words, always be a strong presumption against contravening the desires of these communities, to the extent that going against their wishes requires special justification.

By working in solidarity with affected communities, the grantmaker gains a deeper understanding of the issues involved. By looking to these communities for leadership, she increases their ownership of the work. Both of these lead to better outcomes.

Social justice grantmakers must also be willing to take the medicines they prescribe. We undermine our social justice efforts by exempting ourselves from the rules we would apply to others.

**Respect.** The effective social justice grantmaker respects the dignity of the communities she serves. She does not cast them as complete victims, unable to change their basic condition without her assistance. Nor does she romanticize them. Because all people possess free will, she acknowledges they have the ability to participate in their own oppression or liberation. Respect drives out both under-valuation and unrealistic expectations. It motivates social justice grantmakers to seek wisdom and strength from the communities they serve.

#### **4. The general qualities of a good grantmaker**

Effective grantmakers take calculated risks; they're often creative in the use of the limited resources available to them; they partner well with others, across sectoral lines and other divisions; they're patient because they understand that meaningful social change takes time; and they learn from failure—they're own and that of others.