

# Racial Justice

Racial justice is inherently about power; therefore, for us to practice racial justice, we needed to first acknowledge power dynamics. This meant that, from the beginning, we embedded a power analysis in every aspect of the Amplify Fund - from our understanding of the contexts in which we are working, to the assumptions we have about how change happens, to who and how we want to fund, and our stated values. But it was through conversations about evaluating the Fund that we realized we needed to be explicit about our racial justice values and analysis. We also needed to ensure that our grantmaking and funder organizing practices, as well as our internal operations and culture, were aligned if we are to hold ourselves accountable to our racial justice commitment.

## RACIAL JUSTICE GRANTMAKING

We fund racial justice powerbuilding efforts, so when we identify potential grantees, we ask about their racial justice analysis, their base, and how they are situated within the ecosystem. Because of this focus, we often fund Black leaders, indigenous leaders, and leaders of color. As of May 2022, 49 of 53 grantees were led by people of color.

Racial justice in our grantmaking, then, means listening to grantees, doing what works for grantees, positioning these leaders and their communities as decision makers, and following the expertise of grantees.

**92% grantee organizations are led by people of color.**

Only 4 of 53 Executive Directors in Amplify's network are non-Latinx white.



**AMPLIFY FUND**  
NEIGHBORHOOD FUNDERS GROUP

Photo Credit: Amplify/NFG

## **RACIAL JUSTICE GRANTMAKING IN PRACTICE**

### **OFFERING GENERAL OPERATING GRANTS OVER A PERIOD OF YEARS**

Leaders of color, their organizations, and their communities need the security of multi-year funding and the flexibility of general operating funding to take risks, to address challenges and crises, and to persist in their power building endeavors. Although restricted by our need to fundraise, we have been able to give grantees funding for several years, with no restrictions.

### **PRACTICING LANGUAGE JUSTICE**

We have Spanish-speaking grantees, so all of our materials are in English and Spanish, and we have interpreters available for all grantee meetings. Grantees are also permitted to submit information in Spanish to JustFund.

### **HIRING DIVERSE STAFF & CONSULTANTS WITH RACIAL JUSTICE ANALYSES**

Amplify is entirely staffed by women of color (as of January 2023), and the majority of our consultants are also women of color. Our Program Team, which interacts most with our grantees, has connections to Amplify's places, providing another level of proximity and understanding between funder and grantee. We believe hiring people of color with a racial justice lens has allowed us to build deeper, more trusting relationships with grantees.

### **EASING ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS**

Racial justice organizations led by Black leaders, indigenous leaders, and leaders of color, tend to have smaller budgets and fewer staff to respond to foundation requests; therefore, we do our best to keep the administrative work simple. At the start of the relationship, we invite grantees to complete a few questions (brief descriptions of the organization, the staff, the proposed work, and financial need) on [JUSTFUND](#), the easy-to-navigate website that enables grantees to use this "common application" to apply for funding from multiple funders. After making grants, we learn more about grantees by doing our own research and/or meeting with grantees (virtually or in-person) when it's convenient for them. We do not require any written or financial reports from grantees.

### **CEDE DECISION-MAKING POWER**

Racial justice is inherently about power; therefore, for us to practice racial justice, we needed to acknowledge the power dynamics between funder and grantee, and cede decision making power to communities of color. We did this through our [FUTURE OF AMPLIFY](#) and co-created grantmaking strategy processes. We also structure our conversations with grantees around their needs and what we can do to support their work, rather than how grantees fit into our agenda.

## UNDOING WHITE DOMINANT CULTURE IN PHILANTHROPY

Funder organizing is not only shifting what and who gets funding, but also shifting how funders behave. In 2019, consultant [GITA GULATI-PARTEE OF OPEN SOURCE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES](#), began engaging Amplify's staff and steering committee (made up of funders) in racial justice work to support Amplify's funder organizing goals. She did a deep dive on white dominant culture in order to help us learn to identify toxic practices in individuals, institutions, and the broader field of philanthropy. Separately, the steering committee and staff assessed how our own white dominant practices were hindering racial justice in our strategies, operations, culture, and relationships.

### WHITE DOMINANT BEHAVIORS AND MINDSETS WE IDENTIFIED IN OUR OWN PRACTICES:

#### STEERING COMMITTEE

- Limitations imposed by philanthropic institutions
- Unacknowledged power dynamics
- Prioritizing funder comfort
- Pressure, driven by time

#### STAFF

- Bigger, or more, is always better
- Individualism
- Perfectionism
- Pressure, driven by time

After reflecting about how white dominant culture showed up in Amplify Fund, we made the following changes:

- We began to talk about funders as “accomplices” rather than “governors” of the Fund and emphasized that their role as [FUNDER ORGANIZERS](#) meant building their skill and confidence to act as change agents.
- We devolved the funders of much of their decision making power, focusing instead on grantee-led decision making.
- We engaged in experiments to streamline funder-facing activities so staff could prioritize building relationships with grantees (e.g., some of Amplify's funders agreed to use our end-of-year report as their grant report instead of us having to fill out multiple different funder report requests).
- We turned our attention to the new values governing our fund (articulated by grantees through the [FUTURE OF AMPLIFY](#) process), bringing a racial justice lens to those values, and articulating how the values will dictate our behavior.

# LESSONS LEARNED

## **CONSISTENCY AND CONTINUITY ARE IMPORTANT.**

We know that racial justice is a practice, not an end goal; therefore, regularly challenging white dominant practices and regularly trying new practices is important. However, over the course of several years, Amplify Fund welcomed new funders, new staff, and shifted priorities, which caused gaps in our racial justice work. Moving forward, we are committing to a consistent schedule of reflecting on and improving our practices through a racial justice lens. Another remedy is intentionally onboarding new people to our culture of racial justice work.

## **ALIGN RACIAL JUSTICE ACROSS ALL AREAS OF WORK.**

As stated above, Amplify Fund funders and staff were engaging on two parallel, and sometimes intersecting, paths to analyze our practices. We brought racial justice to most areas of our work, and at the same time, we did not engage in intentional racial justice reflection activities internally with our grantees and Program Team, or in our local funder organizing and fundraising efforts. Without the consistent reflection across our areas of work, the result was an inconsistent understanding of what racial justice meant to Amplify Fund, and a siloing of our racial justice work. We need to allot time in meetings with all Amplify Fund stakeholders to reflect on our practices, and we need to find ways to document and share our reflections across stakeholder groups, especially during onboarding.

## **DEVELOP AN ACTIONABLE “NORTH STAR” THAT GUIDES OUR EFFORTS.**

In various meetings, our funders, our staff, and our grantees have used the idea of “the health, safety, and well-being of Black women” to check our practices. In 2020, our funders asked themselves “what would the Steering Committee look like if it were a space where the safety and success of Black people was prioritized?” The staff later adopted this decision screen during one of our retreats. And, the Future of Amplify process, led by grantees, was guided by three values, one of which was “centering Black women and women of color without burdening them.” This has been a helpful starting point for conversations around racial justice, and in keeping with our other lessons learned, we need to use it consistently, continuously, and across all aspects of the Fund.

## **EXPERIMENT.**

Challenging white dominant practices requires experimenting with new practices. This frame of experimentation has been useful to move from the abstract to the concrete, but it requires everyone to commit to trying out a new practice, evaluating how it went, and adjusting as necessary.

# LESSONS LEARNED

## **CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS.**

Philanthropy is notoriously not accountable to Black and indigenous communities, and people of color. And while Amplify Fund staff and consultants are committed to racial justice, we could still use a formal mechanism to hold us accountable. This is why we are excited for the Co-Leadership Committee, a hybrid body made up of mostly grantees and some funders, who will hold us accountable to our vision, values, and goals. We will also continue evaluating ourselves as funders against our values, to add another accountability mechanism.

## **GIVE YOURSELF AMPLE TIME FOR RACIAL JUSTICE WORK.**

Analyzing behaviors with a racial justice lens takes time and dedicated capacity. We have been lucky to have Gita supporting us throughout the work, and a staff person focused on learning and evaluation to organize reflection sessions. For Amplify 2.0, we are rethinking how we do evaluation so we are gathering grantee feedback on our practices (in a non-burdensome ongoing way), in addition to collecting our own reflections.