

**The Value of Giving Circles in the Evolution of Community Philanthropy:  
How Community-Based Philanthropy Can Be Strengthened by Forging a Bond Between  
Community Foundations and Black Giving Circles in the United States.**

Akira J. Barclay, Emerging Leaders, International Fellows Program ~ 2012

**Abstract**

While most communities in the United States are made up of a colorful mosaic of race and ethnicity, age, knowledge, wisdom and experience, its philanthropic institutions are not so diverse. This lack of diversity hampers foundations' impact on the communities they serve in complex ways. While the sector grapples with issues of diversity, community foundations in particular are faced with the challenge of increasing competition for donations. Meanwhile, more Black Americans are becoming visibly involved in philanthropy, starting foundations and opening donor-advised funds, and a movement has emerged to encourage them to give strategically for long-term systemic change on issues affecting their communities. In this paper, Akira J. Barclay investigates the growing trend of giving circles in the Black community and their relevance to community foundations.

Ms. Barclay explores the challenges facing community foundations today in failing to connect to the growing philanthropy among Blacks in the United States, and she sees an opportunity knocking with the renaissance of collective giving. Studies have shown that community foundations are not well-known or understood in the Black community, their activities are confused with those of public charities, and connections to community foundations are only made through professional advisors or personal experience. Ms. Barclay then profiles three giving circles: The Black Benefactors, in Washington, D.C.; A Legacy of Tradition (A LOT), in Raleigh, NC; and, New Generation of African-American Philanthropy, in Charlotte, NC. Many giving circle members have been born, raised and likely still reside in the community where they are making grants, and these grassroots philanthropists may have a deeper context for community issues and are more knowledgeable about the needs and nuances of the area. Likewise, giving circles are becoming more well-known in Black communities all over the United States because of their responsiveness, influence, impact on pressing issues, and hands-on role in working with grantees, lending technical assistance and building capacity.

Giving circles thus present a unique opportunity for community foundations to make headway in many of the key areas identified for making stronger connections to the Black philanthropic community. These include increased visibility, direct experience with Black professionals and entrepreneurs, relevance and legitimacy in the communities they serve, and trust. Ms. Barclay analyzes the existing challenges to partnerships between community foundations and giving circles, and offers recommendations to community foundations in cultivating relationships with giving circles.

To request the full version of the paper, please click [here](#)

