



# Here's What We're Learning About Donors of Color

Ade Adeniji | February 03, 2023



MELITAS/SHUTTERSTOCK

Over the years, Inside Philanthropy has compiled lists of top donors of color across different industries, including [donors of color in tech](#), [top Black philanthropists on Wall Street](#) and [top Indian-American philanthropists](#). These pieces reflect a lot of research we've been compiling as America's ethnic landscape changes.

By 2050, America will be majority nonwhite and these demographic shifts will have implications for philanthropy. Historically, the largest sums of money flowing from individual donors have come from white men. But people of color are also part of the American philanthropic story, and are likely to play an increasing role in the coming decades.

One of my big takeaways as I've written about individual donors of color is how far under the radar they can fly. The sector often focuses on the most eye-popping gifts, or gifts made by familiar figures. But if the narrative is going to change, those of us in the philanthrosphere need to be looking in new directions. Sarah Shanley Hope of the Solutions Project made an interesting point to me once about making sure donors of color feel comfortable bringing their stories to the fore. "They really can claim that leadership space, and I think it is really important to disrupt philanthropy," she said.

There are people out there deeply dedicated to reshaping the narrative. [Ashindi Maxton](#), co-founder of Donors of Color Network, [Tyrone McKinley Freeman](#) at the Lilly Family School and others have spoken to me at length about the power of giving circles and how donors of color have leveraged collective giving. And Black Philanthropy Month emphasizes a story not just about a wealthy few, but about regular people committed to giving back whatever they can.

We'll continue exploring these themes in the months and years ahead, but I thought this would be a good time to share a quick rundown of some trends and patterns I've noticed so far.

## Many donors are in the early stage of their giving trajectory

Many donors of color are still quite young, and thus have a long runway to build up their giving. Take Nicole Shanahan and her [Bia-Echo Foundation](#), which committed an impressive \$100 million over five years in three areas of focus — criminal justice reform, reproductive longevity and a livable, healthy planet. Shanahan, who is in her 30s, married Google cofounder Sergey Brin a few years ago. Last year, news broke that the couple had filed for divorce.

Other examples abound. Black financier Frank Baker has strongly supported historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the early years of his giving, and [plans to get his new foundation off the ground soon](#). In the realm of sports and entertainment, meanwhile, some athletes of color in their 20s and 30s are already starting to give in a serious way, including [Stephen Curry](#), [Rihanna](#) (through her [Clara Lionel Foundation](#)), [Ozzie Abies](#) of the MLB, and [Ndamukong Suh](#) of the NFL, to name just a few.

## Education is strongly prized



### Follow the Money!

Want to get inside funders' heads? Sign up for our email updates.

SIGN UP

### CONSULTANTS DIRECTORY



Check out IP's directory of philanthropy and fundraising consultants. Browse the listings for your next project. Apply to join the directory. Annual IP membership required.

### Featured Jobs

Find Jobs

GO

#### Grants Management Associate

New York, NY - Wellspring Philanthropic Fund

#### Executive Director

Brooklyn, NY - Community Help in Park Slope

#### Senior Director of Development - School of Theater, Film and Television

Los Angeles, CA - University of California Los Angeles

#### Program Officer, Vote Your Voice

Atlanta, GA - Southern Poverty Law Center

#### Chief Development Officer

CA - Goodwill Southern California

Post a Job More jobs

Powered by [ymcareers](#)  
by communitybrands

By using this website, you agree to our use of cookies.



It probably shouldn't be any surprise that donors of color place a high premium on education. Many of these philanthropists credit the education they received as a vital key to their success. This is true of [many of the Indian-American philanthropists we've covered](#), some of whom got their start at the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT).

What's been interesting to observe among Black donors, meanwhile, is a mix of support for both HBCUs and predominantly white institutions. Donors like Robert F. Smith and Frank Baker first focused on their alma maters, Cornell and the University of Chicago, respectively, and then turned their attention to HBCUs, making huge gifts to Morehouse, in the case of Smith, and to Spelman and FAMU, for Baker. Even donors of color who didn't go to college often focus on education in their giving, including LeBron James, who runs his [I Promise School](#) in his native Akron, Ohio. Former Arizona Wildcat and NFL safety Robert Golden built an [environmentally focused school](#) in partnership with the Chaffee Fresno Zoo.

### Donors deploy conventional giving structures, but with a twist

Donors of color give in ways that people throughout the sector do, including through individual gifts, private foundations and donor-advised funds. Politics and democracy is also important to some in this cohort, like Black real estate investor Wayne Jordan and his wife Quinn Delaney, who [sometimes use 501\(c\)\(4\) structures](#) to advance their cause.

In addition to that, though, donor tables, giving circles, affinity groups and other pooled funds have been a way for historically disenfranchised communities to use their collective power to make a difference. [Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy \(AAPIP\)](#) works nationally to leverage assets for impact in the community. [Philadelphia Black Giving Circle](#) distributes pooled funds to Black-led, Black-serving nonprofits in the City of Brotherly Love. [Latino Community Foundation \(LCF\)](#), which was initially established as an affinity group of United Way of the Bay Area, has invested over \$25 million since 1989 to more than 375 grassroots, predominantly Latino-led nonprofits across the state of California.

American India Foundation (AIF) has been a way for philanthropists across the Indian diaspora to continue to support their home country. AIF supporter Sumir Chadha, cofounder and managing director of WestBridge Capital, [speaks about his commitment](#) to supporting India and the value of organizations like AIF: "My partners and I began making more charitable efforts and making our own charitable journey. All giving is interrelated because all of the problems in India are so interrelated."

It will be interesting to see how these particular structures expand or if other routes become more preferred in the coming decades.

### Racial equity is important, but expressed in different ways

On the heels of the killing of George Floyd and a summer of racial reckoning, the past few years have seen efforts toward a reckoning in philanthropy — some successful, others less so. My colleagues Martha Ramirez and Tate Williams did an [extensive special report](#) last summer analyzing where the sector stands on that front. But just like Black American history or Latino American history is also simply American history, racial justice intersects with education, the environment, medical research, and all the other philanthropic puzzle pieces we talk about all the time.

All that is to say, not all equity-minded giving by donors of color will be expressed through an overtly racial lens. Billionaire Robert F. Smith's Fund II Foundation, for instance, has given tens of millions of dollars to the National Park Foundation, quietly making him one of the largest private donors supporting America's parks. Some of this work has included preserving MLK's birth home and the home where he lived. L.A. Dodgers owner Arturo Moreno has a strong track record of supporting education and scholarships, including in the Latino community.

Another way to frame all of this is that for donors of color, giving toward racial equity is sustained rather than confined to a single moment. A Donors of Color Network study [put it best](#): "[POC donors'] motivation to fund social justice is not episodic nor determined by a moment of crisis, but reflects a lifetime of experience with race-based (and for women, gender-based) discrimination."

### Featured

[Three Takeaways from a Powerful Conversation on Black Philanthropy and Climate Change](#)

["We Are the Wealth We Are Looking For." Yvonne Moore on Black Philanthropy, DAFs and More](#)

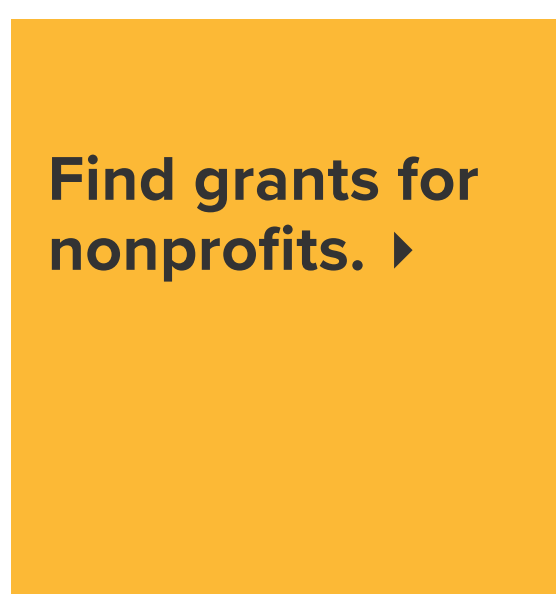
[Here's What We're Learning About Donors of Color](#)

["Demystifying Philanthropy." Seven Questions for Tyeshia Wilson, Black Giving Circle Expert](#)

[IP Explainer: Should Foundation ...](#)

[How the Richard A. Henson ...](#)

### Explore GrantFinder, a powerful resource for IP subscribers.



By using this website, you agree to our use of cookies.

**Become a member and find grants for nonprofits with our extensive research on who's funding what and why.**

SUBSCRIBE

**Follow IP**



**Quick Links**

- About Us
- Contact Us
- Consultants Directory
- FAQ & Help
- Terms of Use
- Privacy Policy

**Become a Subscriber**

- Individual Subscriptions →
- Multi-User Subscriptions →

**Newsletter**

Subscribe to our newsletter

**Follow the money! Get our daily email**

Sign Up

Inside **Philanthropy**