THE BROKEN TRIANGLE
A Framework for Reparative Philanthropic Relationships

Spotlighting an alternative approach to technical assistance consultancy that strengthens the relationship of philanthropy, consultants, and grantee partners.

SUMMARY

REACH Healthcare Foundation observed a system failure in community-based philanthropy, explored it to identify root causes, and tried different ways to improve and remedy the problems. This reflection paper focuses on that repair and is a logical extension of our first report, *Centering Black Voices*, which details a REACH pilot project to improve access to philanthropic resources for Black-led, Black-serving nonprofits.

Foundations frequently hire consultants to inform and implement grantmaking strategies and support grantee partners in the development and implementation of projects and initiatives. This reflection paper conceptualizes the relationship of the **funder**, **grantee partner**, and **consultant** as a triangle that—when well-balanced—allows each party to contribute to more effective results. When the relationships and expectations are not well-defined, however, a "broken triangle" can result, which leads to mistrust among the three parties, damage to relationships, and obstacles to shared progress. This paper explores REACH Healthcare Foundation's understanding of how to repair a broken triangle through philanthropic reparation processes that involve listening, engagement, reconciliation, action, and identification of culturally appropriate technical assistance and consulting support. In these collaborative ways, a stable triangle is established that advances shared interests and outcomes.

The broken triangle framework emerged from a REACH pilot project started in 2018 called *Centering Black Voices* to make investments in the leadership and operations of Black-led, Black-serving nonprofit organizations in REACH's geographic service area. Along with providing unrestricted grants and other

capacity-strengthening supports, REACH wanted to reexamine its expectations as a funder, restructure how resources are distributed, and equalize power and responsibility among all three parties to create a more resilient and productive system that can withstand disruptions, changes, and other challenges. In response to insights gleaned from listening to Black leaders and consultants, REACH has implemented multiyear unrestricted funding and simplified reporting in a continued effort to build relationships based on trust, transparency, dialogue, and mutual learning.

In this paper, we provide insights from our examination of REACH's historical practices, grantee and community feedback, and evaluation activities. The resulting findings—combined with lessons learned from REACH staff, leaders of community-based organizations, and the involved consultants—led us to conceptualize and operationalize a framework of a more equal funder–grantee–consultant relationship that contributes to longer-term growth and improved outcomes. **Our revised approaches are applicable to philanthropic interactions with any marginalized community and aim to inform equity in racial relationships in broader philanthropic practices.**

This paper intentionally focuses on the consultant role, who functions in service of the grantee partners based on the needs and goals that the community-based organization identifies as priorities.

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I. COMMUNITY-BASED PHILANTHROPY

This reflection paper explores the connections among three key components of community-based philanthropic efforts: the **funder** (philanthropic organization), the **grantee partner** (the community-based organization and more broadly the communities they serve), and the **core consultant** or consultants who provide skills in a specific area of expertise and function as a bridge between the philanthropic organization and the grantee partner.

More than six years ago, REACH Healthcare Foundation observed a system failure in community-based philanthropy, including the foundation's policies and best practices, and sought to find out the root causes through a series of one-on-one discussions with Black leaders working in Black-serving community-based health and social development organizations in the Kansas City area. The interviews helped identify various obstacles to grant funding that these nonprofit leaders reported experiencing when partnering with REACH. The interviews also explored if any aspects of working with funders seemed to be working well. Through these efforts, REACH became aware of barriers that were preventing nonprofit leaders from accessing its philanthropic resources. Perhaps most importantly, these connections led to the creation of *Centering Black Voices* so that Black leaders could share and learn from each other.

The wisdom and knowledge presented in our first report in this series, *Centering Black Voices,* highlights lessons learned from listening to Black leaders. In response, REACH has implemented major changes in how we approach philanthropic funding, and the open lines of communication with Black leaders continue to inform how we make investments in our community. Continuous improvements are influencing new extensions of existing work, coaching and technical assistance for grantee partners, and the building of trust through our actions and behaviors.

II. A TRIANGLE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this paper, we explore approaches and actions that can strengthen the triangle formed by the funder, grantee partner, and core consultant. In a typical configuration, funders provide financial resources, community-based leaders offer the wisdom of what the community needs, and consultants deliver culturally appropriate support and expertise. Importantly, the consultant

role forms the stabilizing foundation for the triangle and serves as a key liaison between the philanthropic agency and the grantee partners.

We visualize these interconnected groups as forming a triangle with equal sides that represent equal ownership and shared responsibility for agreed-on project goals and deliverables. Structural stability relies on each group contributing in equally valuable and valued ways. Each side depends on the others' success to achieve their contribution to the project. The depiction of an equilateral triangle eliminates the opportunity for one side to dominate the work and related project decisions—and instead provides a collaborative, equal-minded approach that suits the needs of all involved parties.

GRANTEE
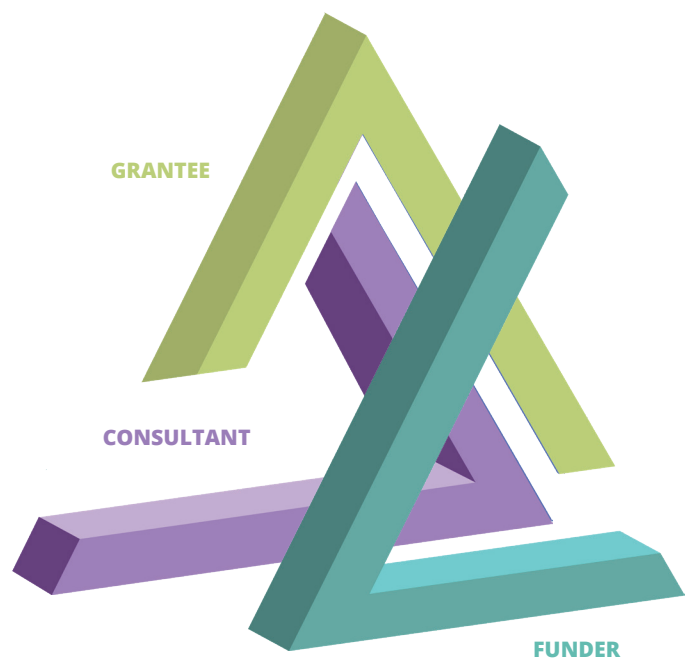
CONSULTANT

FUNDER

Limited models in the past

Most writing on trust-based philanthropy in the U.S. has focused on the relationship between grantee and funder. This simple dyad, however, does not acknowledge that a consultant often mediates that relationship and provides the strategic approach and actionable elements needed to ensure the success of the agreed-on goals of the grantee organization. Trust-based philanthropy in Black communities involves empowering community-based organizations via flexible grants and equitable power dynamics (Yarber, 2023). By diversifying the fundraising workforce and examining intercultural dynamics, the field is addressing power structures and inequities faced by fundraisers of color (Payton, 1999). This approach can foster trust, unity, and solidarity within communities of color and thereby increase community resilience (Copeland-Carson, 2005).

Components of the triangle

The triangle framework is a systematic way to conceptualize and operationalize a healthy relationship among three entities: a **funder (philanthropic organization)**, the **grantee partner**, and one or more **core consultants** (Table 1).

Title	Role	Contribution
TABLE 1: Role and contribution of each entity of the triangle		
Funder	Grant funding, connections to other resources, relationship-building	Providing financial support and resources. Being responsive to feedback and emerging needs of grantee partners.
Grantee partner	Direct service provider	Understanding the needs of the community and providing services and expertise to meet those needs.
Consultant	Expertise, liaison between funders and grantees, leadership	Delivering culturally relevant planning, technical, and implementation strategy and support; offering wisdom for success; building leadership capacity; advancing workforce development; providing evaluation

Contributing factors to a broken triangle

Similar to other instances of racial exclusion, Black-led, Black-serving nonprofits often are met with greater skepticism and scrutiny than their White counterparts when applying for funding (Batten & Williams, 2017). This long-standing reality is the result of explicit and implicit bias against Black-led organizations. Several factors underlie this reality:

- Discomfort on the part of traditional philanthropy in addressing the historically fraught relationship between race and power, yet philanthropy holds the power and privilege.
- Failure by philanthropy to acknowledge that the community knows what they need, leading philanthropic institutions to determine funding priorities and make decisions that are biased toward the philanthropy's agenda. The result is disparities in grantmaking.
- Imbalance of power between philanthropic funders and grantee partners at all levels—systemically, organizationally, and interpersonally.

A weak or broken triangle can result in **foundation redlining**, which is the withholding of important or essential services to a grassroots or smaller nonprofit based on funding guidelines that are not designed to match the needs and abilities of smaller organizations. In response, REACH has made changes to reduce barriers for community nonprofits, especially for smaller organizations.

"Oftentimes the funding guidelines and bylaws of a foundation create limitations and rules that exclude grassroots organizations from being eligible for grant awards. We know that there's an opportunity to eliminate the red lines from our own practices to remove some of those barriers for eligibility and access," notes Carla Gibson, Vice President of Programs at REACH.

There can be policies that clearly have discriminatory effects, like "we only fund by invitation, we only fund organizations over a certain budget size, or that have a certain type of structure, or who have certain types of credentials or recommendations"—all of which have the impact of excluding low-income organizations and other organizations led by minoritized individuals.
—Nonprofit leader

As a funder, REACH strives to recognize how norms rooted in racism, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression have shaped, informed, and influenced our entire sector—including who is deemed trustworthy and who is not.

"We often refer to 'best practices' and hold grassroots organizations to standards that may not be achievable," adds Carla Gibson, REACH Vice President of Programs. She gives the example of inquiring about an organization's board composition without considering that board governance for a grassroots organization could be very different due to various factors. "Because we tend to have a perspective influenced by White culture regarding what is typically expected, we evaluate grassroots organizations based on standards they cannot meet. In doing so, we limit their chances of receiving funding and ultimately set them up for failure even before they have the opportunity to apply for support."

REDLINING, which has been illegal since 1968, is a term that describes discriminatory banking practices that prevented people of color from getting mortgages in historically marginalized neighborhoods.

Consequences of a broken triangle

The triangle dynamic often fails because it is unbalanced and does not consider the value that each entity brings. If any side of the triangle cannot function fully, the resulting instability can create mistrust, inflict harm, and hinder progress toward shared goals.

It's not really a triangle in most cases. All the advice usually just goes one way. —Nonprofit leader

Enhanced focus on the consultant role by REACH

As a result of the learnings from the 2-year *Centering Black Voices* pilot project, the idea for this triangle model and emphasis on REACH core consultants was born. Since 2023, REACH has covered the consulting fees of core consultants to remove the financial burden from the grantee organization. This approach allowed grantee partners to have a deeper focus and trust with the consultants, who are local to the community and understand the lived experiences and cultural aspects of the grantee organization's audience. **REACH's investment in foundation-vetted consultants extends the skills of Black leaders, seeds ongoing growth** and value within the grantee organizations, and **represents a sound investment** due to the lasting impact consultants make in advancing the grantee organization goals. This type of investment results in more structurally sound and effective grantee partner organizations that have the foundational elements to create the kind of community change and positive impact that the foundation strives to support.

Consultants are a cost-effective way to provide specialized expertise and services to organizations. The engagement with consultants can be intermittent to fill a technical assistance or staffing gap, or it can be more sustained to provide professional development or capacity-building within an organization. In either scenario, a REACH-provided consultant represents support that REACH can offer quickly to a grantee partner and is a feasible workaround for when a funder might not be able to provide a grant or direct fiscal support to an organization. With this alternative approach, REACH can respond to a grantee partner's needs and adapt practices to suit the grantee organization's culture.

Additionally, consultants bring with them knowledge, expertise, and local connections. A consultant can have a large influence on the relationship between the grantee partner and the funder and affect all aspects of a project, from what experts are brought in to address additional needs to what type of evaluation is recommended to measure project success. Consultants can also help establish the strategy for a project (e.g., funding or marketing strategy). And because our grantee partners are typically understaffed or might lack the expertise needed to implement specific strategies or processes, a consultant can go beyond the strategist role to provide hands-on assistance with implementation.

The consultant can serve as:

- Liaison: connecting the different worlds of philanthropy and community-based service organizations.
- Translator: demystifying cultural norms that each entity takes for granted.
- Coach: bridging the worlds of the funder and grantee partner to translate norms and best practices commonly accepted in philanthropy, but which might not make sense to the grantee organization.
- Navigator: explaining the dynamics of the grantee organization to convey needs or challenges to the funder.

Local consultants can offset concerns about the fairness of philanthropic practices in marginalized communities (Thompson, 2012) and help diversify fundraising practices and the workforce. Especially when locally based and culturally informed, consultants are valuable partners in creating sustainable philanthropic initiatives that benefit and empower Black communities or other marginalized communities.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TRIANGLE FRAMEWORK

Starting in 2023, REACH began to provide core consultants to area grantee organizations in an effort to improve inequities in grantmaking practices and address the larger issue of racial equity in the communities that our grantee partners serve. One insight we gained was that REACH-supported technical assistance and consulting relationships differed from nonprofits' previous experiences with philanthropy—some nonprofits had never received sustained consultant support beyond a day or two of training on a specific topic or a general group training for multiple nonprofits. For these organizations, REACH was the first foundation to offer individualized consulting support, and thus the organization had no point of comparison. Their insights are included in this paper, along with all of the participants' recommendations for creating a stronger triangle. Summaries of nonprofit leaders' insights are presented first, followed by those of the core consultants.

Listening to Black nonprofit leaders

REACH convened focus groups with Black leaders of nonprofit and service organizations that address urgent health and social development needs in six counties in Kansas and Missouri and held one-to-one interviews with several executive directors or senior managers at community-based organizations that had received technical assistance or some form of consultant support from REACH through the *Centering Black Voices* program. The conversations surfaced clues as to what actions or conditions contribute to misunderstanding, distrust, and dysfunction in the triangle.

Common themes in a broken triangle were:

1. **Chronic underfunding results in core operating needs not being met.** Shoestring budgets do not give nonprofits the means for organizational and capacity building. When funds are limited, grassroots organizations might hire an early-career consultant instead of an experienced consultant—or engage a skilled consultant for only a short time. Even when the consultant is a good fit with a grantee organization's project, there can often be more work than resources. This imbalance results in a strained relationship where the consultant feels undervalued, and the grantee partner feels they are not getting adequate service from the consultant.

2. **A mismatch between grantee partner and a consultant can occur when the funder picks the consultant.** Sometimes, the funder might select a consultant who is not culturally appropriate, or a national consultant who does not have an adequate understanding of the local landscape. In both scenarios, this top-down approach can negatively affect rapport and trust. The result is ineffective partnerships caused by a lack of agency—real or perceived—that erodes the grantee partner's trust in the working relationship with both the consultant and the funding agency itself because the funder selected the consultant. A one-size-fits-all approach of prepackaged "best practices" modeled after technical assistance implemented mostly with White-led organizations—with little grounding in Black communities, culture, and needs—often falls flat.

Leaders reported that consultants who do not understand or make the effort to learn about the unique aspirations of the grantee organization end up providing guidance, tools, processes, or products that are a poor fit and thus are unlikely to work.

I know we're off to a bad start when a consultant asks a bunch of questions but then just pulls out some plan they already made or published some toolkit about anyway. I know it means I'm about to get some general thing that hasn't been designed for or tested on the kind of work we do in a community like ours. It usually happens when it's a big national firm that the funder is in love with. I'd rather not have any technical assistance at all than waste time with this. —Nonprofit leader

Conversely, some nonprofit leaders do not have the bandwidth or the need for an extended consultant engagement and instead simply want quick access to straightforward tools, templates, or guidelines—or even one-time temporary help getting a specific task completed.

I don't want to go through this long process. I have too much work to do with not enough staff. Right now, I just need it to be okay to have a consultant who comes in to facilitate one retreat for me so our annual planning is a little easier on me. —Nonprofit leader

Additionally, the nonprofit might feel obligated to continue to work with the consultant to maintain funding, even if the pairing is a mismatch. In this situation, the consultant's work often lacks staying power after the contract ends, which is wasteful of all parties' time, expertise, financial resources, and energy.

3. **Assumptions made by funders or consultants as to what a nonprofit needs at a particular point in time can be false and do harm.** Often, the nonprofit does not want or need a consultant. The triangle can automatically feel broken when a funder requires that a consultant be involved based on the funder's ideas about the nonprofit's priorities or capacity gaps.

A funder [gave] me money to pay for a consultant to build an evaluation framework at a time when we were facing a cash flow gap and had just lost two out of our four case workers. I was like, "You want me to spend my time and energy on an evaluation framework now?" I was telling them that's not what I needed, but they had decided that was the kind of support they were offering, so it was that or nothing. It was their priority, not ours. —Nonprofit leader

Nonprofit leaders report that these directives from funders cause damage because this type of external diagnosis of needs often is based on limited knowledge of the organization's workings, goals, and challenges. Top-down directives also bypass the leadership, expertise, and agency of the nonprofit leader, whose judgment is trumped by the choices of the funder, consultant, or both.

I would love to see the philanthropic community switch the model from us pursuing them to them pursuing us. Instead of waiting and seeing who writes grants, I'd love to see the funder switch the model. So, they go check out all these organizations, and they essentially sponsor them if you're doing a good enough job. That way, who gets funding isn't necessarily who can write the best…. It's literally based on the impact that the organization is having in the designated area. —Nonprofit leader

Additionally, nonprofit leaders expressed concern about how their choices about if, when, and in what ways to engage with consultants would be interpreted by funders. They worried that funders might interpret their prioritization as a lack of desire, interest, or wherewithal.

We need funders and consultants to understand that work with the consultant has to fit around all that we do to meet the needs of our community. We're already maxed out and can't stop doing what we do for the community to build out ourselves, even though we know it would have a long-term benefit. —Nonprofit leader

4. **Lack of capacity-building support and professional development due to budget and time constraints.** Capacity building encompasses staffing or other infrastructure for the organization to meet the needs of the community it serves. Unless an organization is of a certain size (which indicates adequate staffing) or has a robust budget, professional consulting support can be viewed as an impossibility—even though smaller or earlier-stage organizations usually have a greater need for this type of assistance. Time is a major obstacle in that leadership and staff in small organizations often cannot take time away from the organization because there are too few people to handle the workload.

Brenda Sharpe, President and Chief Executive Officer of REACH, says, "I think there needs to be some reexamining of financial measures of accountability that allow for grantee partners at community-based organizations that don't have that infrastructure in place yet. They might not be able to get the resources to build that structure or capacity at the same time they're being funded to do the work that they're doing."

Grantee partners emphasized that being responsive to community needs was their priority and, as such, sometimes capacity-building work was necessarily de-emphasized or paused altogether.

This is a choice we sometimes have to make. And we don't have the resources or the time or the bandwidth to carry on with our mission-related work and do capacity building at the same time. —Nonprofit leader

This capacity deficit cannot be fixed simply by making a consultant available. In some instances, technical assistance and consulting support need to come after adequate funding of staff positions and basic infrastructure in a young organization. Therefore, the type of consultant support and timing of that support matter.

Sometimes funders make the wrong assumptions about what's possible. ... So if a consultant is positioned as [a resource for] growing our capacity, but our staff are already completely maxed out, it sets us up to be seen as failing in capacity building. —Nonprofit leader

5. **Lack of candid and realistic conversations about power, risk, accountability, and agreements.** Trust between consultants and nonprofits is necessary for a successful working relationship because a basis of trust enables candor about aspirations, challenges, and the realities of the work. Without this candor, consultants cannot fully develop solutions that fit the context, aims, and conditions of the nonprofit.

Funders, consultants, and nonprofit leaders need to be able to have honest conversations about whether organizational capacity is best served by a consultant relationship or by core funding, with foundations and consultants checking their assumptions about what additional work the nonprofit leader and team can take on. —Nonprofit leader

Additionally, many of the nonprofit leaders described experiencing most consultants or technical assistance providers as "extensions" or representatives of the funding agency, and that the grantee partners never felt certain about whose perspective or interests the consultant was serving. Lack of transparency and candor about the motivations and interests of consultants, as well as the expectations of the funder, routinely interfere with building and sustaining a healthy working relationship.

We need to reorient the framing and tone of the relationship so that the consultant is really in service of helping make our vision happen, as opposed to working in service of making the foundations comfortable with our capacity. —Nonprofit leader

Most respondents reported that before interacting with REACH, they had never had a consultant or a funder who was candid about what kinds of information the consultant would be asked to share about the nonprofit and with whom, or how the funder would make judgments about continuing to support the nonprofit.

6. **An imbalance in power** results when funders or consultants have disproportionate power to determine the form, focus, and intensity of support a nonprofit receives, and that support does not necessarily match the aspirations, needs, culture, and context of a Black-led, Black-serving organization. The resulting mismatch can be perceived as disrespectful of a Black leader's time, wisdom, leadership, and community—and destabilizing for the organization.

As a step toward removing power dynamics and fostering trust, grantee partners need to have input into the priorities, direction, and growth of their organization (e.g., via collaborative grant development). Relatedly, enabling nonprofit leaders to have more power over the form and focus of their consulting and technical assistance engagements will ensure the consulting support better fits the organization's aspirations, needs, and current realities.

Listening to REACH core consultants
An external evaluation expert conducted interviews with REACH core consultants to gather their perspectives on implementing the triangle framework. These interviews surfaced gaps and obstacles the consultants observed in the process of providing technical assistance support to several REACH-funded grantee partners. Common themes were:

1. **Lack of plan and budget for time spent building relationships and trust,** which are necessary components and not "nice-to-haves" in the consultant–grantee partner working relationship.

Relationship building and getting a deep understanding of the nonprofit and their needs [is valuable]. Most funders don't provide enough support to do the work in the way I know is most likely to get results. It's like they treat the time for building a deep understanding as "optional." —Core consultant

The REACH approach works better because I had a bank of hours that we could draw from in whatever way the nonprofit needed. I knew I needed to spend a good bit getting to know them, and I could do that because REACH isn't looking over my shoulder to tell me how the hours should be allocated. —Core consultant

2. **Limited available staff time** at some nonprofits (because of chronic underfunding), which negatively impacts availability to engage well with consultants.

3. **Lack of clearly stated agreements about confidentiality, accountability, and reporting.** Consultants reported struggling to make and maintain clear agreements about confidentiality and lines of accountability within the triangle. Consultants do not always trust that the funding agency will interpret information about the capacity of the nonprofit appropriately. Consultants worried about being put in the position of serving as the eyes and ears of the funder, perhaps influencing decisions about whether or not a nonprofit should receive funding in the future.

At the end of the day, who am I accountable to, especially when my contract is with the funder? To do my work well, I need to be a trusted confidante for the nonprofit to really understand what's challenging for them. There are a lot of times I've been put in the position of "telling on" a nonprofit that's not doing so well on their capacity goals. As soon as a nonprofit recognizes that I'm asked to report back, that trust is destroyed. —Core consultant

4. **Nonprofits sometimes do not want sustained support.** In these instances, the nonprofit needs a consultant who understands the short-term nature of the request. Although the unpredictability in hours can be challenging—especially if a consultant is working with more than one nonprofit at a time—consultants need to allow for some variability in their hours during their engagement with a nonprofit. This inconvenience to the core consultant is somewhat offset by having REACH as the single paying client, so that the occasional short-term engagement is part of an overall mix that includes more extensive engagements with the other participating nonprofits. Flexibility is key, with funders and consultants following the expressed desires of the grantee partners.

Two of the nonprofits I worked with just wanted me to hand over some resources and straightforward guidance they could implement. They didn't have time for or interest in a deeper,

more engaged relationship. I don't know if this means they didn't need it or simply didn't have time, but I suppose if I'm really listening … and that's what they want, I should also trust that decision. —Core consultant

5. **Limitations of a one-size-fits all or standardized approach in business models and the limited ways in which funders support consultants' work stymie tailored approaches.**

I've had funders who want me to shave time off my technical assistance budget, or who will only provide the nonprofit with a very small budget to hire me, to keep the costs low. And then guess what's the first to go? —Core consultant

IV. REPAIRING THE BROKEN TRIANGLE

Before repair can take place, acknowledgment of past harms is helpful.

Acknowledgment is an underappreciated component of what repair actually is and means, but in the research, it's the most important component, the most reparative in a way. Imagine an argument between you and somebody you care about. When they acknowledge your perspective…that is the thing that actually creates more connection and enables repair. —Nonprofit Leader

The focused conversations we had over several years with Black nonprofit leaders and REACH core consultants were instructive as to what makes the philanthropy–grantee partner relationship strong. Their firsthand experience informed recommendations to address ongoing issues in philanthropy. In response, REACH:

- Decreased the administrative burden on community-based organizations with limited staff by shifting the grant application process to **simplified** forms and **shorter reports**.
- Launched the **Rapid REACH Equity Fund**, which provides unrestricted dollars with minimal requirements to aligned organizations that serve highly vulnerable populations. The fund's goal is to **reduce the turnaround time in awarding a grant** (ideal for urgent or unexpected needs such as technology, training, public health- or pandemic-related events).

REACH selected core consultants for specific expertise in five areas that the nonprofit leaders had identified as the highest priority in terms of their organization's unmet needs: grant readiness and writing, fund development, strategic planning/program development, marketing and communications, and finance and accounting.
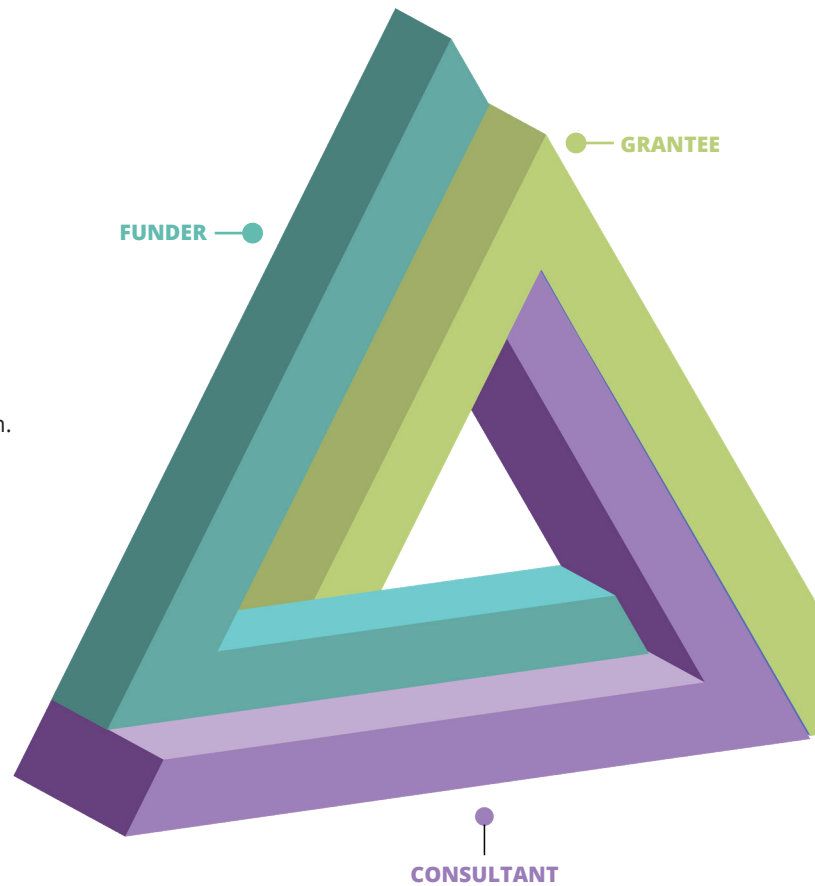
Core consultants are key to a balanced triangle

We found the core consultant to be key to a strong, balanced triangle. By linking the grantee organization with the funder, core consultants are a direct way to foster reparative philanthropy. Furthermore, culturally matched technical assistance and consulting support are essential components for establishing a stable triangle and achieving shared project success. Consultants, who function as both strategists and doers, possess expertise to address challenges related to:

- Lack of capacity to meet staffing, professional development, or infrastructure needs.
- Alignment, accountability, agreement, and mutual contribution.
- Negotiation of the relationship when a grantee partner does not want to work with a consultant.
- Power imbalances and building trust across all three sides of the triangle.

"We believe that the key component for project success is core consultants who are local and culturally matched. These consultants, whose time is paid for by the funder, function as a bridge between philanthropy and nonprofits to foster trust, strong relationships, and accountability." —REACH

Larger changes by philanthropy

Regardless of specific needs, philanthropy needs to undergo an important shift (Table 2) from short-term and discretionary pools of funding.

FUNDER

GRANTEE

CONSULTANT

TABLE 2: Shifts in philanthropic funding approach		
Traditional Approach	**Revised Approach**	**Outcome**
Short-term funding	Longer-term financial and technical support	Stability, investment in capacity building, reduced turnover of Black leaders and staff
Top-down approach with philanthropy setting funding priorities	Connection to community so that needs are identified by the community and by the community-based organizations	Prioritized needs that align with community needs
Formal requirements for grant funding	Flexible approach with fewer requirements	Decreased administrative burden for smaller grassroots organizations, fewer barriers to applying for funding and making connections with philanthropy, independent of funding outcome/success
Long turnaround from grant request to funding decision	Shorter turnaround for funding decisions (e.g., Rapid REACH grant funding strategy)	Decreased barriers and administrative burden to obtain funding

Repairing a broken triangle involves an **active process** by funders that includes **implementing** structures that provide space and time for discussions with grantee partners and consultants to foster a true sense of partnership. **Building trust** is essential to facilitate open communication so issues can be discussed freely and constructively as they arise— and the establishment of trust is especially crucial if the consultant–grantee partner pairing is not working well or has encountered challenges or disagreements. By repairing the triangle, power and responsibility are equalized, thereby creating a resilient structure that can withstand disruptions, changes, and other destabilizing factors.

Carla Gibson, Vice President of Programs at REACH, adds, "First and foremost, you have to acknowledge the historical systemic issues that have created obstacles for Black-led, Black-serving organizations to attain funding and support. From my perspective, what's missing from a lot of trust-based philanthropy is the reparative practice of stepping back and assessing where the issues stem from and how we, as funders, can adjust how we operate and make corrections to change the limiting criteria for funding within our realm of power and influence."

Continual improvements at REACH

After embarking on a multiyear journey of listening to Black nonprofit leaders' lived experiences with philanthropy and gaining insights from our core consultants who generously shared their experiences and perspectives, we believe that the **key component for project success is core consultants who are local and culturally matched.** These consultants, whose time is paid for by the funder, function as a bridge between philanthropy and community-based organizations to foster trust, strong relationships, and accountability.

Feedback from leaders of grantee organizations and core consultants continues to inform REACH's funding processes as we reshape our philanthropic approach from the ground up. Insights gleaned from this listening project continue to shape REACH's engagement and grantmaking with the Black community and beyond. For Black-led, Black-serving organizations and the communities they serve, **flipping the paradigm** means philanthropy needs to abandon the onerous funder-dictated requirements and top-down decrees of what grantee partners must do. Changes implemented by REACH include **multiyear unrestricted funding; simplified and less frequent reporting**; and a **commitment to building relationships based on transparency, dialogue, and mutual learning.**

V. BROAD IMPLICATIONS FOR A REPARATIVE PHILANTHROPIC APPROACH

In this paper, we explore the concept of repairing the broken triangle of philanthropy by highlighting the need for equal relationships among funders, consultants, and grantee partners. As grantmakers, we aim to confront how our sector has contributed to systemic inequities to influence how funding and other necessary resources are distributed. **Although our efforts focused on Black-led and Black-serving community-based organizations, our findings and revised approaches are applicable to philanthropic interactions with any marginalized community and can inform equity in racial relationships with regard to philanthropic practices everywhere.**

We believe that **core consultants** are the key to a stable triangle, as they are a natural liaison between the funder and the grantee partner. Technical support as provided by core consultants can meet the needs that the grantee partner identifies as a priority, such as daily administrative support or focused strategic planning. In addition to providing core consultants, philanthropy can help smaller organizations by making longer-term investments in infrastructure.

Capacity-building grants, while not flashy, can position an organization for success and give leaders time and budget to pursue professional development for themselves or their staff. **Clear agreements and accountability** are also important and lead to all sides feeling mutually empowered and engaged. We suggest that **funders adopt a more flexible approach** to grantmaking that can be tailored to the needs of each organization. In this responsive approach, the funder is a partner who listens to what the organization prioritizes as its top needs.

You know what it feels like when someone respects you. And you know how you show up when you really respect someone else. You ask their advice and listen to their perspective. They ask you for your advice, and they listen to your perspective. And you are working together. That's very different than someone who always gives advice and someone who always only receives advice. So maybe the first thing I would say is that we have to start having conversations with each other where we talk together about what we know about how to solve that problem, and what we can each bring. —Nonprofit leader

Through the even distribution of responsibilities and decision-making power among philanthropic funders, grantee partners, and consultants, a stable triangle is formed that enhances effective collaboration, resiliency to change and challenges, and progress toward shared goals. With this reflective paper, REACH encourages other philanthropic organizations to incorporate the concept of repairing the broken triangle in their grantmaking processes to support community-based philanthropy at the local level and promote social change on a wider scale.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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