

One thing I want people in philanthropy to know is that I didn't wake up one day and decide that I wanted to be an executive director. It was a response that happened as a direct result of the conditions in my community.

Lessons on Being Bold:

A conversation with 2018 Fellow

Bré Campbell

This wasn't my first experience in grantmaking. In the past when I've been asked to decide on grants for other funders, I've always felt like the odd person out, as the only trans person, the only black trans person, the only person living with HIV. So when I joined TJFP's grantmaking team, it was refreshing to know I didn't have to battle with cis people or educate people about what it is to be trans or what's at stake.

I was struggling with coming into this space, understanding firsthand the harm this administration is causing our communities, especially in the South and in rural areas, but I said

yes to being on the panel because I wanted to see what work was going on around the country. Reviewing the 216 grant applications was a really great way for me to learn from our communities about what's working, what's not working, and what people are doing differently. Our people have been hit really hard, so it was good to see that people are finding a multitude of ways to fight back and support each other.



During our weekend-long grantmaking meeting, there were disagreements around our ideas about the work—but not around our ideas of who we are as people. In some funding spaces that are not trans centered, cis people shift the work and attempt to shape or define what's important for trans communities. Because TJFP's process is trans-led, that didn't happen, and instead we were able to dive



TKO Society, Selma, AL, 2018 TJFP Grantee

into deeper conversations about how much money we wanted to give away, why we gave it to the groups, and what it means not only for the grantees that we're funding, but also considering the larger collective across the country.

Sharing space with the other grantmaking fellows and hearing from people from rural Montana to communities in Hawaii helped to open my mind about how differently the work looks for people in different areas. Sometimes when you're on the ground, it is easy to lose that perspective, and instead think, "This is what's working for me and my girls in Detroit, so it should work for everyone, right?"

But, no, it doesn't always work like that. So when an application came in from a rural part of the country, it was important to hear from someone from that community. These conversations really helped me be more strategic and forward-thinking about who we were supporting and funding.

We did have some really challenging, and sometimes uncomfortable conversations around what we should support while trying

to understand each other's rationale around decision-making. And there were moments when I was like, "Ooh, this is really heavy..." but overall it was a good thing, and we were still able to leave the grantmaking space feeling whole.

People don't understand that we're expected to make magic and change the world with small amounts of money.

Lessons for Philanthropy

I want philanthropy to be bold. By being bold, what I mean is taking chances and giving smaller grassroots organizations the opportunities to actually grow. I strongly dislike seeing funders put out requests for proposals (RFPs) that could really change the conditions for a lot of community members—but with some kind of barrier or limitation. For example, often you

have to have a certain budget or you have to be fiscally sponsored or a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

A lot of grassroots organizations that have really great programs and politics cycle through grants of \$10,000, \$20,000, or \$50,000 to do really revolutionary work. As a grassroots organizer, I want people in philanthropy to know that I didn't wake up one day and decide that I wanted to be an executive director. It was a response that happened as a direct result of the conditions in my community. A lot of us are pulled into these positions and expected to know how to run organizations without getting any real type of leadership development and support.

Anybody who is interested in trans justice also has to realize that there's a lot more at stake for trans leaders. People don't understand that we're expected to make magic and change the world with small amounts of money. That often means people don't get paid or are paying for things out of their own pockets.

If I could go back in time as the executive director of my organization and do things

differently, I'd like to have had a clearer understanding of what philanthropy is, the role of a funder, and what foundations can or can't do.

I hear a lot of funders talk about building power, and it's funny because a lot of them are doing the exact opposite. They would rather fund an organization that has a million dollar-plus budget with full staff and all of the things, so they can get their deliverables back. It's safer, right? When I think about building power, it looks like giving funding directly to the most marginalized and the most stretched-thin organizations and communities.

When I Think of Trans Justice

Trans justice to me would mean taking our power back. Changing the records and history books to talk about queer and trans people; how we've always been here, contributing to society. Even though people try to deny and kill us in every way shape and form, we're still resilient.

I think that would be justice: to be able to do and say as I please.



Center for Artistic Revolution, Little Rock, AR, 2018 TJFP Grantee