

From Trust Based Philanthropy to Trust Based Fundraising: How Nonprofit Leaders of Color are Disrupting Their Donor Programs Towards Healing, Equity and Financial Sustainability

By: Alicia DeLia

As an international fundraiser and Investor relations pro-- I've spent the last two decades working with nonprofits leaders, funders and impact investors raising capital for exceptional projects worldwide. Over the years a common theme emerged amongst the social leaders I worked with-- and that was the fact that keeping up with the sometimes endless conveyor belt of sourcing, selling and stewarding funders and investors became an increasingly surmountable obstacle towards programmatic excellence. The labor involved in managing relationships began to deplete and demoralize the nonprofit leaders and teams I worked with--particularly leaders of color.

As the Director of Fundraising and Investor Relations at [RUNWAY](#), I began using my role to advocate for change within foundations, DAF funds and impact investment firms. I created a Funders Manifesto that would guide our nonprofits' trust based fundraising work. I urged wealth holders to begin to consider minimizing administrative requirements, progress reports, and onerous reporting that didn't enhance our work. I requested these practices be replaced with deeper collaboration, trust and relationship. We sometimes walked away from capital that would take us away from our main goal of serving entrepreneurs of color--and we instead deepened relationships with funders who wanted this pathway for themselves as well. We were able to raise over \$10 million dollars in operating support in "right relationship" in just over a few years and are on the precipice of launching a national fund for entrepreneurs also guided by right relationship fundraising. This success has reinspired me towards what's possible when fundraisers and nonprofit are intentional about their fundraising--and build financing relationships that are truly in service to their financial sustainability and work.

While much has been written about the wave of philanthropists, donors and impact investors ceding control and activating change on the funder side--such as Mackenzie Scott who is using trust based philanthropy as her north star-- penning her recently announced foundation, [Yield Giving](#) as one created to "give up control" of her financial fortune-- less is known about what it looks like on the nonprofit side--to build a fundraising program in which trust is at the center. Countless fundraisers and social impact leaders of color including myself, have led organizations and movements which has centered our power as change agents to shift the culture within our own organizations away from "fundraising at any cost" to fundraising as a pathway towards not just programmatic excellence, but towards team wellness, agency and financial empowerment. Along the way we are also deeply influencing our funder and investor communities. My hope is that other nonprofit leaders and fundraisers follow suit and activate a movement of "trust based fundraising" that is driven from the inside of their organizations and becomes part of the fabric of their organizational culture.

As a fundraiser, moving away from transactional relationships towards transformational

ones takes intentionality, planning and boundary setting. It also takes the willingness of philanthropic funders who are activated and who have addressed institutional policies within their own organizations. Deeply mission aligned foundations such as [Kataly Foundation](#) have put trust based philanthropy and restorative investing front and center within their spend-down capital practices. Funders such as [Battery Powered](#) are activating their role as philanthropic intermediaries to call on members to move into greater trust within their giving circles. Overall these funders, and others, are granting more latitude and patience and moving towards a more human and collaborative investing practice that begins to undo some of the harm caused by unequal terms and heavily attached strings. They are stepping into real and authentic relationships with social leaders of color and women- unobstructed by the pretense of perfection- in which obstacles or failures experienced by leaders of color can be more freely discussed as a normal part of creating social value that matches the complex, evolving needs of their communities, clients and beneficiaries. They are allowing social leaders to lead.

I believe trust based fundraising is the future of fundraising and a model that is absolutely essential for leaders of color. This work has shown me what it can look like to break down barriers with funders and co-create exciting, innovative and invigorating partnerships together in which leaders of color are not made to feel as if they need to over prove their worthiness. Trust based fundraising has shown me what a disruptive, bold and restorative journey towards healing people, planet and community can look like through the lens of fundraising.

There is undoubtedly more work to do so that more institutional funders and investors begin to move with deeper trust for their grantees and so that these practices- which are mostly present within the US social enterprise sector- take hold in the Global South. But I would be amiss to not honor this moment and my journey through these budding transformations which have made me feel re-inspired, re-committed and re-nourished towards the possibility of impact investing and philanthropy truly living up to the boldest version of itself.

Alicia DeLia is CEO and Founder of Greater Good Giving, a social impact advisory firm that works with social enterprises to finance their operations impactfully, sustainably and in right relationship- while inspiring impact investors to show up for their portfolios as friends and family would. She is also Director of Business and Investor Relations at RUNWAY- a financial innovation firm capitalizing Black businesses nationwide. Her lens as a fundraiser, economist and small business owner informs her work advocating and fundraising for underrepresented social enterprise leaders in the US, Latin America and Africa to attract the capital they need to create, launch and scale their businesses and impact..