What has been your experience navigating philanthropy as a Black person?

“It has felt tiring. We often have to work hard to put on our cheeriest, most outgoing, most welcoming versions of ourselves. And when we want to raise issues of equity, it feels lonely to push an organization by yourself as a person of color.”

“An emotional roller coaster that makes me question my value in terms of education, professional experience, lived experience, and knowledge, skills, and abilities.”

“The types of people who are leaders in the field either 1. do not truly understand the people they wish to serve and their needs, 2. can never build the trust or connections to the people they wish to serve, and therefore have a program that won’t ever be utilized, or 3. are unwilling to trust that those they seek to serve are able and want to help themselves.”

“I often carry the torch and fight for the funding for outstanding Black run initiatives.”

“Because I’m typically the only Black person in the room, I’m often treated as the ‘Black stamp of approval’ on issues that might be racially sensitive or related to race, equity, and inclusion issues.”

“I was fortunate to have a mentor who cared deeply about my success, but many of my Black female peers have not had this luxury, and have left because of cultural insensitivities and neglect – choosing not to accommodate Black workers in situations where white counterparts are routinely accommodated.”

“If a Black woman speaks up, she might be pegged as opinionated. If a white person speaks up, they might simply be intelligent.”
“Being in the room is not inclusion. Inclusion is being in the room and having a say in things.”

“There is an expectation that I will forgive and openly assist with my white peers’ racial equity journey; that I will manage being triggered in solitude so as to not disrupt or make others uncomfortable. It’s been devastating.”

“It’s been extremely difficult, especially in terms of pay equity and professional growth opportunity. My white colleague is currently receiving all the growth opportunities while I’m given the majority of administrative work. I feel very much like ‘the help’ in my current position.”

“I have felt invisible, not only because I’ve been the minority in the space, but because of the ‘blindness’ of the majority to appreciate and accept my value.”

“Surreal. ‘Othering’ is a term I cling to as it best describes how people of means and wealth often make the issue or cause they support about something ‘over there.’”

“There should be an increase in safe opportunities to communicate more frankly and openly about philanthropy-related issues that affect Black people, to the whole group, to leadership, and to the sector.”

“I’ve been painted as the angry Black person and damn near lost my job for voicing my thoughts, holding folks accountable, and advocating for communities who have been left out of our generous grantmaking.”

“I’ve often felt as if I spoke an entirely different language than my teammates.”
What feedback would you give your senior leaders or board about how to promote the inclusion of Black voices in philanthropy?

“We’ll need to find a way to recruit a much more broad and diverse staff, equal to the attempts and efforts made on the programmatic side to do the same.”

“If you truly care about certain ‘voices,’ you must speak up and ask, then be prepared to act on the feedback received. Inclusion is not meant to be easy, but the payoff is always worth the effort.”

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“It’s not enough to just have a diverse staff, adding bodies and checking boxes. Allowing and bringing individuals of color to the decision-making table is what makes a difference.”

“Be intentional about promoting hard-working people of color who have proven themselves time and time again. Have a progression plan in place and offer professional development opportunities to bridge cultural divides. Be open to new and different ideas, even if they challenge the status quo or make you personally uncomfortable. That discomfort is where your impact lives.”

“We’ll need to find a way to recruit a much more broad and diverse staff, equal to the attempts and efforts made on the programmatic side to do the same.”

“Black voices and people-of-color voices should not always be assumed to be the same thing. All Black voices are not monolithic.”

“Promote from within and encourage Black staff to do more than administrative jobs.”

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What feedback would you give your senior leaders or board about creating a supportive organizational culture?

“As a Black professional, I bear an unspoken burden of cultural assimilation performances, code-switching, tongue-biting, and self-protection that has to be performed daily — all in addition to the kinds of carefulness we all must be mindful of in our workplace, regardless of race.”

“Change the color of boards and senior leaders.”

“Senior leaders and trustees need to ask probing questions to assess what’s working well about organizational culture and what needs improvement. In far too many cases, there is a clear line of separation between staff and trustees, with senior leaders too often serving as an intermediary between the two.”

“Too much work is happening in the ‘head’ space and not the ‘heart’ space – listen, pay attention, move beyond diversity, and take a risk and be authentically inclusive!”

“Invest resources in grassroots efforts. Provide resources so marginalized communities can create their own systems of philanthropy, education, and finances.”

“Culture will propel your organization forward or stifle it. Commitments to racial equity and DEI have to be supported from the board and senior leaders or it will never institutionalize.”