MODERATING CONTRADICTIONS OF FEMINIST PHILANTHROPY
Women's Community Organizations and the Boston Women's Fund, 1995 to 2000

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Philanthropy is typically hierarchically constructed with an imbalance of power between funders and grantees. While this seems inherent in philanthropic relationships where funders inevitably control resources that grantees need, some women's funds have sought to construct less hierarchical and thus more feminist relationships with the organizations they support. Based on many years of insider access to a local women's fund, this article describes and explains the organization's efforts to develop interactive dialogues with its grantees, which led to a change in grants guidelines that were more inclusive of women's methods of community organizing. A small survey of women's community groups, done as background to this research, provides data on challenges and obstacles these groups face when seeking monies to support their work. Some attention is given to implications for general theories of organizations, for funder-grantee dialogues leading to increased accountability in philanthropy, and for support of women's community organizations.

Keywords: *philanthropy; charitable organizations; community organizations; organizations; organizational change; women's organizations*

This article is a case study of a local women's fund's efforts to develop an interactive dialogue with the women's community social change organizations it supports. By engaging grantees in interactive dialogues that challenge or at least moderate the power imbalance between funders and grantees that seems inherent in philanthropic relationships, this women's foundation constructs an alternative and more feminist philanthropic practice.

The literature on philanthropy and nonprofits has long discussed the typically asymmetrical, nonreciprocal, and therefore nonfeminist relationship where grant-

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ees seek support from funders who have largely unmitigated power to give or withhold it. Grantee organizations typically have little say in the criteria funders use for grants or in who receives grants and for what purpose (Colwell 1993; Jenkins and Eckert 1986; Odendahl 1990; Roelofs 2003). Some attention has been given to potential negative effects of this kind of funding relationship on women's activist organizations, such as formalization of organizational structures and co-optation of social change goals (Alter 1998; Bordt 1997; Gelb 1995, 129; Markowitz and Tice 2002; Matthews 1995; Reinelt 1994). While research on feminist funding organizations is almost nonexistent, a few researchers have explored women's foundations, other progressive funding organizations, and how they address this power imbalance by bringing grantees into grant decisions and by seeking out small as well as large contributions in an effort to democratize the funding base and blur the stratified divisions between those who give money and those who seek it (Brilliant 2000; Murningham 1990; Odendahl 1990; Ostrander 1995, 1997, 1999; Silver 1997). While such methods are important, the power of funders to control needed resources seems endemic to philanthropy. It is in this sense that the term "feminist philanthropy" seems contradictory and perhaps even oxymoronic.

While always problematic for organizations that seek grants, the hierarchical construction of philanthropy is also problematic for women's funding organizations that provide grants since—like many other feminist organizations—one of their major aims has historically been to share power and build relationships and structures that challenge hierarchy (Alter 1998; Ferguson 1984; Marx Ferree and Yancey Martin 1995; Fried 1994; Ianello 1992; Thomas 1999; Yancey Martin 1990). The question that drives my research is, How and why have women's funding organizations developed concrete practices to alter (or at least moderate) the hierarchical (and thus nonfeminist) nature of philanthropic relationships between funder and grantee?

My account of the Boston Women's Fund (BWF) describes and explains one such practice. I focus on a five-year period between 1995 and 2000 in which BWF initially was faced with increasing numbers of grant proposals that did not meet their grants criteria. Prodded by the results of a consultants' report based on conversations with grantees, BWF chose to deal with this situation by initiating an interactive dialogue with grantees, which led to revising its grants criteria and creating new programming. In choosing this path, people at BWF, as I will show, rejected a variety of approaches used by more mainstream funding organizations.

This case study adds to an understanding of the innovative forms and practices that women's organizations have developed. While my specific theoretical interest is in how feminist philanthropic organizations deal with the contradictions of operating in an organizational context that seems inherently nonfeminist, my argument is consistent with that of other feminist researchers who claim that for a variety of reasons, women's organizations seem more able to resist a tendency toward isomorphic homogeneity that neoinstitutionalist theorists emphasize (Powell and Dimaggio 1991). Women's organizations, instead, often create and maintain a variety of organizational forms and practices (Alter 1998; Bordt 1997; Marx Ferree and

Yancey Martin 1995; Fried 1994; Ianello 1992; Minkoff 2002a, 2002b; Thomas 1999; Yancey Martin 1990).

Following a discussion of methodology, I very briefly describe the funding situation for women's and girls' organizations and the national women's funding movement as context for my case study. I then describe BWF along with six of its grantee groups. To most clearly delineate BWF's mission, I include three grantee organizations that have consistently received support and three who have been denied. Next, I present data from a small mail survey of the fund's grantee organizations as a way to show the importance of the work of philanthropic organizations like BWF by describing some of the challenges women's grassroots community organizations face as they seek funding. In the key section of this article, I then lay out an account that shows how and why BWF engaged in interactive dialogue with its grantees and then implemented what grantees suggested. This process, I argue, challenges and moderates the commonly constructed hierarchical relationship between funder and grantee. In conclusion, I discuss some general implications of this feminist philanthropic practice of relational dialogue for philanthropy in general and women's organizations in particular.

METHOD

Data for this study include a review of BWF documents from 1995 to 2000, especially internal documents often not available to researchers (meeting agendas, minutes, internal memos, grant reports, and so on) plus all grant proposals (both approved and denied) submitted during these years. My unusual degree of access and insider knowledge derives from my more than 15-year involvement at BWF that allowed—indeed necessitated—my participation in numerous meetings and informal conversations with staff, volunteer board, committee members, and sometimes grantees. During the entire period of this research, I was a fully engaged member of this organization's board of directors, ending my term in 2002. During the past 15 years, I have served (and continue to serve) on various committees dealing with grants, program, strategic planning, retreat planning, and fund-raising.

Particularly among feminists, being an active participant (insider) in an organization while carrying out research on that organization is a not uncommon practice (Gottfried 1996; Naples 1996a; Zavella 1993), and feminist ethnographic literature has explored the advantages and challenges of conducting research as an insider and/or outsider (Naples 1996a; Zavella 1993).

While others have discussed doing research "from within" without a specific research agenda (Naples 1996b, 161), I did not initially set out to do research at BWF at all. Once I decided to study BWF and began to talk more formally with people there about this possibility, I could not (and did not want to) shift from being an engaged insider participant with designated roles and responsibilities to a detached neutral silent and unengaged objective outsider researcher. Where other field researchers might choose to express a point of view on issues being considered by

"subjects" as a way to be seen by them as part of the group to establish and maintain relationships (Reinharz 1997, 15), for me, expressing an opinion was necessitated by my obligations as board member and committee member. I had, then, to both do research and be an engaged participant—to be both insider and outsider, both subject and object in a way that affirms that these "are not fixed or static positions [but] rather shifting and permeable social locations" (Naples 1996a, 84).

My decision to write about the fund occurred in a very gradual way. I cannot pinpoint exactly when or why it occurred, but it had to do with a growing realization of the knowledge that could come from it, the unusual access I had, a rising scholarly interest in nonprofits and philanthropy, and an increasing acceptance among sociologists of writing about groups of which one is a member. One clear turning point was my decision to conduct an anonymous mail survey of organizations that BWF made grants to between 1995 and 2000, which I began as part of a larger study I intended to conduct of women's community-based social change organizations. (While I reported the results of the survey to people at BWF, it was not done for them or at their request.) I asked these small women's community-based social change organizations (via closed-ended checklist questions) to rank the importance of the kinds of work they did (e.g., direct service, advocacy, grassroots organizing), tell about portions of their funding that came from various sources and rank their relative confidence level in these sources, and tell about methods of fund-raising used (e.g., personal donor visits, events, grant proposals, and so on), ranking them in order of how successful each was in bringing in money and how they appealed to potential funders, especially the relative emphasis they placed on services versus organizing, targeting women and girls versus universal services, and so forth.

I sought and obtained permission from people in positions of authority (executive director, grants director, and later the program director) to contact grantees via the mail survey and to expand the study to a then not-well-defined writing project about the organization more generally. In 1998, I circulated an early draft of this paper at the fund and have since shared other drafts with those who asked. I sent a two-page report of survey results to all 59 grantee groups, whether they returned the small survey or not, including suggestions for how my findings might be of use in fund-raising.

While seeking permissions and sharing results and drafts certainly meets (or exceeds) prevailing social science research standards, in retrospect, it seems to me a less collaborative process than one appropriate to feminist methods. I did not, for example, ask people at BWF what kinds of research issues or questions might be of interest to them, and I did not otherwise engage them in the ways that tenets of participatory action research would require (Cancian 1996). I now believe that my not taking a more collaborative, feminist research path may have been due to not wanting my role as researcher to be in the spotlight, fearing it might result in my being seen as more of an outsider in the organization. While space prohibits a deeper discussion here, it may be worthy of exploration in the future since the literature I reviewed does not have much to say about this issue.

FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' ORGANIZATIONS: BACKGROUND ON BWF AND SIX GRANTEES

Organizations run by and for women and girls receive only 6 percent of total monies given by charitable foundations in the United States. This has not changed in nearly four decades (Lawrence, Gluck and Ganguly 2001, xi). While data on the portion of philanthropic monies specifically going to women's community social change organizations like those BWF supports are hard to come by, organizations engaged in advocacy and organizing—community-based or not—receive just 1 percent of all foundation monies (Jenkins and Halcli 1999). Women began to set up their own foundations in the early 1980s in response to this paucity of grant monies, and a growing movement of some 95 women's foundations now exists in the United States and Canada (Brilliant 2000; Murningham 1990; Odendahl 1990; Women's Funding Network at http://wfnet).

BWF was created in 1984 by a multirace, multiclass group of women to generate and control money to support women-led community efforts toward social change. The funding priority is support for community-based groups run by and for women and girls organizing on their own behalf to create a society based on racial, social, and economic justice. Major constituencies are women and girls with least access to societal resources, especially low-income women, women of color, lesbians, women with disabilities, older women, and girls (BWF 2000a, 2000c).

The formalized grants process at BWF is fairly typical of other philanthropies in that organizations apply for grants by submitting written proposals that address established guidelines. Proposals are initially screened by the grants director, and decisions are made by a grants committee. In a relatively unusual practice, this committee is made up largely of local community activists similar to staff or members of the kinds of groups the fund supports. Like the interactive dialogue practice I focus on here, having community activists control grant decisions challenges the more typical hierarchical construction of philanthropy where funders alone make that decision. Among scholars like myself who have studied social change philanthropy—as well as among progressive funder organizations such as the National Network of Grant-Makers—the involvement of grantees in the decision-making process is now considered a key feature in challenging the more typical, hierarchical, "elite" nature of the philanthropic relationship that I described earlier (Odendahl 1990). Since I have devoted much of my other writing to this feature, I will not discuss it further here (Ostrander 1995, 1997, 1999).

As of 2000, BWF gave away approximately half a million dollars a year in grants ranging in size from $3,000 to $25,000. Since its founding, BWF has provided money to more than 200 local women's and girls' social justice community organizations in the Boston area (BWF 2000a). The $500,000 allocations budget for 2000—nearly half of the fund's then total operating budget of slightly more than $1 million—was an almost fivefold increase over the 1997 allocations budget of slightly more than $100,000, with a comparable rise in the maximum grant size.

(This reflects the large increase in monies raised during these years, caused by several factors beyond the scope of this article.) Lower grant levels of $3,000 are maintained, which is consistent with the fund's emphasis on funding new startup organizations with very small budgets. The cap on operating budgets for eligible grantee groups in 2000 was $200,000. In 2000, 43 percent of the fund's annual budget came from individual donations, a third from endowment, 15 percent from foundations, and the remainder from other sources. The fund is committed to building a diverse donor base and to not only relying on large contributions from wealthy women but encouraging multiple small to medium gifts.

A 16-member board of directors governs BWF; the majority are women of color. By the end of 2000, eight staff carried out the work of the organization, also with a majority of women of color. Composition of staff and board reflects the core values of the fund and the stated aim "to reflect our commitment to shared leadership, equity and cultural diversity in all aspects of our organization's operations." Other guiding principles underlying the fund's operations are the following: Change starts at the grassroots level, and systemic change is necessary to achieve social justice; power and wealth must be redistributed to attain equity and systemic change; the fight for women's rights is an integral part of a larger struggle to end oppression based on race, class, gender, age, religion, ability, or sexual orientation; and all movements must combat racism by being racially and culturally diverse in both membership and leadership if progressive change is to occur (BWF 2000b).

Three organizations typical of those receiving support from BWF are the Women Immigrants Training Project, No More Poverty, and City Women Building. (Organizations are real, but the names are fictionalized.) Based on my presence (and often participation) at grant committee meetings, discussions suggested that these three received support primarily because they have a social change agenda that addresses root causes of the issues they aim to address. Leadership in these organizations also reflects the particular constituencies that are targeted for change (e.g., low-income women when the goal is their empowerment). Being constituency led is a key factor in obtaining BWF support. The kinds of activities these three groups engage in have historically been difficult to fund from mainstream sources, which is another reason they are a priority for BWF. It is also to their credit that each of these groups raised some of their operating budgets from their own membership.

The Women Immigrants Training Project received a grant during the period of this research to train 10 immigrant women to "become part of a permanent trainer's network [for] identifying and responding effectively to workplace problems, including sexual and racial harassment . . . and exposure to hazardous chemicals." Participants were "recruited" through "extensive [community] outreach." Once recruited, it was participants themselves who planned the training and chose the "topics and skills they wanted to cover." Two other local "justice funds" had already given money to the Women Immigrants Training Project, and the organization had also raised some money from its own members and events (quotes from grant proposals).

No More Poverty obtained a grant to hire a half-time organizer and train five core leaders to "organize and educate low-income women about issues including welfare and housing rights" and advance their mission of "end[ing] poverty by bringing the voices of low-income women into the debate." At the time of this grant application, No More Poverty had more than 5,000 members. In the aftermath of the 1996 "welfare reform," they had been successful in moderating at the state level some of the worst of the national welfare changes, such as withdrawal of annual clothing allowances. Its board was composed entirely of low-income women from diverse racial backgrounds, and it had strong coalitions with other organizations. The group raised money from several local and a couple of national social justice funds, from individual donations, and a small amount from its own members.

City Women Building received a grant to support a "speak-out" aimed at members of the construction industry so they would create a more positive environment for women and teach boys and girls in local vocational schools about women in this industry. The speak-out was part of a larger strategy "to significantly increase the retention, number, and diversity of women entering and working in non-traditional blue collar occupations." City Women Building's board is a racially mixed group of local tradeswomen. Sources of funding include a union local, a small grant from the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, and a small amount from member dues.

Three other groups are typical of those turned away for grants: Moms on Their Own, Teen Girls Sports Initiative, and Teaching Women about Breast Cancer. Moms on Their Own was denied a grant to publish a monthly newsletter and run seminars for low-income single mothers on how to raise healthy children. Volunteer professionals, mainly social workers and nurses, would develop and lead the seminars and compose the organization's board of directors. The group sought to raise money through newsletter ads, corporate donations, and foundation grants. Reasons for declining to support this group included lack of a social change agenda, failure to address root causes of problems faced by low-income single mothers, lack of involvement of their constituency in planning and running the seminars and in governance of the organization, and other opportunities for mainstream funding. As I will discuss later, these were the most common main reasons for denial of a grant at BWF from 1995 to 2000.

Teen Girls Sports Initiative was turned away for a grant to offer "a physical activity program for inner-city girls to promote self-esteem, goal-setting, and the value of commitment." Through these methods, this group hoped "to lower teen pregnancy, substance abuse, drop-out, and violence," and their proposal cited research showing that girls who participated in sports were less likely to become involved in these behaviors. The organization's six volunteer staff were teachers and coaches from local schools. Funding sources included the charitable foundation of the city's leading newspaper, several corporate donors, and the local community foundation. Support from these established sources was one of several reasons BWF did not fund this initiative. Other reasons were a lack of involvement of the girls themselves—the constituency—in running and designing the program and

an absence of a social change agenda aimed at systemic change around root cause of issues such as teen violence.

Teaching Women about Breast Cancer sought support for "completion and distribution of a documentary [film] that tells of one woman's successful fight against breast cancer." The organization did not yet have a board of directors and planned "to distribute the documentary free of charge to at least 40 Boston-area health agencies that serve low-income women." They had no plan for engaging the women they sought to "serve," and they did not present a plan for raising further money (beyond coming to BWF) now that the film had been created. While certainly aimed at an important issue for women, this group was denied support for lacking a clear objective and a community base, having no apparent social change agenda, and being underdeveloped as an organization. Since BWF wants to support startup organizations that are not yet fully developed, the grants committee might have overlooked the organizational issues had their (our) other concerns been addressed.

CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN'S COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS SEEKING FUNDING: A SMALL SURVEY

In 1998 and 2000, I mailed anonymous questionnaires to all groups who received BWF funding from 1995 to 2000. Twenty-eight (nearly 50 percent) of the 59 returned the survey.

In spite of the facts that women's community nonprofit organizations often name funding as a major problem (Gelb 1995; Matthews 1995; Reinelt 1994; Whittier 1995) and difficulties in obtaining funding for women's organizations have long been acknowledged as one of the major barriers to accomplishing goals of the women's movement (Gelb 1995; Reinelt 1994; Whittier 1995), research on funding is very limited. What my data suggest about the severity of the challenges that women's community organizations experience in their efforts to obtain funding to support their work is consistent with the little other research in this area and points to the importance of the women's funds and other funders who respond to this need.

A key finding of organizations I surveyed is their perception that to maximize their chances of receiving funding, they had to emphasize direct service in contrast to advocacy and organizing and de-emphasize their targeting of women and girls. This is consistent with other research (Bordt 1997; Markowitz and Tice 2002; Reinelt 1994). While all the groups reported that advocacy and organizing were central to their work, and 11 claimed it as their most important and/or sole activity, only 4 (less than 15 percent) said they emphasized their advocacy work in appeals to funders; only 7 (less than 25 percent) emphasized organizing. While all organizations were run by and for women and girls, only 6 (less than one-quarter) emphasized this in fund-raising.

Other problems mentioned include balancing multiple sources of support, sustaining multiple programs to appeal to multiple funders with varying interests, lack of stability or dependability in funding sources, unreliability of any single method

of raising money, and lack of close relationships with funders as a source of information about grant guidelines. The balancing act in relation to multiple funding sources is suggested by the fact that most of the groups surveyed listed more than five distinctly different funding sources. Most often mentioned were individual donors and local Boston foundations, listed as providing from a fifth to a half of total support. Other sources included local corporate funders, national funding sources, or government. About a third of the groups felt confident about only two sources of money, although half expressed confidence in three or four funding sources.

The median number of different activities listed by these very small organizations (most with budgets of less than $150,000 a year) was four or five. While community organizing, self-empowerment work, or advocacy was listed as their most important activity, providing services was also mentioned by 18 groups. While one reason for so many different kinds of programs may be a strategic combining of social change work with direct service (Minkoff 2002a), these findings also suggest that the organizations are overstretched, partly because of the need to appeal to multiple funders with multiple priorities and partly due to the depth and breadth of the pressing issues they seek to address. Since the grantees I surveyed saw no single method of raising money as always reliable, multiple methods had to be in place and ongoing, including individual solicitations, grant proposals, events, direct mail, and so forth (Alexander 1998; Gronbjerg 1993). About half of the groups said they could generally rely on one or two methods to be successful. Finally, grantee responses suggested distant and noninteractive relationships with funders since only 7 grantees (about one-fourth) reported conversations with foundation staff about their grant. When asked about how they framed their appeals to funders, more than half (17) said they relied solely on written guidelines.

The grantees also made a number of suggestions for funders: Provide multiyear funding, use a common grant application, be clearer about grant guidelines, and put more emphasis on general operating support instead of only program-specific grants. Since many of these concerns are already well known among funders who talk with grantees (Scully and Harwood 1996), BWF either already had conformed or soon would conform to most of them.

CONSTRUCTING FEMINIST PHILANTHROPY: CHOOSING A PATH OF DIALOGUE WITH GRANTEES

Impetus for Change: An Unacceptable Decline in Grant Awards

In three grant cycles in 1995 and early 1996, BWF's community-based grants committee rejected nearly three-quarters of the women's community organizations submitting proposals because committee members saw them as not meeting grants criteria. While the numbers of proposals had not changed—remaining at between 60 and 70 a year—this high rejection rate was not caused by a lack of monies, since as reported earlier, monies at BWF were increasing.

In late 1996, staff and some committee members began to see a pattern: The number of grants denied for some reasons was going up while the number denied for other reasons was falling. Fewer groups were being turned down for a perceived lack of clear goals and objectives or because their operating budget was significantly above explicit BWF guidelines. This suggested that BWF was doing better at getting the word out about these two grant criteria, and grantees were doing better at attending to them.

Two reasons stood out for the 1995-1996 rapid increase in grant denials. The first reflected how BWF then defined social change organizing, which it later revised and expanded. The second reflected BWF's commitment to two principles that remain firmly established. Applicants perceived as not sufficiently social change/social justice oriented, especially not doing grassroots community organizing, rose from 20 percent of proposals denied in fall 1995, to 77 percent in spring 1997, to 71 percent in fall 1999, and applicants denied because they were not constituency controlled tripled from 12 percent in fall 1995 to 36 percent in spring 1999.

Other reasons for denial of a grant remained about the same during this period or varied with no pattern evident: Lack of racial/ethnic diversity, not focused on women and girls, not collaborating with other similar groups, and/or duplicating efforts of other groups.

The two main reasons for being denied a grant (not sufficiently social change oriented and not constituency controlled) were not new, although they were increasing. What was new was that they seemed more and more to present barriers to community organizations' success in obtaining grants. That was the situation to which BWF set out to respond.

Considering Less Feminist Alternatives, Responding to a Consultants' Report, and Choosing to Initiate Dialogue with Grantees

What actions did the fund take in the face of this situation? BWF staff and committee members initially responded by considering ways to reach out to and provide special seed monies to organizations to bring them into line with the redistributive methods of community organizing that BWF wanted most to fund. This course of action would have been more consistent with a hierarchical (and less feminist) philanthropic relationship where the funder calls the shots. Another course of action that people briefly considered was giving larger grants to a smaller number of grantees, allowing BWF to target only those small number of community groups that met its existing criteria for progressive organizing. While having advantages, this approach would have excluded what BWF later came to recognize were changing ideas about organizing among its grantee constituencies.

In another less feminist approach, staff (especially those involved with grants and programs) began to ask questions about what grantees needed in the way of training to be able to do more of the kind of community organizing work that BWF wanted most to support. Given other conversations that were going on at BWF at

about the same time, this would have led BWF down a path of providing "technical assistance"—a term used in the philanthropy world to mean any kind of training and nonmonetary support (such as grant writing) that funders give to grantees and potential grantees. While such assistance can certainly be valuable and useful to grantees, technical-assistance programs are typically defined and run by funders with little grantee input. While BWF did not entirely ignore this approach, it was not the major way BWF chose to address its concern about how to award more grants.

In April 1996, BWF wanted to make some strategic decisions about its own technical-assistance program and so hired two outside consultants who were well-known activists in the Boston women's community to conduct focus groups with a sample of grantees about their past experiences with and recommendations for BWF's technical-assistance activities. This initial focus on technical assistance can also be read as an instance of how BWF began down a more traditional path of assisting grantees in coming more into line with what BWF saw as good work—a path consistent with a more traditional philanthropic relationship where the funder alone determines the preferred course of action. What happened to change this?

In the consultants' report, it seemed clear that while grantees had some "practical, easy-to-implement recommendations for improvements in BWF's technical-assistance program"—a term all respondents in the focus groups said they disliked—what mattered more to grantees (aside from needing more money to do their work) was their relationship with BWF, especially the imbalance of power discussed here earlier. According to the consultant,

> Some important political issues surfaced with which BWF will need to grapple as it re-defines its technical assistance program. These issues revolve around money and the way it defines and distorts relationships, for example the relationship between BWF and its grantees.

When consultants reported orally to BWF's board of directors (and in my presence), they talked about focus group participants who said they wanted "partnerships" with BWF and who raised questions about funders' acting as "gatekeepers instead of allies." As stated in a December 1996 letter from BWF's board chair thanking grantees for talking with the consultants, BWF understood from this that grantees wanted "to better understand and account for the unbalanced power dynamics that exist when a funding organization provides technical assistance."

By the end of 1996, BWF's grants and program directors (and the volunteer committees they worked with) were beginning to entertain questions that took them in a different direction from their initial concern about technical assistance. Now they wanted to know, "Is what we are funding what our grantees want to be doing?" and "How can we establish better relationships with our grantees?" (my notes, December 1996 board meeting from grants director oral report). In early 1997, BWF's program committee began to reflect critically on BWF's grants criteria, asking "Who are we funding? Who do we want to fund? Are our basic [funding]

criteria still functioning?" In spring 1997, the agenda for new grants committee members' orientation read in part as follows:

> The Allocations Committee has been grappling with definitions of social change and organizing in practice. . . . BWF prefers to fund social change focusing on re-distribution of power and resources. . . . It sees social change occurring through organizing by those women and girls affected. [An alternative idea we have been considering is that] social change happens in three different tiers: organizing/re-distribution of power; advocacy/increased opportunity; and direct service. While the BWF prefers to support organizing/re-distribution of power, the Allocations Committee should also consider for funding those organizations not doing clear organizing but that recognize and are pushing toward the next level and are directed by the people most affected.

This statement reflects the beginning of BWF's shift from a redistributive definition of community organizing to one that is more inclusive. As I discuss below, this shift was consistent with changing methods of organizing more generally.

In late 1997 and early 1998, the fund's program director held informal conversations with grantees and other local organizers about "the need to re-visit [the fund's] vision for social justice . . . to come together, analyze how social, economic, and political conditions have changed since the 1960's and how the new political climate impacts our work." Included in the goals for these funder-grantee dialogues was BWF's desire to "identify what women organizers need to sustain themselves and each other" (quotes from March 1998 letter from BWF program director to grantees asking to meet with her in "9 dialogues for action").

As a result of these dialogues, staff and grants committee members concluded (1) that the fund's written criteria for grant-making priorities were too exclusionary in their definitions of organizing, were not stated clearly enough, and needed to be revised and sharpened; and (2) that some potential grantees were turning to more service-oriented activities in place of (or in addition to) social justice organizing and needed more and different kinds of peer support—not only money—to be able to do organizing. Grantees were having a harder time doing organizing in part because of a by-now-implemented 1996 federal welfare reform (aided in Massachusetts by a sympathetic Republican governor) that hit one of the fund's main constituencies (low-income women) very hard. Low-income women were left increasingly in need of immediate help from direct service agencies such as homeless shelters. Social justice organizing had, then, become a luxury for some that they literally could not afford but that they wanted to find ways (and monies) to continue.

Changes in Response to Dialogue: Revised Grants Criteria and New Programs

Having come to these conclusions, people at the fund began to make changes quickly. Beginning with the spring 1997 grant cycle, grants staff and committee members made a small change in their process that brought them into closer relationship with grantees. They decided to go to grantees' home sites when they had

questions before making a final decision about awarding or denying funds, instead of having grantees come to BWF's downtown offices.

Most important, by 1998, BWF expanded and clarified grants criteria, adding three previously unarticulated components to their definitions of organizing: (1) Building community, (2) developing grassroots leadership, and (3) educating for social justice. This third component acknowledged some community groups' use of popular education methods to educate constituencies about the root causes of injustice. In making these revisions, the fund was bringing its specifications about community organizing into line with what community activists and activist-scholars nationally were beginning to write about, although I do not recall this ever being explicitly discussed at BWF.

While these three components may have long been typical of women's methods of organizing, since they attend to creating connection and community as a way to "sustain and nurture political activism" (Naples 1998a, 15; Stall and Stoecker 1998), in the 1990s, these methods seemed to be extending more into organizing more generally (Sirianni and Friedland 2001; Warren 2001). Researchers and scholar-activists were finding that community building and leadership development—and the popular education pedagogy through which people can learn to be leaders—create the infrastructure necessary to do full-blown organizing. Educating about root causes and just solutions is also consistent with concepts that include "transformation of consciousness through empowerment" as part of social justice organizing (Kennedy and Tilly 1990, 302). This transformative model of organizing differs from the more established redistributive model (previously emphasized by BWF) that prioritizes "demands for immediate economic improvements in terms of distribution of the social wage, and . . . democratic rights and liberties" (Delgado 1986, 213).

In late 1998, the fund's board accepted the recommendations of the grants and program committees. In further efforts to respond to grantee-expressed needs, the board approved raising the cap on grantee organizations' operating budgets from $150,000 to $200,000, expanded the fund's geographic boundaries beyond the immediate metropolitan area of Boston to a ring of surrounding communities where low-income people of color had been moving to escape rising housing costs in the city proper, established multiyear funding so that grantee organizations that had established themselves for doing good organizing over time did not have to develop new grant proposals every year to access the fund's money, and raised the maximum grant from $10,000 to $15,000.

During 1997 and 1998, the fund also began a new discussion of what they could do to support and develop women and girls' doing more social justice organizing in addition to providing monetary grants. In 1997, the fund initiated a girls' empowerment program partly intended to bring girls from low-income communities of color, one of the fund's main constituencies, into the grant-making process. One of the major reasons for instituting this program, Young Sisters for Justice, was to create a basis for better outreach to girls' groups and encourage those doing organizing to apply for grants. Another aim was to teach the Young Sisters about social justice

issues and grassroots organizing, with an aim to creating a local base of skilled organizers within this age group who might later apply for grants. Since the girls selected to join the Young Sisters were already active in local youth groups, this was seen as a way to move these groups toward doing more girls' organizing and less adult-led advocacy or service-oriented work without a social change component.

The creation of the Young Sisters suggests that people at BWF knew they could no longer assume (or hope) that groups doing the kind of organizing it wanted to fund already existed in the community, at least in the numbers desired. Instead, BWF began to take a more active stance in creating a base for organizing while still trying to avoid the "unbalanced power dynamics that exist when a funding organization also provides technical assistance" that respondents had objected to in the 1996 focus groups.

This led to a proposal in 1997 by BWF's program director to create an organizing institute where community organization grantee groups would come together to share their own knowledge about social justice organizing practices. During BWF's strategic planning, beginning in 1999, this was established as a program priority.

In the summer of 2000, to again engage in dialogue with grantees (as well as with other progressive funding organizations) about the direction an organizing institute should take, BWF retained the consultant who had facilitated the strategic plan to "guide us through the exploratory phases of this initiative" (quote from Consultant Job Proposal). This exploratory phase included BWF's desire to continue to "learn [from our grantees] what organizing is in order to better inform BWF's grant making decisions."

CONCLUSION

The account I have provided explains both why and how a women's charitable foundation engaged grantees in interactive dialogues that provide an alternative to typically less democratic, less participatory (and therefore less feminist) philanthropic practices and relationships. This practice of more active engagement between funders and grantees begins to address an imbalance of power between funders and grantees, bringing it more into line with a variety of practices that some women's organizations have found to share power. I do not mean to suggest that this practice entirely resolves what seems a contradiction that feminist philanthropy will likely continue to struggle with. Even when funders choose to engage interactively with grantees, listen to what they say, and make organizational changes in response, the funders' power over resources is still a dominant influence in these relationships.

While my main theoretical interest here is in women's organizational practices as they relate to inconsistencies that seem inherent in constructing a feminist practice of philanthropy, my findings have relevance to more general issues in organizational theory. While a full discussion is not possible here, neoinstitutionalists have

argued, for example, that organizational change is usually relatively slow and typically occurs through "a process of conflict and contestation" (Powell and Dimaggio 1991, 28, 33). In contrast, the changes I articulate happened relatively quickly, and there was little or no conflict or contestation about them (although other issues were creating some conflict at the time, such as staff relations and board-staff relations). Also, while other studies of feminist organizations and progressive organizations more generally have shown the need to adapt to external pressures by becoming, in some cases, more hierarchical (such as in staff relations as well as staff-board relations, which was occurring at the fund), my findings suggest that this kind of formalization can occur alongside the continued development of innovative and less hierarchical practices in other areas, such as the funder-grantee dialogues resulting in changes discussed here.

I explain the absence of conflict around the organizational changes at the fund I have described here largely by the shared commitment to a clearly articulated and deeply held system of beliefs that exists there (see earlier articulated BWF principles and values). Others have pointed to the explanatory power of this kind of ideological commitment in enabling women's organizations to resist the pressures of organizational isomorphism (homogenization) emphasized by neoinstitutionalists (Alter 1998, 261; Thomas 1999). At the fund, this commitment to feminist and democratic principles extended to sharing power with grantee groups. This tightened connection with grantee groups could contribute to strengthening the fund's ability to resist additional pressures for formalization and dilution of its progressive feminist goals, since other research has found that a key factor here is an organization's "connection to its movement base" (Minkoff 2002a, 45).

Just as feminist organizational practices provide alternative possibilities and "models" for organizations in other fields (Alter 1998), funder-grantee dialogue of the sort practiced by this local women's fund also has implications for larger questions of philanthropic reform, especially in regard to increased foundation accountability. This is especially important as foundations are currently increasing their support of community-based organizations, which they now understand to be important for building the social capital necessary for democracy (Warren 2001, 38). As one prominent sociologist put it, "Who elects—or holds in any way accountable—the large private foundations that channel so much funding to grassroots and community organizations?" (Skocpol 1999, 501). A funding practice of ongoing interactive dialogue with grantee groups presents a relational practice that strengthens accountability to them and holds value for philanthropy overall.

Finally, a growing literature is documenting how community-based (often women-led) organizations of the sort BWF supports work at the front lines of society's most challenging problems and are now widely understood to be critically important to a democratic society. While further discussion of this is not possible here, organizations like these provide opportunities for people to become active in improving the conditions of their own lives, learn skills essential to effective civic action, develop relationships to sustain the work of social change, and create a local base for democratic participation for people who might otherwise have little access

to political involvement (Sirianni and Friedland 2001; Warren 2001). The fact that women have long been the main actors in these community-based organizations is becoming more recognized, and women's contributions, once "over-looked and under-estimated" and "treated as peripheral" (Kaplan 1998, 180, 187), are now more valued (Bookman and Morgen 1988; Kaplan 1998; Naples 1998a, 1998b; Rabrenovic 1995; Stall and Stoecker 1998).

As community organizations and the women who lead them are more and more seen to be pivotal in the development of more engaged society, funding to support their work is a critical factor in fulfilling the equalitarian goals of the women's movement as well as this larger promise of a more active democracy. By explaining how one local women's fund engages grantees in interactive dialogue with funders, I have suggested here that not only does increased funding matter but so does the kind of philanthropic relationship through which that money is distributed.

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