Philanthropy Roundtable

TRUE DIVERSITY
STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

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Americans of all backgrounds have long come together to support one another. Neighbor helping neighbor. Friend helping friend. Stranger helping stranger. Over the years, this generous spirit has evolved and taken many forms. Today, charitable donors provide billions of dollars each year to advance new ideas, strengthen communities and empower those in need: no matter who they are, what they look like or where they come from. This giving still lies at the heart of what makes American society strong and embracing diversity has helped fuel its success—allowing donors and nonprofits to draw upon a range of backgrounds, experiences, perspectives and talents to determine the best ways to come together in service of a higher purpose.

Americans have often relied upon charitable organizations at important moments throughout history. In recent years, Americans again turned to charitable organizations at a time of heightened desire to address injustice and discrimination. Many organizations increasingly adopted policies and approaches that offered the promise of addressing these challenges in a better way. Unfortunately, the policies and approaches they adopted often focused intensely on immutable, physical characteristics to the exclusion of the many other important aspects of diversity.

Over time, increasing numbers of charitable organizations found their efforts had unintentionally shifted to checking the right boxes rather than working on the right solutions. As a result, more and more organizations have come to view these approaches as inflexible, outdated and counterproductive—at times, even discriminatory. Some now worry they may be spending more time making assumptions about people than helping them.

There is a yearning in the charitable community for a new paradigm with a more inclusive outlook—an approach that expands diversity beyond physical and biological characteristics alone to fully embrace the multifaceted characteristics that make each individual special and unique.

That is why we propose a positive evolution in thinking called True Diversity. This is a modern framework for embracing diversity that flows from a fundamental truth: charitable organizations are at their best when they are empowered to focus on serving all people in need rather than only checking boxes on a form.

We celebrate the fact that today's America is a dynamic kaleidoscope of identities: racial, ethnic, sexual, religious, socioeconomic and many others—identities often so complex, nuanced and interwoven as to defy any box-based characterization at all. We also recognize that the diversity within each individual includes many rich and important identities—from place of birth and religion to perspectives, skills and even age—that could never be fully grasped or appreciated with inflexible approaches.

The unique characteristics, hidden back stories, diverse viewpoints, valuable skill sets and personal experiences that make us all human simply do not fit into static boxes. Yet, these things are vital to the work of charitable organizations and to the inherent worth of every individual they engage with and serve. Taking a more holistic approach will help organizations pursue the best ideas and strategies and empower those on the ground who are closest to challenges. It's also the right way to make every person feel like they belong—and matter. In short, it's the best way to fully achieve the benefits of diversity in a complex world.

That is why we agree the time has come for a new framework that recenters on the core American idea that every individual is valued and that no one should be left behind simply because of how they look, who they love or the circumstances of their birth. True Diversity is a unifying vision that seeks to return love, compassion and empathy to the diversity conversation by embracing an equality-based perspective. And it rests on five key principles.

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF TRUE DIVERSITY

1. **Value Each Individual.** Each person is a unique individual worthy of dignity and respect. It is only by taking the time to know and understand them, their challenges and their circumstances, rather than simply making assumptions based on how they look, that we can best support them.

2. **Advance the Mission.** Excellent results are best achieved by bringing together people with diverse skill sets, backgrounds and perspectives to further a common mission. Each organization is in the best position to know what types of diversity in

leadership and staffing will best support its mission—and thus strengthen the communities it serves.

3. **Seek Diverse Perspectives.** Good ideas can come from anywhere, and there are many ways to address social challenges. Bringing together people with diverse views is the key to encouraging a robust competition of ideas, experimentation with different approaches and ultimately better answers and outcomes.

4. **Embrace Conversation.** Discussion and debate open the door to progress. Direct, honest and respectful conversation may take courage, but it is the antidote to division, resentment and stagnation.

5. **Cultivate Empowerment.** The best way to uplift individuals and strengthen communities is to foster the sense of agency that only comes when everyone is empowered to reach their full potential.

Over the decades, our nation has embarked on an enduring journey toward its highest ideal: that all human beings are created equal. We have stumbled. We have fallen. But we've always gotten back up. Today, it's time to dust ourselves off again. True Diversity represents the natural evolution of embracing diversity in the 21st century and the above principles serve as core operating guidelines for charitable organizations that wish to see box-checking and quotas replaced with more accountability and effectiveness to better assist those in need and fulfill their missions with renewed excellence.

We, the signatories to this letter, are similarly committed to this more thoughtful and holistic approach to diversity: one that recognizes the value and dignity of each person and allows donors and nonprofits the freedom and flexibility to pursue the best strategies for achieving their goals and missions. That is why we endorse the above principles, and why we have started this conversation now.

And, because we know that putting these ideals into practice will ultimately require new tools and resources for organizations to implement, we invite others who share our values to join in this conversation, so we can broaden and enrich efforts to make True Diversity the standard at charitable organizations around the country.

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