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In a telephone interview with Dr. David O. Washington ABFE asked for his thoughts on *philanthropy and government* as well as *philanthropy and education* to improve the overall health of the Black community as we approach a new administration in January 2009.

**ABFE:** How can government engage the philanthropic community to improve the economic, social and cultural health of Black communities?

**DOW:** There appears to be a positive perfect storm brewing for increased opportunities for philanthropy expertise to help inform government as it relates to the economic, social and cultural health of Black communities. The pro-social change business that foundations are in is being discussed everywhere I turn. From colleagues in the consulting field, to childhood friends wanting to volunteer more in local communities, to both Senator McCain and Senator Obama in the presidential race promoting "change" and an increased national call to service.

It appears that government is acknowledging more and more the level of expertise philanthropy possesses for knowing what works and doesn't work in underserved communities, and is leaning on us for guidance. As we know, philanthropy is in a unique position to fund new approaches and explore alternative interventions much more easily than government. But what seems different now is that government seems to now be getting it, and as a result viewing philanthropy (whether appropriately or inappropriately is a whole other story) as a testing ground to explore innovative new approaches before government replicates proven programs and takes them to scale.

Another aspect of this positive perfect storm appears to be organized philanthropies increased efforts to "think outside the box" and even engage non-traditional means by which to improve the lives of those in need. Be it philanthropy's cue from the success of the pro-environment movie *Inconvenient Truth* to better utilize "pop culture" (movies, TV, Internet, high-integrity celebrity ambassadors and spokespersons) to get our messages out, or what I see as an increased willingness for like-minded foundations to work together, it's all very encouraging. I know first-hand of three or four projects individual foundations and philanthropists are considering with several high quality non-traditional partners that just weren't being explored - or even dreamt of - 5 years ago.

One reason I reference this exciting sea-change in philanthropy and its potential for impact on communities of color as it relates to government is the presence of CEOs of color at three of the country's largest foundations. Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Dr. Robert K. Ross of The California Endowment, and Luis A. Ubiñas, of the Ford Foundation literally represent the new face of philanthropy. Yet an important caveat to remember is change does not happen overnight and I believe some of the innovations you are now seeing within all areas of foundations is the result of the increased diversity at the front-line, middle-management,

and senior levels of foundations dating back several years.

**ABFE:** How do you envision philanthropy, particularly Black executives and program officers working with the government sector?

**DOW:** This is a touchy issue and an area for extra diligence due to the importance that philanthropy always remain autonomous. Yet at the same time be engaging, involved, and accessible to engage government in a substantive way with the knowledge that for any true large-scale change to occur the resources and reach of local, state, and federal government is a must. Frankly, I believe after November 4th, regardless of who wins, given the unparalleled involvement of all Americans during this historic election cycle, there will be a new intensity of engagement and involvement from all sectors. As a result, anyone willing to throw themselves into the mix and get involved will have an opportunity. And due to the increase thirst for new ideas, unique perspectives, and specialized expertise, I believe Black executives and program officers are ideally positioned to step in and make a difference.

**ABFE:** What specific ways do you see for philanthropy in general to improve Education in America?

**DOW:** With education, philanthropy can do what government can't do, and explore innovative interventions and solutions without having to worry about being judged by voters or constituents. Philanthropy can improve the greater social good by perfecting new models of change. Once new models of change have been identified, then philanthropy can promote the models themselves and/or support advocates to do so, with a constant eye towards improving the greater good. A caveat is that philanthropy sometimes can fall into the safety zone of operating from a type of ivory tower similar to some of my experiences working with academic institutions and not always engage as much as they could in partnering with others or in being effective in getting their fantastic work into the general consciousness. The best way I can put it is that when I worked at a non-profit the common joke was that a popular funder required all its grantees to work together, but the funder wasn't required to work together with other funders.

I believe the more unified in terms of effective mechanisms of communication foundations and the non-profit industry have with one another, the bigger the potential impact the industry can make on education. Children need to be healthy and ready to learn, and philanthropy is poised to promote the premiere evidence-based strategies to do this.

**ABFE:** What areas of education (Pre K, Secondary, etc.) would be a focus to improve and how might philanthropy join in this effort?

**DOW:** There is a lot of talk within the public policy and philanthropy worlds about early investment in children. A study by Bruner (2004) showed that the public can save almost \$7 dollars for every dollar invested in early intervention efforts for high risk youth. There is also growing momentum and support in the public and private sectors for schools as centers of the community models due to evidence-based studies showing this approach to education with schools serving as conduits to a wide array of services and resources working especially well in underserved communities.

Regardless of how well a school performs, it appears on many levels they organically become centers of the community and there are efforts to capitalize on this innate role and provide other resources such as inter-generational learning (adult classes), extended school hours to better coordinate with the work schedules of today's parents, mental/physical/dental health referral ability, and extra-curricular activities such as music, sports, and creative arts & crafts programs.

My gut suggests, given the feedback I've heard from the philanthropy, public policy, and entertainment industry worlds I traverse is that this area of education may be seeing a lot of action in the next several years.

**David O. Washington, PhD**, is the founder and CEO of *Legacy Strategies*, a consulting firm that connects the dots between the philanthropy, entertainment, and policy worlds for positive social change.

**Sharon D. Toomer for ABFE**

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