



# The Snakes and Ladders of Equity in Philanthropy



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Equity is ensuring that everyone starts from the same place and gets what they need to enjoy full and healthy lives. It requires creating, supporting and sustaining social impact, and honest assessments of power, resources, strategies, conditions, habits and outcomes. Neither is this work straightforward, nor is the path to equity linear – much like a game of Snakes and Ladders.

**The Snakes and Ladders of Equity in Philanthropy** simulates a giving journey and paints a picture of what equity successes and failures might look like across the strategy, implementation, and nurturing stages. In ways, it compels us, as a sector, to visualize, practice and pursue the challenges we're asking others to undertake to build an equitable world.

## Instructions

Begin by 'learning' and situate yourself on the equity board, one step at a time. Every step is progress, but some steps will help you climb ladders while some may land you a snake. When that happens, pause and re-assess, as every misstep is an opportunity to learn!

## References

['Tough-Minded Optimism': Savvy Leadership Advice From 17 Years At The Skoll Foundation Helm](#) | [Milken Institute's The Philanthropist's Field Guide: Ensuring Equity in Philanthropy](#) | [FRIDA: Money is Political](#) | [One Journey: Racial Equity, Diversity & Inclusion at the W.W. Kellogg Foundation](#) | [Grant Making with a Racial Justice Lens: A Guide](#) | [Constituency Listening: Beneficiaries' Feedback to Improve Philanthropy](#) | [Harvard Business Review: Talk about Privilege at Work by Lee Jourdan](#)

**START  
HERE!**



**LEARNING**

**DO**  
1 ACNOWLEDGE YOUR PRIVILEGE, I.E., HOW YOUR DEMOGRAPHIC MAKE-UP CREATES ADVANTAGES FOR YOU THAT OTHERS DO NOT HAVE

**DO**  
2 **PAY ATTENTION:** WHO IS SPEAKING UP? WHO IS NOT? WHO IS GIVEN THE AUTOMATIC BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT? WHO MUST WORK HARDER TO PROVE THEMSELVES? DO THIS INTERNALLY, WITH NON-PROFITS, AND COMMUNITIES

**DON'T**  
3 ENCOURAGE THE SAME FEEDBACK LOOPS FROM YOUR INNER CIRCLE, WITHOUT VISITING AND LISTENING TO THE END USERS OF YOUR PHILANTHROPY

**KEY LEARNING**

"WE WILL NEVER DEFUSE THE ROLE OF PRIVILEGE OR THE BARRIERS IT PRESENTS IN OUR ABILITY TO BE TRULY EMPATHETIC BECAUSE WHEN PEOPLE IN PHILANTHROPY CONFRONT PRIVILEGE, THOSE IN OUR COMMUNITIES WILL BE BETTER SERVED."  
-GRANTMAKERS FOR EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS (GEO)

**DO**  
5 REFLECT ON YOUR OWN BIASES AND HOW THEY AFFECT YOUR POTENTIAL, THEN FIX THOSE THAT DISCOURAGE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

**STRATEGIZING**

**DON'T**  
7 PRIORITIZE SHORT-TERM FUNDING COMMITMENTS OR BUILD STRATEGY WHICH INCLUDES HARD DEADLINES FOR OUTCOMES, BECAUSE SUSTAINABLE CHANGE TAKES TIME

**DO**  
8 ASK: DOES YOUR STRATEGY RESONATE WITH THE EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITIES YOU SERVE? WHAT BLIND SPOTS EXIST BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF DIVERSITY IN YOUR CIRCLES?

**DO**  
9 CONSIDER DIVERSITY WITHIN THE NON-PROFIT'S LEADERSHIP, AND HOW THEY MITIGATE POWER IMBALANCES IN THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE

**KEY LEARNING**

AS GLOBAL GRANT-MAKERS, WE NEED TO BASE OUR ANALYSIS ON GEOGRAPHICALLY AND CULTURALLY SPECIFIC POWER STRUCTURES BUILT ON LOCAL SUPREMACIST IDEOLOGIES. I FEEL THIS ACUTELY AS AN ANTI-CASTE, ANTI-RACIST, AND A BAHUJAN (A COLLECTIVE TERM REFERRING TO ALL NON-DOMINANT-CASTE COMMUNITIES) PROGRAM OFFICER WHO GREW UP IN RURAL INDIA, LEADING GRANTMAKING IN ASIA. SO, WHILE JOINING THE CALL TO DECOLONIZE, I ALSO CHALLENGE PHILANTHROPY TO DEBRAHMINIZE!"  
- PRACHI PATANKAR, SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA PROGRAM OFFICER AT FOUNDATION FOR A JUST SOCIETY

**DON'T**  
11 NEGLECT THE INTERSECTING NATURE OF REAL-TIME ISSUES; E.G., NOT SEEING FROM A HEALTH EQUITY LENS FOR ALL LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE PANDEMIC

**IMPLEMENTING**

**DO**  
13 ACCEPT THAT SOCIAL CHANGE IS A RESULT OF MULTIPLE EFFORTS, PRIMARILY GROUND WORK, AND NOT THE FUNDING PROVIDED

**DO**  
14 HAVE REGULAR FEEDBACK, NOT SIMPLY REPORTING, FROM COMMUNITY LEADERS AND NGO PARTNERS

**DON'T**  
15 DOMINATE THE NARRATIVE, SEEK ATTRIBUTION, OR EMPHASIZE ON UNREALISTIC REPORTING THAT IS BURDENSOME

**KEY LEARNING**

SO WE ARE INCREDIBLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR THE WORLD. AT THE SAME TIME, WE ARE DRIVEN BY REALITY AND THE NEED TO BE RIGOROUS, BECAUSE THE CHALLENGES ARE MANY AND THEY'RE MORPHING.  
-SALLY OSBERG, FORMER SKOLL FOUNDATION CEO

**DO**  
16 USE MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING TO COURSE CORRECT - WITHOUT HOLDING PARTNERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR UNFORESEEN CHALLENGES

**NURTURING**

**DO**  
19 CHANNEL LONG-TERM FLEXIBLE CAPITAL AND LEND RESOURCES LIKE NETWORKS, SKILLS, ETC. TO BOLSTER MOVEMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

**DO**  
20 FOSTER EQUITY IN YOUR JOURNEY THROUGH PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING, CONVERGENCE, AND GROUND-UP CONSULTATION

**DON'T**  
21 REFUSE TO REVIEW YOUR STRATEGY EVEN IF THE EVIDENCE IS CONTRARY OR DUE TO RISK AVERSION OR ATTACHMENT/ COMFORT WITH FOCUS AREAS

**KEY LEARNING**

"WE WORK TO CHALLENGE WEALTH AND PRIVILEGE AND RECOGNIZE THAT PHILANTHROPIC GIVING EXISTS BECAUSE OF INEQUALITY AND EXPLOITATION. THIS MAKES OUR ROLE AS GRANT MAKERS AND FUNDRAISERS A RADICALLY POLITICAL ACT BECAUSE WE TRY TO BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT WHO WE RECEIVE MONEY FROM AND WHO WE REDIRECT IT TOWARDS."  
-DEEPA RANGANATHAN, CO-MANAGER (COMMUNICATIONS), FRIDA

**DON'T**  
23 EXERT POWER OVER COMMUNITIES, NON-PROFITS, POLICY BUILDING WHILE SCALING FUNDING PORTFOLIOS