



## Exploring Organic Philanthropy – Documenting Giving in Communities of Color

A Conversation with Barbara Robles,  
Co-Author of “The Color of Wealth: The Story Behind the U.S. Racial Wealth Divide”  
April 12, 2008

### Participants:

Barbara Robles, Milan Pham, Donna Tate, Lea Cordova, Gita Gulati-Pardee, Zulayka Santiago  
*Note: while we had a smaller turn-out than hoped for this event, notably the dialogue went 90 minutes longer than planned.*

### Key Points:

Organic Philanthropy is community meeting community’s needs. It is anchored in community. Community is defined by culture.

### **What prevents “organic philanthropy” from being counted?**

- **Under-reporting** – People of color tend to be modest and not see our actions as “charitable,” but just what’s expected as a family and community member.
- **Exploitive data gathering** – Historically and presently, researchers have extracted data from people of color without giving much back. Data has been used and interpreted to pathologize people of color and overlook systemic factors – for example, the so-called “culture of poverty.”
- **Cultural incompetence** – Researchers that don’t know a community and its culture are unable to see its assets. For example, the front porch is where African American elders train young people, yet this is not counted as an asset.
- **Inadequate evaluation tools** – These are defined by people who don’t understand or like what people of color are doing to take care of our own communities.

### **How do we fully count “organic philanthropy”?**

- **People of color must apply a systems lens and speak truth to power.** The dominant culture is, by definition, self-referential. It creates the need for organic philanthropy because we no longer have a social safety net. But since organic philanthropy is not recognized, we do not control our own resources to leverage to create a robust social safety net. Further, foundations ask us to be “sustainable” and typically offer funding “three years and out.” But they exist in perpetuity – why doesn’t their support? Isn’t continued giving the whole point of foundations?
- **People of color must own our own data.** University researchers can provide a service by training communities how to gather and use our own data. Gatekeepers (people in strategic locations) can “honk the horn” when important information emerges. For example, in March 2008 the Social Security Administration reported that immigrant pay-in extended social security by at least a decade. (National Academy of Social Insurance)
- **People of color must document our own assets.** First, we must see ourselves as assets. Then, we must map all that we value – including the front porch. Another important example – people of color have shorter adolescents because they need to contribute to the survival and economic resilience of their families, serving as negotiators between the family unit and the mainstream. But rather than being recognized as assets, they are pathologized – for example, young people of color are more likely to be tried as adults than their white counterparts for the same criminal offenses.

- **People of color must break the binary approach and utilize a mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.** Why not let the questions dictate the approach? Use both dynamically to answer a series of questions. Identify aspirational indicators – for example, what makes a healthy and strong community or family? Ask how to learn about a community in order to better serve its people.

Organic philanthropy needs a movement.

**Resources:**

- Michael Woolcock of the World Bank and his research on “dynamic poverty.”
- Bill Moyers interview with the mayor of Newark on the structural and the self.

**Potential partnerships:**

- Jim Johnson, UNC School of Business (entrepreneurial work)
- Association for Fundraising Professionals