



Journal of Public Interest Communications

ISSN (online): 2573-4342

Practitioner Q & A

Centering Black Philanthropy and Championing Investment in Diversity

Interview with Floyd Jones

Director of Community & Partnerships at Givebutter

Biography

Floyd Jones serves as the Director of Community & Partnerships at Givebutter, the world's first completely free end-to-end fundraising platform. Throughout his career, Floyd has worked tirelessly on building social impact communities around the world, collectively raising over \$20 million for grassroots organizations and speaking at over 50 conferences across America. His work and content has been featured by ESPN, AfroTech, Variety, and Wired magazine, and has been sponsored by NIKE, Whole Foods, VISA, NBA2k, and more. Floyd is also a pioneer for social justice. In 2023, he founded BackBlack, a multi-platform initiative that has raised over \$1.3 million for 770 Black-led nonprofits.

Question: *Could you describe the moment you had this idea of developing a project centered around Black Philanthropy Month? What sparked that initiative for you?*

Answer: My career started up as a frontline fundraiser. I have worked to raise money for various organizations, and I was often the only fundraiser at these organizations. I was always figuring out how to navigate this space as a Black American, and in a field that is traditionally not composed of people

who look like me. Also, there's a lot of different layers in philanthropy. First of all, it's people asking for money, and money is so multi-tiered. There are so many factors associated with money, especially in terms of emotion and power structures. When you look at the philanthropic landscape, a lot of the power is held by a small, elite few. For me, young and fresh out of college, I always felt like I had to assimilate and strategically shapeshift in these rooms where I'm asking for money.

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<https://doi.org/10.32473/jpic.v7.i2.p57>

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That's where I started saying, this system is broken, right? There's something wrong here. I'm constantly asking for something that people really should be doing anyway. I'm not asking you to donate just because I'm Black. I'm asking for you to give to this initiative because you're a part of this community as well. If my neighborhood can succeed, then this entire city can succeed. We have to ask ourselves, how do we build a better infrastructure that doesn't profit on the backs of other people? How can we build something where we all rise together?

That's the landscape that I'm coming from, and then I eventually realized as I moved through the philanthropic landscape that most of the funding is also held in the hands of a specific few. When you look at it, out of all community foundation funding for Black-led nonprofits is one to two percent globally. When you look at the stats of Black-led and Black-founded nonprofits, their revenues are probably a quarter or less compared to their white-led counterparts.¹ That runs the gambit from corporate funding, unrestricted dollars and more.

There are so many Black-led organizations, Black fundraisers, and Black leaders that are underserved and under-resourced. We need to do the work of saying, how do we come together? I mean the collective "we." How can we bring companies together? How do I bring foundations together? The goal is to create a spark that will initiate change.

Consider the Giving Tuesday model as an example. Giving Tuesday was an intervention created to spark philanthropy and collective giving. Now it's become an

entire movement. Nonprofits all over the world are now benefiting because of this intervention. I thought, how do we do something similar for Black-led organizations? How do we create an intervention to open the door for opportunity and possibility?

Question: *Why do you believe that it's crucial to spotlight Black philanthropy?*

Answer: We highlight Black because Black is at the forefront. However, we have to look at the stats: On average, Black communities and Black individuals give more of their wealth to their communities and social sector organizations than their white counterparts.² And even while they give money, the Black population doesn't have as much purchasing power. If they give most of their wealth, what would it be like if we had more wealth to give?

What would happen if we had more wealth, and better support for that money to flow? These organizations need better resources, the proper infrastructure, and the right platforms to make that money go further. We need to help organizations to mobilize their supporters and create a cohesive landscape with corporate organizations, foundations, and individual donors. That way, the money can go even further and sustain long-term growth. The work is already happening. The Black movement is already happening—we are now just amplifying and supporting the movement to help scale it further and faster.

Question: *It sounds like you're really tackling it from a systemic approach. You're*

looking industry-wide to call out the discrepancies and working within this system to reframe and highlight that people are giving and very capable of it.

Answer: 100%. When you look at how these platforms make money, they are either charging a subscription fee or they're making money on the platform as organizations raise money. Platforms are incentivized to secure larger organizations. Companies operate on principles of profit and growth. However, the individuals steering that profit and growth often have biases and stringent perspectives. Our challenge is to understand how to present our cause in a way that incentivizes these companies to engage.

Because I work on both sides: philanthropy and the private sector. I have found that there is room to meet in the middle. A lot of times people in the private sector think that, because they're not a nonprofit, they can't give back to the community. But giving back is good for your company, getting involved in your community is good for your company. You can do well while doing good. We need to build a movement that is so strong, stable, and scalable that the public has to see us and do business with us.

I started my first initiative at Givebutter and we've seen the results grow exponentially. The amount we are raising is doubling year over year and we are also driving impressions and brand awareness. These are elements that companies traditionally look over, but I have made it my job to look at them. We've built a model that we've been

able to scale across the industry, and we're going to continue to scale.

Question: *How have you been able to rally that organizational support?*

Answer: You have to find something that you believe in, something worth fighting for. When you do that, it doesn't feel like you're working. It feels like you're part of the arc of justice. You become a part of something that is bigger than yourself.

But to bring it to companies successfully, you have to figure out their goals. One thing that I had to learn is that people generally want to contribute, but that's not the function of their business. Every business has a function. If it's a for-profit company, the function is to profit. You have to decipher how your goals and the organization's mutually align. I always tell my nonprofits, regardless of whether you're Black-led or not, you have something to offer. If you've built a community, you have something to offer. If you're doing something in your neighborhood, you have something to offer. It's your job to package your offer strategically for companies that want to partner with you. Then you can help them to accomplish their goals as well as yours.

Question: *As you've worked to build this momentum and gain buy-in from folks, how did you ensure that the voices and feedback from the community were truly integrated into developing this?*

Answer: With BackBlack in particular, the catalyst was my attendance at the Bill and Melinda Gates Greater Giving Summit. That

was one of the first opportunities that I got to sit in a room with the CEOs and leaders of industry across the sector. It was a fabulous opportunity to not only talk to them but also hear from organizations on the front lines. Many organizations were saying, we want to work better with the fundraising platforms. The platforms hold so much power. So, what would it look like if power was redistributed? What would it look like if we take a step back and actually put our people at the forefront?

The voices of people at the front lines have been integrated from the very beginning. I'm excited to push this even further because these endeavors only succeed when people are telling their stories and letting their voices be heard. Yes, we could publish a report about our impact based on the data, but you always need to understand the meaning behind the metrics. And that meaning is the community that's being impacted.

Question: *Beyond the event you attended, were there any methods or digital platforms that you used to gather community feedback?*

Answer: We did a big social media campaign. I hired an all-Black team also to put this together. We hired a Black graphic designer, Black videographer, and a Black web builder. Everyone building that cause was also a part of the community. Then, when we launched a campaign on social media, we got feedback from people in real time. We had them join our mailing list and used it to form focus groups. I have meetings every week now with people, and I

can ask them directly about their needs and challenges.

A major part of the next iteration is going to be building programming to address those needs that they brought forward. Even when working with Givebutter to launch our first Black-led campaign, we did campaign reviews. Every week we would sit down with people and review their campaigns together. Many of those people who sought funding would sit down with my team and me to improve those campaigns over time. It's easy to miss the specifics of these needs when you're just reading a social media post or attending a webinar. So, we sat down and really connected to help them grow for the long haul.

Question: *Storytelling is a big tool when it comes to communications and shaping it for the public interest. Could you share how you have used storytelling to connect with the greater audience? How did you coach the organizations on developing their stories?*

Answer: First, we made a campaign video. I wrote a poem, an original piece. We also incorporated footage from Black-led organizations. We actually weaved their footage into the campaign story. On the Givebutter side, we also published blogs, and through written articles and content we weaved in the stories of those organizations that were granted funding from us in the past. On the organization side, we did a lot of the work through their campaign reviews. We asked, what is your story? Even in the application, we asked for their stories, and then we coached them in the art of

storytelling and saw a lot of success that way as well.

Question: *Can you share some of the big success stories or big impacts that emerged from this initiative that you launched?*

Answer: On a macro level, we raised over \$1.3 million for over 770 organizations in five weeks. It really speaks to what can happen when everyone is working cohesively. There are so many initiatives already taking place, but we need to ramp it up. We need to be a hub and a home for those initiatives already taking place. That's how to mobilize more funding and get corporate partners involved when we all work together. It was beautiful to witness.

In terms of other success stories, one organization that we helped was a sports organization for youth to secure funding. They provide sports programs for kids in a marginalized community. I talked to a lot of the leaders when they were in the parking lot of FedEx getting jerseys for their kids. They were on the front lines doing the work, and they were just brought to tears. They felt we showed them how to truly mobilize their community. It spoke to the power of just giving people a chance. If you're only looking at the numbers and you miss your people, you're missing the point. You won't see long term growth that way. Some companies get it, and it was beautiful watching them get involved. I'm excited to

continue expanding this because there's no limit. There's really no limit.

Question: *What does the future hold for Black Philanthropy Month and BackBlack?*

Answer: The main goal is to continue expanding, especially with BackBlack. We want to continue building the movement, bringing on the right partners, and eventually we want to involve the voices of Black businesses and artists. We're going to do more with social media and amplifying messages of change from the front lines. We're continuing to scale and solidify this so that more people can get involved for years to come.

Question: *What advice would you give to communicators looking to foster public interest in Black philanthropy initiatives?*

Answer: I would suggest focusing on your story. What is your story, and why are you choosing to get involved? At the end of the day, people connect with people, and they will join your movement because they want to be a part of making change. They identify with it or else want to be a part of the transformation that you're making. The goal of our movement is not providing handouts. It's about changing infrastructures and systems together. It has to be a collective effort. I always say—if you want to go fast, go by yourself, but if you want to go far, go together.

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¹ A 2020 racial equity and philanthropy report by Echoing Green and the Bridgespan Group (Dorsey et al., 2020) indicates disparities in both revenues and unrestricted assets between white-led and Black-led organizations.

² A 2012 report by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation estimates that, on average, Black households give away 25% more of their income per year than their white counterparts (Braithwaite, 2022; Singletary, 2020; W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2012).