



GROUNDING GIVING — THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RIGHT KIND OF INTERMEDIARY

Grantmaking for racial equity and racial justice must make building power within communities of color to advance systemic change its primary goal, with the vast amount of funding in the service of this goal, as defined by those most impacted. It must not take at face value the applications that use the words but don't advance the work.

Grantmaking for racial equity and racial justice is most successful when grounded in the places, policy changes, and people from the field, not from philanthropy. Intermediaries — public charities that award grants to other nonprofits — play a key role in getting money to smaller and emerging organizations. They are often started to meet the needs of communities of color, women, regions, or communities with less support, allowing donors with shared interests to actively center movement needs. The most helpful intermediaries are typically in closer relationship and alignment with the field and more willing to make investments that others may view as risky.

Both long-term general support funding for existing organizations and robust startup funding for emerging groups are necessary to bolster Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Arab, and Asian American and Pacific Islander communities — and their organizations — to be self-determining. A commitment to racial justice requires funders to ask, listen, and align with the direction and strategy of movements

for lasting change. Those movements will always include organizing and protest that shift private, public, and corporate grantmaking.

The surge of funding to Black organizations in particular that occurred in 2020 followed decades of disinvestment interrupted by important but small, temporary bumps after movement moments or severe attacks. The impact of that disinvestment endures. Funders can ameliorate it by adopting more rigorous standards and goals that will in turn increase sustainable support for transformative organizations and the solutions they create.

Below are six examples of grounded giving to build power for racial justice.

1. SOUTHERN POWER FUND

As the nation was reeling from the coronavirus pandemic and the murder of George Floyd, four organizations, each with decades in the struggle for Black liberation ([Alternate Roots](#), [Highlander Research and Education Center](#), [Project South](#), and [Southerners on New Ground](#)) launched the Southern Power Fund, challenging donors to raise \$10 million in 90 days. The fund raised more than \$14 million and enlisted nonprofits closest to the problems to figure out how to disperse the money. Most of the roughly 250 grants distributed to grassroots groups in the South were for \$40,000, and those modest sums made a big difference. “It gets the money out of the

In a reality where only 4 percent of philanthropic dollars come to the largest geographic region of the United States, a region where the largest concentration of Black people live — the U.S. South, the giving bump that some felt in 2020 is only beginning to fill the equity deficit that has been centuries in the making. If we see giving as an opportunity to build the capacity of southern organizations that are the tip of the spear and cream of the crop, saving any semblance of democracy in this country again and again, it is of critical importance to give like we want these communities and organizations to win.

— ASH-LEE WOODARD HENDERSON, CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
HIGHLANDER RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTER

hands of institutional philanthropy and into the hands of people who actually know what is happening and are doing the work,” says Ash-Lee Henderson, co-executive director of Highlander.⁶³

2. ELECTORAL JUSTICE VOTER FUND

The Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation and the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) received an influx of donations and philanthropic grants in 2020. Both regranted to chapters and issued an open call for applicants. The foundation gave more than \$21 million to affiliated chapters and other Black-led community organizations, and throughout the pandemic made cash relief grants of \$1,000 to individuals. The M4BL has launched the Electoral Justice Voter Fund, which will make \$75,000 grants to 12 Black-led organizations that are fighting to expand democracy.

3. NATIONAL URBAN INDIAN FAMILY COALITION

In 2003, the executive directors of 12 urban Indian centers founded the National Urban Indian Family Coalition (NUIFC) so that they could learn and advocate together for the good of their communities. The coalition now includes over 40 centers across 22 states. While these are all broad

social service organizations, they regularly engage in civic education and advocacy on issues of poverty, housing, and health — both accessing existing systems and fighting for transformation. In 2017, the NUIFC began regranted for civic engagement; its giving rose dramatically the following year with a large investment from the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation, followed by several others. The coalition has regranted about \$3 million since 2018.

4. THE AAPI CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FUND

The AAPI Civic Engagement Fund started in 2013 to “foster a culture of civic participation within AAPI communities by supporting the growth of AAPI groups as organizational movement and power building leaders that achieve specific policy, systems, and transformational change.”⁶⁴ Although Asian Americans are politically active and often progressive, they receive very little dedicated funding. As intermediaries were emerging in other communities, EunSook Lee, the former executive director of the progressive National Korean American Service & Education Consortium, collected pledges from the Carnegie Corporation

[63] Palmer, Stacy, and Parks, Dan. *Billions to Fight Poverty; Funds for Racial Justice; Giving Is Strong but Uneven*. *Philanthropy This Week*, June 26, 2021.

[64] Asian American and Pacific Islander Civic Engagement Fund. *Mission*. n.d.



PHOTO: SAINTATEE SUÁREZ

of New York, Coulter Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund to start the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund, which has granted just under \$19 million across the country to date. Asian Americans Advancing Justice—Atlanta, a fund grantee, helped organize the unprecedented turnout of Asian American voters in Georgia — more than 80 percent of those eligible — for the primary and general elections in 2020 and the state’s pivotal Senate runoffs in January 2021.⁶⁵

5. THE PILLARS FUND

Since 2010, the Pillars Fund has invested more than \$6 million to support American Muslim institutions, leaders, and storytellers whose work advances equity and inclusion. The fund raises money largely from individual donors, and has an open application process. In addition to local civic engagement and community organizing, it also funds artists and content creators, and hosts community events for education and discussion.

6. THE CONTIGO FUND

The Contigo Fund was founded in 2016 by the Arcus Foundation and several other national progressive foundations in response to the Pulse massacre that year, which took the lives of 49 people, most of them Latinx and part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. Contigo established a community advisory board made up of leaders from the groups most affected by the massacre, including immigrants, LGBTQ people, people of color, and survivors of the shooting. Using a participatory model and a strong intersectional racial justice analysis, this diverse group drives all of Contigo’s grantmaking. Since its founding, Contigo has given out more than \$2.2 million in grants, helping seed and grow grassroots groups led by and for LGBTQ people and people of color, strengthen the leadership of LGBTQ people of color, and win concrete policy victories — including making Orlando, Florida, the first sanctuary city in the U.S. South.

[65] Kass, Arielle. *Asian American Voting Grows in Georgia, and with It, Political Power*. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 2, 2021.