

Responsive Philanthropy

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Voters during a get-out-the-vote voting rally in Calhoun County, Georgia, one of stops of "The South Is Rising" bus tour. The tour, which visited various small towns and cities in the South, was organized by Black Voters Matter Fund, a 501(c)(4) organization co-founded by former director of Grantmakers for Southern Progress, LaTosha Brown, and Cliff Albright. Photo courtesy of LaTosha Brown/BVMF.



Philanthropy: Perilous times call for bold measures

By Tory Gavito

A national collaborative of funders and organizers is asking foundations and donors to meet the challenges of our time by responsive grantmaking, breaking silos and going local.

Hunger drove the parents of Jakelin Amei Rosemary Caal Maquin to take her on the journey north. On December 7, Jakelin died of dehydration in U.S. Border Patrol custody. Climate, migration, incarceration, jobs and de-

mocracy are center stage in the politics propelling both the autocratic and democratic movements.

Those closest to the pain must influence the policy decisions that will affect their futures. Democratic movements built by local organizing will get people their seat at the table and undermine autocratic movements. Philanthropy must evolve to meet the scale of the challenges and opportunities that lie before us.

We can achieve that by increasing the speed and size of grants, removing silos between donors and organiz-

ers, and focusing locally to create the groundswell of organized people, ideas and resources required to change the trajectory of history.

THE STATUS QUO IS RISKIER THAN TAKING RISKS

According to the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, we have 12 years to mitigate climate change catastrophe¹ as a rise of global fascism erodes democracy.²

The concurrent rise of these threats will have the most impact on poor people of color. *(continued on page 11)*



challenging grantmakers to strengthen communities

We see that impact now. In Central America, where 1/3 of employment is based on agriculture, the region is experiencing a multi-year drought.³

We have to ask: Is philanthropy up to the task?

Currently, philanthropy has adopted neoliberal⁴ models of assigning risk to grantmaking, particularly for grants to communities most affected by systemic inequality.⁵

But, given the perils we face as a nation and as global citizens, the risk of maintaining the status quo outweighs the risk of experimentation in funding new leadership and ideas.

Way to Win, a coalition of funders and organizers, was co-founded by Leah Hunt-Hendrix, Jenifer Fernandez Ancona and myself in 2017 in response to this moment.

Our mission is to work in partnership with those most affected by injustice to improve lives and to achieve a representative democracy that works for all.

The 2016 election cycle was a wake-up call. In postelection debriefs, Way to Win heard 2 recurrent themes:

1. There is a broken feedback loop between organizers educating unlikely voters and donors who believe in expanding the electorate.⁶
2. There is little funding that connects civic engagement during election season with community organizing every other day of the year.

As members of Women Donors Network (WDN) and Solidaire, we started Way to Win based on lessons from

state-based donor networks that craved partnership with community organizers building democracy from the ground up, year-round.

3 STEPS TOWARD TRANSFORMATION

For us, “organizing” entails “[d]evelop[ing] the agency of individuals and communities ... to act purposefully on the issues they care about ... enabl[ing] them to become leaders with the motivation, skills and capacities needed to make the changes they want.”⁷

Organizing fueled Florida’s successful 2018 Amendment 4 campaign, a statewide constitutional amendment restoring voting rights to more than 1.4 million formerly incarcerated citizens, undoing a vestige of slavery that disenfranchised about 1 in 4 Black Floridians.

Organizers built the leadership of formerly incarcerated people, giving them the skills they needed to frame the debate through sharing their stories in the media and at the doors.⁸

These leaders had the motivation and skills to make the change they wanted. And sustained organizing, keeping a broad base of support for the amendment, will be the only way to hold the victory as the governor-elect subverts its implementation.⁹

Our charge as grantmakers is to scale, replicate and iterate organizing efforts by taking 3 steps:

1. Increase the speed and size of grantmaking.

Donors need to recognize that to make big change organizers need big investments.

In a recent example of how not to

proceed, a foundation required its grantees to participate in a months-long collaborative process to develop a joint proposal.

After the proposal was prepared, the organizations learned that the grant, after being split among grantees, was a small fraction of each organization’s monthly operating budget. The process was a net drain on the capacity of these organizations.

Two models stand out as examples of the right way to increase the speed and scale of dollars moving to the ground and increase the likelihood of achieving their desired outcomes:

- **Invest in and with donor collaboratives with strategies tied to specific policy shifts.**

Donor collaboratives are pooled funds that allow smaller funder dollars to be leveraged so that the ultimate grants are more sizable and thereby have more impact than if the funder acted alone.

One example is Four Freedoms Fund (FFF), whose mission is to shift immigration policy and to achieve full integration of immigrants in democracy.¹⁰ FFF staff and consultants work deeply and collaboratively in the states where they invest to advance their grantees’ strategies. FFF also educates national and state funders to mobilize more resources for these local strategies.

By investing in trusted collaboratives like FFF, program officers bypass months of landscaping that they would otherwise conduct on their own.

The risk of maintaining the status quo outweighs the risk of experimentation in funding new leadership and ideas.

New and Renewing Members

Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice
Amalgamated Charitable Foundation
American Jewish World Service
Annenberg Foundation
Blandin Foundation
Brooklyn Community Foundation
Bush Foundation
Community Foundation of
Tompkins County
Community West Foundation
Conant Family Foundation
Consumer Health Foundation
Field Foundation
Foundation for Child Development
Garment Workers Center
General Service Foundation
Hyams Foundation
Incourage Community Foundation
Libra Foundation
Lumina Foundation
Mendelsohn Family Fund
Mentes Puertorriquenas en Accion, Inc.
Metro IAF
National Community Reinvestment
Coalition
National Guestworkers Alliance
Ohio Voice
Organize Florida
Poik Bros. Foundation
Race Forward
Racial Justice NOW!
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Rosenberg Foundation
Sandler Foundation
Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Southwest Organizing Project
Tarbell Family Foundation
Tecovas Foundation
Tennessee Justice Center
The California Endowment
The David Rockefeller Fund
The Lawrence Foundation
The Melville Charitable Trust
The Whitman Institute
Walton Family Foundation
Weingart Foundation
William Caspar Graustein
Memorial Fund
Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation

- **Invest in and with donor advising networks with strategies tied to building power for specific communities.**

Like Way to Win, WDN stands out as a donor-advising hub whose members move in concert with strategic urgency.

WDN's strategy includes advancing reflective democracy via data and grantmaking, and supporting women's leadership in the Black freedom movement.¹¹ Through other WDN projects, members fund voter justice in the South, fight for women in the workplace and elevate women in the climate movement.

Listening deeply to leaders and movements most affected by injustice, WDN holds a long-term vision while moving resources quickly and nimbly.

2. Remove silos between donors and organizers.

Grantmakers and grantees must overcome the walls that separate us. We need more communication and trust to take on innovative campaigns.

The walls only serve to confuse who has the power and expertise to accomplish a goal. The degree-holding expert in Manhattan, for example, does not have the power to rewrite right-to-work laws in the South, thereby raising economic conditions for the middle class across the country. But organized communities have the requisite influence and motivation to change policies that personally affect them.

By listening to organizers, Way to Win developed a new set of metrics to gauge power building beyond the outcomes of a single election cycle (check out our Signals of Success).

Bringing down the walls is also more efficient. Organizers shouldn't have to read tea leaves. A free exchange of information can more quickly move big

resources and identify discreet needs that can be easily filled.

For example, Way to Win's leaders listened to and trusted local organizers like LaTosha Brown, co-founder of Black Voters Matter and former project director for Grantmakers for Southern Progress.

She had a big idea about renting a bus through the election cycle to recreate the energy of the Freedom Rides. Way to Win co-founder Jenifer Fernandez Ancona and Brown knew that for news about the bus to reach more than just those at community bus stops, the organizers needed professional media content to distribute digitally.

Way to Win and others funded the bus and a trusted documentarian to follow the bus through the Southern Black Belt.

The images and stories they gathered became one of the key progressive narratives that broke through the national news cycle during the election.

Moreover, Brown became a national spokesperson on voter suppression in Georgia. Because the media drew attention to Georgia, more Georgians knew how to contact organizers and lawyers to seek redress if they had trouble casting a ballot, and we now have the national imperative to reform voting rights.

3. Decentralize philanthropy.

The change we seek will arise when more communities are organized to demand change. Because most foundation program officers are removed from local efforts, they often trust national brands over local entities for their grantmaking.

When the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in *Shelby County v. Holder*,¹² foundations increased gifts to national groups like the Brennan Center for Justice and the American Civil Liberties Union, both incredibly worthy endeavors.

But foundations did not match their national giving with support for local voting rights work developed with organizers mobilizing electorates impacted by the Supreme Court ruling.

The Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP) works with a cohort of movement leaders in Texas behind a multi-year strategy to improve reflective democracy in the state.

TCRP lawyers were called when organizers at the Texas Organizing Project (TOP) arrived at closed polling locations at 7:00 a.m. on Election Day in Harris County, a county as large as Louisiana. The lawyers filed suit immediately and by noon had a judicial ruling to keep polling locations open 2 extra hours that evening.

And those same TOP organizers then maximized the impact of the court order by deploying field teams to alert the community that polling location hours were extended.

National organizations cannot replicate that kind of impact unless they have permanent staff in the states collaborating with local organizers' efforts.

COMING TOGETHER

We have the capacity to ensure that all communities have a seat at the table and the freedom to thrive. To achieve our progressive vision, we need organized communities and organized funders. We need strategic donor collaboratives and networks – such as Way to Win – that move member resources toward shared goals, maximizing the scale and impact of their grantmaking. ■

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Notes

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2. Robin Wright, "Madeleine Albright warns of a new fascism – and Trump," *The New Yorker*, April 24, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/madeleine-albright-warns-of-a-new-fascism-and-trump>.
3. Oliver Milman, "The unseen driver behind the migrant caravan: climate change," *The Guardian*, October 30, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/30/migrant-caravan-causes-climate-change-central-america>.
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5. Susan Wolf Ditkoff, Alison Powell and Kyle Gardner with Tom Tierney, *Four Pathways to Greater Giving*, Bridgespan, <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/philanthropy/four-pathways-unlock-greater-philanthropic-giving>.
6. Jens Manuel Krogstad and Mark Hugo Lopez, "Black voter turnout fell in 2016, even as a record number of Americans cast ballots," Pew Research Center, May 12, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/facttank/2017/05/12/black-voter-turnout-fell-in-2016-even-as-a-record-number-of-americans-cast-ballots/>.
7. See Dr. Hahrie Hahn, University of California, Santa Barbara, <https://medium.com/@hahrie/what-is-organizing-1508746331d1>.
8. Alice Speri, "Florida's Amendment 4 would restore voting rights to 1.4 million people," *The Intercept*, November 3, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/11/03/florida-felon-voting-rights-amendment-4/>.
9. Steven Lemongello and Skyler Swisher, "Amendment 4: 'A day of celebration' in Florida as 1.4 million ex-felons have voting rights restored," *Orlando Sentinel*, Jan. 14, 2019, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/politics/political-pulse/os-ne-registration-day-amendment-4-florida-20190107-story.html>.
10. Visit <https://neophilanthropy.org/collaborative-funds/four-freedoms-fund/>.
11. Learn more about Women Donors Network and its reflective democracy campaign at <https://womendonors.org/reflective-democracy-campaign/>.
12. Vann R. Newkirk II, "How Shelby County v. Holder Broke America," *The Atlantic*, July 10, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/07/how-shelby-county-broke-america/564707/>.