



HONNOLD
FOUNDATION

Strategic Plan

2022-2025

*Building Energy Resilience
in Partnership with
Marginalized Communities*



Executive Summary

Since the Honnold Foundation (HF) was founded in 2012, our work has focused on expanding access to solar energy for communities around the world. Now, a decade into the Foundation's work, we are at a critical moment in the global renewable energy transition. HF's staff and Board of Directors have undertaken a strategic planning process in response to the evolution of the Foundation's internal and external context over the last several years. Outcomes of this process include:

- A revised mission and vision centering our work to advance equitable solar energy access in partnership with marginalized communities
- A new Theory of Change which focuses on three key strategies: investing in energy resilience, empowering strong organizations and networks, and amplifying grassroots voices
- Objectives to guide our operations and programs through 2025: ensuring expanded solar energy access for marginalized communities, equipping our operations for sustainability and scale, and advancing community-centered systems change

Further information on our theory of change, strategies, and objectives is detailed in this strategic plan and in the accompanying [Appendices A, B, and C](#).



History & Background

Over the last several years, the Honnold Foundation has evolved rapidly. In 2018, HF became an independent 501c3 nonprofit, and as Foundation assets grew, began developing a robust grantmaking framework. In 2021, HF underwent a leadership transition, welcoming Emily Teitsworth as the new Executive Director. Throughout this period, demand for community-based solar energy funding has grown significantly: Since 2020, HF's open calls for grant proposals have resulted in over 2,000 applications from more than 100 countries around the world, representing a pipeline of \$120 million in community-based solar energy projects.

The COVID-19 pandemic, accelerating climate change emergencies, and socio-political upheaval on a global scale have also dramatically shifted HF's ecosystem. And while resources and attention have been drawn to renewable energy, the bulk of philanthropic funding still goes to "big bet" technological innovation, rather than supporting community-based energy resilience.

It is within this fluid and rapidly-evolving context that the HF team has mapped out our approach and priorities for the next three years. Throughout this strategic planning process, we have consulted with and collected feedback from key stakeholders, community partners, and technical experts, ensuring that we have a full and data-driven understanding of how HF can best advance a just transition to renewable energy.



Key Questions & Approach

Before launching the Honnold Foundation’s strategic planning process, it was essential to ensure we had the data we needed to make informed decisions about our future direction. To that end, we sought formal feedback from our grantee partners and financial supporters, analyzed the global renewable energy funding landscape, and completed a US-focused solar energy policy analysis (Appendices).

To develop a roadmap for HF’s future work, our team utilized the “Seven Questions” framework, adapted from an approach originally developed by David Sawyer of Converge. Beginning with our “why,” and moving towards greater specificity and detail, these guiding questions enabled the HF team to ensure our future plans are centered around our core values, aligned with the greatest needs in our sector, and reflective of our strengths as an organization. The Seven Questions include:

1. *Why do we exist?*
2. *Who are we?*
3. *Who do we serve?*
4. *What do we do?*
5. *What’s our current reality?*
6. *Where are we headed?*
7. *How do we get there?*

Once our team answered these questions and drafted a 3 year plan, we sought additional feedback from grantee partners, solar energy industry experts, and other key stakeholders to ensure that our process effectively engaged with and responded to the needs of our community partners.

Given the rapidly-evolving global context of our work, some of our plans will inevitably change during the time period covered by this strategic plan. However, we remain committed to centering the renewable energy needs of marginalized communities, and ensuring that we prioritize both people and the planet, in all our work.

Principles & Commitments

Without grounding in principles of equity and trust, our core mission and strategies cannot be successful. HF's approach is based on the understanding that marginalized communities best know their own needs, and recognizes that to effectively partner with these communities, we must address historical gaps in philanthropic support. HF's approach is based on our commitments to:

Respond to the urgency of the present

Since our founding, HF has remained committed to never building up an endowment, and to driving resources to our partners as quickly and efficiently as possible. As the climate crisis and global socio-political instability worsen, we are morally obligated to maintain lean core operations and to spend out our financial resources in service of an equitable transition to renewable energy.

Resource gaps in philanthropic support

Our 2022 funding landscape (see [appendix](#)) identified key issues in renewable energy funding, including neglected geographic regions and an over-reliance on investment in technology at the expense of frontline communities. While there are many effective ways to advance renewable energy access, HF continues to support solar access in marginalized communities due to the demonstrated unmet need for this work, as well as the flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and resilience of solar technology.

Embrace calculated risks to drive innovation

As a funder, HF welcomes the opportunity to support pilot projects, innovative uses of solar energy, and in general, to take risks other institutional funders may not. This enables us to effectively seed and scale new community-driven approaches to solar energy use.

Prioritize community-driven solutions

We believe that the most sustainable solutions are ones that are created for communities, by communities. All of our partners' initiatives are developed alongside the communities where they work, in order to ensure the projects are culturally-relevant and designed for long-term success.

Catalyze change for people and the planet

Equitable access to renewable energy can do a lot more than turn on the lights. Whether it's food sovereignty, education, or healthcare, our partners' projects always use solar energy as a catalyst for greater change in their communities.



Mission & Vision

Problem statement:

As the world transitions to renewable energy, marginalized communities are excluded from the resources they need to adapt and thrive.

Mission:

The Honnold Foundation partners with marginalized communities to expand equitable solar energy access.

Vision:

We envision a world where marginalized communities lead the transition to renewable energy, with the resources they need to adapt and thrive. Our work directly supports the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals 7 (“Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all”) and 13 (“Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”).



Theory of Change

The Honnold Foundation's theory of change centers on advancing renewable energy access through our partnerships with marginalized communities. Our three principal strategies include **investing in energy resilience**, **empowering strong organizations and networks**, and **amplifying grassroots voices**.



Vision

We envision a world where marginalized communities lead the transition to renewable energy, with the resources they need to adapt and thrive.

Achieve UN SDG 7 (clean energy) and 13 (climate action)



STRATEGY 1

Invest in Energy Resilience



Grantmaking and Microgrid Development

Access to reliable and sustainable energy can catalyze long-term improvement in the health and well-being of communities, while also reducing environmental impact. At HF, our grantmaking focuses on both people and the planet: we support grassroots organizations that use community-driven solar energy solutions to enhance the quality of life in their communities while reducing their environmental footprint. Our emphasis on community-driven, pilot-scale projects complements utility scale and impact investing approaches.

Our grantmaking is designed as a partnership. We focus on incubating innovative ideas, scaling proven solutions, and providing technical expertise, ensuring that the solutions we invest in will benefit communities for years to come. Our grants are structured as general support, and we endeavor to reduce grantee application and reporting burdens to the greatest extent possible. We tell our grantee partners, “once a partner, always a partner”. That means that even after specific projects are completed, HF continues to support partners through mentorship, capacity building, and storytelling.

While the transition to renewable energy is gaining traction globally, HF is working to ensure that those historically excluded from vital energy resources aren’t left behind. Building on our existing approach to working with marginalized communities¹, over the next three years, HF’s grantmaking will focus on the following priorities:

- Partnership with Black and Indigenous-majority communities in both urban and rural settings
- Support for women- and girl-centered projects, and capacity building to advance women’s leadership within partner organizations
- Investment in regions of the US and Latin America which receive only a fraction of the available funding for renewable energy initiatives,² while simultaneously being home to some of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world (e.g. Central America and the Amazon basin)
- Funding for island-nation communities anywhere in the world that are highly susceptible to climate change impacts (e.g. Indonesia, Vanuatu, and Madagascar)

¹The Honnold Foundation defines Marginalized Communities as “those that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political and economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions”- NCCDH.



STRATEGY 2

Empower Strong Organizations & Networks



Capacity Building

Equipping marginalized communities with the resources they need to adapt and thrive will require more than direct investment in their solar energy projects. To bring about a world where marginalized communities lead the transition to renewable energy, it is vital that the organizations based in those communities are fully equipped with the resources and expertise they need. HF provides grantee partners with a range of capacity-building resources to strengthen their organizations internally, leading to more effective and sustainable organizations in the long term. Our partners guide our capacity-building efforts, ensuring that we provide relevant and specific capacity building tailored to their current needs.

Over the next three years, HF's capacity-building programs will build a global network of innovative community-based organizations in addition to providing training and ongoing technical support. Partner convenings and fostering partner-to-partner connections will lead to increased knowledge sharing among our partners, ultimately growing collaboration and scaling impacts within national and regional networks. Individual and shared training opportunities will strengthen the internal skills of our partners and their leadership, leading to more resilient and sustainable organizations. And finally, working with our partners to enhance women's leadership opportunities by ensuring women's presence on Boards and Executive teams will advance equity and promote more diverse and impactful organizations.



STRATEGY 3

Amplify Grassroots Voices



Storytelling and Policy Advocacy

While the majority of HF's work focuses on small and medium-scale community solar projects, we also recognize the importance of advancing systems change to achieve a just transition to renewable energy at the global level. HF's systems-change work focuses on storytelling and policy advocacy as closely linked strategies for expanding the reach and impact of community voices and solutions.

Over the next three years, our storytelling will focus on elevating stories of community-led solutions that use solar energy to advance socio-economic development and environmental conservation. We will also expand our support to grantee partners to enable them to produce high quality film and photo assets in partnership with local creatives, improving their ability to tell engaging stories on their own terms. Finally, as key policy moments emerge in the coming years, we will leverage our film and storytelling capabilities to advance policy change in support of community renewable energy access at the local and national level.

In addition to utilizing film to support policy objectives identified by our partners, HF will directly resource US and global grassroots environmental justice coalitions. Building on work launched in 2022, HF will also advance community-centered global advocacy work within the UN system, enabling representatives of grantee partner organizations to engage strategically during key annual moments such as Climate Week, UNGA, and COPs 28, 29, and 30.



Objectives 2022-2025

As a result of our strategic planning process, HF is focused on achieving the following core objectives over the next three years:

Ensure expanded solar energy access for marginalized communities:

- Launch a revised grantmaking strategy that prioritizes Black and Indigenous communities in under-funded geographic regions
- Double our grant funding to at least \$2 million each year
- Expand capacity building, storytelling, and policy support to grantee partners

Equip our operations for sustainability and scale:

- Formalize key organizational policies and processes to facilitate expansion of our global operations, while maintaining a whole person-centered team culture
- Develop a strong and stable base of financial support through our major gifts strategy, and expansion of foundation and corporate partnerships
- Complete a DEI audit and institutionalize an action-oriented inclusion and diversity framework

Advance community-centered systems change:

- Produce and distribute at least one film each year centered on solutions developed by our partners
- Support US-based grantee partner advocacy with a focus on achievement of local and state policy to enable equitable renewable energy access
- Accelerate progress towards UN SDGs 7 and 13 through advocacy at UNGA, annual COPs, and additional key moments



Conclusions

Building on our 10 year track record of growth and impact, the Honnold Foundation has used this period of strategic planning to sharpen our grantmaking focus and ensure greater reach and impact over the next decade. After identifying gaps in current climate philanthropy and revamping our programs to reflect and meet those gaps, the Honnold Foundation is prepared to utilize our agile team, growing platform, and growing pool of funding to strategically address communities' needs and deepen our global impact.

HF will continue to prioritize our grantee partners and their communities in all aspects of this work, expanding on current grantmaking initiatives, building capacity within precedent-setting organizations to enable them to scale, and empowering climate leaders from the communities we serve to not just have a voice, but a voice of authority and influence in the years ahead.



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