

FUNDING TRANS RESILIENCE



Research & Writing by
V Varun Chaudhry, PhD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
About Gender Justice Fund - 2	
The Beginnings	3
The Funding	5
The Committee	7
The Process	9
Setting the Guidelines - 9	
The Applications - 12	
The Interviews - 12	
The Decisions - 15	
Themes and Recommendations	20
FIGURES	
Figure 1: Funders	5
Figure 2: Trans Resilience Fund Guidelines	11
Figure 3: Fast Fact on Applicants	13
Figure 4: Trans Resilience Fund Applicant Interview Questions	14
Figure 5: Funded Groups	18
Figure 6: Fast Facts on Funded Groups	19

INTRODUCTION

This report tells the story of the Trans Resilience Fund, a program initiated and carried out by Gender Justice Fund (GJF) in 2021 in response to the inequities facing transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) people in the COVID-19 pandemic. Using pooled funds from seven philanthropic entities and a participatory grantmaking process centering Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) trans individuals, GJF awarded a total of \$170,000 to support trans-focused work in Philadelphia and surrounding counties. Grants made through the Trans Resilience Fund went towards providing direct financial support to TGNC communities, particularly TGNC communities of color, and to organizing, advocacy and direct services for TGNC individuals.

At the suggestion of staff at the Samuel S. Fels Fund, GJF engaged V Varun Chaudhry, a scholar whose work focuses on nonprofit organizations and foundations, transgender and gender nonconforming communities of color, and black feminism, to document the process. This report is the product of their work, and we are grateful to the Fels Fund for providing the financial support to make it possible.

The report takes an ethnographic approach, starting with the history of the Trans Resilience Fund. It then describes how the funding coalesced and details the community-led process for making grant decisions. It concludes with themes and recommendations emerging from the process. The report also provides information on the applications considered and the organizations and groups that received funding from the Trans Resilience Fund.



Participants in the 2021 Philly Trans March, which was funded through the Trans Resilience Fund (Photo credit: Joe Piette)

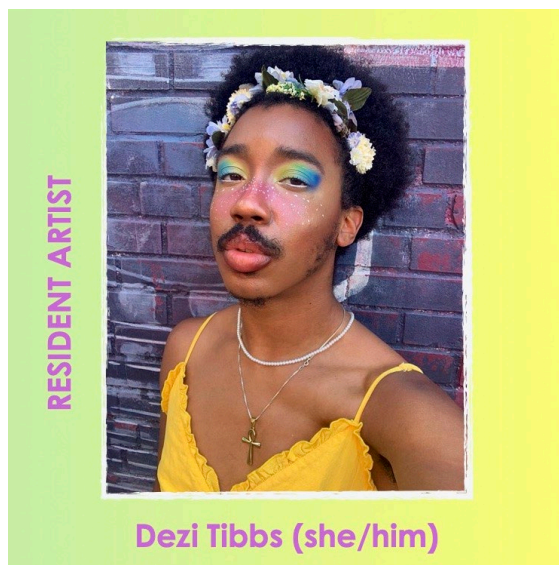
INTRODUCTION

It is our hope that this report will be useful to funders who are interested in replicating a similar participatory grantmaking process or wish to learn more about funding the trans community. We also view this report as part of GJF's own accountability to the local trans community and as a reflection of the value we place on the process of holding funders and organizations accountable to serving and meeting the needs of the TGNC and other marginalized communities in this and other moments of crisis and inequity. We recommend that funders and organizations acknowledge the expertise of TGNC communities by turning to these communities directly to name their own needs, and by supporting them, financially and otherwise, to make decisions for their communities.

- Gender Justice Fund Staff & Board

ABOUT GENDER JUSTICE FUND

Gender Justice Fund (GJF) is a private Philadelphia-based foundation that fights to end all forms of gender-based oppression through trust-based philanthropy and by amplifying community-led systems change. GJF funds agencies and coalitions working towards gender justice through systems or culture change while also helping to build the broader movement by leading and supporting collaborative efforts and advocating for additional philanthropic support for gender issues. For more information about GJF, visit www.genderjusticephilly.org.



Headshot of Dezi Tibbs, one of nine trans and non-binary artists funded through a grant to Genderfunk Philly (Courtesy Photo)

THE BEGINNINGS

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated existing inequalities facing transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) communities,^{1,2} Gender Justice Fund (GJF) began investigating what could be done to support TGNC communities in Philadelphia. During its 2020 name change and rebranding process, GJF articulated a commitment to centering the needs of marginalized women, trans, non-binary, and gender nonconforming individuals, including and especially people of color, immigrants, people living in poverty, people with disabilities, and people impacted by the criminal justice system. However, as of early 2021, there were no trans-specific grantees in its funding portfolio. In recent years, GJF had received only one application for a trans-focused initiative, but the service delivery model did not fit the systems change focus of GJF's Systems Change grant program to which they had applied. GJF Executive Director, Farrah Parkes reached out to members of the TGNC community and realized that it would be important to more proactively invite organizations serving and led by TGNC communities to apply for grants. Parkes reflected, "As we thought more about it, we realized that if we wanted to fund trans groups or trans liberation work, then we would need to meet that work where it was and not wait for it to meet our model."

"Meeting the work where it was," particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased homelessness, joblessness, and poverty in TGNC communities, meant supporting work that focused on the survival and everyday basic needs of these communities, particularly TGNC communities of color. To evaluate this idea, Parkes turned to her network of local Philadelphia funders, and to two highly visible trans leaders in the Philadelphia trans community, Mayor's Office of LGBT Affairs Executive Director Celena Morrison and ACLU of Pennsylvania Trans Justice Coordinator Naiymah Sanchez. They responded with enthusiasm. "The community always needs resources," Sanchez said. "When you think about what we're going through right now [in the pandemic], folks who are doing sex work don't have resources because they're scared to engage, or they're going to be risking their lives. So, if we could find a way to

“*...if we [Gender Justice Fund] wanted to fund trans groups or trans liberation work, then we would need to meet that work where it was and not wait for it to meet our model.*”

Farrah Parkes,
Executive Director, Gender Justice Fund

¹ Whittington, Charlie, Katalina Hadfield and Carina Calderon. 2020. [The Lives and Livelihoods of Many in the LGBTQ Community are at Risk Amidst COVID-19 Crisis](#). Human Rights Campaign.

² Woulfe, Julie and Melina Wald. 2020. [The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Transgender and Non-Binary Community](#). Columbia University Irving Medical Center.

THE BEGINNINGS

funnel resources, especially financial resources, into our community, to give a sense of security and just being and existing, that would be amazing.” After confirming with Sanchez and Morrison that there would be interest in and capacity for this kind of initiative, Parkes began soliciting funding for the project. As funding came together, so did the grantmaking process.



Art by Kah Yangni

THE FUNDING

The Gender Justice Fund had already given its own grantees small, no-strings-attached grants in light of the pandemic. But Parkes still wondered, “Who is being left out of our relief efforts? And how do we do this, how do we bring the trans community into our grantmaking?” Parkes noticed, too, that the pandemic had led more and more funders to want to contribute to pooled funds. The process of pooling funds to create the Trans Resilience Fund, Parkes explains, was “honestly, far easier than I would’ve imagined.” Parkes turned to funders with whom she had existing relationships, including the Douty Foundation, which was “sunsetting” (closing its doors and spending down its endowment).

Jen Leith, Executive Director of the Douty Foundation, said that when she was approached about giving some of Douty’s remaining funds to this trans-focused fund, she was immediately interested. According to Leith, Douty, as a social justice funder that had funded some LGBTQ organizations but not a great deal of trans-focused work, was eager to be involved in supporting TGNC communities. When she presented the information to her board in early 2021, Leith said, “Everybody just said, ‘Absolutely, we should support this, and what is the grant level that would be deemed appropriate and needed?’ ... I didn’t have to do any heavy lifting, and I didn’t really have to explain anything about it.”

The same story seemed to be the case for most of the other funders who contributed to the project, including the Collective Future Fund, the Samuel S. Fels Fund (Fels Fund), the Philadelphia Foundation, and the Valentine Foundation. For many of these funders, the ask came from Parkes in between grantmaking cycles, and program officers used this fund as an opportunity to spend their discretionary funds, where all they had to do was send the one-page proposal that Parkes had drafted in consultation with trans community members to their supervisors or boards for approval. As with the Douty Foundation, these boards agreed unanimously to support the Trans Resilience Fund.

At the Philadelphia Foundation, discretionary funds could not be spent directly on grantmaking; for Edurne Irizarry, a Program Officer there, this was not a limitation, but rather an opportunity to support the Trans Resilience Fund community grantmaking panel. Irizarry had experience supporting community-led grantmaking processes in her work with YOUTHadelphia, the youth community advisory committee for the Philadelphia Foundation’s Fund for Children. “I was like, here’s all this money. Give it to them [the committee.] Pay them. Feed them... That support went to the committee members, and sort of keeping the process alive. I felt really strongly about

Figure 1: FUNDERS

- Collective Future Fund
- Douty Foundation
- Gender Justice Fund
- Samuel S. Fels Fund
- Philadelphia Foundation
- Valentine Foundation
- William Penn Foundation

THE FUNDING

supporting something like this, to give them the opportunity to make these decisions, because that doesn't happen. And when it does happen, there's all these conditions." The lack of conditions or restrictions on this process gave committee members freedom and agency in making decisions about the funds - which was important to both funders and committee members, as noted in interviews.

The final piece of the funding puzzle came together after the committee had already begun its process: the Fels Fund, another social justice-focused funder and supporter of the ethnographic component of the project, helped secure a \$50,000 matching gift from the William Penn Foundation, one of 50 largest foundations in the country. Contributions from the pooled funds totaled just over \$200,000, with \$170,000 distributed to the granted organizations. Gender Justice Fund contributed \$26,000, which speaks to both the generosity of the contributing funders and the collective enthusiasm around collaboration with other funders. The process of assembling funding took place in a few months, leading one of the committee members to comment in a meeting, "This really shows you just how easy it could be for these things to have happened already. It's

just a matter of people doing what they should do and being on board." Parkes responded that while securing the funding was easier than anticipated, she was not sure if it would have been as easy if it were not for the timing, particularly in a global pandemic. Overall increased philanthropic interest in participatory grantmaking, pooled funds, and supporting underserved populations played a significant role in the ease of the funding process.

“

I felt really strong about supporting something like this, to give them [the trans community] the opportunity to make these decisions, because that doesn't happen. And when it does happen, there's all these conditions.

Edurne Irizarry

Program Officer, The Philadelphia Foundation

THE COMMITTEE

As GJF sought out funding for the project, Parkes began the process of assembling a committee of TGNC community members to make funding decisions. In addition to the two community leaders to whom Parkes had initially reached out, Celena Morrison and Naiymah Sanchez, Parkes engaged Wit Lopez as the committee facilitator. Lopez is a Black, nonbinary trans Philadelphia-based artist and performer who came highly recommended from the Third Wave Fund in New York City, where they facilitated a giving circle. Lopez, Sanchez, and Morrison worked together to identify committee members to participate in the grantmaking process. Assembling the committee posed a unique challenge. Sanchez explained, “Knowing that we were really centering POC, grassroots organizations, we don’t want white people deciding what POC person gets the money. That just wouldn’t look right... but we also had to think about how many trans-led, POC organizations and grassroots groups are out there, and who we wanted to have at this table that would be exempt from the money. So, we had to be strategic about that.” Given the relatively small number of eligible organizations—those serving TGNC communities and TGNC communities of color specifically—it was important that the committee not have too many nonprofit, grassroots organizers who might be applying for the funds and have to recuse themselves from the evaluation of their own proposal.



As someone who’s trans and doesn’t have a lot of privileges, it was awesome to be in a space where I could contribute in a really major way and help other trans folks.

Trans Resilience Fund Committee Member

The result was a committee of nine TGNC individuals, almost all people of color, who brought a range of experiences to the table. The committee consisted of individuals who had a lot of nonprofit experience, artists and performers from the community, some who had primarily done community-building work outside of nonprofit organizations, and others connected to the ballroom scene in Philly. Some had past experience on funding panels, while others considered themselves to be “brand new” to the process. Multiple committee members cited the different perspectives and intergenerational aspects of the committee as one of the most moving parts

of the experience. One member said the committee makeup was “indicative of what Black and brown trans Philly looks like, organizing in the city outside of LGBTQ+ organizations proper. It was so meaningful, the range of experience. I think I was most blown away by the multigenerational dimension of it. Like, I knew that was going to be super generative and also have its rough edges because this is multi-dimensional, and you know, there’s language and lived experience that differs, but [in its range] it’s the totality of our story.”

THE COMMITTEE

Before, during, and after the process, committee members were enthusiastic about what it would mean to be a part of a group of trans folks making decisions about funding for trans communities. Several committee members shared that they were excited to participate in a funding process from a different side, the side of allocating the funds and not just applying for them. One committee member, who considered themselves new to the funding world, said, “As someone who’s trans and doesn’t have a lot of privileges, it was awesome to be in a space where I could contribute in a really major way and help other trans folks.” Rather than being in a situation where “you literally end up bonding with the other trans person or the other Black person or brown person,” committee members felt empowered in a space where they could say, “We know the issues that are facing our communities.” In this context, supported by trusted facilitators, many community members were able to be honest, to the point where they quickly developed a rapport with one another. One committee member even described the committee coming to feel like “family.”

Because TGNC communities, particularly TGNC communities of color, face high levels of economic insecurity on the whole,^{4,5,6} the committee itself was made up of people who, in the words of one member, “probably needed a grant themselves.” Lopez, Sanchez, and Morrison emphasized that to make participation accessible, it was important to compensate the committee for their time. Except in cases where it was prohibited by an individual’s job or role, committee members were compensated at a flat rate of \$1,700, in addition to receiving a gift card for food delivery. The rate was calculated based on the estimated number of hours of meetings, grantee interviews, and proposal review at a rate of approximately \$40 per hour. In addition, Lopez suggested that food delivery cards were necessary to sustain the committee members during the virtual meetings, which could, at times, feel long and arduous. Members were ultimately given \$150 gift cards to Door Dash or to a grocery store of their choice. Still, this compensation was limited, and at least one committee member needed to work during the meetings. Lopez explained, “We’re working with a trans population who may or may not be employed right now, and that has to be the understanding that we come in with... A trans person can’t be like, ‘Oh, that’s employment that can wait over there.’ Sometimes, you have to work, and you have to take that opportunity.” Committee compensation was thus essential, and a factor that Parkes, Lopez, and all of the committee members took quite seriously, adding additional compensation as additional meetings needed to be scheduled. Some committee members logged on to Zoom from their offices and from weekend and evening jobs, but from start to finish, they all remained eager to participate in the process.

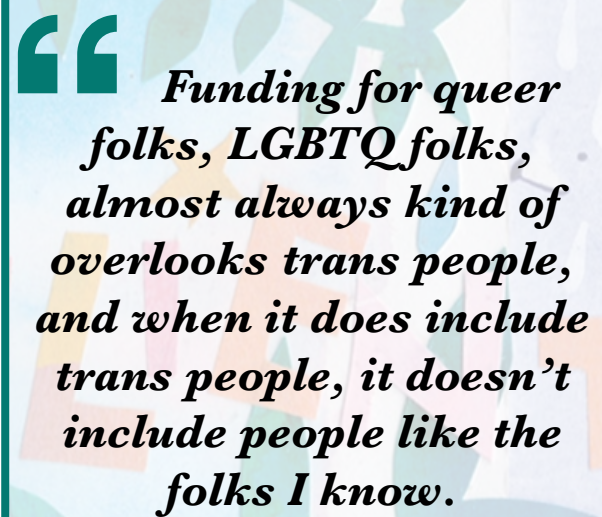
⁴ Center for American Progress and Movement Advancement Project. 2015. [Paying an Unfair Price: The Financial Penalty for Being Trans in America](#). Center for American Progress and Movement Advancement Project.

⁵ Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling. 2011. [Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey](#). National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

⁶ It is also important to note, as one funder said in an interview, that there still exists a serious lack of data about transgender communities, particularly transgender communities of color, in Philadelphia. See the “Themes and Recommendations” section of this report for more.

THE PROCESS

The first meeting of the Trans Resilience Fund committee took place on April 13, 2021. Like all subsequent meetings, it took place virtually on Zoom. Over the course of three hours, committee members introduced themselves to one another. While many of the members present knew each other previously, there were still numerous introductions to be shared. Lopez encouraged committee members to “brag about themselves” in their introduction, setting the stage for the meetings to prioritize self- and community love. The excitement within the group, even with the virtual format, was palpable. There was an immediate sense of recognition in the group: many of the committee members’ previous experiences with nonprofits and funding in Philadelphia and beyond were not positive. Instead, as one committee member put it, “Funding for queer folks, LGBTQ folks, almost always kind of overlooks trans people, and when it does include trans people, it doesn’t include people like the folks I know,” such as homeless trans people, and trans people of color.



Funding for queer folks, LGBTQ folks, almost always kind of overlooks trans people, and when it does include trans people, it doesn’t include people like the folks I know.

Trans Resilience Fund Committee Member

Committee members described feeling their needs and interests as trans people of color were ignored by nonprofit organizations and having limited access to resources to support the trans- and POC-led organizing that they and their communities wanted to prioritize. One committee member said in their introduction, “So many times, all we get is pizza and a Wawa gift card [instead of the more significant support needed].” It was with this critical, almost skeptical, perspective that the committee set the guidelines for the Trans Resilience Fund. Overall, committee members were pleased with the process: “we developed everything cooperatively and completely and professionally,” one committee member said.

SETTING THE GUIDELINES

The guidelines for the Trans Resilience Fund, including the eligibility requirements, application guidelines, interview questions, and evaluation criteria, were established over the course of three meetings, taking place on April 13, April 27, and May 18, 2021. Early in the process, committee members agreed that they were interested in uplifting Black, Indigenous, and people of color-led and -focused organizing efforts, particularly if they were grassroots, not connected to one

THE PROCESS

of the larger social service providers or nonprofit organizations in the city. Ultimately, as one committee member asserted early in the process, the fund should function to “transform trans lives.” Transforming trans lives, in the case of this fund, meant ensuring that the majority of funding should be distributed to individual trans people, particularly trans people of color. In the initial meetings, multiple committee members asked why the funds could not be given directly to TGNC people in Philadelphia, rather than moved through organizations and groups. They were skeptical of the ways, as one member put it, “money often just gets moved around, instead of actually distributed,” when given as a grant to organizations. Gender Justice Fund’s Executive Director, Farrah Parkes, explained that funding individuals would be “a very complicated and incredibly difficult process,” particularly with Internal Revenue Service regulations. With this concern clarified, the committee members tasked themselves with ensuring that if the funds were to be given to groups, they would still be given to individuals where possible, rather than spent on gift cards, pizza, and other small “tokens” that organizations were notorious for giving to trans and other marginalized communities at events.

Doing so meant addressing two important, interrelated concerns; the first was which organizations could be eligible for the funds, and the second was how the Gender Justice Fund could hold the grantees accountable once they were given the funds. Regarding eligibility, organization size was a primary issue. The ability to fund grassroots organizations and new groups and initiatives who did not yet have, or who did not want, official nonprofit status, was made possible by a partnership with Bread & Roses Community Fund. Many committee members expressed worries that larger organizations would apply for funds—with the help of trained grant writers—and receive funding, only to absorb it into general operating funds for the organization. Furthermore, individuals who had worked for larger nonprofit organizations in Philadelphia were particularly skeptical because they knew that some of these organizations did not have a substantive track record of working with and supporting trans people. At the same time, committee members knew that there was potential in the programs that existed within these larger organizations: “Although some of these larger organizations don’t get it right,” one of the committee members said in an interview, “they have a strong connection to the community that just isn’t going to go anywhere.”

Committee members then wondered if it would be possible to ensure that the funds would go to trans-specific programming, rather than to the larger organization as a whole. While members recognized that the guidelines on use of funds could state this requirement, the underlying worry seemed to be that large organizations might simply say they would spend funds on trans communities but would not actually do so. Parkes weighed in with her perspective: “The truth of philanthropy is you can’t make anybody do anything. [You] have to believe that they’re going to do it.” The onus was on the committee, then, to select organizations they trusted to be

THE PROCESS

Figure 2: TRANS RESILIENCE FUND GUIDELINES

Who can apply:

- Applicants must be nonprofit groups/organizations (two or more individuals working collectively to provide services to the broader community), not individuals.
- Applicants do not have to be incorporated as a 501 (c) (3) organization but must certify that their work is for charitable purposes.
- Applicants must be located in and serving Philadelphia and/or Chester, Bucks, Montgomery, or Delaware Counties.
- Both new and established groups/organizations are welcome to apply.

Grant Sizes:

- Applicants may apply for grants of \$5,000, \$10,000, or \$20,000.

Use of Funds:

- Groups/organizations with organizational budgets of under \$250,000 who also serve exclusively the trans community can apply to use funds for the following:
 - Direct financial support for trans individuals via food, cash, or transportation assistance; covering medical, housing, or utility costs; or payment of other expenses related to health and safety.
 - Providing services to trans individuals.
 - Organizing and advocacy for the trans community.
 - General operating support.
- Groups/organizations with organizational budgets under \$250,000 who do not exclusively serve the trans community can apply for funds to be used for any of the following:
 - Direct financial support for trans individuals via food, cash, or transportation assistance; covering medical, housing, or utility costs; or payment of other expenses related to health and safety.
 - Providing services to trans individuals.
 - Organizing and advocacy for the trans community.
- Groups/organizations with organizational budgets of over \$250,000 can only apply for funds to be used for direct financial support for trans individuals via food, cash, or transportation assistance; covering medical, housing, or utility costs; or payment of other expenses related to health and safety. Organizations applying in this category may use 10% of their grant to cover the cost of administering funds.

THE PROCESS

accountable and carry out the work they proposed to do. Beyond accountability, for many committee members, the question was, how do we hold organizations accountable to serving the communities they claim to serve, without over-policing the work? An issue for many social justice funders is combating long-standing patterns in philanthropy that require nonprofit staffers and grassroots organizers to report back, with specific, often numerical, data, how their funding was used. The problem with this pattern is that it can limit the kinds of liberatory work that is possible for these groups, and it requires that organizations orient their work around reporting back to funders, rather than supporting community members. The final guidelines (see Figure 2), constructed collaboratively by the committee, were an attempt to both ensure accountability and avoid over-policing, while also encouraging a range of organizations to apply. The committee wanted applicants to be encouraged to imagine new projects, while also ensuring that funds were used in ways that would meet their goal of transforming trans lives. They decided to set slightly different standards for applicants depending on their budget size and target population.

THE APPLICATIONS

The Trans Resilience Fund received 22 eligible applications (26 applications total, four of which were ineligible). Figure 3 provides details on the range of eligible applications. Applicants ranged in terms of mission, vision, and scope: some organizations and groups applied to support existing programs and initiatives, while others hoped to get new programs off the ground. Some organizations were brand new, forming in response to the pandemic, while others were long-standing organizations or programs in the Philadelphia area.

THE INTERVIEWS

The committee conducted virtual interviews with all eligible applicants from Thursday, June 10, to Friday, July 2, 2021. In the process meetings beforehand, the committee agreed upon a set of questions that would guide the conversation (See Figure 4). Prior to the interviews, committee members identified additional questions, specific to each application, that they wanted to include in the conversation. Interviews usually had two committee members present to interview one or more representatives from the applicant organization. Interviews were scheduled for an hour but lasted between 40 and 45 minutes on average, allowing a few minutes for committee members to discuss their thoughts afterwards.

The interviews, committee members agreed, were a great opportunity to hold the applicant organizations accountable to what they had put in their applications. Reflecting on the interviews, one committee member said, “it [became] really clear that some of these groups came

THE PROCESS

Figure 3: FAST FACTS ON APPLICANTS (n=22)

Populations Served:

- 27% served only TGNC individuals
- 50% served mainly* TGNC individuals
- 86% served mainly* BIPOC individuals
- 82% served mainly* low-income individuals

Staff Leadership:

- 41% were led mainly* by TGNC individuals
- 59% were led mainly* by BIPOC individuals

Use of Funds (applicants could request funds for multiple purposes):

- 86% requested funds for direct financial support for TGNC individuals
- 36% requested funds for organizing and advocacy for the TGNC community
- 36% requested funds for providing services to TGNC individuals

Budget / Nonprofit Status:

- 64% had budgets of under \$250,000
- 36% did not have 501(c)(3) nonprofit status or a fiscal sponsor
- 9% were fiscally sponsored

**more than 50%*

together... just to get this money.” In interviews with some organizations, it became clear that they had misrepresented themselves as being trans competent or trans-serving, when, in reality, they were not. In a few cases, committee members were misgendered, and in some they were interrupted or felt disrespected. In other cases, trans leaders or staff came to the interviews and people already knew each other; while sometimes this made for comfortable conversation, in other moments it led to committee members being “lobbied” outside of the interviews. “There’s pros and cons to having trans people interview trans people,” one of the committee members noted after the fact. Some committee members, and some applicant organizations who did not get funding, expressed frustration with the model where only two committee members were present for interviews. Rather than having clarity around the fact that the committee made the ultimate decision about whether or not a group would be funded, some believed that the decision came down to the two interviewers. This lack of clarity led to some uncomfortable interactions for committee members outside of the interview context, as well as some interpersonal frustration

THE PROCESS

and resentment. Another committee member said, “The interview process for me [was] the best part. Getting to be dead front and center. It was all on the table, and I appreciated it being super raw.” Through some difficult or awkward moments in some interviews, it became clear to this and other committee members that, with the groups that applied, “you either know what you’re doing, or you really don’t.” The interviews were a chance for the groups who applied to meet with committee members face to face (virtually). In some cases, this meant that people who had benefited from or felt neglected by certain programming asked directly about their own experiences. In other cases, this meant that the groups that applied failed to respond to the urgent, pressing questions that the committee asked. Having conducted 22 interviews collectively, the committee came together to make the decisions on who would receive grants from the Trans Resilience Fund.

“ *The interview process for me [was] the best part. Getting to be dead front and center. It was all on the table, and I appreciated it being super raw.* ”

Trans Resilience Fund Committee Member

Figure 4: TRANS RESILIENCE FUND APPLICANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Can you tell us more about your group/organization, and its history?
- Can you tell us more about your planned project, or your work (if you are applying for general operating funds)? How do you think your project would shift the conditions for trans people in your community? How are you already doing this work?
- Can you talk about your plans for outreach and making connections with the community?
- How are trans people centered in your work?
- How will you know if your project or work has been successful?
- What would be the impact of this funding for your organization?
- Is there anything that wasn't fully captured in your application that you want us to know about?
- What is your vision for your group or organization for three or four years from now? What kind of work do you want to be focusing on in the future?
- Do you have any questions for us?

THE PROCESS

THE DECISIONS

The committee gathered for two longer, five-hour virtual meetings on Saturday, July 10 and Sunday, July 11, 2021, to decide which applicants would receive funding. Despite it being a lengthy process with few breaks, the committee members were focused and careful as they moved through the decision-making. After beginning by naming what they found most “joyous” about the process—love for one another, learning from the brilliance of the leaders of the groups who applied for funds, and getting to know fellow committee members even better—they dove into an efficient but arduous decision-making process.

Prior to these meetings, each committee member had submitted an online evaluation form with feedback for each application; the two committee members who conducted the interviews each completed an additional form with their feedback. The evaluations asked committee members to rate applicants on several criteria and make one of three funding recommendations: “Definitely Fund,” “Maybe Fund,” or “Don’t Fund.” Farrah Parkes was then able to “screenshare” the results of the feedback forms on Zoom. Each eligible application received a set of “Definitely,” “Maybe,” or “Don’t” votes from both the proposal stage (nine votes total, since all committee members voted on the proposals) and the interview stage (two votes, one from each committee member who conducted the interview). In the decision-making conversation, committee members could refer to these scores. On the first day of the two-day process, 10 minutes were allocated for discussion of each application. If the committee was unable to come to a decision within this time limit, the application was put on a list for further discussion on the second day of the decision-making process.



Staff of Trans Resilience Fund grantee The Welcome Project PA at their annual Pride Festival (Courtesy photo)

THE PROCESS

Most of the funding decisions were made unanimously on the first day of the process; 15 of 22 or 68% of the applications were decided on within the allotted time frame. The interviews had made fairly clear which organizations fit within the committee's vision, particularly when it came to funding work that was trans-led, or that was focused on reparations for Black and brown

TGNC communities. The applications that were harder for committee members to decide on generally fell into one of two categories: either they were led or primarily staffed by white or non-trans individuals, or they were programs of larger, comparatively well-resourced organizations. Committee members did not come to an immediate consensus on organizations that might have been doing "good work," but that were not primarily staffed by people of color. When considering applications from some of the larger organizations with bigger budgets, committee members felt unsure if the funds would actually be distributed to TGNC individuals.

“ It was nice to be a part of something where we could say, ‘Black-led and POC to the front,’ and be able to back it up with material support.

Trans Resilience Fund Committee Member

When they returned to these “maybes” the following day, the conversation continued. For organizations working just outside of Philadelphia, the committee discussed how much leeway they should give for predominantly white staff, and predominantly white people being served. Some critiqued the “white savior mentality” of the white-led organizations, and others expressed frustration with the assumption that more rural or suburban areas did not have large populations of people of color. One committee member observed, “While we are centering Black and brown folks, there are other ways that folks can be marginalized, such as living in rural areas. Any kind of support when you live in that context can make a difference. Trans people live on farms, in suburbs, live in all kinds of ways just to make it to another day.”

On the question of whether larger organizations could be trusted to allocate funds to TGNC communities, there remained what Parkes later called “this ongoing ambivalence.” Committee members acknowledged that some larger organizations played an important role in supporting the trans community, even as they sometimes caused harm to the very community they served. In the case of larger organizations, interviewers often advocated for the leaders they were impressed by and felt they could trust with the funds. In most cases, if the funding would become cash given directly to TGNC individuals, particularly TGNC people of color, the committee decided to accept those proposals.

THE PROCESS

The decision-making conversation was not always easy. There were a few moments where individuals reported feeling triggered or discussed individual or collective traumas. In one instance, when a committee member described a traumatic experience with an organization under consideration, it led another committee member to name that they were “triggered” and wanted to move on to the decision-making. In one committee member’s opinion, this was not the space to air grievances about specific organizations—grievances that were likely numerous due to the failure of so many organizations to provide resources and serve TGNC communities—but rather a space to allocate funds, and trust that the groups that applied would do what they said they would do. “I understand, people need to be vocal about what they’ve experienced personally by an organization,” that committee member explained afterward, “but that’s not what we’re here for, you know? Because if that was the case, then nobody would’ve gotten the f*****g money. Let’s just be real.”

At the end of the decision-making process, Parkes showed a spreadsheet with the names of the 10 organizations chosen to receive funds, their size, how much they applied for, and how much they would be awarded. Figure 5 lists the organizations selected for funding and Figure 6 provides summary data on funded applicants. Each of the organizations was able to receive a grant in the amount that they applied for, and there was an additional \$5,000 remaining. Because of the relatively small balance remaining, the committee was offered the option to either reconsider the list of organizations it had decided not to fund, or to allocate additional funds to groups it had already decided to fund. The committee members fairly quickly agreed that they would prefer to give additional funds to two organizations they were particularly excited about. Both Coalition for Black Trans Economic Liberation (CBTEL) and Hearts on a Wire were named as organizations that were doing particularly important work aligned with the goals of the fund: CBTEL was providing cash assistance to Black trans folks in Philadelphia, while Hearts on a Wire was providing funding to incarcerated trans individuals throughout Pennsylvania. Reflecting on the decision to allocate the remaining funds in this way, committee members said, “I’m so excited that in a couple of months, people [who are incarcerated] are going to have money on their books.” Another committee member said, “it was nice to be a part of something where we could say, ‘Black-led and POC to the front,’ and be able to back it up with material support.”

THE PROCESS

Figure 5: FUNDED GROUPS

- [Attic Youth Center](#), \$20,000 for direct financial support to trans youth who need name changes, stable housing, access to affirming, sensitive medical care, and other basic needs.
- [Coalition for Black Trans Economic Liberation](#), \$22,500 for direct financial support to Black trans people to combat housing and food insecurity, address precarious living situations, help support safety nets in times of inconsistent income and lack of access to government benefits or family support.
- [Genderfunk Philly](#), \$5,000 to support Resident Artist project, which will provide employment opportunities to trans and nonbinary theatre artists, with Black trans and nonbinary artists as a priority.
- [Hearts on a Wire](#), \$22,500 for direct financial support to transgender and nonbinary individuals who are currently incarcerated.
- [Y-HEP Health Center at Philadelphia FIGHT](#), \$20,000 for direct financial support for TGNC youth under the age of 25 to access grants of \$400 to pay for out-of-pocket expenses related to healthcare, such as hormone therapy, gender-affirming surgeries, and mental, behavioral, speech, and physical therapies.
- [Philly Trans March](#), \$20,000 to pay primarily Black and brown speakers at Philly Trans March, Trans Day of Remembrance/Resistance, Black Trans History Panel, and Trans Day of Visibility events; food at these events; and general operating support for this programming.
- The Black Visioning Group, \$20,000 for direct financial support to Black queer, trans MaGes (marginalized genders), darker-skinned, fatter, disabled/differently-abled, poor, hood femmes and individuals, for reparations, housing, and other basic needs.
- [The Welcome Project PA](#), \$10,000 for community services for trans people, including mental health services, support groups and social events, as well as direct support for rental assistance for trans people dealing with homelessness.
- [Valley Youth House](#), \$10,000 for direct financial support to trans youth who are experiencing, or who are at risk of, homelessness, particularly for temporary housing when city shelters feel unsafe; utilities and other bills; grocery and transportation needs; hygiene and gender-affirming products; and transition-related medications and services.
- [The Arcila-Adams Resource Center at William Way LGBT Community Center](#), \$20,000 for direct financial support to TGNC individuals for transition-related supplies, including binders, packers and stand-to-pee devices, prosthesis and padding materials, hair/wigs, and legal name changes.

THE PROCESS

Figure 6: FAST FACTS ON FUNDED GROUPS (n=10)

Populations Served:

- 20% served only TGNC individuals
- 60% served mainly* TGNC individuals
- 100% served mainly* BIPOC individuals
- 90% served mainly* low-income individuals

Staff Leadership:

- 50% were led mainly* by TGNC individuals
- 60% were led mainly* by BIPOC individuals

Use of Funds (applicants could request funds for multiple purposes):

- 90% received funds for direct financial support for TGNC individuals
- 40% received funds for organizing and advocacy for the TGNC community
- 10% received funds for providing services to TGNC individuals

Budget / Nonprofit Status:

- 50% had budgets of under \$250,000
- 40% did not have 501(c)(3) nonprofit status or a fiscal sponsor
- 10% were fiscally sponsored

**more than 50%*

THEMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Trans Resilience Fund marked several firsts for Gender Justice Fund. It was the organization's first time managing a pooled fund, the first time providing earmarked funding for the TGNC community, and the first time managing a participatory grantmaking process. These are some of the lessons learned along the way.

- 1. COMMUNITY-LED ACCOUNTABILITY IS KEY:** Throughout the grantmaking process, committee members expressed fears and anxieties about whether or not organizations and groups that applied would use the funds to support TGNC communities. The process was structured so committee members could directly engage with applicants to gauge whether or not they trusted the various organizations, groups, and individual leaders with this unique set of funds. Committee members appreciated that the Gender Justice Fund took a hands-off approach and allowed the trans community members to make decisions by and for themselves.

Recommendations for Funders: Funders must recognize that TGNC communities, particularly TGNC communities of color, are generally skeptical and critical of the institutions that claim to serve them, especially nonprofits and philanthropic organizations. This is arguably true of most marginalized communities, and thus funders should ensure there are community-led systems of accountability, such as interviews and careful review processes involving representatives of marginalized communities.

- 2. RECOGNIZE THE DIVERSITY OF TRANS LEADERSHIP:** The leaders selected to be on the committee were not all the individuals who are typically chosen for trans-focused advocacy work in Philadelphia. Committee members found the makeup of the committee “refreshing,” particularly in the ways it recognized the contributions of elders in the community. Individuals who did not have nonprofit or funding experience productively challenged and pushed their peers to see things differently, and everyone in the group benefited.

Recommendations for Funders: Ask community members to recommend individuals for participatory grantmaking panels, consult a variety of individuals for different processes, and refrain from turning to the same community members who are already supported by existing institutional efforts. Think expansively when considering who a “community leader” might be; individuals who organize primarily through social media might have radically different perspectives from individuals who are used to working in nonprofits, and from those who engage in direct action organizing.

THEMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3. PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING REQUIRES RESOURCES:** As some funders and all committee members indicated, having financial and other material support to be present for the panel was “crucial.” Even as some committee members had to participate in meetings while at work, people across the board agreed that the financial support to participate was necessary to allow them to be present, eager, and interested in the process. This was particularly important given that many of these committee members had in the past felt slighted by similar nonprofit and philanthropic efforts to support trans and LGBTQ communities.

Recommendations for Funders: Support community grant makers not only with financial incentives for participating, but also with such resources as food, technical support, and accommodations for different learning styles and abilities. Doing so will not only allow for a more diverse group of people to be a part of the process, but also demonstrate your trust in their expertise to help guide the process.

- 4. MAINTAIN TRAUMA AWARENESS:** As members of the local trans community, some Trans Resilience Fund committee members described previous experiences with some of the applicant organizations that were traumatic, even triggering. It was important that the group facilitator maintained a careful balance where committee members could share traumatic experiences where relevant or recuse themselves from conversations when necessary, but ultimately, try to be as open to all applications as possible.

Recommendations for Funders: Recognize that marginalized communities like TGNC communities come with many different experiences of trauma, and be prepared to slow down and take breaks, while also making space for individuals to work out issues that arise among the group. Work with trans-identified (or at the very least, trans-competent) facilitators, mediators, and even mental health providers to support the grantmaking process.

- 5. TRANS COMMUNITIES NEED DIRECT SUPPORT AND FLEXIBLE FUNDING:** The majority of the funds from the Trans Resilience Fund went to direct financial support, but many of the organizations had visions for exactly how the funds would be spent. One committee member explained the diversity of needs for trans-specific resources: “binders or... hygiene kits, those necessities that a lot of cis folks might not understand the purpose of... For the trans community, those things are kind of like their armor. It’s armor that you need to navigate the world that we live in, and [it’s important to] make sure that folks can have those things and have access to those things.” Notably, the need for direct support was identified even by larger,

THEMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

more institutional organizations. Valley Youth House, a large provider of housing services, recognized that their trans clients needed more resources in the way of direct financial support. Given the restrictions in typical government and philanthropic funding streams, the Trans Resilience Fund provided them with a unique opportunity to acquire no-strings-attached funding to directly financially support their clients. The Attic Youth Center and Philadelphia FIGHT's Y-HEP Center voiced similar concerns.

Recommendations for Funders: Trust TGNC community efforts to distribute funds through organizations like CBTEL, for example, particularly when institutional limitations prevent philanthropic organizations from giving funds directly to individuals. In nearly all cases, Trans Resilience Fund grantees planned to redistribute the funds through organizational grant, assistance, and reparations programs. Allow mainstream organizations the flexibility to use funding to meet basic needs of their clients.