

WE ARE ON A BRIDGE TO A NEW PARADIGM



# 2022 IMPACT REPORT

PREPARED BY



BUILDING INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY POWER

**Partnership** is a catalytic creative force, where things we can only imagine alone become possible because of a commitment to working in a vulnerable relationship; where there is comfort asking for help, listening and learning deeply across differences, seeking genuine input that results in each partner seeing themselves reflected in what is created.

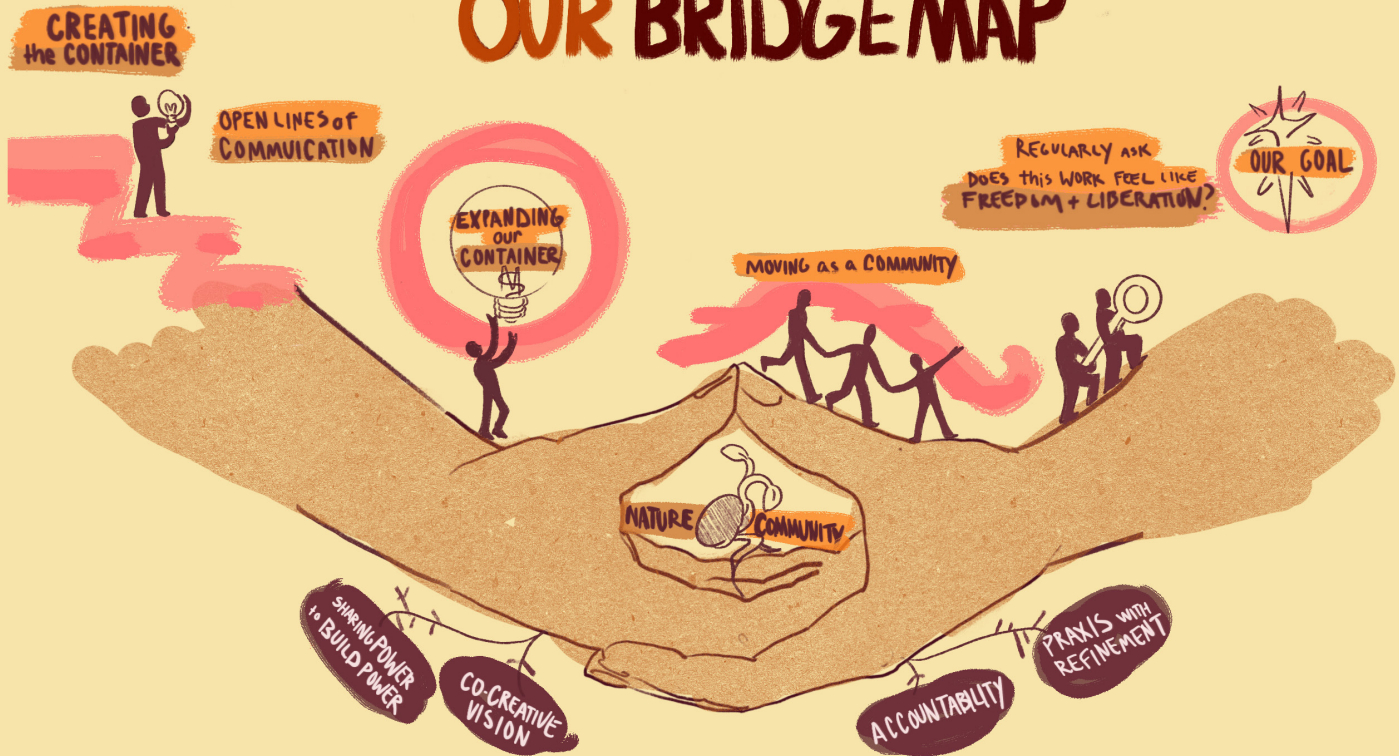


BUILDING INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY POWER

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# OUR BRIDGEMAP



## INTRODUCTION: BUILDING POWER IN COMMUNITY

The Partnership Fund and Partnership Action Fund (collectively The Funds) are c3/c4 pooled funds bringing together funders and field leaders committed to a shared vision of developing independent political power. This report focuses solely on our 501c3 legally permissible work. We exist to support critical movement ecosystems for change. Together we are guided by a deep commitment to building a multi-racial, pluralistic democracy, where we all have the power to live with dignity.

This work began as an experiment within the larger field of civic engagement funding and organizing, initiated by a set of leaders with growing curiosity around what it would take to resource and develop independent political power (IPP) that is rooted in, and accountable to, multi-racial and multi-class bases within states. Our founding partners knew the traditional approach to civic engagement funding was not building lasting change. The voices of low income and BIPOC communities largely remain unheard, filtered through a partisan political machine that is unresponsive to their needs, leaving the promises of democracy still unfulfilled. In our country racialized capitalism and white supremacy culture have worked in

tandem to dis-empower and traumatize communities of color in the political, economic, and cultural arenas.

We are left with two political parties (largely neo-liberal in their orientation) unable and unwilling to fully respond to the needs of our communities. We need politics to truly serve the will of the people rather than the careers of politicians or the corporate bottom line. The Partnership Fund (TPF) believe we can flip this dynamic through building truly independent political power rooted in membership-based organizations that center the voices of directly impacted people through all aspects of civic life.

The Fund was named The Partnership Fund because we knew uncovering a different approach to traditional civic engagement funding – breaking out of business as usual, 50+1 state election strategies that were not producing durable results – would require many smart leaders coming together as equals; that the answer to our questions did not lay with one institution or one organization but would require all of us learning across difference to find a new and better way to resource change.

# WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS IMPACT REPORT

We have learned so much about what it takes to support independent political power, and we still have more to learn. In the spirit of always sharing lessons learned and refining our praxis, this report is designed and presented as a humble pause to reflect on our impact so far. Our core inquiry is, what has been the impact of our Partnership?

We **talked to 14 partners** and two funding allies, from a mix of grantee states and funding strategies asking three questions:

- How has our partnership impacted your work?
- Our guiding values are community, nature, and self-determination. What feedback do you have to offer us on how we might better live our values and support power-building infrastructure?
- What are you seeing / assessing / experiencing as ongoing or changing needs that you'd like to bring to our community's attention?

This report has two sections. The first is an introduction to our approach and a summary of our process. The second section is the Impact section that synthesizes the feedback we received. Before presenting the themes that emerged about our impact to date and what more is being asked of those of us committed to independent power-building moving forward, you'll find an overview of our funding approach and strategies.

## HISTORY AND OVERVIEW OF OUR FUNDING

**To date, we've granted nearly 11 million dollars to over 30 frontline partners in 11 states.**

We began in 2014 with a focus on grantmaking that supported cohorts of state-based organizations in five focus states: Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, Ohio and Virginia. In 2018 we expanded to include investments in Florida and Missouri, and in 2021 incorporated a southern strategy through a series of exploratory grants in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Initially all states in the power-building portfolio were supported with 400k annual, multi-year minimum investment. With our expansions in 2018 and 2021, in service of increasing equity and impact, we moved away from the minimum investment requirement in the short term, with an

ambition to return to 400k minimum investments per state over the next 5 years.

Through all of this we've stayed true to our belief in partnership by sustaining general support commitments to our grantee partners -- through election cycles, transitioning leaders, shifting priorities in philanthropy and an entrenched divisive political and social climate. We believe the path to true transformation is through the increasing political power and centering of leaders within the infrastructure who are accountable to and members of truly independently organized people's organizations.

Power for our grantees means the ability to define a vision for the future, set an aligned agenda and policy priorities, win those policies, implement the policies, and maintain the policies, processes, and culture that support that future.

We believe this cannot happen without organized people, and that **no one organization can do this alone**. We understand power at its best to be democratic, rooted, and independent. It is attained when interdependent people's organizations work together in public towards a shared vision and long-term agenda within an ecosystem. This is why we commit our work to ensuring ecosystems of powerful people's organizations in states have the support they need to collectively wield power and win change.

We prioritize organizations that center the leadership and lived experiences of people most impacted by inequality and historically excluded from democratic practices because of our belief that systemic inequalities, including racial and gender injustice, are most effectively addressed when driven by the lived experiences of and leadership of impacted communities. As such, the Partnership Fund is committed to building independent political power through organizations that center the leadership and experiences of directly impacted communities, including Black women, immigrants, women of color, and LGBTQ people.

We also know that the resources of support we have to offer expand beyond money. We've hosted strategy convenings and learning cohorts across different geographies and roles since our founding that have helped strengthen the collective wisdom and impactfulness of this field. You can learn more about the states we support in the [appendix](#). ■

# A NEW PARADIGM FUNDING APPROACH



*We view **power** as a living energy, a relationship between forces that grow, shift and evolve. **Power** is personal and collective. We work together to build narrative **power**, economic **power**, administrative **power**, disruptive **power**, and modeling **power**. We are constantly working to be ‘in right’ relationship with **power**. We seek to move past colonized old paradigm ‘**power over**’ models to embody generative, expansive, new paradigm **power**.*

In 2019, on the cusp of a global pandemic, Erin Dale McClellan was hired as the second executive director in The Fund’s history who brought with her a new vision on how to continue to deepen the success and impact of The Fund.

## From 2014 to 2018 The Fund:

- claimed credit for helping to coalesce the disparate field of leaders advancing independent political power approaches through a thoughtful convening and shared learning strategy,
- helped funders and field leaders understand the importance of this approach, spread powerful and actionable frameworks around how to advance independent political power (IPP),

- changed how states planned, aligning donor and philanthropic efforts towards power-building.
- All while supporting impactful leaders of people’s organizations with the flexibility and respect and trust required to succeed.

With that success came a new challenge. Many across the field of civic engagement were now claiming to advance independent political power, without really changing their practices or approach. This threatened to dilute organizing efforts that were actually disrupting the status quo, using this now popular framework of IPP as a cover to continue business as usual within civic engagement.

Yet Erin knew that this business as usual civic engagement practices were only replicating the old models and ways of work we were trying so hard to defeat. In the famous words of Audre Lord, “The Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s House.”

The truth is those of us working to uphold the promise of democracy will almost always be outspent by those looking to maintain the status quo. In order to transform

conditions and move past the status quo, this next phase of TPF would require finding new ways of working, to shift our praxis, and to push our own and the field’s learning edge to find different ways to do the work of grantmaking that could actually bring real transformation; to act and live into our values of power that could usher in a new paradigm.

## HOW DOES THE PARTNERSHIP FUND DEFINE WHOLENESS:

The crisis in U.S. democracy demands a new paradigm to understand and express power. We commit ourselves to a true democracy that shares power for collective well-being. Our understanding of Independent Political Power is rooted in our belief that we must transform old colonial paradigms of power into new paradigms that are generative, expansive, and shared.

We believe transformative independent political power is built and sustained when individuals, organizations and infrastructure are striving to be whole. Wholeness for The Partnership Fund means an authentic balance in the spirit, mind, body, and heart of the individuals, organizations, and ecosystems where we operate. TPF prioritizes and centers wholeness from lived experience which shows us that unhealed people build broken organizations and systems; we must strive towards wholeness to create something new. TPF works to align our philanthropic allies to travel this road with us, to join our journey

to dismantle the impacts of colonization and build a foundation that truly honors community and nature. Racism, white supremacy culture, and the colonized mind disconnect us from each other, self, and nature. We recognize that TPF must work together with grantee and funding partners to unearth the damage and trauma in ourselves, our organizations, and our systems in order to transform them.

## VALUES

We started this journey into a new paradigm with articulating clear guiding values that would help us to better bring our commitment to IPP into practice.

### **INDEPENDENT – SELF-DETERMINATION**

Deepening our practice of independence through centering our value of self-determination.

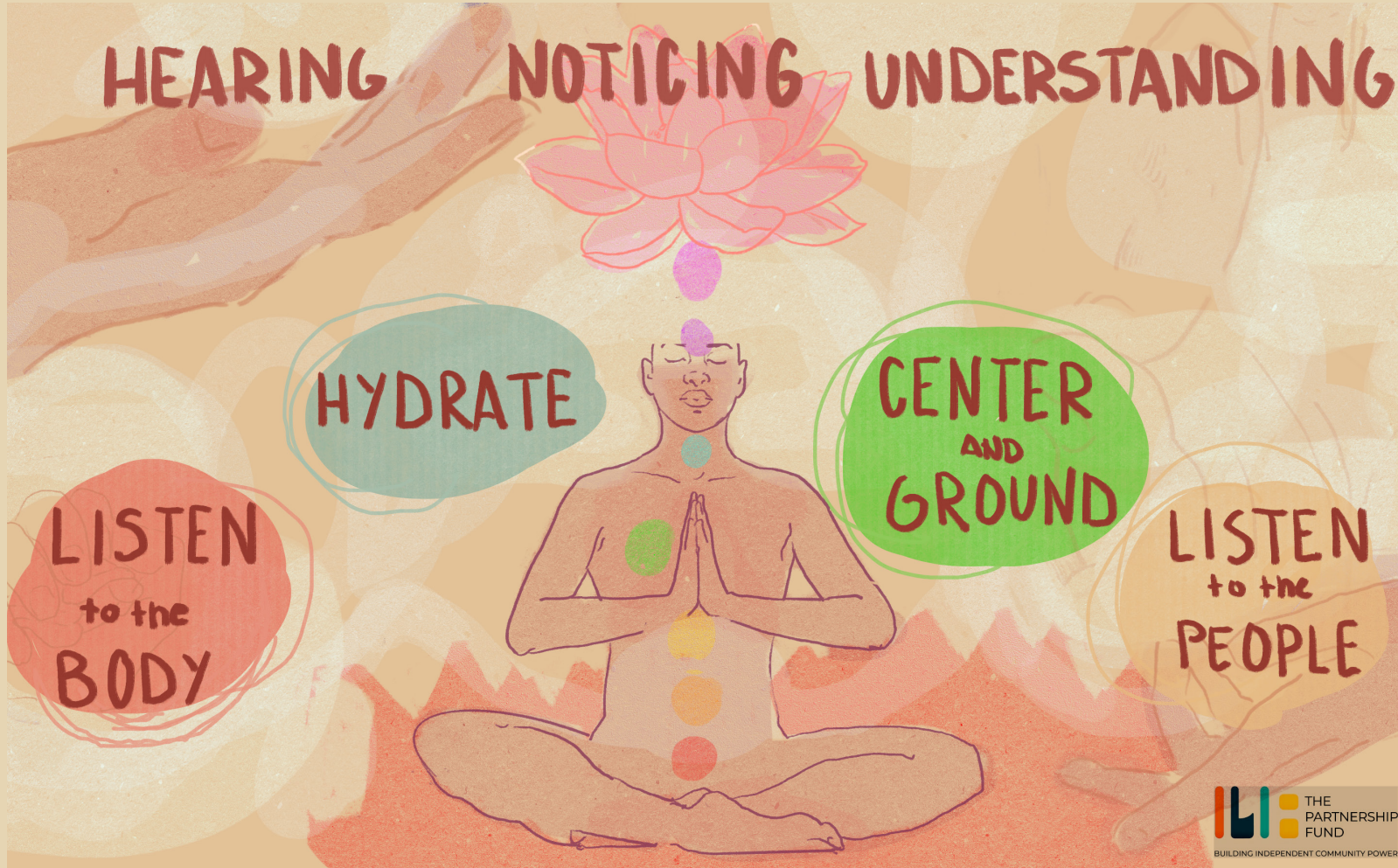
### **POLITICAL – COMMUNITY**

Deepening our political practice by centering our value of community at every turn.

### **POWER – NATURE**

Deepening our practice of interdependence to build power by centering our value and awe for nature.

HEARING NOTICING UNDERSTANDING



A NEW PARADIGM FUNDING APPROACH

## EVOLUTIONARY CHANGEMAKERS

Next we committed to facing the truth of what stood in the way of embracing transformational approaches to wielding power, recognizing “nothing can be fixed until it is faced” - James Balwin. We needed to address the active work and legacies of colonialism and racialized capitalism in ourselves, TPF, and our institutions, to face these wounds and heal.

This meant an open invitation for all staff, funding, and grantee partners to participate in a new leadership development program called Evolutionary Changemakers designed to help us all heal from the destructive practices and forces of colonial paradigms, seeking the wholeness and integration necessary for a new paradigm, post-colonial approach to working, relating, and being with ourselves and each other.

## CENTERING BLACK LEADERS

We looked at our grantmaking portfolio for legacies of the old approaches and challenges, and realized that still less than half of our grantees were organizations led by people of color and people’s organizations. So we invited new people’s organizations led by and serving people of color to the state alignment power-building cohorts we already supported, and launched the Southern strategy with exploratory grants into four additional states as part of our core power-building grantmaking portfolio.

We also launched the Collective Courage Fund, our first special innovation fund project, as an effort to bridge economic and political self-determination for Black communities through supporting Black cooperators to create and participate in movement ecosystems for change.



# CO-CREATIVE GRANTMAKING

And we launched a new paradigm governance committee, an open call was sent to our grantee and funding partners to decide how to bring more self-determination into our grantmaking practices. We knew we couldn't shift power as long as all the decisions in our fund were still held by the same few; that's status quo. So we decided to cross a bridge to the unknown and design a new approach called co-creative grantmaking.

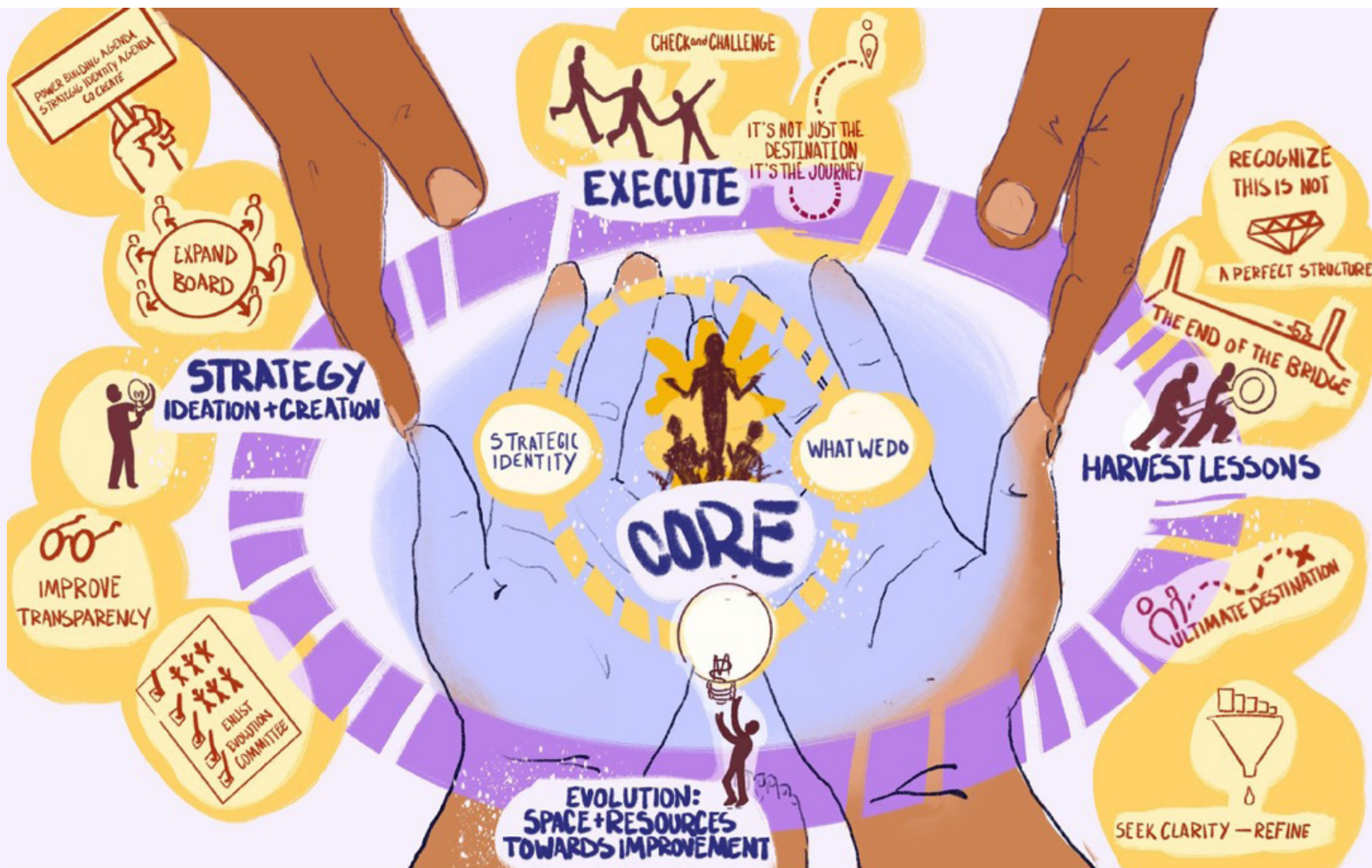
Participatory grantmaking is on the rise throughout philanthropy, with grantee decision panels and formal votes and voices in the decisions becoming standard practice. But our new paradigm governance committee did not ask for traditional participatory grantmaking practices first and foremost. Instead this committee asked that our first step be to create a shared organizing agenda to serve as the guiding strategy for our work. Something we all as funders, organizers, and staff could work out loud and together towards as the heart of our co-governance.

To uncover our specific power-building agenda, we hosted a full partnership, (virtual) strategy retreat and used a framework we call the Five Directions Assessment. This draws on the teachings of [Vivette Jeffries-Logan](#), a citizen

of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation (OBSN); the Indigenous people of Orange, Alamance and Caswell counties in North Carolina; Tema Okun of dismantling Racism Works, as well as Dr. "G. Love" Geryll Robinson of Five Directions Wellness. In many wisdom traditions, this tool is also known as the medicine wheel. Using tools rooted in who we are as nature (what we are being detached from) will help root us back into our dignity and humanity. The medicine wheel is whole, a circle, beginning and end that allows us to build deeply rooted partnership, to innovate what's necessary for the future, returning to wholeness.

You can find this organizing agenda, our five directions power-building agenda that guides our strategy and work now, in the appendix of this report.

The stories, themes, and reflections in the rest of this report are our way of staying connected to our community; to ensure these changes and shifts of the past three years are supporting the powerful leaders we respect and admire to build lasting movements for change. ■



# OUR IMPACT

## BUILDING STATE POWER THROUGH THE POWER-BUILDING GRANTMAKING PORTFOLIO

In this section of the report we focus on the direct feedback from the assessment interviews.

“You have great ideas and no one is competing with you and you are adding what no one else is doing.”

-- Eunsook Lee, AAPI Civic Engagement Fund

Historically the impact of The Partnership Fund has been as a key funder and supporter of state-based ecosystems, with investments rooted in membership-based organizations contending for state power. These investments were made over many cycles and continued regardless of swinging funding trends in philanthropy. This work has an impact. Today we see a powerful coalition of state-based organizations holding the line and protecting democracy. They are one of our last lines of defense to fight back authoritarian fascism at the national level. Everything we do now continues to build on our power-building approach that has been instrumental in developing rooted state-based infrastructure.

## LIBERATORY MONEY BUILDS TRUST AND RELATIONSHIP

It can seem simplistic at this point, but what we heard is general operating support matters. The quality of liberatory practice in the money and how applications and reporting work matters. Many in philanthropy now extol the importance of general operating support, yet somehow our grantees are still straddled with onerous, transactional grants; frontline partners reiterated how critical the general operating support we provide is first and foremost. There continues to be deep appreciation for general operating support because it helps frontline partners use the funds flexibly, shows trust in the organization's abilities, helps maintain staff and grow their capacity, and helps partners to grow their base.

Specifically, they noted that general operating support is a way for the funder and frontline partner to build stronger relationships and trust. Project support implies



transactional support, that “we will give you this money, but we must see you work for it,” as opposed to investing in the organization and supporting it to be successful. In return our partners are more willing to engage in strategy conversations and support the power building agenda. We work together, we grow smarter and more impactful, together.

## A STRATEGIC PARTNER AND ALLY IN THE WORK

Most encouraging was the theme of being valued as a strategic partner to frontline and funding allies. Grantees reiterated that their relationship with TPF does not seem one sided but is a real partnership. This was confirmed by funder allies; TPF is thought of as a partner in the funding world that brings open and honest communication to help advance collective success.

“Our relationship doesn’t feel transactional tied to outputs, doesn’t feel like “how can you help me” feels like how we can support and lift each other up.”

--Melanie Aranda, Center for Civic Policy

It was gratifying for the Funds to see the positive impact of our deep belief in building trusting relationships reflected back to us. The little things were reported to make a difference. Partners noticed that we ask people how they are doing, and we actually want to know the answer.

“I can see how much you all take what grantees are saying to heart. You have invested so much time into me personally and also my state and organization.”

--Caitlyn Adams, Missouri Jobs with Justice

## ADVANCING MEMBER-LED STATE ECOSYSTEMS

“TPF comes from an exploratory space asking who are the partners moving a thing together. This is rooted in membership based organizations as the anchor and looking together across the state to explore what is needed...that is part of the success story.”

-- Prentis Haney, Ohio Organizing Collaborative

Grantee partners named as impactful our process of working to understand the ecosystem in the state, focusing on exploring and learning together, and how that approach has helped advance state-based conversation about strategy and even influenced campaign directions. When TPF works in a state, we don't start with building comms capacity, or field capacity, we start with the needs of a rooted organization and build from there..

Grantee partners named as impactful our process of working to understand the ecosystem in the state, focusing on exploring and learning together, and how that approach has helped advance state-based conversation about strategy and even influenced campaign directions. When TPF works in a state, we don't start with building comms capacity, or field capacity, we start with the needs of a rooted organization and build from there. As one grantee reported,

“A positive impact was the state based strategic planning that TPF guides and supports. Oftentimes in our sector because there is so much going on all the time no matter how well C3 table or other collaborations we get stuck in here and now.”

--Melanie Aranda, Center for Civic Policy

## MICHIGAN SNAPSHOT OVER TIME: What do TPF movement ecosystem cohorts look like in practice?

Michigan is an original TPF grantee state. In 2014 there was no independent power-building infrastructure capable of contesting for power state-wide and democracy was reeling. Anti-democratic city managers were the norm. The Flint water crisis and Detroit home foreclosure crisis were visible signs of the ravages of de-industrialization and extractive, racist, anti-democratic policies.

The Economic Justice Alliance of Michigan (EJAM) was founded in 2014 and served as our anchor exploring what was needed to build independent political power. Following EJAM's lead we became a founding investor in We the People Michigan, helping to bring a true state-wide multi-racial, multi-issue, people driven organization contesting for power to the state. In 2020 three more people's organizations joined the partnership, with general operating grants to Detroit Action, Mothering Justice, and Restaurant Opportunities Centers Michigan (ROC Michigan). In 2021 we added Detroit Disability Power as a necessary, member led movement partner again following our grantees lead.

Today there is a more robust, supported IPO infrastructure to build long term multi-racial, working class power in the state. This long-term work of organizing in every part of the state – that focused on challenging the efforts to divide our communities around race and class – created the recent success of enshrining reproductive rights and autonomy in the state constitution and advancing voting rights. These hard earned victories are a testament to the impact rooted, resourced, powerful people's organizations have at the state level.

We have been told by our anchors that the quality of general operating support TPF offered historically was critical in making them whole in this work, and received a direct request from them to increase the amount of high quality general operating support funds for the other member-led organizations in the cohort. Yes, they asked us to raise and distribute more money for their peers in the movement even at their own expense. Unfortunately, high quality, general operating support for member organizing is still rare, and our groups know that to build on and sustain recent wins there must be a whole robust ecosystem working together, not just one or two powerful organizations.

## SELF-DETERMINATION IN GRANTMAKING

“What you are doing gives hope that there is not as much distance as there has been between those in the trenches and those with the money. The initial product is the existence of a relationship to close the gap between shared aspirations and dueling realities.”

--Brett Bursey, South Carolina Progressive Network

CoCreative Grantmaking at the Partnerships Fund is our work to root relationships and shared power in the bones of our organization. We practiced this co-creation through a series of guided conversations at the national, regional and state level to develop our powerbuilding agenda through the state-cohort calls directing state-level strategies; and The Collective Courage Fund has a governance committee made of Black led cooperative leaders that develop the criteria and lead Collective Courage's grantmaking strategy. What we heard is that this work to change the way dollars are given is good and important and it matters. We need to keep going. And that doing it in a relational way helps weave important relationships for leaders on the ground that lead to smarter and stronger infrastructure. Interviewees reported feeling the power of centering self-determination when the anchors of our cohorts in New Mexico, Minnesota, and Michigan chose to take less money themselves in order to strengthen the work of the collective. When one group steps aside to support others, they feel supported in the cohort. This allows for us to create more effective strategies and build more durable ecosystems for change for the long haul.

## CONVENING

“I was impressed with the people and organizations in the room, across fields, sectors, and geography and approach and background; a valuable broad group of folks doing power building and organizing work.”

-- Sean Carroll, Land Stewardship Project

An impact we underestimated was the power in our convenings. Our partners greatly appreciated our approach to convenings (all on zoom) as fun, with spirit, high energy and impressive in the high quality. There is incredible

power and impact in bringing together values aligned leaders across differences, sectors and issues towards a shared agenda. They appreciated the intersectional visions we put forward and the way we held space for reflection, invention and new approaches to our work. We created spaces for long term strategic thinking out of the day to day grind. They appreciated the opportunity to network, think big, and move toward more value aligned approaches to the work. Our convenings centered breath, spirit, and wholeness as central themes of our work. We also developed tools that partners found useful that included the situational analysis we developed in 2020 to support our strategy convening. This tool was still being used by some partners as a reflection tool supporting their own teams' planning.

## EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF POWER

“It struck me when you make a distinction between power as hierarchy that it's good to call out the difference.... it has happened a few times in our work that people have an adverse response to power and identify it as something they don't have; they don't associate the term power the same way I associate it. The distinction is valuable and having that discussion is valuable”

-- Sean Carroll, Land Stewardship Project

When we gather as a TPF community, we make it a practice to slow down and really define our shared values and the vision we are working together towards. This includes continuing to discuss what power and building power really means for all of us in our work. Grantees reported that by being specific in the definition of power, we are seeking to build together what really matters. They described knowing this is a space they need to be in when we took the time to do this, as they are grappling every day inside of their organizations, amongst staff and membership and with bases, around how to define and contest and really wield power in line with their values. Power is a broadly used term across civic engagement and organizing work. What our grantees told us in the impact interviews was that our active exploration into new paradigm power specifically matters for them and their work.

# SHIFTING CULTURE

This comes to the heart of what grantee partners report as valuable about our partnership over the past few years: shifting culture into a new paradigm. TPF has focused on moving into a new paradigm where we leave the harmful aspects of racism, patriarchy, hetero-patriarchy, capitalism and ableism among others in the past. The Fund works to raise these issues in our convening and offer tools and resources that help our frontline partners practice decolonizing their work. We were excited to learn that our approach to decolonizing our praxis work has

seeped into our frontline partners' work. They noted our support has influenced their organizational work culture. As their organizations grow, they have been able to make space for the important work each person needs to do alongside the work that the organization needs to do to decolonize praxis. This includes making space for important conversations, hiring outside consultants and for some, explicitly strengthening their stance as allies alongside POC led organizations by holding bad actors accountable. People's organizations are concretely and practically changing because of the spaces we provide to actively grapple with and model this shift.



## EVOLUTIONARY CHANGEMAKERS - HEALING AS A STRATEGY

“Evolutionary changemakers impacted me personally, I never found anything like it in my professional work, but it also gave me the confidence to approach the work differently.”

--Caitlyn Adams, Missouri Jobs with Justice

We offered evolutionary change makers as a resource to help our frontline and funding partners decolonize their practice. We felt it critical to bring forth indigenous leadership as a guide to decolonizing praxis and evolutionary change. We had strong participation during the COVID lockdowns and as the world opened back up

many partners were less consistent in their participation. Either way, whether they attended once or many times they expressed the need for this space as a way to strengthen their individual leadership to strengthen their organization. For some organizations they participated as a team and noted that the team bond and connection was strengthened. Others noted that it brought the culture of healing and wholeness to the work and allowed them to bring their whole selves to work as a praxis. Many cited the level of professional coaching from evolutionary changemakers was unlike any they have been offered in a professional setting and truly changed their work.

“All true revolutionaries are guided by great feelings of love”

-- Che Guevara



## A REFLECTION: THE PARTNERSHIP FUND LIVING INSIDE ITS VALUES

An organization's values are its core, its culture, its very being. At the Partnership Fund, our values were developed during a 2020 strategy session. Elijah, an 11 year old youth leader in Georgia spoke to us about the work he was doing. When asked what our values should be he said, "Community and Nature because our world is filled with individualism and greed." We felt it important to listen to the wisdom of the seven generations that are on the way. They are the future of our work. We all raised our hands when asked if these values resonated. We decided to add them as core values to guide our work.

A core tenant of the Partnership Fund is to build deep and meaningful relationships with frontline leaders. We developed the original Independent Political Organizations with frontline grantees, we advised state based donor collaboratives to position frontline leaders. We spend time with state partners to listen to their needs and work together with them to organize donors and strategy. We continue this work today because we know our strongest assets and deepest experts are those leaders working day to day in their states to build power and transform conditions for their communities. To improve on this work a critical area of inquiry for our assessment was to ask our partners. "How are we moving in alignment with our values?" We heard that our work to advance self determination and community were strongly felt. This included how we convene our partners and our co-creative grantmaking practices. We also got feedback from partners that they can feel the care and compassion we have for them and individuals and for the work they are doing in their communities. We also learned that while our praxis of the values of self determination and community were strong and felt throughout our program areas, our partners were less clear about what we meant by nature.

Community and Self determination feel very present in my work with Partnership Fund both what is happening and how it is happening. Everything is done with a lot of investment in community building. I feel nature is present in the directions, the food justice and collective courage, but not really sure how it shows up. The nature part of it I don't know what that means. Not sure if that tree hugging or saving the climate?

-- Elianne Farhat, Take Action Minnesota

We explored this conversation and left the assessment knowing that we must sharpen what we mean by nature. In our Five Directions Assessment tool, we use the four directions of north, south, east and west which guides us to returning to balance and harmony in our work. We believe this works at the individual, organizational and infrastructure levels. In praxis - we mean decolonizing our grantmaking practices and investing in our frontline partners to strengthen our movement core which is connection and interdependence with mother nature and each other. We believe every act of connection is returning to what is most essential to build transformative power - relationship and wholeness. Our impact assessment brought home to us a need to speak more clearly on the role of nature in our work.

"This tackling of the colonizing mind. I would combine decolonizing and self determining nature. How can indigenous communities be more involved in The Fund?"

-- Eunsook Lee, AAPI Fund

When we speak to decolonizing our work we are lifting up the indigenous practices that many of our ancestors lived by. We also look to first nations on Turtle Island as leaders and guides on this path. The Partnership Fund, while having multi-racial power building organizations, Black led cooperatives and other important BIPOC communities as frontline partners, does not directly support any indigenous organizers. The funders were encouraged to build relationships with and invest directly in indigenous power building organizations as leaders and guides in our work. We also know that sovereign nations, maroon spaces, liberatory zones and land stewards (land cooperatives) are key to fighting for power in a new paradigm. Power is land. Land is home.

# CHALLENGES AND PRESSING NEEDS IN THE DIRECTIONS?

“What you are doing gives hope that there is not as much distance as there has been between those in the trenches and those with the money. The initial product is the existence of a relationship to close the gap between shared aspirations and dueling realities.”

--Brett Bursey, South Carolina Progressive Network

The threat of authoritarianism and fascism are ever present. The security and safety of our democracy are real and dangerous. The need to support organizations to create healthy and vibrant organizations to combat these forces was clear as well. The final area of our assessment focused on challenges and pressing needs facing our frontline partners in each direction of our power building agenda. We asked our partners what we needed to change or do differently? What changes in the landscape do we need to respond to and address moving forward?

## ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: SEEKING WHOLENESS IN RELATIONSHIP

An important challenge is how The Partnership Fund can help our grantee partners shift culture in their own organizations and put the values and practices of The Partnership Fund to work more effectively in their state. The last few years have been incredibly difficult for movement leaders. They continue to struggle with the fights they have to wage in their state, while also building organizations where transformation can happen for their members and their staff.

“It all comes down to that. How can this work at TPF better help us with our own culture? There is a lot we need to do in our organizations. The dynamics we are trying to change in the world are reflected in our organization and we achieve our goals by people thriving. Everything you are talking about in this agenda - structure, money flow- are important in our organization. Thinking about this model and questions to bring into our own organization and culture and how do we measure progress?”

--Sean Carroll, Land Stewardship Project

The Partnership Fund approach to building independent political power has evolved. We focus on strengthening the capacity of our grantee partners and aligning philanthropy at the national level to support a power building approach

that we believe will result in transformative changes for our partners and their communities. One of our funding partners, Tony Johnson of the Group Health Foundation and a leader from the Chinook Indian Nation and chairman of the Tribal Council shares with us their understanding that, **“It takes as long to fix a problem as it took to make it.”** He reminded us that is a natural law in his tribal community, and while we know it will take time, we are anxious to see movement because the problems facing the communities where we invest are urgent. The Fund believes we must do two things at once **1) Fight back against oppressive forces to mitigate harm and 2) Build the way forward.** We know no one organization can do this alone at the local, national or state level. Our relationships and partnerships matter even more in this context.

“We need more time in relationships, still coming out of the zoom pandemic bubble and reorienting how we invest in each other. We need to come out of isolation and focus on alignment across orgs and real human connections.

-- Kat Rohn, OutFront Minnesota

The Fund were encouraged to convene partners to connect, strategize and build relationships together. We have included more face to face meetings including our Grantee Partner gathering focused on specific strategies like independent resource generation and cooperation and more face to face staff meetings in 2023.

## MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

We were asked what mutual accountability looks like for both The Fund and our frontline grantees. This is a difficult issue to balance. As a funder we want to support our frontline partners and as a partnership practicing co creative grantmaking we are all accountable to each other. We were asked to keep doing the individual check-ins with front line grantee partners to ensure that we both are moving the power building agenda forward together. We did not take this as a sign that we should be taking more time with our frontline partners - but that these check-ins, build relationships, share challenges and strategies, and maintain our relationship. It also gives each partner in this relationship an opportunity to speak to what they need. We ask each other how we are living into the power building priorities as a way to maintain accountability and rigor.

“I appreciate the confidence you have in us to do our jobs and not need a bunch of reports and oversight AND I think the 1:1 check ins are also a moment to have accountability with us as grantees. How are we living into these power building priorities in tangible ways?”

-- Elianne Farhat., Take Action Minnesota

## REPAIR (I AM, WE ARE)

Our partners reiterated that they need strategy, space, time and resources for repair for inter-organizational harm. This aspect of The Fund’s powerbuilding agenda needs to expand and grow to scale. The toxic nature of some aspects of social justice work that include harmful staff culture, overwork, stress, infighting, competition, and undermining allies needs to be minimized. How do we help our movement at large through our frontline grantee partners get to wholeness? Our frontline partners see this as an obstacle to winning transformative change.

“Sometimes we perpetrate, sometimes others perpetrate. We know we need each other, and then there will still be withholding of information, resources, money and power. And that’s where we harm our collective ability to win and make change. We are in a capitalist society so this keeps happening. Until we decide to fight collectively against it...”

-- Keyona Hough, Black Yield Institute and Cherry Hill Food Cooperative

One partner highlighted the need for the ecosystem to see the critical nature of healing support for new leaders who many times come into the work because they have been harmed by these systems of extraction.

“new leaders - particularly those in membership based organizations as the warriors fighting to reshape our democracy and the architects of the new future”

-- Prentiss Haney, Ohio Organizing Collaborative

There is a need to cultivate healthy collectives to build resilient communities in alignment with our values. This happens when we expand the circle of relationships and expand the circle of rights using an intersectional approach that honors the whole person’s identities and needs. The crisis calls for multi faceted approach resourcing beyond single issue fights. How can we build alignment to fight across multiple fronts in unison and balance? One grantee partner talked about their decision in the state to simply leave toxic infrastructure behind and create the new. They described this process as amazingly healing, everything else aligned. It was a reminder that we can support walking away from toxicity to create new culture and rhythms and alignments for the work that is more sustainable.





## LONGTERM THINKING AND INVESTING

Another area where The Fund were pressed to work harder was in lifting up the continued need for racial justice funding. The sense from frontline partners is that while the calls for investment in Black Led organizing and leadership and in racial justice funding have been made and there is a sense that funding has been moved to these organizations, the reality is that the commitment from philanthropy has fallen short.

The ‘ask’ from our partners is for The Fund to help the larger field understand that status quo civic engagement approaches, that funding electoral campaigns aka 50 plus 1 strategies, is insufficient to create long term change. Issue campaigns and electoral campaigns are important, but must be supported alongside work to transform systems and build alternatives. There is a yearning to develop strategies that center base building and membership development. There is a need for organizations to strengthen their capacity to experiment and to try new strategies. We are building a future we have not yet seen, and resources for that work are just as critical as electoral and issue campaigns.

“There is a need to figure out how to grow assets and build a regenerating fund using popular tools like endowments and other tools. It seems that our organizations and cooperatives would benefit from acquiring funding and developing it ourselves. Our lifts are heavy. Knowledge of how we create these revolving funding sources will be helpful and support in building them on the ground would fortify our national organizing.”

-- Eric Jackson, Black Yield Institute

The message for The Fund is to continue to struggle and find new ways to bring flexible resources to the work. We believe this strategy should center on what is called independent resource generation. We also believe we should invest in innovation and learning at a much larger scale. We want to support front line partners to be able to be creative, fail, and learn. We also need to invest in campaigns to develop alternative systems that support our communities to build a new future.

“We need a philanthropic movement that can meet the moment....If we want to transform systems and build a world where we center people and care and joyful thriving lives and that takes 100% and that is what we build toward and is really hard. The organizations are rebuilding and strengthening their base because everything has changed in the last few years and getting to a philanthropic sector that can meet the times is critical. This is how the Partnership Fund as a model helps people.

- Elianne Farhat , Take Action Minnesota

## PRACTICING DEMOCRACY

The assessment also offered feedback about our work to support membership based organizations. Since 2014, The Fund has seen anchoring our work in membership based, people centered organizations as a critical strategy to building power. We make a distinction between organizations that have “supporter, or outreach programs” and those who are organized to be governed by people directly impacted by the problem. For example, these organizations have leadership committees that represent constituencies by race, geography, issue or better yet chapters that govern the activities of the organizations. While we understand the importance of communication hubs, research hubs, and field programs, we believe that membership based people governed organizations are practicing democracy directly and empowering everyday people to lead. We believe these organizations -winning their campaigns- encourages people to be change agents and supports shared governance models that are critical to governing civil society.

“Part of what is being contested in the US is democracy based on majority rule. Winner takes all - since the inception of our political project. Now it has worked when the country was predominately white, male land-owning. Now as it has shifted we have fought to expand the definition. We have fought and won and now it’s a full threat to democracy. The idea of majority rule is being contested now. They want to replace it with a minority. 21st century American apartheid. They want to undermine majority rule for an apartheid system with minority rule again.”

-- Prentiss Haney - Ohio Organizing Collaborative

This insight is particularly important because we are in an epic battle against authoritarianism and fascism. This fight at its core is to narrow who governs our country and uses disinformation, dog whistle politics, violence and corporate money to gain total control of our governing systems into the hands of those who do not want a multiracial democracy in this country. Our work at The Fund to invest in membership based organizations is now more important than ever and must be more prevalent in all of the work we are doing to align philanthropic resources and tell our story of impact.

## COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT AS A MODEL OF GOVERNANCE

It is clear from the feedback that Collective Courage is a program that offers a model for living into the value of self determination and community. In addition, cooperatives are also organizations that practice democracy. According to the International Cooperative Alliance, a cooperative is:

“an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.”

--ICA

Collective Courage is a fund named after a book by Dr. Jessica Gordan Nemhard called *Collective Courage: The History of Black Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice* - a guiding text to cooperative developers reviving the cooperative movement across the country. Our project is focused on growing the civic engagement and power building potential of the Black led cooperative movement at this moment. In 2022, we invested in 9 food and land cooperatives to strengthen their civic engagement work. We learned that the definition of civic engagement in the cooperative movement varies to include policy advocacy, political education, base building and electoral justice. Our work in 2023 will be to focus on each of these tactics and provide specific capacity support for each tactic including planning electoral justice work in preparation for 2024.

# History & Vision: Collective Courage Fund

"The history of African-American cooperativism is really a parallel, a sort of silent partner, to the long civil rights movement. The story is not just about the triumph and the survival of co-ops in the black community, but it's also about the sabotage and the challenges."—  
*Jessica Gordon Nembhard*



"The Collective Courage governance committee has given me insight on the magnitude of our work and what's happening in the cooperative movement. Being a part of the grant reviewer process confirmed that we can create our own requirements for how to give our resources, how we collect our resources and how we become collective owners. We are doing the work even when we are just figuring things out."

--Keyona Hough, Black Yield Institute  
and Cherry Hill Food Coop

Cooperators are also learning from this program as members of its governance committee. They were able to review 56 applications submitted to The Fund and study the varying forms of cooperative organization. It has created a safe space for Cooperators to learn together, share their organizing challenges and encourage each other. The important value lifted here was ownership. Ownership is power. Collective Courage is a space where the Cooperators have ownership of the work. They are determining the direction and providing guidance on

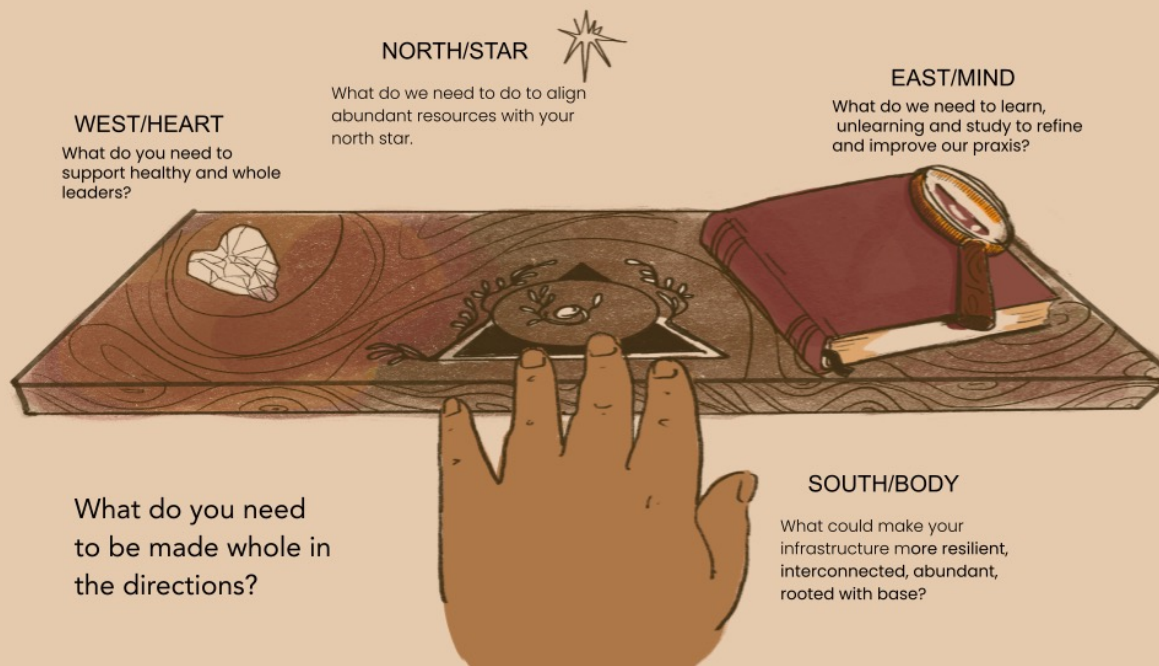
investment strategies that directly impact their work locally. Having safe space to share and strategize is another critical aspect of building transformative relationships.

"Sometimes I need to get some things off my chest. Sometimes we have to tell people how we feel so they can know how hard it is out here. Everything we are doing is uphill. You can say forget it, I'm done walking uphill. Or you can continue to create safe spaces where we can say I'm scared, upset and tired of fighting this battle. And be able to share your real feelings when we get overwhelmed and want to give up. Because these are real feelings and they can impact our ability to move authentically if we can't share them safely."

-- Keyona Hough, Black Yield Institute  
and Cherry Hill Food Cooperative

## IN CLOSING

Thanks to all who are partners with us in this journey, for sharing honestly and openly. In the work of building our democracy there never feels like a good time to pause, to rest, to reflect, to share feedback. We honor all the feedback that strengthens our practice, and all of you who have read and shared in these lessons and work with us.



## APPENDIX A: POWER-BUILDING AGENDA

### Our power-building agenda

#### A transformed approach to philanthropy (north:vision)

- One that moves towards self-determination: for the organizations we support, infrastructure, and resources.
- One that supports planning for 7 year cycles at a minimum (and seven generations thinking ideally); real spacious time to plan, strategize, executive, and find co-conspirators, creating space for leaders to breathe.
- One that seeks the medicine we need as givers and gatekeepers of wealth to move in more liberatory ways.
- One that embraces learning first and execution second.
- One that focuses on resources and leadership that support the collective (supporting what helps the whole thing get strong vs. individual components) and moves past competitive money.

#### More resilient, interconnected, abundant, rooted infrastructure and base. (south:base, money, infrastructure)

- In order to really enact a structural shift in the political economy --where we have truly rooted and independent organizations who are more powerful and contesting for what those historically excluded from power need to thrive -- we need a healthier, larger, stronger base of leaders engaged powerfully year round.
- This requires money for year-round staffing (ending the expand / contract cycle), and money

for rooted orgs to really pour into their people and keep the talent in the house.

- We need resources for relational infrastructure to invest in the connective infrastructure; to strengthen the resiliency and power of local leaders, not just the ED, but amongst the base; spaces for relational base-work, not simply door knocking targets; Intergenerational space; peer support to share the load to have more people moving the work forward more powerfully. This will help to create a deeper web of connectivity amongst like-minded organizers.
- Increased resources for local organizing, including rural organizing, bringing smaller grassroots orgs into infrastructure and connections while challenging scarcity mindsets and beliefs; money for the locally rooted organizations without scarcity strings.
- Funder allies to participate in infrastructure, lifting up, aligning, and organizing together around moving past destructive application and reporting practices, building alternative shared and mutual accountability processes, to deepen support for necessary infrastructure and movement work.
- Increasing Self Determination/ Autonomy for infrastructure (base building, ecosystem building, support at local level building up), which requires helping to identify more democratic donor bases, new relationships with donors and funders.
- Work with allies to build a stronger IRC movement - efforts to build independent funding strategies beyond codependency in philanthropy.

- There's no power without ownership. We need land and fertile soil to sustain base, movement, and infrastructure.

**The advancement, support of, and development of whole person leadership (from head, heart, and spirit). (west: healing)**

- We heard a strong call for the healing support necessary to build collective power.
- We must support stronger more grounded leadership healing (sabbatical, rest, somatic leadership, mental health support for organizations, conflict resolution)
- We must resource these leaders in ways that allow them more time for their necessary leadership (less barriers to funding, reports, applications, budgets) multi year general operating, long term commitments.

**Co-conspiratorial learning spaces and research (east: study) that spans geographies and power-centers, inclusive of philanthropic and organizing partners, to discover new ways to build independent power. Our learning agenda will focus on:**

- Studying and practicing self-determined power, and new ways of wielding and transforming power in line with our values, not just replicating old destructive models. We recognize what we are working to build has never existed in the world; it takes study and practice to really discover the new ways of organizing and wielding

power in line with our values. And it requires strategic space to dream big and work towards this larger vision while meeting the immediate needs of now.

- Genuine independence requires ways of moving towards more democratic and independent resources; we need to study and learn what is required to support an ecosystem for independent resource generation (IRG).
- Study and elevate opportunities to capture political and electoral capital for real power-building work, to enact real structural shift in the political economy: where we find more orgs, more powerful.
  - Need to understand more about opposition;
  - How to contest the outside, destructive movement profiteering class that makes a living off of our work but rejects our values;
  - Those working to defund and discredit our organizers, who will keep growing louder as we grow stronger.

## THE FIVE DIRECTIONS ASSESSMENT

### Five Directions Key

**A transformed approach to philanthropy (north: vision)**

**North: Vision and values.** When traveling the underground railroad or sailing the ocean blue the North Star is a guiding light. This helps to ensure you are moving in the right direction. What is the north star you're building towards?

**East: The direction of the mind.** What do we need to understand better, research and explore?. What do we need to learn and unlearn? What do we need to study to improve our practice?

**South: The Body, The Ground, Base, Physical Infrastructure (systems)** space of physical healing. What do our organized bases in place on the ground (Money, land, physical infrastructure, material infrastructure, equipment) need to build power and reach our north star?

**West: The Emotions, Feelings.** What do we need to do to address trauma and healing? How do we repair? How do we move into truth and reconciliation? What do we need so we don't throw people away?

**CORE: You, Your organization, The Core, the 5th direction.** The Collective. At the center of all this is the spirit, soul, integration and the identity of who WE are.



# APPENDIX B: COLLECTIVE COURAGE OVERVIEW

## The Cooperative Approach to Building Black Independent Political Power

“The history of African-American cooperativism is really a parallel, a sort of a silent partner, to the long civil rights movement. The story is not just about the triumph and the survival of co-ops in the black community, but it’s also about the sabotage and the challenges.” – Jessica Gordon Nembhard

The Collective Courage Fund was launched in 2020 to grow Black-led cooperative movement power and infrastructure. The Fund resources Black-led cooperatives through grantmaking, capacity building, and connection to grow local civic engagement infrastructure through their community work.

The Black vote is critical to electoral races across the country, especially in states with Black populations above 25%. Civic engagement organizations across the country focus on integrated voter engagement. The civic engagement movement (including funders, voter engagement and movement building organizations, policy advocacy organizations) historically engages Black voters in October and disappears after the election, only to return again next October. Many of these programs include efforts to register voters, encourage them to turn out in elections, endorse candidates and support public education programs.

Year after year parties and politicians, and in many cases, donors and foundations pour financial resources to encourage Black turnout; however, many of the organizations receiving these funds are white led and / or live outside the target Black community. They drop into a community around election time, leaving few if any resources behind. While it is critical to increase voter turnout and overall civic engagement, after the elections communities are left with little more than a few percentage points increase, if that.

The Collective Courage Fund seeks to grow Black civic engagement infrastructure in a way that grows community power, assets, resources, employment, and connection. We need infrastructure that is generative, community governed and controlled. In many states, there exists a gap.

Black led organizations are not a central part of the civic engagement movement. In states where collaborative tables exist, like the State Voices network and other large organizing collaboratives, Black cooperatives are not at the table.

While Black cooperative efforts are isolated and underinvested, they work on the front lines against community assaults via lack of jobs, housing and transportation systems. Key investments could build a bridge, strengthening the cooperative movement and deepening Black leadership within the civic engagement infrastructure across the country.

### Why Black-led Cooperatives are best positioned to lead civic engagement work in this political moment?

- Voting and democratic decision-making is in the DNA of Cooperatives
- Cooperatives are trusted community members, they are the roots of the branches of our communities
- Cooperatives have members/owners who identify with their cooperative (unlike some other organizations that have online supporters etc.)
- People are only going to turn out this year if we do the work to turn them out. **We have to know where are people are and be in a trusted community with our people---** Black cooperatives are the most trusted community in many of our communities
- We are a community of practice, and **this election is positioned to shift our political context for many years--**engaging in this election is another opportunity to identify where are people are at, what they care about, and continue to build the collective power of Black Cooperatives

### The Intervention:

The political and economic crises facing Black communities mandates innovation in the support and development of Black independent political infrastructure. Black Led Food Cooperatives are a burgeoning movement in which investment, alignment and capacity building will manifest a stronger, Black led, independent political movement. These organizations are critical because they can not only engage their individual membership base, they are also able to engage locally because their membership is rooted in the community.

The Collective Courage Fund, a body governed by representatives from the Black-Led Food Cooperative Movement will be directly resourcing cooperatives across the country to build strong electoral engagement campaigns. This includes direct grantmaking, capacity building, landscaping, & philanthropic advocacy to uplift the work of cooperatives.

### 2022 Goals:

- Grant \$2 million to Black-Led Cooperatives leading or developing civic engagement campaigns in their local communities
- Grow the capacity of Cooperatives to run civic engagement campaigns through a capacity building and learning cohort. This program offers training and connection with partners
- Grow the electoral capacity of city and state infrastructure in key states
- Facilitate partnerships between cooperatives and traditional civic infrastructure to build data and training capacity
- Expand the philanthropic dollars that are supporting Black-led cooperatives on a local and national level

### Update & Important Partner Information:

As of June 2022, the Collective Courage Fund has received more than **55 applications from Black-Led Land and Food Cooperatives who are looking to build civic engagement campaigns**. These are organizations that are not resourced by traditional civic infrastructure and for the most part are going to be running first time programs.

In order to meet the growing need to grow the capacity of these organizations paired with the urgency of the 2022 elections, **the Collective Courage Fund seeks to increase its budget by \$1,000,000**. Any additional dollars raised will go towards supporting this effort.

While the work of Collective Courage is a multi-year and long term commitment, we know that elections are pivotal moments of community engagement and organizational building. We believe it is essential to grow the grantmaking budget in this cycle for the organizations to grow and build needed organizational infrastructure.

**If you are interested in partnering on this project please contact: [erin@partnershipfunds.org](mailto:erin@partnershipfunds.org).**

## APPENDIX C: GRANTEE STATES OVERVIEW

State	Governor Democratic/ Republican	Total House Representatives (Democrats)	Total House Representatives (Republicans)	Total Senate Representatives (Democrats)	Total Senate Representatives (Republicans)	Is Population Growing or Declining
Florida	Republican	35	85	12	28	Increasing
Georgia	Republican	77	103	22	34	Increasing
Maryland	Democratic	99	42	32	15	Declining
Michigan	Democratic	53	56	16	22	Declining
Minnesota	Democratic	69	65	31	34	Increasing
Missouri	Republican	49	107	10	24	Increasing
New Mexico	Democratic	45	24	26	15	Increasing
North Carolina	Democratic	51	69	22	28	Increasing
Ohio	Republican	35	64	8	25	Declining
South Carolina	Republican	43	81	16	30	Increasing
Tennessee	Republican	25	73	6	27	Increasing
Virginia	Republican	47	52	18	21	Increasing

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to our Advisory Board and funding partners for investing in this work. We thank our staff for their commitment and labor to make the last three years. We are also grateful to the amazing grantee partners and funding allies that participated in this assessment. Thank you for your time and your thoughtful feedback. Leaders from the following organizations either participated in an interview or completed the impact survey.

- The AAPI Fund
- The Black Yield Institute
- Center for Civic Policy
- The Food Coop Initiative
- The Land Stewardship Project
- Little Africa Food Cooperative
- Missouri Jobs with Justice
- Progress Now, NM
- South Carolina Progressive Network
- The Ohio Organizing Project
- OutFront Minnesota
- The State Infrastructure Fund
- Take Action Minnesota



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