



EDWARD W. HAZEN FOUNDATION



REVALUATING PRACTICE:

REIMAGINING PHILANTHROPY

ABOUT THE EDWARD W. HAZEN FOUNDATION

The Edward W. Hazen Foundation is a private foundation established in 1925. The Foundation is committed to supporting young people and parents in communities of color in their organizational and leadership efforts to dismantle structural inequity based on race and class. Our focus is on organizations embedded in communities and grounded in the experiences of young people of color, seeking to transform public education and change the conditions of their lives.



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Hello
my name is
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INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the Edward W. Hazen Foundation's board of directors decided to [sunset the foundation](#). We were determined to move the full corpus into communities by 2025—a century after the Foundation's establishment.

We made a commitment to center the communities and organizations that the Foundation serves by asking the field to help us design our plan for grantmaking and other sunsetting activities. This initiated a five-year spend-down strategy that included multi-year general operating support, along with various other forms of assistance such as consulting, training, peer learning, and more, in response to the requests of grantees.

Having made the decision to put ourselves out of business, we began questioning all the ways our processes and systems reflected norms grounded in academic beliefs of knowledge creation and elitism. We interrogated our practices and adapted them to better align with our values and goals. At Hazen, we aimed to understand and implement anti-oppressive practices within our operations and interactions with the broader field. This led us to transform our application procedures, refine our outreach strategies, and prioritize the needs of our grantees over our own assumptions or experiences.

Over the past five years, we have prioritized transparency and responsiveness to our grantees and the field. We elevated their voices, particularly those in persistently underfunded regions. We engaged in a practice of continual dialogue and learning that was not subject to the pressures of traditional grant reporting cycles. And we aimed to strengthen grassroots organizations, contributing to their sustainability well beyond Hazen's existence.

As we approached our final months, we asked our grantees to share their experience with philanthropy as the basis of our final message to the sector. We hope you will find their insights and aspirations for the field informative.

Our partners describe how the power imbalance between funders and grantees weakens the resilience and impact of social justice organizations, affecting the progressive movement's overall health and efficacy. [Their insights also reveal](#) how funders' charitable mindset—contrary to a justice-oriented approach—can prioritize ameliorating the symptoms of systemic issues over supporting the individuals tackling these challenges, often replicating these very symptoms within their institutions. Our grantees also share examples of effective and equitable practices from some of our peer institutions, which we are eager to recognize.

WE HAVE ORGANIZED THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF OUR GRANTEES INTO THREE SECTIONS. EACH INCLUDES DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES AND ASPIRATIONS IN THEIR OWN WORDS, SOME REFLECTIONS FROM THE FOUNDATION, AND A SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ARE ACTIONABLE AND DESIGNED FOR IMPLEMENTATION.

Some of their observations may be familiar to you, as many of you are also engaged in your own efforts to reinvent the practice of philanthropy and grantmaking with a focus on equity and justice. Philanthropy—and our society—has been pushed to confront the societal racism and inequity elevated in the public consciousness by actions such as the uprisings in the wake of the murder of George Floyd.

Certainly, the exploration of the racism and oppression inherent in philanthropy pre-dates May 2020. Many have been grappling with these questions for some time and have made important contributions to our thinking at Hazen, laying the groundwork for our continued efforts to address these critical issues in more meaningful and impactful ways. We hope this report contributes to the ongoing dialogue, provides examples for those undertaking their own explorations, and acts as motivation for others invested in equitable and just practices in philanthropy to transition from conversation to concrete action.





1

REBUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Authentic, long-term partnership with grassroots organizers is the catalyst for systemic change.

No matter the intentions of even the most justice-focused funder, the fact remains: philanthropy exists because of the unequal and unjust accumulation of the few and that affects the viability of sustainable partnerships. There is increasing recognition of the inadequacies of many practices that are considered “norms” in the philanthropic sector. The conversation, once the purview of a small subset of progressive funders, has broadened, urging funders to shift from unequal relationships based on resource disparities to authentic, long-term partnerships with grantees. Some funders are now engaging with social justice organizations in new ways to better support them and their communities. In doing so, funders strive to align their strategies with the needs of their grantees, abandoning a proscriptive approach for one of collaboration.

AN IMBALANCE OF AUTHORITY UNDERMINES TRUST

Failing to recognize the structural inequity in the funder-grantee dynamic hinders funders' ability to build trust. "We feel the power imbalance—we are nervous we might do something to jeopardize our funding," shares Eduardo Esquivel, co-director of [New Mexico Dream Team](#), a statewide network committed to creating power for multigenerational, undocumented, LGBTQ+, and mixed status families. "But funders are either unaware or pretend that dynamic isn't there. Then, they try to skip over the discomfort, thinking that by ignoring it, we can form a trusting relationship. There cannot be any trust without honesty. They ignore the main reason our relationship exists—they have the money we need to operate."

By addressing the unequal dynamic and mitigating the authoritative position they have

when engaging grantees, funders and their teams can alleviate the pressure on grass-roots organizations.

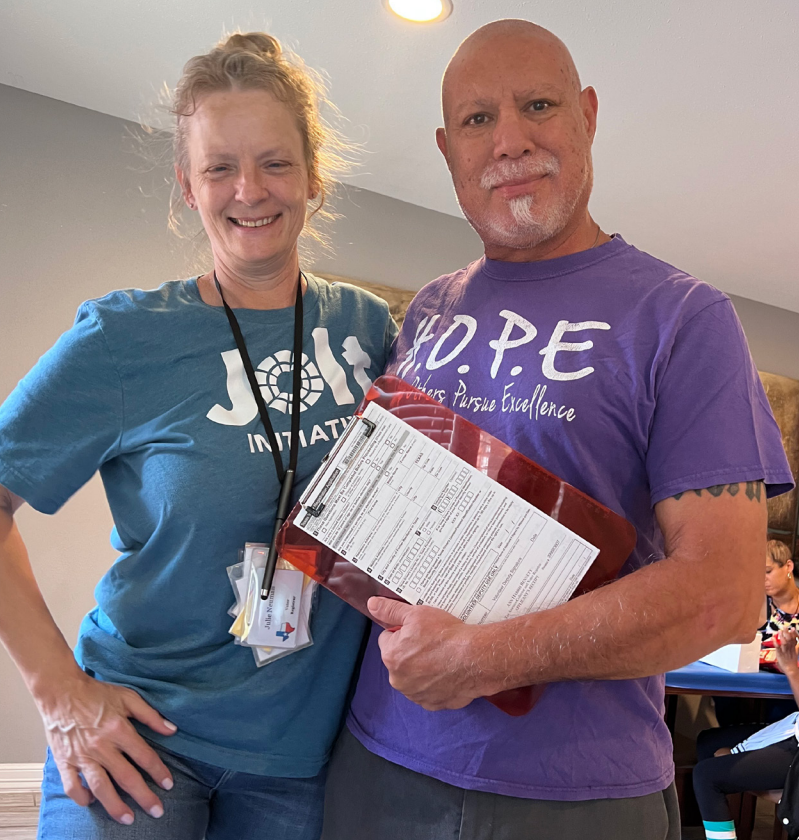
In funder-grantee interactions, this approach involves explaining why a funder supports their grantees' mission, detailing how they can assist as a philanthropic partner, and inviting grantee feedback on communication frequency and methods to foster an effective partnership. On a logistical level, multi-year general operating funding assures grantees that their funding is not at risk every time they meet with a program officer. If multi-year funding is not available, explain why, and agree on realistic expectations for what a nonprofit can accomplish in a year's time with the funding provided.

Transparently discussing constraints of both foundation staff and grantees transparently helps funders reassess their practices and processes, especially those that might be rooted in distrust and surveillance. Requesting an inordinate number of meetings with organizational leaders and quarterly reports from understaffed and under-resourced nonprofits creates a heavy and unreasonable burden. Yet, foundations often require this information, and program officers are compelled to ask for it to meet institutional expectations.

From a grantee's perspective, these requests send a message that "you don't trust me enough to be able to do this work," explains Marquetta Atkins-Woods, founder and executive director of [Destination Innovation Inc.](#), an organization in Wichita, Kansas, working to equip young people with the tools and mindset to move courageously, with purpose and discipline, to activate underserved communities. "Making extra time for a funder means taking away time—an important resource—from my team and from the community that they are funding us to reach. Donating to a program is not a reason to police the people running them. It embodies the same harmful systems we are fighting against."

"We feel the power imbalance—we are nervous we might do something to jeopardize our funding. But funders are either unaware or pretend that dynamic isn't there. Then, they try to skip over the discomfort, thinking that by ignoring it, we can form a trusting relationship. There cannot be any trust without honesty. They ignore the main reason our relationship exists—they have the money we need to operate."

-Eduardo Esquivel,
co-director of New Mexico Dream Team



If grantees or prospective grantees require more time or funders require more information, being clear about the purpose and the timeframe helps. This transparency not only clarifies the objective for grantees but also enables them to manage their time effectively. Grantees aim to be productive partners, and they appreciate the opportunity to discuss the limitations of their capacity without judgment and to collaborate on alternative pathways of participation, if necessary.

PARTNERSHIPS REQUIRE THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Grantees need meaningful partnerships with foundation staff who are truly committed to their success. Often, these people include program officers who can influence the allocation of resources. If funders want community organizations to build more robust strategies, they need to hire staff with experience developing and being accountable to a grassroots community.

“[Isabel Sousa-Rodriguez](#) [Hazen’s former program officer] helped build me and my

organization,” said Brenda Lozano, executive director of [Dream Action Oklahoma](#), a community-based organization that aims to empower its local immigrant community through advocacy and education. Before joining the Hazen Foundation, Sousa-Rodriguez spent nearly two decades working as an immigrants-rights organizer.

“We’ve been around for 15 years,” Lozano continued. “But we only recently started the journey of fundraising through philanthropy. Before meeting Isabel, we were getting donations from locals, but it wasn’t enough to pay staff members. Isabel completely shifted how we view the relationship between a grassroots organization and a funder.” Sousa-Rodriguez saw the organization’s potential and co-created a roadmap that directly impacted Dream Action Oklahoma’s growth. As a result, Hazen’s contributions included providing support for trainings to engage youth members and forging connections with other like-minded funders. Sousa-Rodriguez’s actions allowed the organization to shift from having a team of volunteers to full-time, paid staff members.

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- Brenda Lozano,
executive director of Dream Action Oklahoma

HAZEN'S REFLECTIONS

A good relationship demands transparency, especially when it feels uncomfortable. To get to a place of trust, collaboration, and shared purpose, we funders need to acknowledge our control of resources. This control creates an unequal dynamic in all our interactions with current and prospective grantees. Therefore, it's incumbent on us to proactively address that inequity through an iterative process—not only at the start of the relationship but every step of the way.

HAZEN ABSORBED FINANCIAL AND LOGISTICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO MITIGATE GRANTEE CHALLENGES AND TAKE GREATEST ADVANTAGE OF THEIR STRENGTHS.

From the beginning of Hazen's spend-down, we have asked grantees how we should spend the Foundation's money, inviting them into the decisions we make every day. Ongoing consultation on our strategy and funding priorities, whether to provide more but smaller grants or larger grants to fewer organizations, along with specific budget decisions like allocating capacity-building funds, has allowed us to recalibrate our approach. This adjustment enabled us to reallocate resources more effectively to meet our partners' immediate and future challenges directly.

To address the barriers caused by written application and report processes, we changed to an interview protocol for both application and reporting and provided interview questions to prospective grantees in advance. We used these to collect data necessary for decision-making and to begin and further build trusting relationships.

[When the pandemic hit](#), we learned our grantees weren't prepared for remote work. We asked them about their needs and responded by offering support to help them navigate the transition. For example, we absorbed the costs of Zoom licenses for our grantees, paying the vendor directly, reducing their administrative load, and enabling them to access a greater range of services through the app. This wasn't just about adapting to a crisis; it was about reaffirming our commitment to shoulder more responsibility as the party with greater assets and capabilities.

We assumed a deeper obligation to our grantees because the inherent imbalance between funders and those in the field means we must consistently do more to actively enhance grantee capacities and lessen the pressures they face.

Moreover, having people on our team with experience in organizing allowed us to support richer relationships with grantees; they invited collaboration and welcomed the opportunity to inform our grantmaking practice.

Hiring staff and building a board of trustees with experience in social justice work from communities impacted by racism, poverty, police violence, and a divestment in public education has had a practical effect and has aligned with our values. [Their insights have contributed](#) to the Foundation's redistributive goals and provided valuable recommendations that have transformed perspectives and relationships. When empowered, these staff, advisors, and board members can push institutions to think beyond what philanthropy is comfortable doing and towards what it should do.

RECOMMENDATIONS

NAME AND CONFRONT THE IMBALANCE

The funder-grantee relationship is inherently unequal in our society. Foundations persist when a nonprofit does not meet its goals, but a nonprofit's sustainability is threatened if a funder pulls their support. Grantees feel this disparity immediately, and ignoring it only reinforces it. "Funders can be the judge, jury, and executioner of nonprofits. Some foundations embody the same systems that they fight against, and it's critical they are cognitive about that, especially when working with BIPOC communities," warns Marquetta of Destination Innovation.

Viridiana Hernandez, executive director of [Podder in Action](#), an organization that builds power to disrupt and dismantle systems of oppression and determine a liberated future for people of color in Arizona, points to the [Satterberg Foundation](#) as an example of a funder reevaluating its relationship with grantees by recognizing that its impact extends far beyond the provision of financial resources. "They do [trust-based philanthropy](#), give general operating funds with multi-year commitments," she explains. "There is no application or report required. Satterberg understands that they are hoarding resources that don't belong to them, and their goal is to move that money to organizations like ours."

Grantees are better prepared to partner with funders who are clear about the extent of their power and their limitations. "It helps to know what their constraints are—it humanizes them. When funders are open about their work, their approach to funding, and what they are up against, then we can come to a place of mutual understanding," recommends Cathy Dang, national co-director of [Grassroots Asians Rising](#), a national alliance of grassroots organizations rooted in working-class pan-Asian immigrant and refugee communities organizing for a

world where working-class immigrant and refugee communities have dignity, safety, and justice.

"Some funders just don't come from a movement building lens, so it's helpful when program officers tell us what they need to effectively advocate for us."

- Alicia Olivarez,
associate director at [Power California](#)

BUILD AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH TRANSPARENCY AND VULNERABILITY

The strength of a partnership often hinges on the willingness to share vulnerabilities. This openness fosters a deeper level of trust and collaboration, enabling both funders and grantees to navigate challenges more effectively together. "It's especially helpful when program officers are transparent about internal challenges at their funding institutions and ask us to help them strategize about how to address those challenges," adds Alicia Olivarez, associate director at [Power California](#), a statewide multi-racial civic engagement organization made up of on-the-ground community partners in urban, suburban, and rural communities in California. "Some funders just don't come from a movement building lens, so it's helpful when program officers tell us what they need to effectively advocate for us. Transparency is paramount." By openly sharing the challenges they face, funders can unlock new levels of trust and cooperation, laying the groundwork for more effective collaboration.

REIMAGINING THE APPLICATION PROCESS

To make our processes responsive to the needs of prospective grantees, the Foundation asked grantees what did and did not work in their relationships with prospective funders. **They issued a clear call for transparency, clarity, and responsiveness.**

As a result, the Foundation significantly revised our application process: shifting from written applications to interviews and redefining the site visit process. These changes not only improved our data collection for grant decisions but also facilitated relationship building right from the start.

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FROM THE FIELD:

1 **Value an organization's time:**

Do your homework and re-search the organization before you approach them. When you meet with an organization, time should be spent discussing the opportunities for partnership, not what the organization does.

2

Make your criteria and processes clear:

Provide easy-to-find, clear information on the foundation's values and priorities, grant criteria and process. Include timeframes, grant size, and number of grants to be awarded. Providing this information is an extension of respect, so organizations can decide whether it is worth their time and effort to apply.

3

Provide opportunities for questions:

Host webinars and calls, among other communication channels, to create spaces where prospective applicants can actively ask questions.

4

Be mindful of the time it takes to complete an application:

Ensure organizations, especially those with smaller staff, have sufficient time to prepare their applications.

5 Expand your perspective: Acknowledge that academic norms of communication and knowledge creation are only part of a broader spectrum of valuable perspectives and methodologies. Consider other ways to solicit the information you need, like video submissions, phone calls, or site visits, so prospective and current grantees have a choice in how they showcase their mission and goals and share their partnership needs.

7 Audit your processes and systems for accessibility: Recognize technical barriers of online portals and offer alternatives, particularly for groups in communities that lack broadband infrastructure and technical capacity. Also consider those for whom English is not a first language.

9 Boost the visibility of organizations: Use the application process to increase the visibility of organizations among other potential funders, particularly when these organizations align with the missions of funders in your network. Consider including external funders in site visits and sharing lists of both funded and non-funded organizations.

6 Provide feedback: Grant writing is a skill many organizations are always looking to improve, especially in regions that are often underfunded. Provide meaningful feedback to organizations that are funded and those that are not.

8 Counter the competition generated by most traditional application processes: Pitting organizations against each other does not support the collective efforts needed to sustain a movement for social justice. Frame your language to inquire about the organization's contribution to the ecosystem, rather than its superiority over others. Ask grantees to recommend other organizations to consider for funding. Also, be open to accepting proposals written for other funders who align with your mission and values.





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RESOURCE GRASSROOTS ORGANIZERS TO SCALE

The movement for social justice needs a much larger infusion of financial resources from funders to sustain the people leading it.

Funders have the opportunity to realize a new vision for philanthropy. We must strive for an ecosystem in which community leaders and social justice movements are nourished by philanthropy's investments rather than depleted by its ineffective approaches to funding.

[Funders perpetually underestimate](#) the scale of resources required to support movements, and that tendency has only worsened in the 2020s. With the record-setting inflation of recent years, awarding a \$50,000 grant in 2019 and maintaining that grant at the same level for three years has gradually [decreased the worth of the grant by about 20%](#). In other words, a long-term commitment without adjusting grant levels reduces the current value of funding and a grantee's capacity and impact over time.

While social justice nonprofits are struggling with the rising costs of rent, gas, and labor, they're also managing shifting expectations as a new generation enters the workforce. Employee expectations have changed drastically since the COVID-19 pandemic, and today's workforce is less likely to accept unlivable wages for their labor. The pandemic has also increased awareness of a wide range of disability justice and access issues, including the importance of self-care, more holistic benefits, and the need for hybrid options for both the workplace and organizing.

The most strategic organizations are quickly adapting to shifts in priorities at both national and local levels, but pivoting comes with increased costs—financially, emotionally, and personally. Funders are being called to pivot, too. They must provide movements with flexible, ongoing resources to sustain their leadership and momentum.

ORGANIZERS DESERVE REPRIEVE FROM THE INJUSTICES THEY FIGHT AGAINST

Nonprofits mobilizing communities with limited resources are often under-resourced themselves. Burnout, turnover, unlivable wages, lack of basic benefits, and the relentlessness of injustice challenge grassroots organizations and their staff.



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I GET PUSHBACK FROM FOUNDATIONS WHEN I SAY WE SHOULD BE PAYING ORGANIZERS \$70,000 TO \$80,000, OTHERWISE STAFF TAKE ON SIDE JOBS TO MAKE ENDS MEET, AND THAT AFFECTS THE SUSTAINABILITY OF OUR WORK. STILL, FUNDERS FREAK OUT [AT OUR SALARIES LINE ITEM]. BUT THAT'S WHAT ORGANIZERS NEED TO SURVIVE.”

-ELSA BAÑUELOS-LINDSAY,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MOVIMIENTO PODER

“Housing and living costs keep increasing, and our communities are affected. That includes our organizers and our staff. At least three of our staff members have side jobs, and one of them is full-time,” reveals Sandra Hernandez-Lomeli, director at [Latinos Unidos Siempre](#), a community organization based in Salem, Oregon, developing youth leadership and advocacy around issues affecting their lives. Choosing between fighting injustice and financial security is hardly a choice at all; yet, without secure support from funders, it is a choice nonprofit staff often face.

[Philanthropy adds to this indignity](#) by heaping administrative burdens on grantees. Grassroots organizers often come from the communities they serve and personally combat the same oppressive systems that directly impact their communities: economic instability, deportation, criminalization, and housing instability. Funders often tie resources to unrealistic expectations, placing demands on an organization’s time while ignoring the social injustices that deplete its members.



“We work hard to organize our communities, and we want to pay our staff quality wages for their labor. We make up our budgets through a patchwork of grants—the need to constantly fundraise to survive is time-consuming and stressful,” admits Jasmine Gripper, former executive director at [Alliance for Quality Education](#), a coalition organizing parents and mobilizing communities across New York state to ensure a high-quality public education to all students regardless of zip code. “It’s frustrating when a funder asks for a 14-page proposal or report, but their grant covers less than one person’s salary. Funders should be realistic about the limits to their dollars, especially in high-cost states during high inflation years.”

A livable wage for grassroots organizers is a reasonable expectation. Yet, there are funders who expect nonprofit partners to achieve program deliverables and community outcomes without providing sufficient dollars for the staff of those programs to receive a living wage and basic benefits—staff who are also part of the community. “I get pushback from foundations when I say we should be paying organizers \$70,000 to \$80,000, otherwise staff take on side jobs to make ends meet, and that affects the sustainability of our work. Still, funders freak out [at our salaries line item]. But that’s what organizers need to survive,” explains Elsa Bañuelos-Lindsay, executive director of [Movimiento Poder](#), a Colorado nonprofit led by working-class Latine immigrants, queer, youth, women, and families building collective power through community organizing, leadership development, and civic engagement.

The same working conditions and benefits that foundation staff receive should not be luxuries for nonprofits. A livable wage and appropriate benefits are not only imperative for any funder concerned about social justice to provide, but they are also essential for building sustainable and effective movements that retain and cultivate leadership over the long term.

“I’ve really appreciated it when funders have helped us think about additional partners who might support us. They reviewed national foundations and their own list of contacts for funders who may have been a good partner for us. Beyond giving us names, they also prepared us to approach people and build connections.”

- Malaika Parker,
executive director of [Black Organizing Project](#)

DISTRIBUTE AND ALLOCATE RESOURCES WITH CARE

Building a sustainable movement for social justice requires more than money alone. When there is a trusting relationship between funder and grantee, it fosters care. A funder’s support can evolve to meet the needs of their grantees because they have established a collaborative relationship where trust is present and safeguarded. “I’ve been able to reach out to a program officer about the organization going through an emotional crisis—there may not have been any headlines about it, but it was happening, and we needed support outside of programming or reports. We needed wellness stipends and coaching support. And the funder was able to help us because I trusted that I could talk to them,” retells Viridiana of Poder In Action. “Funders are vocal about investing in the work—but not the people doing the work. And I’ve always appreciated the ones that invest in the people.”

Investing in people is a long-term endeavor. Grassroots organizers are highly skilled at power-building and community outreach, but the skills it takes to run an organization are too often learned on the job—without external support. A funder who invests in the development and growth of its nonprofit partners also invests in the organization’s sustainability. “I went to Lori Bezahler [president of the Hazen Foundation] and explained what I was experiencing. ‘I am at a loss,’ I told her,” reveals Elsa of Movimiento Poder. “She worked with me to discuss options and gave me seed money to get a coach. She recommended someone who helped me think more clearly about our vision, mission, and theory of change and helped me move through a major shift within our organization. Without that seed money and Lori’s willingness to push me in a respectful way, I don’t think we would be in the place we are now as an organization.”

A funder’s investment in grantees goes beyond financial resources. Local grassroots organizations are often small with limited philanthropic connections, leaving them at risk of missing out on essential support. Grantees benefit from the networks their funders bring them into. “I’ve really appreciated it when funders have helped us think about additional partners who might support us. They reviewed national foundations and their own list of contacts for funders who may have been a good partner for us. Beyond giving us names, they also prepared us to approach people and build connections,” shares Executive Director Malaika Parker of [Black Organizing Project](#), an organization working to end the criminalization of Black and Brown youth in Oakland, California.

A funder who cares enough to listen to grantees, learn about their concerns, and invest in their longevity is a true partner.

HAZEN'S REFLECTIONS

Multi-year general operations support is critical but insufficient for the durability of nonprofits. Resourcing to scale means addressing the full range of grantee needs in a meaningful and collaborative way. Grassroots organizers respond to the needs of their community—funders must be held to the same standard and be accountable and responsive to the needs of their grantees.

HAZEN'S STRATEGY PRIORITIZED BUILDING UP ORGANIZATIONAL STABILITY AND ORGANIZING INFRASTRUCTURE

Our funding strategy emphasized the importance of building out the organizing infrastructure in places that have been historically under-resourced, such as rural areas and places lacking a progressive funding infrastructure. If an organization met our programmatic criteria but they were unproven financially, we still funded them. **It was more meaningful to move resources to areas where the organizing infrastructure might thrive with support, but where local funding streams would be less likely.**

This led the Foundation to fund organizations that may not have been successful in attracting other funders to that point. Often, funders view any signs of potential financial instability or staff who lack traditional credentials as reason to steer clear of engaging a nonprofit, even if their work is mission-aligned. **Labeling social justice nonprofits as “risks” without accounting for the context in which they are**

in, in fact, risks perpetuating the historic disinvestment in nonprofits led by Black and Indigenous people and people of color, particularly in rural areas like the Deep South.

Once we partnered with the organization, we used our networks to generate interest for other funders to support the organization's work and provided opportunities to strengthen the organization's fundraising capacity or organizational knowledge about financial management. We provided funds in addition to the annual grants to help strengthen staff and organizational capacity. This included funding to access training and consulting, to provide communications support, to improve staff compensation, and to create HR policies that reflect organizational values.

The Foundation's decision to spend all our resources was an acknowledgement of the critical moment we are living in. The generations of wealth we hold empowers us to think and act boldly on behalf of our grantees and the movement for racial justice. They are the legacy we leave behind.



RECOMMENDATIONS

ACCOUNT FOR THE COST OF CAPITALISM

“We cover childcare because our staff need support in that way. We also often need emergency assistance to deal with challenges specific to Texas, like the weather and transportation, but there is no support or formal process to enable that. We need funders to start acknowledging other costs that organizations are taking on to stay in their communities,” recommends Bria Virgil, co-executive director of [Youth Rise Texas](#), an Austin-based organization that puts youth at the forefront of healing communities and ending the criminalization of undocumented people and people of color.

No amount of budgeting will keep nonprofits afloat when the realities of capitalism continue to drive more communities into poverty. Needs vary by geography, and funders should be adaptable to the circumstances confronting organizations operating in different contexts. Funders who prioritize programs over people further deplete resources that could support organizational sustainability.

“It is imperative that we support the everyday work happening and the leaders on the ground who make it possible. Too often, organizations receive funding to conduct seasonal or project-based work without funders considering the capacity and infrastructure needed to create long-term outcomes,” explains Cendi Tena, co-executive director at [Leaders Igniting Transformation](#), a Black- and Brown-led Wisconsin nonprofit that organizes young people to build political power for social, racial, and economic justice. Instead, unrestricted funding allows nonprofit leaders to be both strategic about long-term budgeting and nimble when emergencies arise.

PRIORITIZE PEOPLE

Organizers are not immune to the racial and social inequities they work against. Showing up daily during times of local and national crisis is exhausting and difficult when organizations are understaffed and under-resourced. “Invest in us,” stresses Marquetta of Destination Innovation. “Financially invest in our mental health. Make sure we have what we need to go out there and do the work. Expecting people to organize and mobilize communities with an empty cup is awful. We’re not healing communities unless we’re healing the people that are out here doing the work.”

A successful movement needs healthy people and strong networks. To better align a grant-making strategy with the needs of the movement, funders must better understand the organizing landscape. There are organizers who have built community power and coalitions for years and groups who are just beginning their journey. These organizations are not in competition; they both need support. “It’s important for philanthropy to have long-term relationships with both emerging organizations and organizations that are pillars in their communities,” explains Henry of InnerCity Struggle.

By investing time and resources into preliminary research, funders can make better decisions about their grantmaking strategy that complements existing coalitions and movement priorities. An organization’s survival relies on the health and energy of its staff and its networks—fund the people who make up your grantees as fiercely as you fund programs.



ROOT THE POWER



UNITED TEACHERS OF WHITTIER

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REASSESS POWER

Funders must acknowledge, address, and alleviate the unequal power they hold.

Grassroots organizers spend years developing deep political and social analysis. They are experts at identifying and addressing power socially, politically, and personally in interactions with potential allies or targets. Their relationships with funders are no different. Grantee partners are viscerally aware of unequal power dynamics, while too many funders ignore them. Funders should strive to become a trusted ally, not a target to be managed. Neglecting philanthropy's dominating position within funder-grantee dynamics only augments the imbalance and impedes opportunities for strategic collaboration.

With a rigorous commitment to challenging the imbalance of power in grantee interactions, funders can mitigate philanthropy's most harmful impacts and bring the full institutional weight to the service of the grantees in the pursuit of lasting social change.

VALUE ON-THE-GROUND KNOWLEDGE

Unchecked funder behavior can corrode partnership and hinder progress towards social impact. Such behaviors may manifest as a lack of transparency in funding decisions, the imposition of top-down decision-making without genuine involvement of grassroots organizations, or a hyperfocus on short-term gains. When funders prioritize their own interests over those of their grantees, and value academic forms of knowledge creation over the wisdom found and developed in communities, they inadvertently neglect the deeper, systemic issues that grassroots organizations are combating.

“Instead of working with us to challenge structural inequality, we have funders who think transactionally, and ask questions like ‘What can you achieve in a short time frame that is sexy for my board?’” recalls Bill Kopsky, executive director of [Arkansas Public Policy Panel](#), an organization advancing social and economic justice by organizing groups of people across Arkansas and helping them become effective agents of change in their communities. Short time frames can undermine relationships and reduce complex social justice work to superficial metrics, overshadowing the deeper, ongoing efforts required to create lasting change.

[This mindset fosters a problematic dynamic](#), where organizations are incentivized to prioritize projects with immediate, board-pleasing results over those that work long-term to methodically challenge systemic barriers. This misalignment of goals can be particularly challenging for program officers to navigate, especially those who seek to bring resources to grassroots organizations despite an organizational culture far removed from the realities of the communities they seek to serve. Yet, it is funders focused on long-term, collaborative partnerships that are more likely to allocate resources in ways that empower grassroots



organizations and their communities and result in sustainable strategies.

Grassroots organizing and movement building take time and money. Funders must be prepared to steward a relationship through wins and losses and must not expect to undo structural racism with nominal funding. “The issues that exist in our communities will not be resolved within a grant period or even a lifetime. Many of the issues that organizations fight against are rooted in white supremacy and capitalism, which took hundreds of years to build,” shares Vanessa Flores-Maldonado, executive director of [Providence Youth Student Movement](#), a Rhode Island-based organization that envisions a strong, healthy Southeast Asian community free from state, street, and interpersonal violence. “Our work, while it is powerful and beautiful and highly needed, isn’t guaranteed to have an immediate visible impact—and that must be okay because our work is still valuable.” By not demanding a new policy win every year, funders

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-VANESSA FLORES-MALDONADO,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PROVIDENCE YOUTH STUDENT MOVEMENT



can empower community members to act collectively, foster change-driving relationships, and devise new, agile strategies.

REIMAGINE THE FUNDER ROLE IN DESIGNING STRATEGY

Building a foundation of trust with nonprofit partners begins with addressing the harmful and ineffective behaviors that permeate philanthropy.

Funders too often consult with people and institutions far removed from the communities they serve, neglecting the learning and analysis developed within those communities. Then, they introduce initiatives and policies that—though well-intentioned—again neglect the reality of organizers and leaders on the front lines of social justice, which can ultimately impede the nonprofits' success.

In recent years, funders have attempted to play a more active role in building connections among grantees, at times requiring nonprofits to participate in virtual and in-person grantee convenings or coalition building opportuni-

ties. While it can make sense for grantees to connect and build solidarity, it also creates additional work, involves more resources from organizations who are already stretched thin, and can lead to arbitrary and ultimately unsuccessful groupings of nonprofits.

“The push for coalition building often happens with place-based funding. Funders try to dictate who they think we should work with. Pushing us to be part of established coalitions that may not be welcoming of new players or forcing place-based coalitions without a shared goal has slowed the work. These efforts feel counterproductive,” shares Alicia of Power California. “We are in an under-resourced, rural region, and we don’t have the wide base of consultants, facilitators, and other resources to invest in coalition building and conflict resolution as I see in some major, better funded cities. It’s much harder to do that kind of coalition building in rural regions with less infrastructure, and funders need to understand that going in.”

Funders would do better to provide opportunities and resources for organizations to take the lead and define convenings and

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-Henry Perez,
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coalitions of their own making, especially in rural regions often overlooked by philanthropy. But they must do so with special attention to the challenges and opportunities present in regions like California’s Central Valley. Though it may be geographically close to metropolitan areas like San Francisco and San Jose, the Central Valley has a distinct agricultural and immigrant heritage. The strategic approach to community organizing must tend to the cultural nuances, geographic realities, and social infrastructure present in the region. Philanthropic partners should actively seek out people who can help them understand the nuances and be flexible in the support they offer to meet the unique needs of grassroots organizers in those communities.

With curiosity and an openness to learn, funders can use their resources to engage and convene grantees in ways that honor their community-led coalitions and allow for pow-

er-building without imposing constraining or inappropriate objectives on grantees. “I find it useful when funders ask us what coalitions we are already participating in, and which ones could use support. It allows us to discuss the coalitions we, as organizers, have established based on key issue areas and the needs in our communities,” specifies Henry Perez, executive director of [InnerCity Struggle](#), a community organization striving to build a powerful and an influential movement of youth and families on the Eastside of Los Angeles to promote healthy, safe, and nonviolent communities.

Parent Action Committee is a multicultural group of parents and community members dedicated to improving the quality of education for all children in the Southwest Bronx, New York. “Folks come from across the country to discuss a specific topic, and there’s a shared interest and goal. People can apply to attend; it’s not a requirement, and anyone from an organization is welcomed—it’s not only for executive directors. We sent a staff member and a leader who is undocumented to a recent convening.” For example, “[Communities for Just Schools Fund](#) has done a great job with their educational convenings,” explains Chauncy Young, director of the Parent Action Committee at [New Settlement](#).

[Elevating grantees](#) includes elevating the communities they are organizing with and for. The resources funders offer their grantees must be accessible to more than executive directors—this may include, for example, youth who are in their neighborhoods canvassing for prison reform and parents working in childcare and hospitality who attend monthly Zoom meetings to learn about workers’ rights. If funders are committed to truly resourcing the movement for social justice, they must also commit to resourcing the communities pushing the movement forward. That begins with getting to know them.

HAZEN'S REFLECTIONS

GRANTEES DEFINED HAZEN'S CAPACITY-BUILDING SUPPORTS

All the Foundation's capacity work has been in response to grantee requests. We gathered information through surveys and one-on-one check-ins and developed activities based on what grantees needed.

Occasionally, grantees faced challenges specific to their sustainability, such as enhancing fundraising efforts or managing leadership transitions. In response, we collaborated with them to determine how we could best facilitate their growth. Sometimes that meant providing financial support so they could hire a consultant to learn their specific needs and guide them to viable solutions. It also meant funding specific organizations that grantees recommended so they could all access particular kinds of trainings, such as the organizing training from [School for Unity and Liberation](#) and management skills from [The Management Center](#).

It is essential to underscore that grantees always had a choice in the selection of a consultant. Even when we held the contract, the consultant operated independently and did not report back to the Foundation. **Reassessing power may require creating a separation between the resources provided and the oversight of how those resources are used.**

As funders, our role must entail using our resources, relationships, and platforms to promote and champion our grantees. At the



Foundation, we enacted our commitment to advancing justice by listening to our grantees and thinking creatively and collaboratively about the support we can offer—even with our own limitations. **Allowing grantees to determine what support they need and then delivering resources in a way that respects their knowledge, autonomy, and operational context can significantly shift the power dynamic—allowing us to be more responsive and effective practitioners.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

RESPECT THE VALUES AND PRACTICES OF THE COMMUNITIES YOU FUND

“We need to get philanthropy to realize that power-building means more than engaging executive leadership. For us, it’s all about our members. We want to elevate their participation, growth, and voices,” shares Chauncy of Parent Action Committee at New Settlement. When funders communicate with grassroots organizations beyond those in formal leadership roles, they honor distributed power models and activate the voices of members and communities grantees are fighting for.

The [Trans Justice Funding Project](#) has created a model of philanthropy that is entirely designed, driven, and enacted by the community it serves. All grantmaking is done by fellows, not professional staff, and they develop a map of groups that they identify and distribute it to other potential funders.

By approaching grantee engagement from a place of humility, curiosity, and thoughtful consideration, funders use their power to promote nonprofit leadership and facilitate strategic collaboration. That means taking the time to learn what grassroots organizers are working towards, the challenges they’re facing, and what resources are at a funder’s disposal to help mitigate those barriers.

COLLABORATE, DON’T CONTROL

Communities are not all the same, nor are the solutions to the issues they face. Give organizations the flexibility to come up with their own—often better—solutions, and support them in accomplishing shared goals.

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Solutions crafted by those directly affected and on the front lines often differ from what funders might typically expect to see because organizers are responsive to the realities of that community and that time—not some theoretical approach. “It can be disruptive when funders come up with preconceived ideas about solutions because one particular solution has gotten traction in the media or in one geographic context,” shares Tanushree Dutta Isaacman, lead organizer at [Action in Montgomery](#), a broad-based community power organization rooted in Maryland’s Montgomery County neighborhoods and congregations.

The same sentiment was echoed by James Lopez, executive director of [Power U Center for Social Change](#), an organization that develops the leadership of Black and Brown youth and Black women in South Florida. “If you’re actually interested in creating the change you want to see, you have to be equally invested in studying the conditions and making sense of the issues with the practitioners who are on the ground.”

CONCLUSION

Conversations surrounding the racist and oppressive underpinnings of philanthropy have a long history, but the moment to move discussion into action is now. Many of our peers are far along in examining their grantmaking philosophy and practice. Others are just beginning. Still, others are stuck, unsure of the risk they are willing to take to use their power to challenge the fields we have helped sustain. We hope that this report serves as a steppingstone for action.

To our peers, we urge you to question the assumptions rooted in privilege that have been passed down to us. We risk causing more harm by perpetuating an inequitable system than by attempting to

change it. All change begins with action. We hope this report is a catalyst for creating a future for philanthropy where its value is based not on its exorbitant wealth, but rather on its fierce advocacy for and commitment to equity and justice.

To grassroots organizers, we hope that hearing from your peers provides further examples akin to your own experiences. Use their stories of strength and vulnerability to inspire the conversations you have with funders and philanthropic leaders. We invite you to take language from this report if it helps you to frame your concerns and advocate for the partnership that best serves and empowers you.



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A special thank-you to the grassroots organizations we have been privileged to support. We are grateful for all that you have done for us and in the movement for racial and social justice. We look forward to all you have yet to accomplish.

Action in Montgomery *
Urban Peace Movement
Nollie Jenkins Family Center
Black Organizing Project *
Philadelphia Student Union
Youth Justice Coalition
Destination Innovation *
Hearing Youth Voices
California Native Vote Project
Dream Action Oklahoma *
Maine Youth Justice
Communities United
Grassroots Asians Rising *
IntegrateNYC
Jolt Initiative
Genders & Sexualities Alliance
Network

Connecticut Students for a
Dream
California Youth Connection
InnerCity Struggle *
Youth United for Change
Kenwood Oakland Community
Organization
Latinos Unidos Siempre *
Providence Youth Student
Movement *
Make the Road Nevada
Leaders Igniting Transformation *
Alliance for Quality Education *
Palenque LSNA
Movimiento Poder *
Arkansas Public Policy Panel *
New York State Youth
Leadership Council

New Mexico Dream Team *

Knights and Orchids Society

Dignity in Schools

**New Settlement Parent Action
Committee ***

**Kids Rethink New Orleans
Schools**

School of Unity and Liberation

Power CA 99 Rootz *

Gente Organizada

Journey for Justice Alliance

Poder in Action *

**Youth United for Community
Action**

**Funders' Collaborative on Youth
Organizing**

**Power U Center for Social
Change ***

**OPAL Youth Environmental
Justice Alliance**

Youth Engagement Fund

TODEC

CADRE

Visionary Freedom Fund

Youth Rise Texas *

Khmer Girls in Action

* Indicates grantees who participated in interviews, surveys, and focus groups for this report.



THANK YOU

TO OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The unwavering dedication of our Board to adapt and respond to the needs of grassroots organizing has brought us to this moment.

Alberto Retana, chair
Cristina Jiménez, vice chair
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Mara Tieken
Rashad Robinson
Lorella Praeli
Rukia Lumumba
Hashim Benford
Sanjiv Rao

TO OUR STAFF

The Hazen Foundation staff have shown a steadfast commitment to enacting the Foundation's values through their practices.

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Sara Houston, accounting manager
Hana Sun, program consultant
Lori Bezahler, president
Isabel Sousa-Rodriguez, former program officer

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Social Justice Fund Northwest
Trans Justice Funding Project

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METHODOLOGY

The researchers worked in collaboration with the Edward W. Hazen Foundation staff to develop a strategy using multiple methodologies to collect data for this report. Since the main goal of this report is to amplify the perspective of movement leaders, the research focused on attaining in-depth, qualitative feedback from Hazen Foundation grantee partners through three methodologies: (1) two focus groups of Hazen grantees; (2) one-on-one interviews with a select group of grantee partners; and (3) a comprehensive survey sent to all Hazen grantees, ensuring every grantee had an opportunity to offer their feedback.

The survey, along with the questions used in the focus groups and interviews, was designed to elicit insights about where philanthropy is succeeding—and falling short—in partnering effectively with racial justice movements. Whenever possible, researchers asked respondents for specific examples of both harmful practices and effective practices they have witnessed from philanthropy. The researchers fielded the survey and conducted interviews and focus groups over a two-month time period, from late August to late October 2023. In total, 18 individuals participated in focus groups and interviews, and six responded to the survey. Overall, the respondent set was diverse in terms of organizational budget size, geography, title, and role.

Since this report highlights the wisdom of movement leaders, researchers informed respondents that the data collected and used would not be inherently anonymous. Instead, researchers communicated the desire to uplift grantee voices and attribute insights to specific organizations wherever possible—particularly around current movement assets and needs as well as positive or constructive feedback for grantmakers. Researchers assured respondents that they would have final approval of quotations attributed to them prior to the publication of this report.

The quotes presented in this report draw from the survey, focus groups, and interviews, all of which reflected similar common themes.



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