

Why Are Social Change Movements Important?

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Movements are a whole lot of people doing a whole lot of things for a long time. And movements will always exist. Organizations come and go. You have to look at all the different various roles from an indigenous point of view... everyone has a role in a movement.”

—Judith LeBlanc, Native Organizers Alliance

What is a social change movement? Why must foundations include power building and solidarity in their vision for social change? Philanthropy can play a critical role as a listener, convener and facilitator to help resource the infrastructure, ecosystem building and sustainability of social movements.

This guide accompanies the video about the importance of social change movements in changing inequitable systems and policies, and about their characteristics. After watching the video, follow the steps in the guide to deepen reflection and discussion, and to foster change.

Move The Money: Practices and Values for Funding Social Movements is a set of resources produced by the Building Movement Project.

Move The Money is geared towards grantmaking institutions seeking to deepen and transform their support of organizations, networks, and leaders involved with social change movements. These resources draw and build upon the wave of ongoing efforts that encourage the philanthropic sector to invest in movements.

This guide is one of four that are available along with accompanying videos at www.buildingmovement.org.



Expand Vision to Include Social Change Movements

#BlackLivesMatter. #MeToo. #HereToStay. #ClimateJusticeNow. These are widely recognizable hashtags, but they also represent masses of individuals and organizations, deploying robust strategies and tactics, online and in the streets, creating a groundswell of urgency that makes it impossible to ignore their calls to action and demands. These movements are pushing for systemic, structural, policy and cultural change and building people power at every step of the way.

Movements, as the bulleted list below explains, hold characteristics that are different from other forms of social change such as advocacy, organizing, campaigns, and leadership development. They also defy dominant standards because they are hard to define, not linear, and don't have one leader or spokesperson.

- **Masses of People Participate:** Movements are the manifestation of an organized and grassroots base of people, directly affected by adverse conditions, who challenge existing power structures and advance a new vision. Movements are most effective when they are spearheaded by communities who are most directly impacted by the injustice and who have the most to gain (or lose).



- **Multiple Strategies Align:** Protest. Art. Economic shaming. Online organizing. Advocacy. These are some of the tactics that movements use to call attention to the targets of power, and to generate new and radical possibilities.
- **Movements Share A Collective Vision:** Movements require a shared understanding and framing of what's not working and a shared commitment to potential solutions. The long-arc of movements allow for people to stake a vision that goes beyond short-term fixes or band-aids.
- **Movements Are Not Linear:** Movements defy traditional dominant standards of understanding success and growth. They ebb and flow depending on the needs of communities or the possibility of a “movement moment” when a spark occurs that mobilizes mass actions. And movements are continually evolving which means that there is confusion, chaos and conflict—often at a public and visible level.
- **Movements Thrive in Ecosystems:** Movements don't exist in silos but are connected to and shaped by other movements. Often, movements learn tactics around messaging and outreach from each other. Movements are also full of many organizations and collectives that require support. Using an ecosystem approach to understand movements can be helpful in ensuring that the entire landscape is nurtured rather than a few visible organizations.
- **Movements Have Multiple Leaders and Spokespersons:** While in the past, social movements have been associated with a single issue or a charismatic leader, the recent decade has given rise to broader movements that take the shape of diverse formations and ecosystems. In addition, an individual's role in a movement may change over a lifetime or career.



Uprising against anti-Black racism (2020). Photo Credit: Shutterstock



Reflections:

- Think of a social movement that has inspired you. What characteristics does the movement embody?
- How does your foundation envision social change? Does this vision include social movements?
- If your foundation's vision includes supporting social movements, how is this reflected in grantmaking?
- If your foundation's vision does not include supporting social movements yet, what are the barriers or obstacles?
- Towards the end of the video, movement leaders describe their visions for what social change movements can accomplish with philanthropic investments. Linda Campbell (Detroit People's Platform) notes:

“ The investment in a robust statewide Black- and people of color-led infrastructure is one of the really important directions we want to move in the next 12 to 18 months.”

Reflect on Linda's call to action. What does it mean to build infrastructure led by people of color at the state and national levels? Why is it important for philanthropy to support this vision?

- How can you and your foundation commit to learning more about social change movements locally, nationally, and globally?



