

MOVEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE SERIES



# Funding Movement Infrastructure

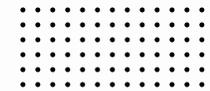
January 2023



Building Movement Project

# Introduction

Over the past three years, in the midst of the pandemic and the 2020 uprisings, Building Movement Project curated a project called Move The Money, a pointed call to action for philanthropy to support social change movements and movement leaders. Move the Money included development and training on a series of short videos and guides featuring interviews with movement leaders and philanthropic representatives as well as two funder labs that brought program officers together for a series of learning conversations. Through these activities, we have had an opportunity to better understand the barriers that exist in supporting social movements.



In this brief, we identify several barriers that arise for funders seeking to invest in social movements, and provide openings to addressing them. We culled these challenges and approaches from trainings and funder labs that we conducted in 2021 and 2022.

# Lessons on Funding Movement Infrastructure

## Challenge



### **My foundation isn't ready to support social movements.**

While many foundations desire to support social movements, most are not at that stage yet for a range of reasons: there may be a lack of understanding of the power of movements, or a perception that movement-based organizations engage in activities that are risky and disruptive, or a focus on conventional philanthropic models that prefer to invest in one or two organizations and short-term campaigns.



## Approach

### **Begin a process to understand and support social movements through small steps.**

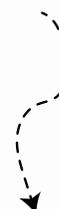
There are different approaches that foundations can take to support social movements, even in nascent stages, including: (1) deepening their own knowledge of the history and values of social movements; (2) connecting with existing grantees to better understand their partnerships; (3) building relationships with movement leaders; and (4) participating in movement-aligned funder collaboratives.

## Challenge



### **Our foundation's leadership distrusts social movements.**

While many program officers are ready to support social movements, foundation executives, board members, and trustees continue to be wary of social movements. This distrust shows up in many ways including when foundations ask movement leaders to "make the case" time and again for support; influence strategies and formations that are more likely to be amenable in dominant culture; and provide incremental support or crisis funding rather than long-term infrastructure dollars.



## Approach

### **Disrupt perceptions by learning about social movements and trusting leaders.**

When foundations change the power dynamics and focus on accountability, they can build authentic relationships with grantee partners. This process includes letting go of tendencies to manage and control movement strategies, and instead maintain a stance of deep listening and learning, particularly from grantee-partners and from program officers with deeper connections to communities. It means learning about the histories, values, and formations of social movements through trainings and resources. And, it means recognizing when a foundation's well-meaning ideas are redirecting movements away from their vision and scope.

# Lessons on Funding Movement Infrastructure

## Challenge

**Program officers who hold marginalized identities are automatically tasked with the role of "educator."**

Program officers who have connections with communities and relationships with grantee-partners can play a vital role in identifying partnerships and providing invaluable recommendations to guide grantmaking strategy. Yet, many still feel invisible and unheard by foundation leadership, or utilized as proxies to understand the needs of communities within foundations.

## Approach

**Provide training and engagement opportunities for program officers from communities under threat today.**

Foundations can support program officers by encouraging their participation in affinity groups, nurturing spaces for connection, and prioritizing their input on grantmaking. Political education sessions and organizer trainings can also be useful to enable program officers to be more effective within their institutions. And, it is important to not treat foundation staff as the primary sources for information and education when there are opportunities to learn from external community stakeholders. When engaging with community stakeholders for the purpose of learning, however, it is important to provide payment for time and labor.

"As a program officer who belongs to a community under threat, I am often asked by my foundation's leadership to educate others, which is an uncomfortable position to hold."

- Funder Lab participant

"Take part in community organizing training. The tools you learn there can help you with the relationship building, network building, dealing with some of the political dynamics and tensions."

- Kevin Ryan, Ford Foundation  
Speaker, Funder Lab

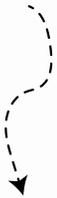
# Lessons on Funding Movement Infrastructure



## Challenge

**Our foundation supports movement groups, but our investments remain incremental and siloed.**

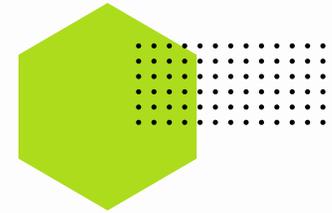
Movements are intersectional, reactive, and non-linear in nature. In contrast, foundation investments tend to be siloed and oriented towards short-term results, leading to a structure that limits visionary, long-term work, while also creating competition and a sense of scarcity among movement groups.



## Approach

**Adjust processes and practices to align with the needs of movements.**

The mismatch between what movements need and what foundations provide can only be resolved when grantmakers fundamentally change their practices. Funders should adjust their processes and align themselves to be responsive to movements - not the other way around. Additionally, funders must broaden their understanding and framework of "movement wins." In many cases, building community power through organizing, popular education, and solidarity strategies can be vital for the long-term success of movements even when they don't produce immediate electoral or policy wins. Shifting the focus of evaluating impact from a specific issue to the overall power of a community is a better standard for understanding social movements.



"During the pandemic, so many funders relaxed their requirements, made general support grants, multi-year grants, renewed without proposals, stopped requiring narrative reports, and the world didn't fall apart. Perhaps this shows that some of our bureaucracy isn't needed, and we can just let it go permanently."

- Molly Schultz Hafid, Butler Family Fund  
Speaker, Funder Lab

# Lessons on Funding Movement Infrastructure



## Challenge

**Our foundation supports 1-2 critical organizations rather than broader ecosystems.**

Social movements become powerful when different formations engage around the same demands using a variety of strategies and playing multiple roles. Yet, foundations tend to support 1 or 2 key organizations rather than investing in the ecosystem as a whole. As a result, social movements can lose momentum if they are dependent on just a few organizations to lead the way.



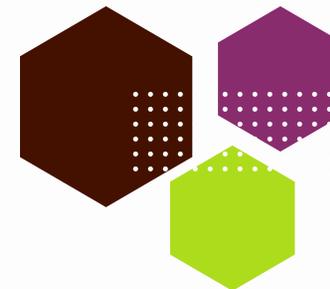
## Approach

**Identify and get to know the broader goals of the ecosystem.**

In addition to supporting 1 to 2 critical organizations, foundations must also identify the diverse components of social change ecosystems and support their coordination efforts. Participatory grantmaking processes can be helpful in better understanding the diversity of ecosystems and bring to light newer organizations.

"When we made the shift from being fundamentally a funder of direct service/traditional funding to systems change and investing in movements and organizing, we made the case to the board that we need to be much more nimble. We cannot wait for our bi-annual board meeting to make grants when things are moving in real time."

- Nicky Goren, Philanthropic and Nonprofit Adviser  
Speaker, Funder Lab



# Lessons on Funding Movement Infrastructure

"Philanthropy does need to do a better job of holding itself accountable. There's room for that to happen."

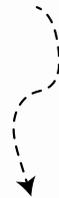
- Robby Rodriguez, Philanthropy Adviser  
Speaker, Funder Lab

## Challenge



**Our foundation spends a lot of time looking inward to figure out our standards and policies on equity, and we are slow to put those values into practice externally.**

As with many institutions, foundations are moving through internal dialogues around their values and culture, in addition to examining their processes and practices around grantmaking. Yet, these planning conversations often take so much time and attention internally that it inevitably delays grantmaking during times of tremendous need.



## Approach



**Balance internal planning with clear standards and frameworks for grantmaking.**

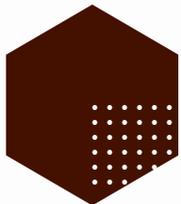
While it is essential that all institutions engage in honing their internal practices and culture, these endeavors should not compromise the vital grantmaking priorities of foundations. Ensuring that grantmaking continues while internal dialogues are occurring sends a signal to grantees and communities that foundations are paying attention to their needs.



# Lessons on Funding Movement Infrastructure

"I'm inspired by the Right Relations Collaborative, a partnership between Indigenous leaders and philanthropic representatives who want to liberate capital and shift the way that they engage with Indigenous communities. The Indigenous Council of Aunties sets the values and priorities for the Collaborative."

- Funder Lab participant



## Challenge

**Our foundation constantly asks movement leaders for interpretation and guidance, but does not support their leadership.**

Movement leaders are called upon by philanthropy to interpret the impact of policies and systems, and to explain what the needs are in their communities time and again. Yet, the philanthropic sector does not trust community wisdom enough to invest deeply in movement leadership. This extractive process must shift in order to address the imbalanced relationship between grantmakers and grantseekers.



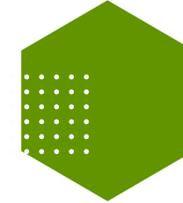
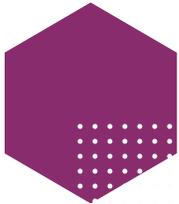
## Approach

**Include the input and participation of movement leaders, and invest in their leadership.**

The philanthropic sector could benefit from the engagement of movement leaders at all stages of grantmaking, but must provide the resources for this to be a sustainable practice. For example, participatory grantmaking enables community leaders to identify organizations that should receive funding. Funders could provide specific support to movement leaders themselves through sabbaticals, well-being and sustainability grants, and skills development. And, philanthropic institutions would benefit from being evaluated by grantees through an index that measures their level and scope of support for social movements.

**During this time of unprecedented and overlapping crises, we also asked Move the Money and Philanthropy and Social Movements Funder Lab participants to tell us how and where they find hope. Here's what we heard:**

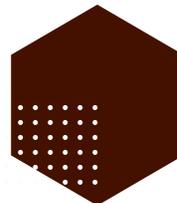
"I find hope in the honor of working daily with folks who are activating their vision for change with and for the communities they are part of."

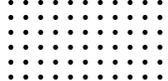


"Hope means creating new systems, not just adapting old, problematic ones."

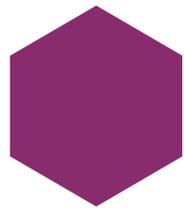
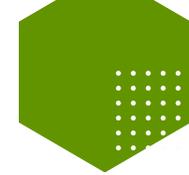
"Where do I see hope? Our foundation recently presented our annual college scholarships to dreamers. On the stage was a young man who I first met when he was 8 and his family had crossed the Rio Grande. Fast forward to now: he is a 23-year-old special education teacher in our public school system and handing out these same scholarships to those in his former shoes."

"Hope has been being able to name how we want to move into the future unapologetically."



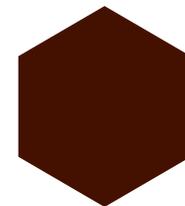


"The visioning, persistence and hard work movement leaders continue to advance in the face of these unrelenting times inspires me daily."



"5 of our 30+ grantees in 2021 were brand new organizations."

"Having program staff that has lived experience and connection to the movement can help explain, bring nuance and be a resource to others."



"Our applicant pool in 2021 was 95% BIPOC-led orgs & efforts."



"We are speaking explicitly about structural racism in our strategies, beyond equity."

# Resources

## ***Move The Money: Practices and Values for Funding Social Movements (Building Movement Project)***

Move the Money is a set of resources geared towards grantmaking institutions eager to expand and deepen their support of organizations, networks, and leaders involved with social change movements: [bit.ly/move-the-money](https://bit.ly/move-the-money).

## ***Social Change Ecosystem Map (Building Movement Project/SolidarityIs)***

This is a framework that can help individuals, networks, and organizations align and get in right relationship with social change values, individual roles, and the broader ecosystem. Funders can use the framework to map out their grantees, better understand the ecosystem's assets, and identify areas for growth and expansion: [bit.ly/EcosystemRoleMap](https://bit.ly/EcosystemRoleMap)

## ***Solidarity Is This Podcast (Building Movement Project/SolidarityIs)***

- *Funding Movements Differently*: In this episode, host Deepa Iyer talks with Cúagilákv (Jess Housty) and Kim Hardy, co-leads of the Right Relations Collaborative, about their work with Indigenous leaders and funder partners. Guided by the Aunties Council, the Collaborative is a pathway for the reparations and regenerative work led by community-rooted Indigenous changemakers across communities and territories in what is colonially known as British Columbia. Listen to the podcast at [SolidarityIs.org](https://SolidarityIs.org) and learn more about the Collaborative at [www.rightrelationscollaborative.ca](https://www.rightrelationscollaborative.ca)
- *Philanthropy's Role in Social Change*: In this episode, Rickke Mananzala (Executive Director, New York Foundation) joins guest host Sean Thomas-Breitfeld (Co-Director, BMP) to talk about how philanthropy can act in solidarity to support movements, build the power of communities of color, and advance social change: [SolidarityIs.org](https://SolidarityIs.org)

## ***Criteria for Philanthropy at Its Best: Benchmarks to Assess and Enhance Grantmaker Impact (National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy)***

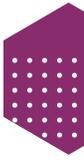
This resource provides a set of measurable guidelines that helps foundations and other institutional grantmakers operate ethically and maximize the impact of their dollars: [www.ncrp.org/about-us/philanthropy-at-its-best](https://www.ncrp.org/about-us/philanthropy-at-its-best)

## ***Equitable Grantmaking Continuum (RVC and Nonprofit AF)***

Based on their experience working with grassroots organizations led by and serving marginalized communities, nonprofit leader Vu Le and his previous organization, RVC, created this tool for funders to analyze how their foundation is doing and take actions towards more equitable grantmaking: [bit.ly/equitable-grantmaking](https://bit.ly/equitable-grantmaking)

## ***It's Time for Philanthropy to Reimagine BIPOC Leadership Transitions (Nonprofit Quarterly)***

This piece by Cathy Dang and Liz Sak examines the harmful assumptions that funders hold about leadership transitions and offers a starting point for philanthropy to fundamentally change the way they approach transitions and how they support BIPOC leaders: [bit.ly/reimagine-leadership](https://bit.ly/reimagine-leadership)





## Philanthropy and Social Movements Funder Lab Participants (2021-2022)

Gina Acebo, Akonadi Foundation (formerly)  
Khia Griffis, Albuquerque Community Foundation  
Anne Vor der Bruegge, Arlington Community Foundation  
Ashley Crawford Starck, Borealis Philanthropy  
Anita Patel, Bush Foundation  
Albert Maldonado, The California Endowment  
Jennifer Acree, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation  
Carla Fredericks, The Christensen Fund  
Aerial Ozuzu, Community Foundation of Greater Memphis  
Jamaica Maxwell, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation  
Marissa Guerrero, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation  
Nadia Firozvi, Democracy Fund (formerly)  
Angela Vo, The Emergent Fund  
Shireen Zaman, Ford Foundation  
Prachi Patankar, Foundation for a Just Society  
Mónica Córdova, Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing  
Akilah Massey, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations  
Philippe Sion, Humanity United  
Joanna Lauen, Irving Harris Foundation  
Rena Payan, Justice Outside

## Acknowledgements

This report in the Movement Infrastructure Series was authored by Deepa Iyer and UyenThi Tran Myhre, with editorial support from Frances Kunreuther and Sean Thomas-Breitfeld.

Megan Briggs, Lehigh Valley Community Foundation  
Hallie McClain, Marguerite Casey Foundation (formerly)  
Kate Levin Markel, McGregor Fund  
Kaberi Banerjee, Meyer Memorial Trust (formerly)  
Ryan Barker, Missouri Foundation for Health  
Alethia Jones, Open Society Foundations (formerly)  
Amardeep Singh, Open Society Foundations (formerly)  
Sadie Kliner, Pivotal Ventures  
Emmy Hall Ganos, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
Kathryn Wehr, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (formerly)  
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Martha Davis, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
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Rachele Tardi, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
Uma Viswanathan, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (formerly)  
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Ryenne Jennings, Wayne County Community Foundation  
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