INVESTING IN THE POWER OF YOUNG PEOPLE:

20 Years of Philanthropic Support for Youth Organizing

Seema Shah, PhD

FCYO AT 20

FUNDERS' COLLABORATIVE ON YOUTH ORGANIZING

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Seema Shah, Ph.D. is the founder and principal of COMM|VEDA Consulting, a consulting firm that provides research, writing, and project management services to mission-driven organizations. Dr. Shah's career spans two decades in the academic, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors. Trained as a clinical-community psychologist, her work has touched on a wide range of topics, including diversity, equity, and inclusion, urban education, community organizing, and youth development. Dr. Shah has authored more than 30 publications, including *Transforming Young People and Communities: New Findings on the Impact of Youth Organizing* and *Building Transformative Leadership: Data on the Impacts of Youth Organizing*.

The Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) works to create a strong, stable, and interconnected youth organizing field that supports young people to play leading roles in advancing justice and equity for their communities. We believe that the key to solving our most pressing social problems lies in supporting the leadership of young people who have been most impacted by inequity. We view youth organizing as a critical strategy to both support the holistic needs of young people and empower them to create meaningful systemic change. Our work to build a strong youth organizing field includes grantmaking, capacity and infrastructure building, funder learning, and research and publications.

Since 2000, FCYO has served to connect funders and practitioners to a wide range of resources designed to strengthen the field of youth organizing. This report is part of FCYO's 2020 National Youth Organizing Field Scan, a series of four reports that together offer an in-depth look into a field that has grown in significant ways over the last two decades. Visit www.fcyo.org to access the latest research on youth organizing, connect to other funders or practitioners involved in organizing, and find free webinars on topics such as organizing strategy and capacity building.

funders' collaborative on youth organizing

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TO OUR COMMUNITY:

In early 2020, the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) set out to survey the past 20 years of support for youth organizing in celebration of our 20th anniversary.

Little did we know that as we embarked upon this journey, we were standing at the doorstep of a patently historical year for youth organizing and its philanthropic allies. A global pandemic landed, prompting extraordinary mutual aid networks, rapid digital pivots, and a spate of rapid response funding. A string of high-profile police murders spurred a prolific season of racial reckoning, with mass protest built on deep organizing legacies generating philanthropic and public support that secured unprecedented policy changes. And, as 2020 came to a close, young people of color turned out en masse to raise awareness about the issues concerning their communities, register their peers to vote, and partake in an election in which their participation indisputably shifted the direction of the country.

This year tested the stability of the foundations we have built and measured the full strength of our ability to innovate upon unprecedented challenges. Though we will always have room to grow and work that lies ahead, 2020 showed us in no uncertain terms just how far youth organizing has come in our power to effect change.

With *Investing in the Power of Young People: 20 Years of Philanthropic Support for Youth Organizing*, FCYO trains our lens on the critical role philanthropy has played in shoring up a youth organizing field poised to meet the multiple challenges of this moment. Compiling insights from interviews with nine institutional funders and surveys of over 312 youth organizing groups, we witness a funder community that has transformed alongside the youth organizing field in major ways.

In this report, we first look back to FCYO's origins and hear from the early funders deeply dedicated to youth organizing as a vehicle for social change who weathered the shifting economic and political landscapes of the 21st century to envision and build a committed community of philanthropic practice. We learn from youth organizing groups about their experience as recipients and partners in this community, finding that while the funding landscape expanded and diversified, important growth edges remain. And, importantly, we hear the nuanced insights of current youth organizing funders on their key priorities for the work ahead, including:

1. Investing in field infrastructure, including supporting national and regional collaboratives and advancing research
2. Supporting leadership development and organizational capacity-building
3. Recognizing and valuing the connectivity of youth organizing to youth development, civic engagement, the arts, and other issue areas

While 2020 demonstrated the palpable strength of a resourced youth organizing field, youth organizing still remains a deeply underfunded and marginalized arena of philanthropic investment. Many groups are still unable to get the resources they need, with persistent disparities across constituencies, issues, and geographic regions. We still need to build out a national landscape with enhanced resources directed toward the leadership development and networks and alliances critical to the overall success of the field. There are yet many untapped philanthropic allies.

As we present to you the evolution of a committed youth organizing funder community over the last 20 years, we look forward with equal enthusiasm to the pivotal role a committed and passionate philanthropic community can - and, we believe, will - play in further realizing the sustained transformative power of youth organizers.

In Solidarity,
The FCYO Family

PHILANTHROPIC SUPPORT FOR YOUTH ORGANIZING: A 20 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

THE EARLY YEARS: BUILDING THE CASE FOR YOUTH ORGANIZING IN PHILANTHROPY

Throughout the 1990's, young people of color around the country, many of them high-school aged, led campaigns for social change on a variety of issues, including fighting for the de-criminalization of youth and advocating for public education reform. Though their work drew upon a long tradition of youth movements for change, much of it was happening under the radar of institutional philanthropy. Barbara Tavares, president of the Edward W. Hazen Foundation at the time, recalls, "There was a lot of work that was happening on the ground from Mississippi in the South to Philadelphia to the West Coast. But it was invisible, disconnected, and underfunded." Recognizing these challenges, a small group of funders with a commitment to youth organizing began initiating discussions about how to support and resource this work more effectively. Following a series of conversations with both funders and organizers, the idea of a funders' collaborative began to take root.[1]

Launched in 2000, the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing created a space for funders to come together with practitioners to learn more about youth-led social change efforts, invest in the field in a more coordinated and strategic way, and build out the knowledge base for the field (Sherman, 2002). Moreover, this new infrastructure helped connect largely local and regional youth organizing efforts into a national conversation.

Among FCYO's early investors were the Ford Foundation and the Surdna Foundation. Ford and Surdna's introduction to supporting youth organizing was representative of much of the funding zeitgeist at the time, which focused on youth development. Robert Sherman, director of the Effective Citizenry program at Surdna, helped move the foundation from a paradigm of youth service to the notion of young people as civic actors who can serve as powerful agents of change in their communities. Likewise, Inca Mohamed, a program officer at Ford at the time, recalls, "Ford was not funding organizing of any kind." With the Foundation's investments in youth development, however, she was able to make the case among her colleagues by framing youth activism as a component of youth development. This reframe aligned with FCYO's focus on high-school aged youth organizers, distinct from activism by college-aged young adults.

1 *For more information about the origins of FCYO, a detailed description can be found at https://fcyo.org/resources/1998-funder-retreat-fcyo-origins-part-2*

Early supporters of FCYO collectively engaged their peers in one-on-one conversations while also organizing funder briefings to help others in the philanthropic community learn the social change strategy of organizing, which was new to many funders. FCYO made sure that young people were at the center of these conversations. Nat Williams, president of the Hill-Snowdon Foundation, believes this was critically important and helped create the space within philanthropy for "young people to represent themselves in their own ways."

In its early years, FCYO invested heavily in knowledge-building, supporting funder education and broader field-building efforts by publishing a series of reports through its Occasional Paper Series. In its first five years, FCYO produced eight reports, articulating models of youth leadership and organizing, describing the connections between youth development and youth organizing, and documenting the work of youth organizing groups across regions including the South, Southwest, and Midwest. These reports became essential resources that helped build the field by providing frameworks and documentation that could speak to the defining values and approaches embodied in youth organizing, as well as the impact of this work.

FUNDING FOR YOUTH ORGANIZING IN 2010–2015: BIG DIPS AND BOLD INVESTMENTS

In its first decade, FCYO helped articulate the case for youth organizing within philanthropy and successfully brought more funders into the fold. However, by 2010, the effects of the 2008 financial meltdown began to reverberate in the field, evidenced by a notable downturn in funding. The downturn reflected a combination of factors. Foundation endowments took a hit, and while many foundations increased their payout rates to address immediate community needs, 41 percent of youth organizing groups reported that their foundation funding decreased between 2010-2012. At the same time, a critical mass of groups folded or downsized operations, reflecting larger economic realities. Moreover, shifts in foundation funding priorities and turnover among foundation program officers who had served as important allies further exacerbated the funding crunch, reflected in part by a decline in funding for FCYO itself. Sanjiv Rao, director of Ford Foundation's civic engagement and government program, describes this period as a "fraught" time for youth organizing and emblematic of the ways funding for youth organizing is "particularly susceptible to a fragile economy."

While overall funding for youth organizing dipped during this time, several large foundations – Atlantic Philanthropies, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and The California Endowment – bucked the trend and made substantial investments in youth organizing.

- From 2010 through 2014, **Atlantic Philanthropies** invested $47 million in reforming overly punitive school discipline policies (Marek, 2016). Atlantic's investments in school discipline reform were multi-pronged and supported the work of educational and judicial leaders, as well as researchers and policymakers. At the same time, Atlantic believed that centering the leadership of young people of color, whose educational trajectories and life outcomes were the most negatively impacted by harsh

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discipline policies, was essential in building the political will to change policies and practices. With youth organizing as a central lever for change, Atlantic funded grassroots organizing in 22 states, which ultimately precipitated policy shifts at the local, state, and federal level (Mediratta, 2016).

- When **The California Endowment** began its Building Healthy Communities initiative in 2010, it centered local community decision-making as a pillar of its work. As the initiative progressed, investments in youth organizing became increasingly prominent, including the Endowment's $50 million commitment to its Sons & Brothers initiative focused on boys and young men of color, its support for new and emerging groups in underserved parts of the state, and its investments in youth media and arts and culture to advance campaigns for social justice. The seeds of these investments continue to grow as The California Endowment has helped to bring new funders to the table and create a statewide infrastructure for youth organizing, while simultaneously embracing youth organizing as a primary driver for change in its own grantmaking strategy.

- In 2011, **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** began what would become a multi-phased partnership with FCYO to advance healthy communities through youth organizing. Initially, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's investment facilitated support for youth organizing groups to address the root causes of childhood obesity with a specific focus on improving access to healthy, affordable, and culturally relevant food in schools and communities. Through a cohort-based grantmaking strategy, the initiative helped build the relationships and capacity necessary to create a movement for a just and sustainable food system. The partnership has since evolved into a fellowship model, with young adults serving as Fellows in youth organizing groups to support local health equity work and connect it to state and national strategies for change including community engagement and policy development and implementation. To date, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has invested more than $4 million in the initiative.

2015–TODAY: A YOUTH ORGANIZING FIELD AND FUNDER COMMUNITY POISED TO LEAD

The past few years have seen another stretch of funding increases, with more than forty percent of youth organizing groups indicating that both foundation funding and support from individual donors increased between 2017-2019. This upward trend reflects a number of factors: the demonstrated success of youth organizing groups in advancing meaningful social change; funders' desire to increase their impact on issues such as immigrant rights, educational opportunity, economic justice, and climate change in the wake of the 2016 election; an improving economy that expanded foundation coffers; and a growing body of research that highlights the positive impact of participation in youth organizing on social-emotional development, civic engagement, and academic success.

Notably, in 2017, the Ford Foundation, the second largest foundation in the United States, made a five-year, $5 million investment in FCYO, re-engaging with youth organizing after a period of time spent focusing on other priorities. In addition to making a substantial investment in FCYO as an infrastructure organization for the field, Ford has stepped into a significant leadership role in helping to generate interest among other funders, supporting FCYO's funder briefings and engaging in peer advocacy. In part because of Ford's leadership and advocacy, a growing number of donors are investing in FCYO, signaling increasing funder support and interest in youth organizing.

While funders are encouraged by the growing interest in youth organizing, many longstanding supporters of youth organizing worry that this infusion of funding will not be sustained in the wake of another economic downturn. Lori Bezahler, president of the Hazen Foundation, observes the importance of understanding the work of youth organizing as a marathon, not a sprint, and raises concerns about philanthropy's attention span, reflecting "We saw everyone wanted to do rapid response funds after Ferguson and after Parkland, [and] after the election, and that's not a strategy. The appetite for rapid response philanthropy is not sustainable."

At the time of this writing, the world is in the midst of a global pandemic, making these fears all the more relevant. The economic, health, and social impacts of the pandemic are being felt in real-time and will reverberate in both philanthropy and the field of youth organizing in ways that cannot yet be fully known, but will undoubtedly impact the work of youth organizing groups as well as the foundations that support them in fundamental and far-reaching ways.

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING THE FIELD OF YOUTH ORGANIZING: THE CRITICAL ROLES OF PHILANTHROPY

As FCYO rounds out its 20th year, we interviewed nine institutional funders with a track record of investing in youth organizing to get their perspective on how philanthropic investment has helped build and support the field and the ways in which funders can invest strategically and thoughtfully to create a stronger, more sustainable field.

Interviewees highlighted three major levers for growing and strengthening the field:

1. **Investing in field infrastructure, including supporting national/regional collaboratives and advancing research**
2. **Supporting leadership development and organizational capacity-building**
3. **Recognizing and valuing the connectivity of youth organizing to youth development, civic engagement, the arts, and other issue areas**

INVESTING IN FIELD INFRASTRUCTURE

In recent years, the youth organizing field has grown from a loosely connected set of grassroots organizations across the country to a more interconnected network of groups that are collaborating with and learning from one another to achieve collective impact. This shift is not coincidental but is instead due, in part, to philanthropy's partnerships with infrastructure and intermediary organizations that have since become central hubs for learning, expertise, and knowledge-building. Indeed, research on field-building efforts shows that such entities are an essential mechanism for social change and increased impact (The James Irvine Foundation, 2009).

New regional and national collaboratives, for example, have helped catalyze more effective campaigns for education reform, immigrant rights, and gun control, among other issues, at the state and national level. Having such structures and mechanisms in place to scale campaigns is critically important, asserts Amoretta Morris of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and allows organizing groups "to not only have boots

on the ground in all of these communities, but also the ability to move things nationally when folks are working in alignment." In addition, research on youth organizing has contributed to field knowledge on what constitutes best practices in youth organizing and how youth organizing functions to create change at both the community and individual level.

Both large foundations and smaller ones have made substantial investments in field infrastructure in recent years. Importantly, these infrastructure investments have strengthened networks among organizing groups as well as funders.

- Through the BUILD program portion of its Youth Opportunity and Learning (later merged with its Civic Engagement and Government) portfolio, the **Ford Foundation** has awarded large grants to organizations including the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, Alliance for Youth Organizing, and Communities for Just Schools Fund. Each of these groups plays a coordinating role nationally, convening groups across the country for shared learning and strategizing while also supporting organizational capacity-building. Sanjiv Rao of the Ford Foundation notes that these BUILD grantees achieve three core objectives: "They help raise money to give money directly to the field. They create the donor education and learning space to help sustain the momentum around youth organizing. And, third, they provide core infrastructure support in terms of capacity-building and network-building to build the field."

- While California is often perceived to be a state with strong support for youth organizing, this was largely true for the Bay Area and Los Angeles but less so for the Central Valley, Tribal Lands, and other parts of the state. **The California Endowment**, through its ten-year Building Healthy Communities initiative, helped develop a statewide infrastructure for youth organizing, investing in groups like YO Cali, Movement Strategy Center, and PolicyLink that have helped support emerging organizing efforts and created platforms for coordinated statewide campaigns for health equity, immigrant rights, and educational justice, among other issues.

  Albert Maldonado, senior program manager at The California Endowment, shares, "Our investment in intermediaries created space where we took our young people outside of these places. We [took] them to Sacramento, to Los Angeles, to DC, to New York. These opportunities help young people build relationships, to find out what is possible, to learn from others, and to build more of a movement infrastructure and identity beyond [their] place." Today, the landscape of youth organizing in California looks vastly different than it did ten years ago, with a robust network of youth organizing groups across the state, not just in Los Angeles and the Bay Area.

  In addition to strengthening organizing networks, funders have come together to form the Southern California Youth Organizing Funder Collaborative, a local collaborative that allows funders to learn from one another while pooling together their resources for increased grantmaking to the field.

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— Albert Maldonado, The California Endowment

- In Connecticut, a state with relatively little infrastructure for youth organizing, the **Perrin Family Foundation** has played an instrumental role in building the field by creating resources for both organizations involved in youth development and youth organizing efforts, as well a growing network of funders invested in the work. After developing a multiyear grantmaking and capacity building initiative to support and strengthen youth organizing groups, the Perrin Family Foundation's Critically Conscious Youth Development portfolio took shape. The grant portfolio recognizes that even though organizing is not in the DNA of all youth groups, cultivating young people's critical consciousness, even in the context of youth development programs, helps build stronger movements.

  The nascent infrastructure for youth organizing was not a result of lack of vision or will, but instead was largely driven by scarcity of investment in this approach. To address this reality, the Perrin Family Foundation has hosted briefings to create opportunities for Connecticut-based funders to learn from other foundations across the country that embrace youth-led change as a critical strategy in pursuit of their broader missions. The Foundation went on to seed and convene a funder network called Supporting Organizing Work Connecticut. Initially a learning space, the funder's table now has a formal membership structure and a steering committee that is helping to create a pooled fund and move resources to address capacity and infrastructure needs identified by organizers across the state.

  On the organizing side of the equation, one of Perrin's grantees, Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice hosts monthly round tables for the Foundation's grantees and provides coaching and troubleshooting support across constituencies, geographies, and issues in Connecticut, which has helped to create a statewide infrastructure for organizing groups.

- Generating knowledge and developing a research base are also critical to field-building efforts. **Atlantic Philanthropies, The California Endowment,** and the **Hazen Foundation,** among other funders, have supported research efforts by institutions such as University of California-Santa Cruz, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and University of Colorado-Boulder. Because of these investments, a robust and growing body of research not only documents successful campaigns to change local and state policies, but also identifies the ways in which the methodology of youth organizing – engaging young people of color who are closest to the problems to generate, research, and advocate for solutions – is associated with a slew of positive outcomes, including improved academic performance, greater awareness of one's own identity as well as the identity of others, and acquisition of important civic skills such as communication and public speaking (Terriquez, 2017; Watts, Kirshner, Govan, & Fernandez, 2017).

SUPPORTING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY–BUILDING

Related to the importance of investing in field infrastructure, youth organizing funders are also prioritizing leadership development and organizational capacity-building. For example, the lack of fundraising capacity is a frequently cited concern among organizing groups. Many also want to shore up their communications, staff development efforts, and technology infrastructure. These types of capacity-building investments can help ensure that organizing groups are sustainable for the long haul. In addition, supporting executive directors and allocating resources to leadership development can help mitigate high rates of turnover and create pipelines for social justice leadership. Examples of foundation-led initiatives for capacity-building and leadership development include the following:

- Since 2017, the **Andrus Family Fund's** capacity-building program, SOAR, has supported groups' immediate capacity needs and more recently has focused on two core areas: healing justice and strategic communications for organizing. Through the program, Andrus Family Fund paid for ten organizations to attend SPIN Academy training, a one-week deep dive into communications for social justice organizations. In the realm of healing justice, Andrus Family Fund hired Universal Partnership to lead healing justice related leadership, organizational, and strategy development short- and long-term work with a subset of its grantees. Andrus will also partner with Social Movement Technologies to train organizations in digital organizing.

- With support from the **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**, the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing connected young people to organizing groups for Fellowships that focus on addressing school wellness, supporting groups' local work and connecting groups to state and national strategies for change including community education and engagement and policy development and implementation. The program helps facilitate the leadership development of those who have "aged out" of youth organizing, while allowing them to continue building their leadership skills through a structured program.

- Some efforts are focused on developing a leadership pipeline within philanthropy. The **Marguerite Casey Foundation**, for example, has a Youth Fellow on its board, and while the explicit purpose is not to prepare young leaders for careers in philanthropy, the role helps young people understand the role of philanthropy in supporting organizing.

RECOGNIZING THE CONNECTIVITY OF YOUTH ORGANIZING TO OTHER FUNDING PRIORITIES

Liz Sak, president of Cricket Island Foundation, observes, "One of the challenges within organizing is that it's so narrowly defined that a lot of funders don't see themselves as part of it. How can we talk about it in a way that brings people to the table instead of pushing them away from the table?"

Youth organizing sits at the intersection of a host of different strategic goals and may not always fall under the explicit moniker of youth organizing. While there is a cadre of funders who have a robust portfolio focused on youth organizing or center youth organizing as part of their core mission, our data show many more funders support youth organizing groups without naming such a focus. Rather, funders may support youth organizing because of its effectiveness in tackling an issue that they care about. Alternately, many funders have a focus on youth development and their interest in youth organizing may be grounded in organizing groups' efficacy in promoting positive youth development. Some funders have a vested interest in civic engagement and democracy and may see value in investing in organizations that promote civic learning. Still other funders come at this work through an equity or social justice lens.

Across different issue areas, as well as the strategic lenses of youth development, equity, and civic engagement/democracy, our research shows that a range of funders understand youth organizing to be an effective strategy to advance their funding priorities. Below, we explore some of these entry points into the youth organizing funder community.

ISSUE AREAS

Young people can be an important part of achieving funder-desired outcomes on the burning issues of today such as education, climate justice, and criminal justice. Engaging funders through their issue areas of interest can be a powerful way to create new coalitions and partnerships. Atlantic Philanthropies' work on school discipline reform is an example. Kavitha Mediratta, who led this work at Atlantic, explains, "Just like in a car, you need more than the engine, right? You actually need other components in order to make it succeed in going some place. So the thought was 'how do we use donor resources to fully populate this ecosystem of players?' It's actually required to make change happen." Atlantic successfully brought more funders into the fold, while also connecting youth organizing to a broader set of actors – researchers, policymakers, and practitioners – to build a coordinated effort that ultimately resulted in changing the federal guidance on school discipline.

"One of the challenges within organizing is that it's so narrowly defined that a lot of funders don't see themselves as part of it. How can we talk about it in a way that brings people to the table instead of pushing them away from the table?"

— Liz Sak, Cricket Island Foundation

Likewise, for funders who are interested in immigrant rights, the emergence and effectiveness of youth-led movements such as DREAMers showed the ways youth-led movements successfully advocated for tangible policy wins. The March for Our Lives, similarly, demonstrated the power of a multiracial coalition of young people to change the public discourse on gun violence, attracting donors who may not have had a track record of supporting organizing.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Many foundations have portfolios focused on youth development, but youth development funders and youth organizing funders have typically operated in separate spheres. Yet a growing body of research shows that participation in youth organizing is strongly associated with positive outcomes related to leadership and social-emotional development (Flores, 2020; Shah, 2018). As Ford Foundation's Sanjiv Rao states, "Youth organizing is a form of youth development. It's not just a direct action in the streets or on the steps of city hall, but it's actually fundamental to leadership development, fundamental to the developmental needs of young people."

New investments in youth organizing reflect the growing recognition of youth organizing as a youth development strategy. Annie E. Casey Foundation, for example, which has had a longstanding focus on expanding opportunities for young people and their families, has started to make deeper investments in youth organizing, recognizing that organizing exists within the broader continuum of youth development.

EQUITY

An expanding focus on and commitment to equity in the philanthropic sector also creates opportunities to bring youth organizing to the fore. With equity increasingly becoming an expectation, funders are starting to consider what it means to distribute resources to grassroots organizations and partner with communities that have been historically marginalized.

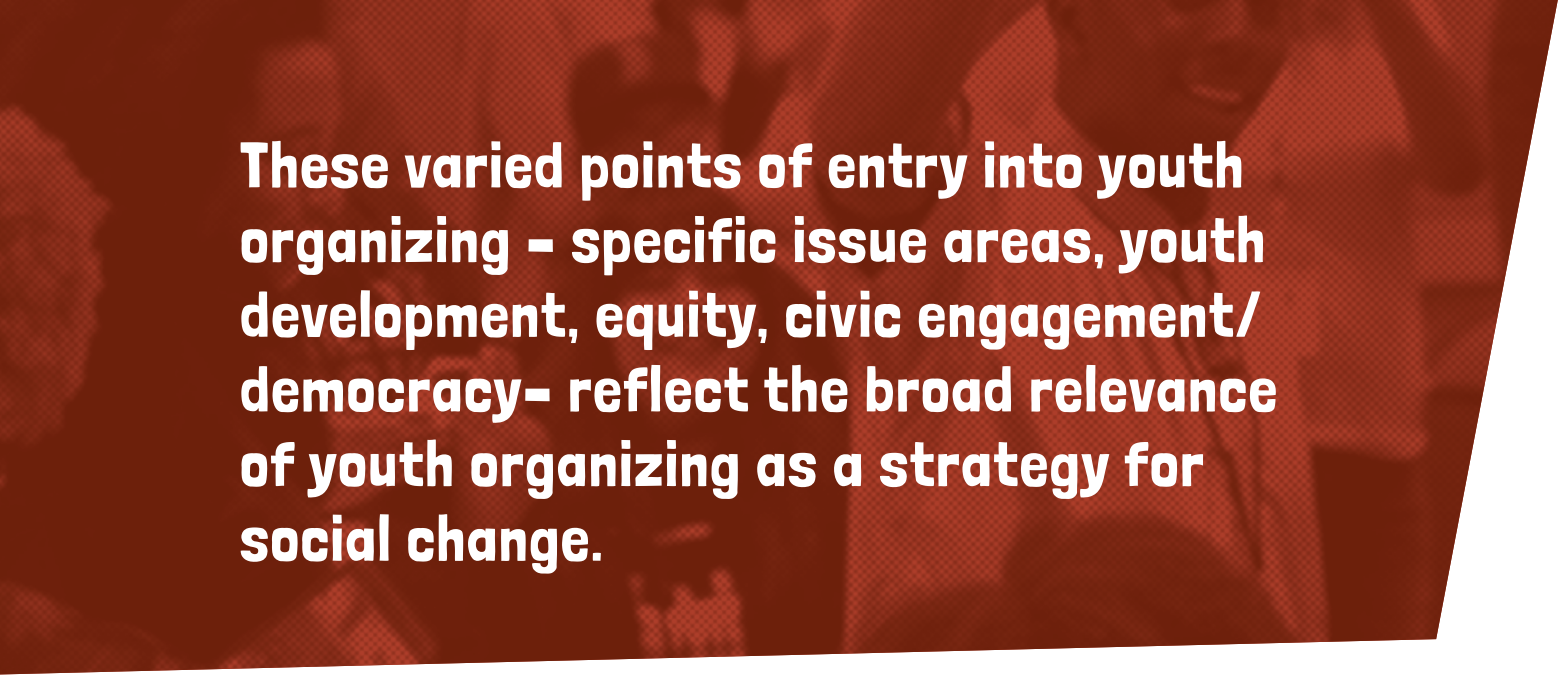
As Laura McCargar of Perrin Family Foundation notes, the increasing attention to issues of equity "creates an on ramp to be able to talk about organizing in a different way." An equity lens allows foundations to think about how organizing meshes with their existing strategy and framework, rather than creating new language or a new portfolio. This has been especially true in Connecticut, where historically there have been few funders who have named organizing as an explicit part of their grantmaking portfolios. At the same time, dollars to youth organizing have increased in recent years in part through Perrin's funder advocacy efforts.

Others we interviewed observe that the language of "power" can be uncomfortable for some foundations and their boards, yet it is language that youth organizing groups regularly use to describe their work. While foundations can benefit from exploring what power means to them, equity can serve as an equally effective entry point.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT/DEMOCRACY

Some funders observe that youth organizing is not necessarily a part of grantmaking portfolios that focus on democracy and civic engagement, even though data shows that young people involved in youth organizing have higher levels of participation in civic engagement (working on a political campaign, voting, running for office) than their peers. Both funders and youth organizing groups have an opportunity to bridge that gap.

Some also note the ways in which arts and culture, as forms of storytelling and journalism, are central to organizing goals. Albert Maldonado from The California Endowment believes, "We have to think about our culture makers, our artists, our storytellers. It's no different than youth organizing – storytelling is an important part of democracy and holds our folks accountable."



These varied points of entry into youth organizing – specific issue areas, youth development, equity, civic engagement/ democracy– reflect the broad relevance of youth organizing as a strategy for social change.

These varied points of entry into youth organizing – specific issue areas, youth development, equity, civic engagement/democracy – reflect the broad relevance of youth organizing as a strategy for social change. In addition, the work of youth organizing itself is still evolving and creating new entry points for engagement. Lori Bezahler, president of the Hazen Foundation, notes, "We need to be able to shed the assumptions we have about what the work looks like and should look like because we need to understand the particulars of context, whether that's geographic, cultural, historical, economic. [Youth organizing] may look different in a rural community than it does in an urban environment, but [can still be] moving towards the movement outcomes."

As these funders observe, youth organizing is not a monolith but instead has many incarnations. For this reason, holistically and effectively resourcing the field will require funders expand their understanding of youth organizing and recognize its integral role across a breadth of philanthropic social change strategies.

TODAY'S FUNDING LANDSCAPE

Due to methodological and capacity limitations, we have historically had limited information about funding patterns for youth organizing. For this report, we gathered data from multiple sources to piece together the most comprehensive information to date on the funding landscape for youth organizing. While gaps in the data remain, we hope this data can provide baseline information for the field as it enhances its efforts to track funding flows to youth organizing.

Our analysis includes data from three primary sources (for more detail on data sources, see Appendix A):

1. 312 youth organizing groups provided general information about their sources of funding as well as funding challenges through a survey administered by University of California-Santa Cruz. Of these groups, 117 also completed a supplemental survey on organizational budgets conducted by FCYO.

2. A subset of these 312 groups – 128 groups -- completed profiles on FCYO's Youth Organizing Map, which included names of their top three funders (philanthropic, government, or corporate) and the amount of funding received from them. In 2019, FCYO asked organizations to update their data, which provided relatively recent data for this analysis.

3. FCYO requested 2016-2017 grants-level data from Candid for the 312 youth organizing groups who took the survey. Candid's database included information on foundation grants for 179 of these youth organizing groups. Its database does not capture all grants received by any given youth organizing group, but this data allows us to add to our understanding of the funding universe by capturing funders who may not have been identified via FCYO's Youth Organizing map.

FUNDING HIGHLIGHTS

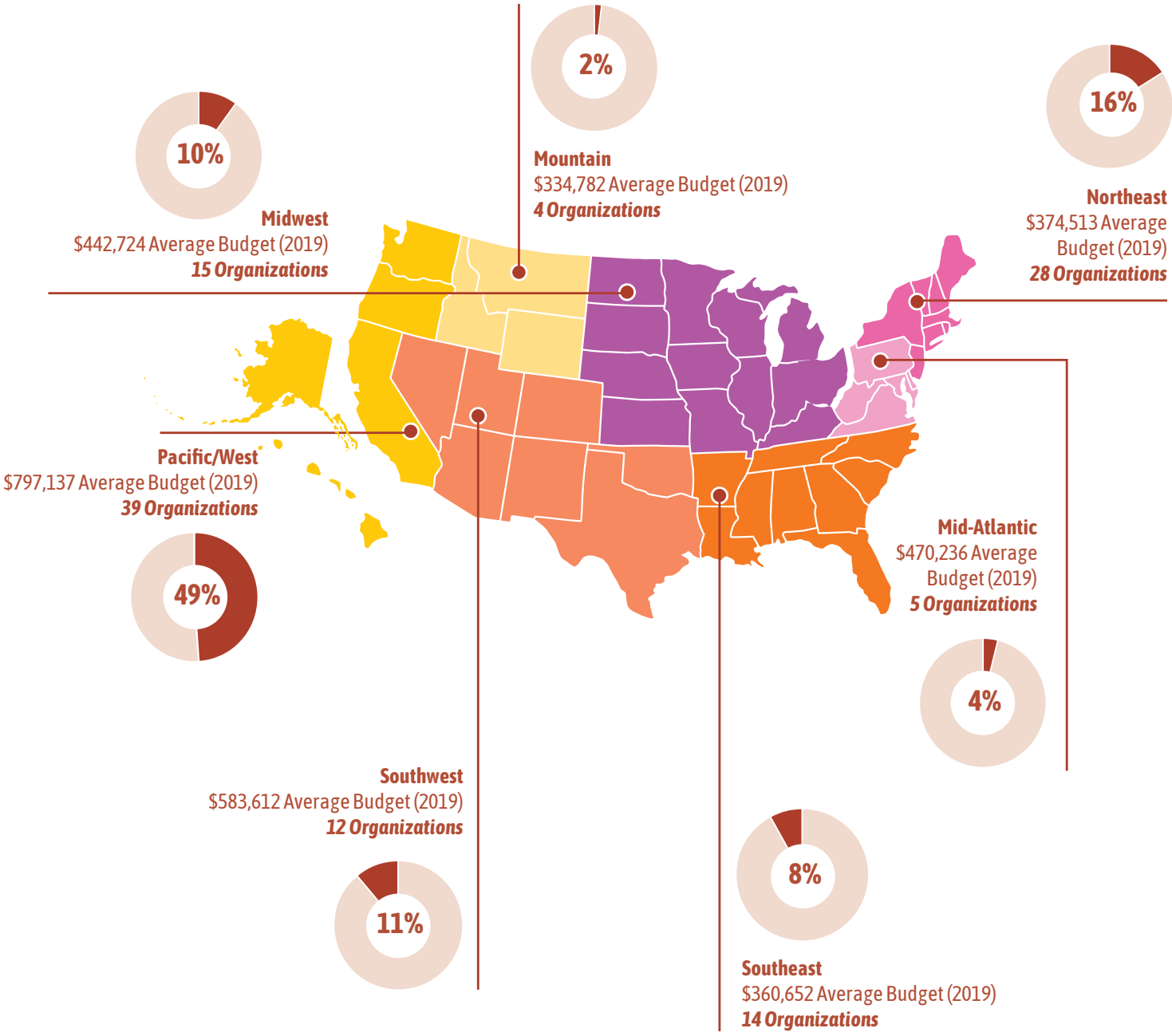
AMOUNT OF FUNDING

We estimate that between the years 2016-2019, the 312 groups in our sample collectively received between $169 million to $211 million annually for their youth organizing efforts. This range is based on total funding captured by the Candid data set (which only captures foundation funding) as well as the budget survey (which captures funding from all types of donors).

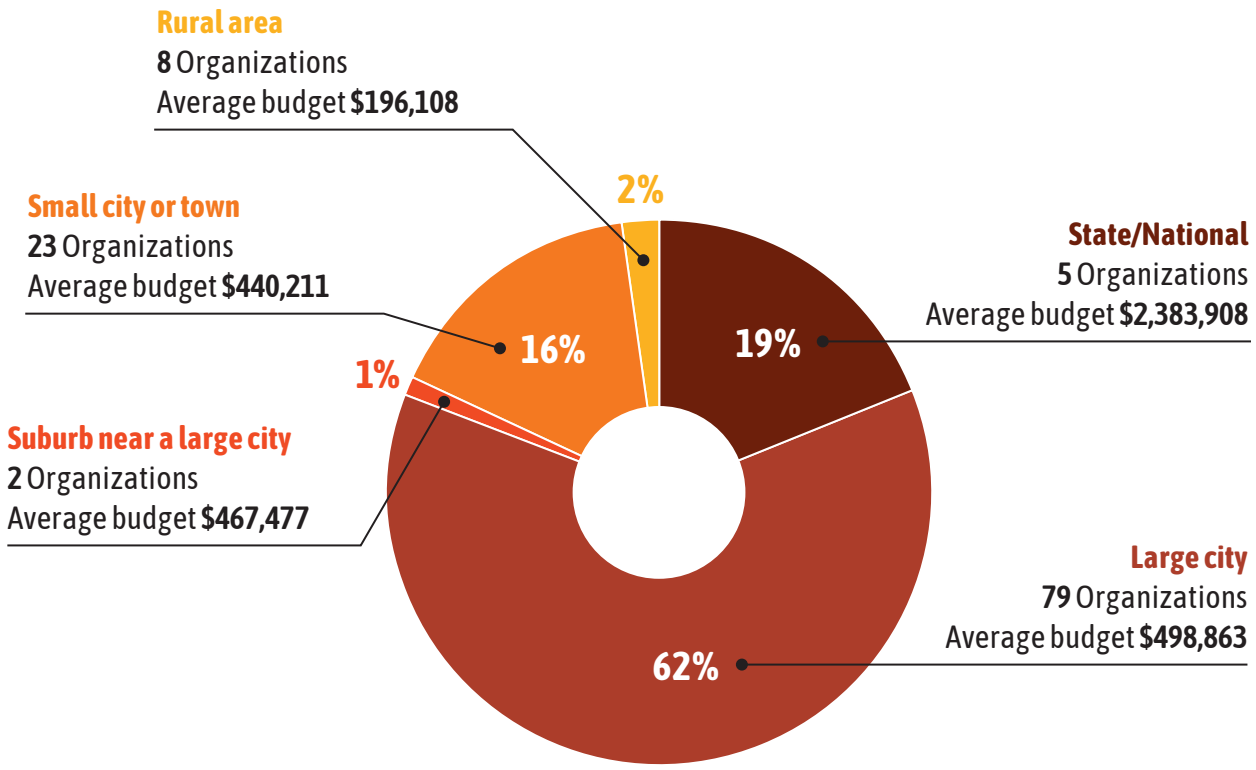
BUDGET SIZE

The budget survey showed that youth organizing groups (or the youth organizing arm of an intergenerational organizing group) reported an average budget size of $546,653. On average, intergenerational groups devoted 12.5% of their budgets to youth organizing.

AVERAGE BUDGET AND PERCENT OF TOTAL FUNDING BY REGION



AVERAGE BUDGET AND PERCENT OF TOTAL FUNDING BY COMMUNITY TYPE



As current events underscore the importance of systemic change, additional investments in youth organizing represent a tremendous opportunity for funders seeking to make an impact.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

The majority of youth organizing groups reported receiving foundation funding, with ten percent of groups indicating foundations provided all of their funding and 41 percent indicating that more than three-quarters of their budget came from foundations. Government, individual, and corporate donors also contributed to youth organizing groups, although half did not report any corporate dollars and nearly a third did not have government funding.

YOUTH ORGANIZING GROUPS' FUNDING SOURCES: A BUDGETARY BREAKDOWN

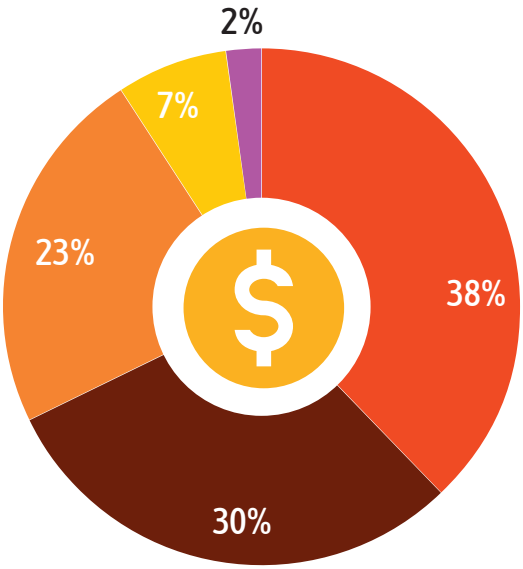
	Percent of Organizational Budget from Funding Source					
Funding Source	**0%**	**1-25%**	**26-50%**	**51-75%**	**76-99%**	**100%**
Foundations	2.4	10.7	13.7	22.9	**40.5**	9.8
Government	**30.4**	26.1	34.8	4.3	4.3	0
Corporations	**50.6**	46.8	2.6	0	0	0
Individuals	3.7	**83.2**	8.1	2.5	1.2	1.2

How to read this table: The numbers inside the table represent the percent of youth organizing groups reporting that a particular percentage of their budget comes from a particular source. For example, "9.8% of youth organizing groups report that 100% of their budget comes from foundation funding" or "34.8% of youth organizing groups report that between 26-50% of their budget comes from government funding."

NUMBER OF FUNDERS

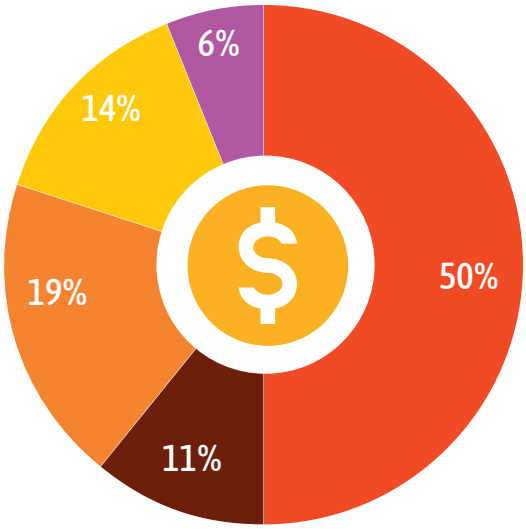
Based on data from Candid as well as the FCYO funding map, we identified 734 unique funders who had given grants of $10,000 or more to youth organizing groups in recent years. About a third of these funders – 270 – gave $100,000 or more to youth organizing groups, with most of the remaining funders awarding one or two small grants to organizations within their community. For these funders, support for youth organizing groups is likely tied to local relationships rather than overarching support for youth organizing.

TYPES OF FUNDERS



- Family Foundations
- Independent Foundations
- Public Charities
- Corporate Foundations/Giving Programs
- Government Agencies

SIZE OF ASSETS



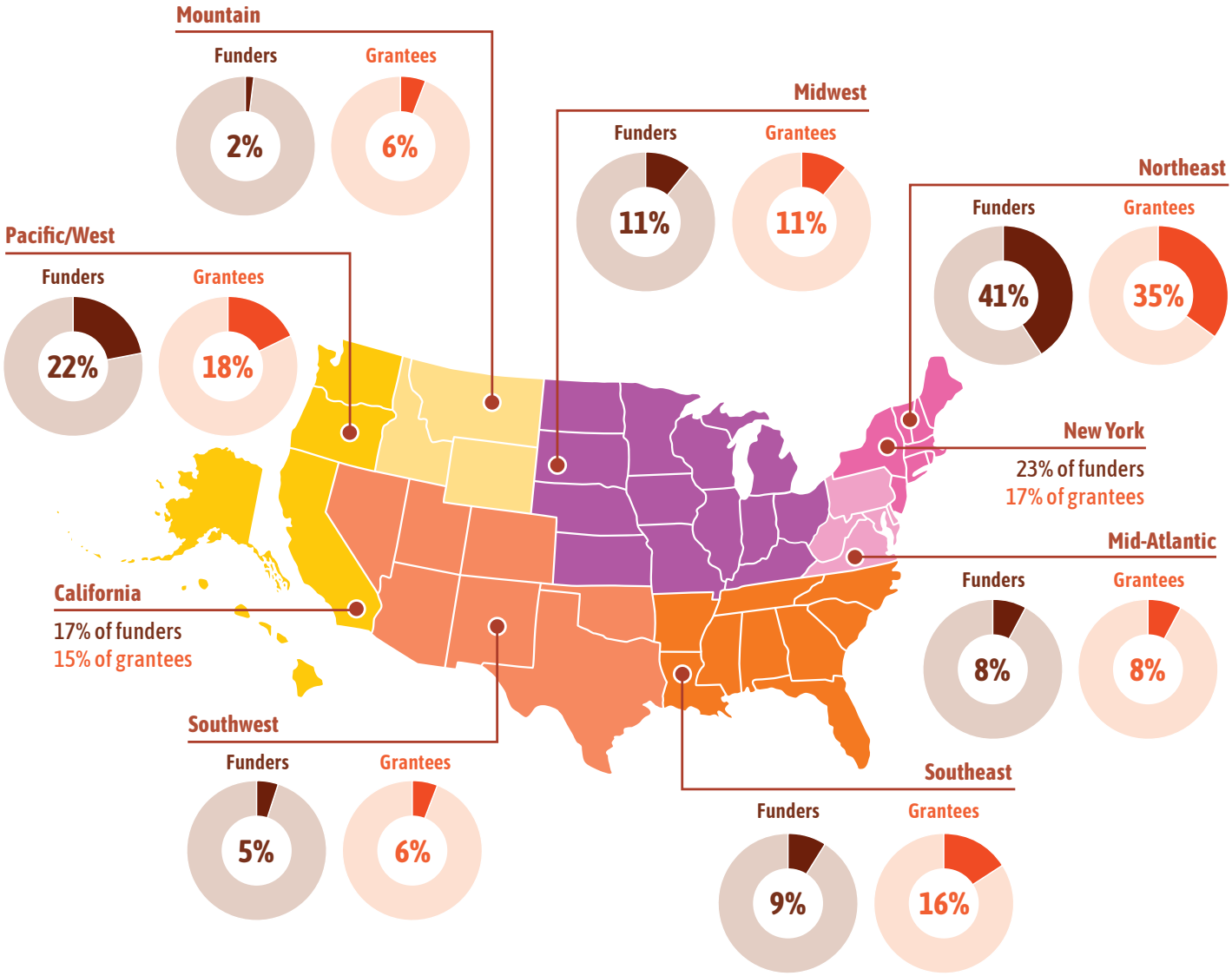
- ≤ $50 million
- $50-$100 million
- $100-$500 million
- ≥ $500 million
- Unavailable

LOCATION OF FUNDERS

Of the 734 funders identified, 23 percent were located in New York and 17 percent were located in California. Regionally, 41 percent of funders were located in the Northeast, 22 percent in the West, 11 percent in the Midwest, 9 percent in the Southeast, 8 percent in the Mid-Atlantic, 5 percent in the Southwest, and 2 percent in Mountain states.

LOCATION OF GRANTEES

In general, the geographic location of organizing groups in the Candid dataset corresponded with the geographic location of funders. Seventeen percent of youth organizing groups receiving foundation grants were located in New York and 15 percent were located in California. Regionally, 35 percent of youth organizing groups receiving foundation grants were located in the Northeast, 18 percent in the West, 16 percent in the Southeast, 11 percent in the Midwest, 8 percent in the Mid-Atlantic, 6 percent in the Southwest, and 6 percent in Mountain states.

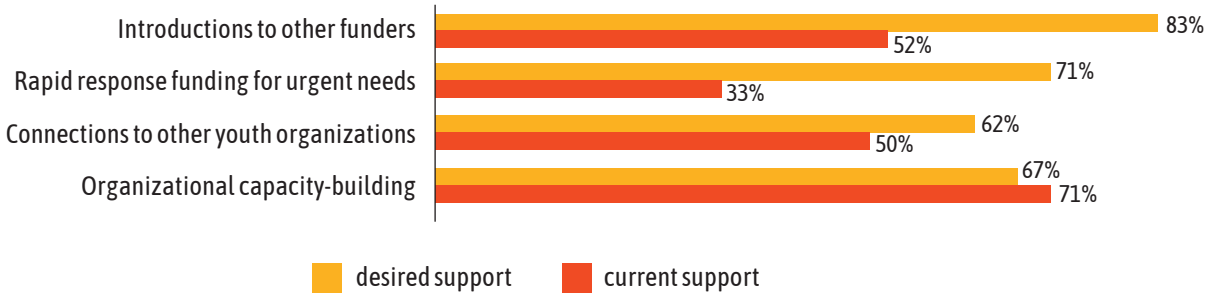


FUNDING CHALLENGES

Survey findings showed that while many youth organizing groups are financially stable, they still lack resources for longer-term sustainability. Sixty-one percent of groups indicated they maintained an operating reserve and 49 percent had dedicated development staff.

DESIRED SUPPORT FROM FUNDERS VS. CURRENT SUPPORT FROM FUNDERS

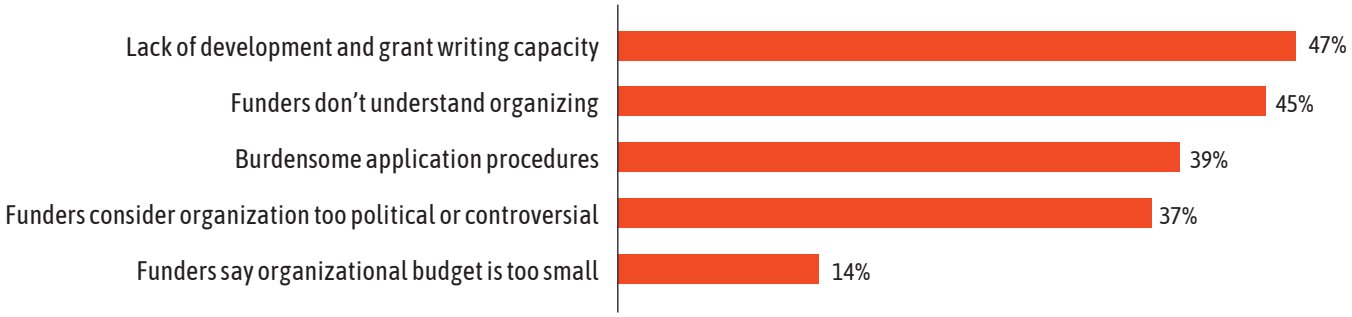
Although funders provide support beyond their dollars, there is a disconnect in the type of support funders provide and the type of support youth organizing groups desire. Youth organizing groups report the greatest discrepancies in their interest in introductions to other funders (52 percent versus 83 percent) and rapid response funding for urgent needs (33 percent versus 71 percent).



OBSTACLES TO SECURING FUNDS

Groups face a range of obstacles to secure funding for their work. The biggest obstacles to fundraising were a lack of understanding of organizing, lack of development capacity, burdensome application procedures, and being considered too controversial or political.

Other obstacles, shared through open-ended responses, included budgets being too small or too big and funders not supporting the geographic region or population group served by the organization. Indeed, both youth organizing groups and funders themselves flagged the following funding gaps: groups located in the South; groups located in smaller towns and rural areas; groups serving Native youth; and groups serving LGBTQ youth. The lack of funding support for emerging groups, especially those without a formal 501c3 designation, was also noted. As one funder put it, "philanthropy's behind" – young people are already organizing across traditional boundaries of race, gender, sexuality, and geography and doing so in organized ways that may not fit into a standard nonprofit model.



TAKEAWAYS FROM TODAY'S FUNDING LANDSCAPE

- With approximately $200 million in annual support, there is substantial interest and investment in youth organizing, but this funding is a drop in the bucket compared to philanthropic support for closely aligned areas such as youth development ($1.8 billion in 2017) or civic engagement ($460 million in 2017).[2] As current events underscore the importance of systemic change, additional investments in youth organizing represent a tremendous opportunity for funders seeking to make an impact.

- Funders who have supported youth organizing are concentrated in the Northeast and on the West Coast, often making it harder for groups in other parts of the country to develop relationships with these funders. In particular, we see under-investment in groups in the South and in rural areas.

- While large foundations like The California Endowment, the Ford Foundation, and others have made investments in youth organizing, the majority of support comes from smaller foundations and family foundations in the form of small grants that are typically under $50,000.

- Organizing groups face numerous challenges in obtaining funding. Support to shore up groups' fund-raising capacity, coupled with shifts in foundation practice that seek to address gaps, are needed.

The current economic uncertainty underscores the vulnerability of funding for youth organizing and makes it all the more important to track funding flows. While this analysis provides the best baseline information to date, additional steps need to be taken to improve both the quality and quantity of data on funding for youth organizing. FCYO's Youth Organizing Landscape Map, slated to be re-launched in 2021, has the potential to become the go-to repository for comprehensive data on investments in youth organizing. As this resource becomes available, we encourage both funders and organizing groups to provide annual updates to the map to ensure the field has reliable information on where funding is going and what the funding gaps are. Doing so will enhance the ability of funders to make impactful investments, while allowing the field to advocate more effectively for equitable resources.

2 These data are derived from a search on Foundation Maps (https://maps.foundationcenter.org/home.php) and represent approximate figures of foundation giving in 2017. They are provided here for a rough comparison.

LOOKING FORWARD: A NOTE FROM THE FUNDERS' COLLABORATIVE ON YOUTH ORGANIZING

In the past 20 years, investment in youth organizing has made steady progress away from the margins of philanthropy toward becoming a recognized and respected means of advancing youth development and social change. Leveraged by the critical leadership of key funders, our research demonstrates that youth organizing has a growing presence in both the consciousness and portfolios of many philanthropic stakeholders. Small family foundations are now centering youth organizing as a primary strategy for addressing inequity in their local communities. Issue-based funders are connecting with the unique capacity of youth organizing to advance their causes. Funder affinity groups are emerging across the country to align their strategies for resourcing the field. At the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, the growth in number, size, and regional distribution of foundations represented on our Advisory Board over the past 20 years embodies this same pattern.

Yet despite this growth, the youth organizing field remains badly under-resourced. Relative to the total amount of funding for traditional youth programs, youth organizing still represents just a tiny fraction. This is particularly marked in regions outside the social justice funder hubs located in large cities and on the coasts. From this perspective, then, the field's effort to make the case for the benefits of youth organizing has had only modest philanthropic results.

Beyond the youth organizing funder community's continued growth, the funders we interviewed expressed concerns about the funding ecosystem writ large. When the next economic downturn happens, will funding for youth organizing decline as it did in previous recessions? How can funders and young people alike create a narrative that sees youth organizing as critical and essential? How can the field become more powerful, influential, and sustainable by building the capacity and strength of longstanding organizations, while fostering innovation by seeding new and emerging groups?

These questions become even more urgent as the impacts of the global pandemic reverberate in both the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors and as those who are the most vulnerable – particularly people of color from low-income communities – seek to recover and rebuild from the economic, social, and health impacts of the pandemic. It is unclear which organizations will survive, how they will need to adapt, and what issues will surface to the foreground. What is clear is that the needs of communities and of young people will be more urgent than ever and that a downturn in funding for youth organizing could have dire consequences for young people and the communities they live in.

Despite our uncertain future, at the core, the principles guiding investments in young people remain the same. As Nat Williams, president of the Hill-Snowdon Foundation, states, funders need to pursue a "community and liberation" approach to grantmaking, one that centers the needs and solutions of young people, their families, and their communities, recognizing that ultimately they will have the strategies and insights needed to ensure that their communities thrive.

Across 2020, youth organizers stood at the helm of a national uprising that advanced unprecedented social and political change. They mobilized en masse to contest the school to prison pipeline and, in response, saw meaningful increases in resources for their schools and communities. Simultaneously, youth organizers remain at the forefront of the climate movement, forging an intersectional understanding of climate justice at local, national, and global decision-making tables. Likewise, they are enacting tangible shifts in health equity, immigration justice, gender and reproductive justice, and many other arenas.

This moment confirms that youth organizers are poised to have a transformative impact on the trajectory of our democracy and our planet. They are demonstrating their readiness and capacity to win significant change on critical issues. Yet to realize the full potential of their leadership – for this moment and the generations to come – will require broad, strategic, and sustained investment in the youth organizing field.

Over the past 20 years, youth organizing's philanthropic champions have made impressive progress toward building a funder ecosystem willing and ready to lead such a charge. Now, more than ever, is time to rise to the moment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As we reflect on our 20 years of organizing resources for young people on the forefront of social justice, FCYO offers the following recommendations to ensure that young people have the resources they need to play a leading role in advancing a more just and equitable world.

1) Resource the leadership of young people most directly impacted by oppression and injustice

Addressing social issues requires the leadership of those whose lives have been most affected by inequity and therefore hold both unique knowledge of the problem and the deepest stake in its resolution. A key feature of youth organizing is a focus on those young people who have been directly impacted by injustice

including young people of color, low-income young people, young women, and queer and trans young people. As marginalized and oppressed communities have historically received an inequitable share of resources, these same communities represent a priority area for philanthropic resources

2) Make dedicated investments in under-resourced areas

Youth organizing groups without resources and with limited fundraising capacity face the steepest barriers to compelling funders to invest in their organizing work. This funder scan highlighted that patterns of divestment continue in critical organizing spheres, including the South, rural areas, and Native and Indigenous youth organizing. Philanthropic allies should seek leadership from under-resourced communities and regions to collaboratively develop grantmaking portfolios that level these disparities. Likewise, grassroots leadership can support philanthropy in identifying emerging groups whose practices are grounded in principles and practices of youth organizing.

3) Uplift youth organizing as a best practice for youth development and social emotional learning

A growing body of research points to youth organizing as a best practice for youth development and social emotional learning among young people who are members of marginalized and oppressed communities. Yet there is a significant number of youth development funders who are unaware of or have yet to engage in supporting youth organizing. Existing youth organizing funders might leverage their position to advocate and invite youth development funders to understand youth organizing as a valuable strategy to advance - and expand - their aims.

4) Support leadership development and personal transformation as part of organizing

A strong youth organizing field requires young leaders who are equipped with the emotional, political, and strategic tools to lead the fight for a just society. Supporting leadership development includes providing resources to groups to implement transformative leadership development into their work, strategically investing in the cultivation of a leadership pipeline for youth organizers, and providing targeted support to organizational leaders for their development as well as for their transitions.

5) Engage networks and intermediaries as key components of a funding portfolio

Youth organizing groups thrive when they are part of a healthy social justice ecosystem that includes other youth organizing groups, intergenerational or adult community organizations, labor unions, policy and advocacy organizations, and training and capacity building groups. While ensuring that resources get to grassroots groups, funders also have a role in supporting the connective tissue of a strong field. In our own experience, FCYO has had the most success with cohort-based grantmaking programs that include funding and grantee-driven opportunities for peer learning and relationship building.

6) Support young people in building meaningful power

As Fredrick Douglas said, "Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground .... Power concedes nothing without demand." Those in philanthropy are often wary of talking about power because the conversation mandates we reckon with our willingness to take risks in service of change. But the kind of transformation we need requires real power. For some youth organizing funders, this may mean shifting their lens to support young people as organizers rather than beneficiaries of services. For others, this might mean reorienting their assessment processes to support the long and often messy work of making systemic interventions - in which short term policy wins may be benefits but are not the primary aim. For still others, this may mean pushing up against the limits of their lobbying resources to support voter engagement or preparing to face resistance or controversy that funding youth organizing groups may surface.

7) Fund the integration of youth organizing strategies into issue-based work while breaking silos

Funders seeking to advance specific social justice issues must have a strategy to engage the leadership of young people. Without young people's leadership, there is little chance of long-term success on critical issues such as education justice, health, climate change, criminal justice, reproductive justice and more. What's more, growing field research demonstrates that when issue-based funders invest in the leadership of young people, the results are positive. At the same time, issue-based funders should be careful to fund in ways that do not reinforce silos or predetermine narrowly defined policy campaigns. The history of the last twenty years demonstrates that the greatest success on issues comes when groups are able to build broad based multi-sectoral alliances and long-term community power.

8) Implement responsive, trust-based philanthropic practices

As much as its aims, the mechanisms of grantmaking condition the ability of youth organizing groups to access, utilize, and benefit from philanthropic support. Chief characteristics of trust-based, responsive philanthropy include: long-term, unrestricted support that allows for flexibility in shifting organizing conditions, accessible application and reporting processes, retooled assessment and evaluation processes, giving amounts not informed by a 5% payout rate but by the true cost of social change, youth engagement in decision making, and intentional risk-taking.

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APPENDIX A: DATA SOURCES

Survey of Youth Organizing Groups: University of California-Santa Cruz received responses from 312 groups. Organizations receiving the survey were identified through a variety of sources, including organizations appearing in the Funders' Collaborative for Youth Organizing database, as well as groups previously identified through research conducted by University of California-Santa Cruz, which has focused on groups located in California. The survey asked questions about staffing, membership/participant demographics, issue area focus, as well as several questions about funding and challenges in securing funding.

Supplemental FCYO Budget Survey: To get additional information on budgets, FCYO administered a short budget survey via email to the 312 groups that received the Survey of Youth Organizing Groups. 117 groups responded, for a response rate of 37.5 percent. Survey deployment coincided with COVID-19 and protests for racial justice and police accountability, so it was likely that fewer groups had the bandwidth to respond.

FCYO Youth Organizing Map: Youth organizing groups can voluntarily share information about their organization, its areas of focus, population groups of focus, and other information, including their top three funders (foundation, corporate, or government) through a portal on the FCYO website. As part of its 2019 convening, FCYO required organizations to provide information to the map when registering and has also collected information from organizations applying for its grants. At the time of this analysis, the map included data from 128 groups. While the dataset includes the names of top three funders and the amount of their funding, this information is self-reported by organizations and not independently verified. The dataset does not include the total amount of funding received by groups.

Candid Grants Data: FCYO provided the names of the 312 groups that responded to the Survey of Youth Organizing Groups to Candid to obtain grants data from 2016 and 2017. Candid's dataset includes grants reported by foundations on IRS Form 990-PF and also includes data from supplemental sources, such as websites and press releases. The data are independently verified. However, the dataset skews towards grants from larger foundations and not all grants to youth organizing groups are captured, particularly those going to smaller organizations or organizations with a fiscal sponsor. Thus, only 179 of the 312 groups identified by FCYO appeared in the Candid dataset. The dataset includes detailed information on foundation location, recipient location, and grant amounts, allowing us to assess patterns in funding for youth organizing and to assess the broader universe of funders supporting youth organizing.

APPENDIX B: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Manuela Arciniegas, *Andrus Family Fund*

Lori Bezahler, *Edward W. Hazen Foundation*

Albert Maldonado, *The California Endowment*

Laura McCargar, *Perrin Family Foundation*

Kavitha Mediratta, *Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity*

Amoretta Morris, *Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Sanjiv Rao, *Ford Foundation*

Liz Sak, *Cricket Island Foundation*

Nat Chioke Williams, *Hill-Snowdon Foundation*

FCYO AT 20

FUNDERS COLLABORATIVE FOR YOUTH ORGANIZING