



GRANTMAKERS  
FOR SOUTHERN  
PROGRESS

# as the south grows ON FERTILE SOIL

BY RYAN SCHLEGEL AND STEPHANIE PENG



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AS THE SOUTH GROWS

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## ABOUT NCRP

The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy is a 40-year-old organization that envisions a fair, just and democratic society in which the common good is recognized as a high priority; where a robust public sector is empowered to protect, preserve and extend the commonly held resources and the public interest; where a vital nonprofit sector provides voice and value to those most in need; and where all people enjoy equality of opportunity, access and fair treatment without discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, economic status, national origin or other identities.

NCRP envisions philanthropy at its best contributing to this vision of society by operating with the highest standards of integrity and openness, and by investing in people and communities with the least wealth and opportunity and nonprofit organizations that serve and represent them.

## ABOUT GSP

Grantmakers for Southern Progress (GSP) is a network of funders who seek to strengthen the infrastructure for social justice work in the U.S. South to more effectively advance a social justice agenda on a regional and national level. GSP pursues this goal through leveraging resources for social justice work in the South, increasing the coordination among funders supporting social justice in the region and educating the philanthropic community about the critical role that social justice work in the South has in resolving persistent regional and national challenges.

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# AS THE SOUTH GROWS

## foreword

### *Dear Reader,*

The American South is home to more people than any other region in the country, and it's still growing. Immigrant communities are on the rise, African Americans whose forebears fled Southern violence are returning, and many others are relocating to the South, attracted by jobs, mild weather and enticing culture. The South is barreling toward a future of prosperity and diversity.

But the South's challenges – some old and some new – are real. Few of them are unique to the region, but they color Southern community life in specific ways. Income inequality, police violence and poor health outcomes still hit Black and poor Southerners particularly hard. Extractive industry continues to pollute one of the South's greatest assets: its natural resources. And the disastrous impacts of climate change are hurting the South in ways the rest of the country won't experience for a generation or more.

Despite these trends, the South is also home to some of the most vibrant and promising systematic change efforts at work in the country. Our new national reality of unified, reactionary, anti-democratic government has been a reality for Southerners off and on for more than a generation. Therefore, national and non-Southern organizations have much to learn from their Southern counterparts.

Southern nonprofits are dynamic, innovative and resilient. By necessity, they work at the intersections of identity and issue, building on the South's tradition of mutual aid, relationship-building and radical hospitality to change their communities for the better – often without much in the way of philanthropic resources.

Investing in work for justice and inclusion in the South can be daunting for philanthropists. Structural inequities along race and class lines and stubbornly conservative state politics obscure the progress and exciting potential of systems change efforts at the local and regional levels across the South.

Many philanthropists choose not to invest in Southern communities or choose short-term opportunities that undermine the long-term capacity of Southern nonprofits. Other funders invest in what they think is “safer” direct service work. While aid to those in need is undoubtedly critical, only investments in systemic change can achieve widespread, deep impact in the region.

Grantmakers for Southern Progress and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) are proud to present the first report in our series, *As the South Grows*. The goal of the project is to increase the amount and sustainability of funding from local and regional Southern funders, as well as from national funders, that improve the quality of life and increase the power of marginalized communities in the South and are accountable to and informed by these communities.

Narrative is powerful, especially in the South. If funders – national and Southern – continue to see the South framed by deficit, isolation and lost causes, philanthropic investment will continue

to bypass the region. In this series of reports, we will lift up stories of potential, of impact and of concrete capacity that we hope will get foundation staff and donors excited about funding in the South again.

Without sustained partnership between national and Southern philanthropy, progress in the South will be short-lived and precarious. Southern funders have a crucial role to play in the Southern philanthropic landscape, and we hope to be able to inspire them with these stories, too.

Investing in places and organizations that have historically been excluded from traditional philanthropic support will always appear risky to foundations. The best antidote to that risk is trusting, honest relationships with Southern nonprofit leaders. And in the South, those relationships will be based in listening, mutual aid and physical presence. We wish we could take every funder interested in investing in the South on a road trip to meet some of the fierce advocates we met in the course of this research. Because we can't, we hope to bring their voices to you in the reports to follow.

The time to invest in Southern equity work is now. With the right investments in sustainable social justice infrastructure, progressive candidates will be able to leverage the demographic changes in the South for long-term, region-wide change. Just as the South birthed a nationwide movement for civil and human rights in the 20th century, Southerners' potential for transforming their communities and our country in this century is immense. This project will help funders better understand that potential and provide tools for advancing work that will lead to lasting, just change.

In this first installment, we elevate the stories and perspectives of four nonprofit leaders in the Deep South – Alabama and Mississippi specifically. Esther Calhoun, Kenneth Glasgow, Ivey Allen and Carol Burnett are working hard for racial, social and economic justice against strong opposition and, in a few cases, with little philanthropic investment. They, and their colleagues, face well-organized and well-resourced opposition to self-determination for communities of color, poor communities, immigrant communities, women and others.

So how can Southern leaders like those we highlight here build enough power among marginalized communities to realize what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called “the beloved community”?

We hope these stories will provoke more thought around this and other questions among the philanthropic sector. We encourage those who are interested in learning more to start a conversation with Southerners themselves about how to be part of their exciting work.



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Project Director, Grantmakers  
for Southern Progress



AARON DORFMAN  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Despite growing challenges to civil rights, inclusion and economic justice across the country, and especially in the South, the philanthropic sector has not recognized the potential in local organizations and the legacy civil rights infrastructure of the Alabama Black Belt, the Mississippi Delta and places like them across the South.*

These two regions benefitted from just \$41 in foundation funding per person between 2010 and 2014, compared to the national funding rate of \$451 per person and the New York state rate of \$995 per person. Just 16 percent of the \$55 million given by foundations to benefit these two regions in that five-year timeframe was for power-building strategies like policy reform or community organizing.

Beginning in 2016, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) and Grantmakers for Southern Progress began documenting the challenges, opportunities and assets of Southern communities like Selma. We interviewed more than 90 community, nonprofit and foundation leaders and co-hosted four focus groups to gather as much information as possible from the people who know best.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Southern communities are rich with natural leaders and existing organizations – whether incorporated as a 510(c)3 or not – but often funders don’t recognize them. Sometimes, foundations and donors disregard Southern leaders because these individuals seem to lack the educational credentials or formal capacity that grantmakers expect from experienced nonprofit executives. Sometimes, foundations and donors defer to existing power structures by working only with established political, business or social sector leaders.

Southern leaders who come from and are deeply connected to those affected by poverty, racism, sexism and other injustices are those most well-equipped to lead positive change in their communities.

And the capacity to effectively relate to, persuade and represent communities is more important than the

capacity to write a grant proposal or speak a funder’s language. Southern leaders understand what is and is not possible in their communities. They understand what rhetoric can push boundaries in a productive way and what may be detrimental.

Southern foundations have a crucial role to play in convening partners around a “big table.” Southern funders also can help bridge the gap between how work in their communities is described and how national organizations expect it to be described.

## RECOMMENDATIONS











*Are you ready to start your high-impact philanthropy in the South? Here are four recommendations to get you started:*

- Understand context. Build authentic, transformational relationships.
- Appreciate collective power. Explore advocacy funding as a complementary strategy to funding direct service.
- Focus on shared goals and value different approaches. Set a “big table” inclusive enough for diverse local and national partners.
- Make long-term, flexible commitments of capital, time and capacity.

Across the Deep South – where building democratic accountability and collective power for disenfranchised communities was once a globally recognized specialty – there are exciting opportunities for philanthropic investment. If Southern and national funders as well as individual donors come together and identify specific places and causes that align with their values, Southern leaders in the Deep South can and will change their communities for the better.

## DO’S AND DON’TS

*Nonprofit leaders, advocates and funders across the South offer some insights that will lead to greater and more sustainable impact for Southern philanthropic investments.*

 <b>DO</b> search for and fund Southern organizational leaders who represent the communities they serve.	 <b>DON’T</b> assume formal education and nonprofit management capacity are necessary to engage one’s community in an inclusive vision for a more just and sustainable future.
 <b>DO</b> prioritize leaders and organizations that have the trust of their communities as represented in relationships and the influence to get people to show up and speak out.	 <b>DON’T</b> burden your grantees with unreasonable goals and reporting requirements.
 <b>DO</b> support Southern community leaders and organizations that are able to articulate how identity, history and politics combine to suppress the power and prosperity of their communities.	 <b>DON’T</b> assume the community leaders and organizations most well-adapted to affecting systemic change in a given community are those already well-connected to political, economic and philanthropic power.
 <b>DO</b> look for networks of collaboration, resource-sharing and co-strategizing that already exist.	 <b>DON’T</b> rely only on established 501(c)3 organizations to leverage your Southern investments.
 <b>DO</b> provide flexible, multi-year funding and capacity-building support.	 <b>DON’T</b> treat your grantees like contractors.

# INTRODUCTION

From her desk at the Selma Center for Nonviolence, Truth & Reconciliation, Executive Director Ainka Jackson can see the Edmund Pettus Bridge stretched across the Alabama River. The bridge carries Highway 80 from Selma upstream to Montgomery across farms so fertile that King Cotton and stolen labor once made Selma the wealthiest city in Alabama. Now, it is among the poorest. In 1965, the bridge was the site of widely broadcasted and morally electrifying moments in the Civil Rights Movement, making it a lasting symbol of the power of nonviolent resistance to oppression. Now Selma suffers from one of the highest crime rates in the country for a city its size.

The Selma Center for Nonviolence, Truth & Reconciliation is going to change that. Its leaders are heirs of the legacy Civil Rights Movement leaders left in Selma. The center trains community organizers, develops young leaders and hosts community conversations about Selma’s path toward what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called “the beloved community.”

How can Selma build economic prosperity that is shared by all and not by just a few? How can the rural Black Belt build enough collective power to pursue its own destiny, instead of being dictated to by corporations and political machines hundreds of miles away? These are the questions Jackson, the Center and leaders across the South are trying to answer together.

But Jackson and her counterparts in Southern communities have been overlooked by philanthropy. In small towns across the Alabama Black Belt and the Mississippi Delta, movements to establish community control over schools, economic development and political institutions pit grassroots networks against centralized power, which still rests in mostly white, wealthy, male hands. In the decades since the Civil Rights Movement, national foundation interest in the rural South has waxed and waned, and Southern foundations have focused on funding direct service work instead of systemic change strategies with the most potential for long-term progress.

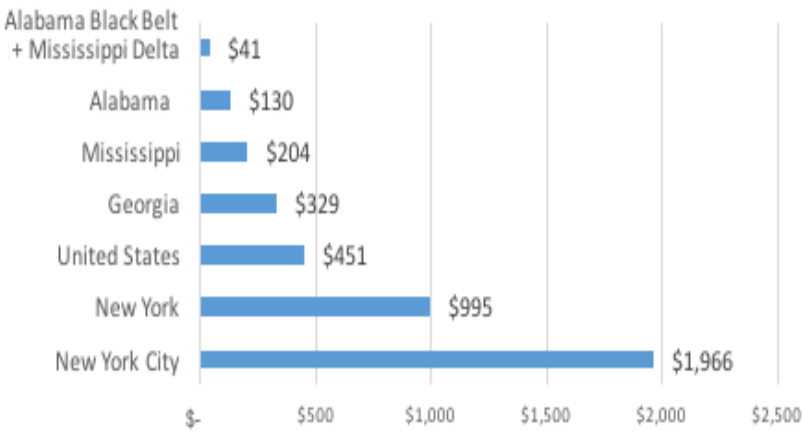
Beginning in 2016, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) and Grantmakers for Southern Progress (GSP) began documenting the challenges, opportunities and assets of Southern communities like Selma. We interviewed more than 90 community, nonprofit and foundation leaders and co-hosted four focus groups to gather as much information as possible from the people who know best.

We hope that, by elevating the stories of Southerners doing the hard work of making their communities more just, equitable, prosperous and sustainable, we can jumpstart a conversation in the philanthropic sector about investing in long-term change in Southern communities. In this report, we explore some of the many opportunities for philanthropic investment in building collective power in the South, with the Black Belt of Alabama and Mississippi – herein referred to more generally as the Deep South – as our backdrop.

The South is fertile ground for philanthropic investment. The skills and infrastructure necessary to build power among marginalized people in the South already exists. Foundations and other donors can support that work and help move Southern communities toward a future of shared prosperity if they build deep, trusting relationships with local networks and give them the resources they need to realize their vision for their communities.

Despite growing challenges to civil rights, inclusion and economic justice across the country, and especially in the South, the philanthropic sector has not recognized the potential in local organizations and the legacy civil rights infrastructure of Selma, the Mississippi Delta and places like them across the South. The two regions in focus here – the Alabama Black Belt and the Mississippi Delta – benefited from just \$41 in foundation funding per person between 2010 and 2014, compared to the national funding rate of \$451 per person and the New York state rate of \$995 per person. Just 16 percent of the \$55 million given by foundations to benefit these two regions in that five-year timeframe was for power-building strategies like policy reform or community organizing.

## PER CAPITA GRANTMAKING, 2010-2014



*It’s very surprising that Alabama had three of the biggest, most effective movements during the Civil Rights era; yet philanthropic support in Alabama is so small. I strongly feel that Selma will change the world again, so investing in Selma is investing in the South and is investing in the country.*

*If a shift happens here, it will be modeled and done elsewhere. Collectively, we have more resources than we acknowledge, but we don’t come together to use them.*

*Part of what we need is for people on the ground to do an asset assessment in each community. What are its resources? When something happens, who is the person that people go to and who spreads the word? Who tries to solve the problem? You have to have some resources to be able to do that kind of organizing.”*

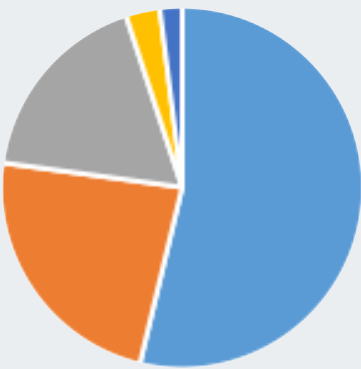
*-Ainka Jackson*

## BLACK BELT + DELTA GRANTMAKING BY STRATEGY



- Health and Human Services
- Other
- Education
- Power-building

## BLACK BELT + DELTA GRANTMAKING BY POPULATION



- Economically Disadvantaged People
- Not categorized
- African Americans
- Women
- Other Marginalized Communities





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# VOICES FROM THE DEEP SOUTH

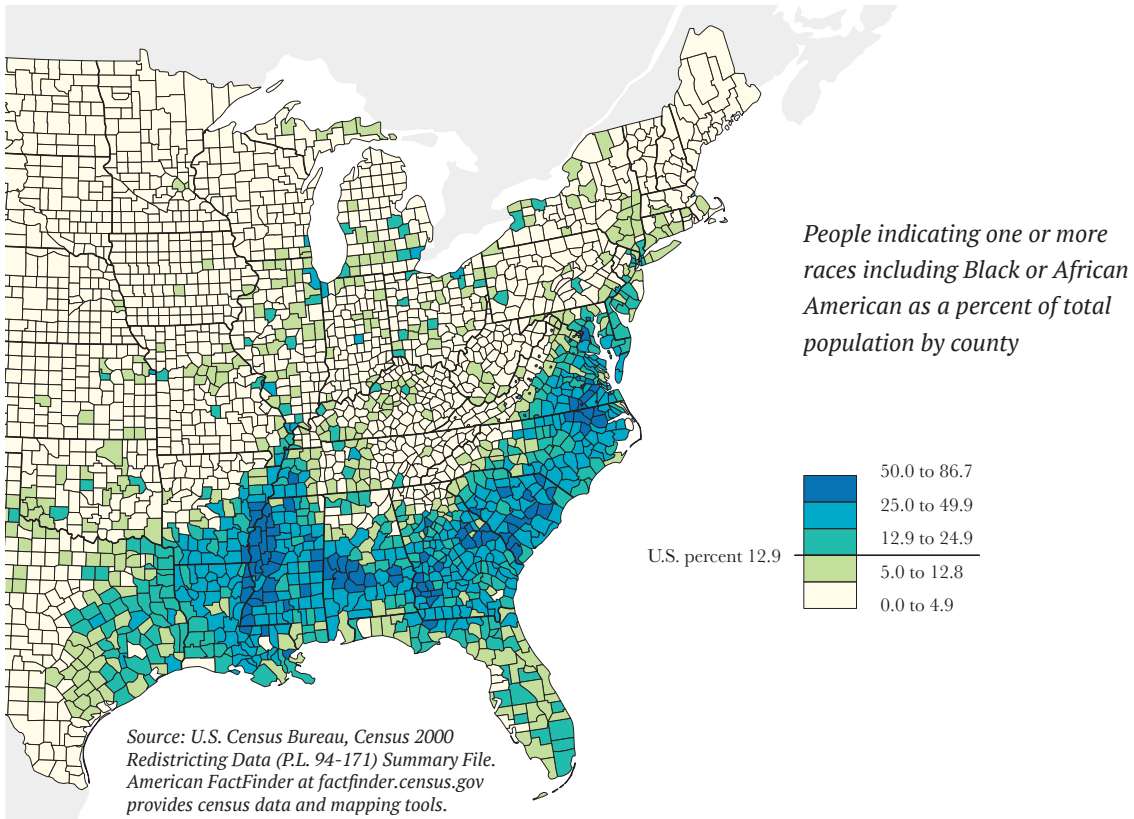
*The Black Belt is a swath of fertile soil – and an eponymous region – that extends from Virginia south through the Carolinas before arcing west through the Deep South and ending in the Mississippi Delta.*

Beginning in the 1600s, European colonizers brought enslaved Africans to the Black Belt, where the colonizers devised a system of slave labor supported by a racial supremacy myth and a culture of violence that worked enslaved Black people to death to reap profit from the Black Belt’s land. The “cotton boom” brought fantastic wealth to white slave owners and made the region home to large communities of Black farmers, most enslaved.

In the wake of slavery’s destruction during the Civil War, these Black farmers attempted to reclaim the land in addition to reclaiming their labor. Former masters foiled their efforts to establish a free agricultural economy by passing draconian labor laws, which reinstated slavery in all but name and reestablished white control over the land. In the decades after emancipation, tenant farming in the Deep South replaced slavery as the primary method of extracting wealth from the land and suppressing Black self-determination. Centuries later, those tenant farmers’ descendants still grow cotton, corn, okra and other crops on small farms across the Deep South.

We spoke with four of those descendants to talk about the ongoing work of building self-determination in the Deep South.

## MAP OF BLACK BELT





## ESTHER CALHOUN

### UNIONTOWN, ALABAMA

*Health, Environment  
and Racial Justice Activist*



Esther Calhoun lives in Uniontown, Alabama, population 2,400, where for generations her family earned a living through farming. Uniontown residents are mostly poor and mostly Black, and, much like the other small towns that sprout up across the Alabama Black Belt, they are proud of their home.

“I was born and raised in Uniontown,” said Calhoun during our interview.

The drive from Selma to Uniontown crosses 30 miles of rolling farmland and pine forest until – just a few miles before Uniontown – the turnoff for the Arrowhead Landfill appears and so does the reason why Calhoun was the target of a \$30 million libel and slander lawsuit.

That’s because Uniontown is also now home to 4 million cubic yards of toxic coal ash, dumped there in 2010 after an environmental disaster in Tennessee led the Tennessee Valley Authority and their partner company – Green Group LLC – to ship it south to Calhoun’s backyard. Since then, Calhoun and the organization she leads, Black Belt Citizens Fighting for Health and Justice (BBCFHJ), have been vocal about the public health consequences of the dump. And they’ve been asking pointed questions about the implications of moving the waste from a predominantly white, middle-class community in Tennessee to Uniontown.

“We took pictures [of] the waters coming off the landfill. We had a scientist test the waters that had arsenic in it. We had the EPA come from Georgia to view how close this huge mountain [of landfill] is. Alabama Department of Environmental Management allows sewage water to flow into the creek. The creek flows down, and it goes from community to community,” said Calhoun, describing the basics of the environmental and public health threats posed by the waste. “There is sewage that’s contaminating the water, and children are drinking this water.”

In 2016, Green Group sued Calhoun and the BBCFHJ, alleging that the activist and her organization have knowingly misrepresented the facts of living with the toxic waste dump and impugned the company.

Largely because of the lack of power in Black, Hispanic and poor communities in the Deep South, politicians have made it easier for low-wage, environmentally destructive industry to take root in the region. In 2016, the Alabama Black Belt had a poverty rate of 27.7 percent – higher than the national rate of 15.5 percent and the Alabama statewide rate of 19.2 percent. In many Mississippi Delta counties, the poverty rate exceeds 30 percent, and in some it reaches 40 percent.

Esther and BBCFHJ persist despite the lawsuit and intimidating strength of their opposition. The organization – which is sponsored by regional community organizing

and leadership development powerhouse Project South – has built a coalition of Alabamians across race, class and gender lines. They have garnered the attention of national environmental groups, and Calhoun has drawn comparisons to another daughter of the Deep South: civil rights activist and philanthropist Fannie Lou Hamer.

Like Hamer, Esther does not have a college education. She and BBCFHJ do not have the resources to file for 501(c)3 status or to develop an advanced fundraising plan. Calhoun and her organization have struggled to get the resources they need because, despite their demonstrated capacity and their work’s radical intersectionality, they have not yet attracted the investments of foundations or other donors.

“You know living in the Alabama Black Belt we don’t get any attention; that’s the problem. We the ones that need the funds because we down here on the ground. We’re the ones that are suffering,” said Calhoun. “I mean there’s so much going on in these little towns, and we don’t have the funding and a lot of people is overlooked. We’re going to get affected with all the environmental injustice. I mean I’ve been to different places, but Uniontown is so overburdened; I’ve never been in a place like this that is so overburdened with so much environmental injustice and environmental racism.”

Calhoun described some of the needs and challenges she has encountered in her efforts to save her home town.

“We don’t even know which way to turn,” said Calhoun. “People around here need help, and when we reach out for help we get overlooked. We need lawyers, we need water testing. I mean I could go on and on and on. We’re dealing with the landfill going out trespassing on our Black cemetery. And I know it’s happening in other areas, too, but we don’t have the funding to confirm it. And it is so, so overwhelming because in big cities they get money and whatever they need but rural areas don’t get the attention they need and we’re the ones that are funded last.”

And there’s the underlying racism that’s prevalent in some of her dealings with those who purport to help. “Some of these environmental people – just because we’re in a rural area and Black, they look at us funny. If you’re Black, they don’t really want to deal with you,” shared Calhoun. “They’ll say little things, but they don’t really want to help the Blacks, you know what I’m saying? They act like it, ’cause they want to hear your story and they want to put their name on it. Well, we was out there helping Black Belt citizens, but what do they do?”

*Marginalized people across the South often do not have the power to determine the destinies of their communities.*

But the Deep South is fertile ground for more than cotton. Beginning in the 1950s, the network of Black civic and religious leaders across the region was the foundation on which Dr. King, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Congress of Racial Equity, Student of Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and other organizations built the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March. Later that year, as a result of national attention drawn to Selma and the Edmund Pettus Bridge, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act – and the fight for the beloved community continued.

As the nation turned away from legalized racial discrimination, its prison system expanded, disproportionately locking up people of color. The Sentencing Project estimates that in Alabama between 1980 and 2014, the state’s incarcerated population more than quadrupled while its total population grew by 25 percent.

Across the South – and the country – the penal system grew like a weed, taking the place of mental health care facilities and crowding out other kinds of infrastructure investments in rural communities. Black Southerners began to fill prisons and were once again stripped of their voting rights in the process.



## PASTOR KENNETH GLASGOW

DOTHAN, ALABAMA

*Criminal Justice Reform Activist*



From his home in Dothan, at the southeast corner of Alabama just 16 miles north of the Florida line, Pastor Kenneth Glasgow is organizing a nationwide movement of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people to demand civil rights, humane treatment and a second chance at a happy, healthy life.

“My ultimate goal has always been to gain an equilibrium across the board and in doing so, I have to look at the justice system and recognize the disparity,” said Glasgow. “The racial disparity behind bars, in the bails and even in the whole set up of the courtroom setting in the South.”

In the fall of 2016, Glasgow was the spokesperson for one of the biggest prison strikes in American history. He spent hours on his phone – bouncing between calls with reporters from *The New York Times* and *Buzzfeed News* to text messages from strike leaders inside prisons across Alabama, the South and, eventually, the country.

Pastor Glasgow understands what has been apparent to many for decades: Mass incarceration disproportionately deprives people of color of economic, political and physical self-determination in a way that can be traced straight back to slavery. Glasgow leads The Ordinary People Society (TOPS), a faith-based 501(c)3 organization working to empower those most affected by mass incarceration. Unlike many criminal justice-focused organizations, TOPS has representation inside and outside the penal system.

But until recently, TOPS’s work has attracted little

philanthropic support. The Southern Partners Fund, a small public foundation in Atlanta, and the Drug Policy Alliance in Washington, D.C., have provided lifeline support. Glasgow works in deep relationship with Project South. The high-risk venture philanthropists at Open Philanthropy Project have recently made significant investments in TOPS’s work. But, for all the national acclaim TOPS’s successes have garnered, most foundations have declined to invest.

“No one thinks that anything can ever get done in the South,” said Glasgow. “It took until a couple of years ago when I started changing all these laws and then people started looking and saying, ‘Wait a minute. How could you say nothing could get done in Alabama and this guy just changed the laws in Alabama and got bipartisan efforts going to have the things reformed? How can you say nothing can happen now in Alabama when Glasgow won a lawsuit in 2008 causing people inside Alabama prisons to be able to vote?’”

Glasgow also spoke about the challenges of getting philanthropic support.

“Fundors and foundations set up criteria that will not fit grassroots organizations so what they end up getting is a person that looks good on paper but actually isn’t doing any work,” said Glasgow. “They know the language, they have the grammatical skills, they write this awesome proposal, and they’ve never even been inside a prison, never even been on the street. Are [foundations] basing it on whether

the person has a company, basing it on what they do, basing on the work they are committed to and have done or are you just basing it on somebody that can fit your criteria on paper?”

He offered advice to grantmakers and donors about how to pick grantees and what kind of capacity they need to look out for to make an impact on criminal justice reform in the South.

“If you really want something to attach your foundation money to that is going to get you whatever goal you want to reach, you’ll want to attach it to one of the grassroots organizations that’s actually on the ground doing the work that’s dealing with the directly impacted people, not somebody in an ivory tower with a beautiful office and a full staff on payroll but they ain’t getting no work done,” Glasgow shared. “In the South, you can lobby all the hell you want to, but our resource here is not money because we don’t have none. Our resource here is relationships.”

He urged funders to look for organizations that are walking the talk.

“You got a whole bunch of criminal justice organizations out here that say ‘we’re fighting for these people that are locked up, that are formally incarcerated,’” he cautioned. “Check out all the organizations that do stuff for criminal justice and are fighting for people incarcerated, formerly incarcerated and see how many of them hired somebody that is not directly impacted, formerly incarcerated. ... [Ask them] How many [formerly incarcerated people] do you got on your board? How many of them have you hired?”

Glasgow saw firsthand the importance of involving the very people he sought to serve in what he, his organization and partners have accomplished.

“The system changes started in 2009 when we created the formerly incarcerated and convicted people’s movement. We got together and brainstormed, came up with formerly convicted people movement – we got about 40 different delegates,” he recounted. “We now have what’s called the Super 8. For the past four years, we’ve been going back and forth with the Department of Justice, on monthly phone calls, even quarterly physical meetings in Washington at the Department of Justice.”

Pastor Glasgow, TOPS, their connections at Project South and the Southern Movement Assembly and his network of incarcerated community organizers have changed Alabama policy to restore the franchise to thousands of Alabamians; they have organized a nationwide prison strike, and now they influence federal policy decisions on race and criminal justice.

*Grantees aren’t the only ones with valuable perspective on power-building work in the Deep South. We spoke to Southern funders, too, and they helped us better understand the balancing act that foundations – especially smaller foundations – are called to perform.*

## IVYE ALLEN

### JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

Foundation Executive



Ivey Allen's decades of work in Southern philanthropy have made her a pragmatist. She leads the Foundation for the Mid South in Jackson, six hours west of Dothan on meandering Highway 84. The foundation represents a certain kind of grantee-centered, Black-led philanthropy that is sparse but powerful across the South.

Integral to the foundation's work is a strategic emphasis on public-private partnerships to improve the lives of people living across the Midsouth region. Those partnerships can be challenging in the South's political environment, but Ivey and the foundation understand that, without partners who cross the ideological spectrum and come to the table with different skills, resources and priorities, addressing entrenched poverty and racially disparate educational outcomes will be next to impossible.

Allen will be first to tell you that the South's most valuable asset is its leaders. "One of the key assets is individual and community leaders who have been there and who are there. Those people will put in their heart and soul to move their communities forward," she said.

And she acknowledged the challenge racism presents for those leaders without downplaying their ability to affect change.

"Oftentimes our partners tend to be Caucasian. In some of the smaller Delta towns you have mayors of color, but if you're working on a county level, or wherever there's resources, there's still some Caucasians that are in control of that pot of money," noted Allen. "So, recognizing that and never losing sight of why we're at the table, if I can get the other folks to bring their resources, then the more the better."

She's also aware of the challenge of talking about race. "Employers are not thinking of having more black welders, they just need welders. It's about knowing when to push

your agenda," said Allen. "[It's] always having your agenda top of mind, but knowing when to use certain language, and when to let it slide but do what you need to do."

Allen also addressed the misperception among foundations about the lack of capacity in the South.

"People think of the South and think there's no capacity there. Not true. People have the skill sets; some of them, more than we know, have book knowledge. But they also have a lot of experience, even if they don't have the technical aspect of it," explained Allen. "Those leaders are going to continue to be there, whether we are in there investing or not. So how do you help people who don't look

at you as just a handout but look at you as a partner in helping to move their respective communities forward?"

"Another asset is really being intentional about having a diversity of voices at the table," Allen added. From the county supervisor and mayor to members of the community who are most affected, "It's the only way the community is going to move forward," she said.

Having these diverse voices come together comes with its own challenges. Allen shared her experience of a press conference announcing the Re-Entry Council, which is made up of the Department of Corrections, the attorney general, judges and the foundation.

"We had put together a press conference to announce the effort, and in the press release, I said this is a wonderful thing, 'and a disproportionate number of people in the criminal justice system are males of color,'" she recalled. "My program person said to me 'Everybody's backing out of the press conference. They're all mainly white; they're not comfortable with us talking about race.' So I said, 'take the statement out,' and he said, 'really? You're going to let it go?' And I said, 'why do I care, it's about the work we've done.'"

They took the statement out and the announcement was made. "But when one of my board members went up to talk, he didn't know anything about the negotiation, and he said, 'There's just a disproportionate number of black males in the prison system,'" Allen continued. "Behind him was all those people. It took me being willing to let that go in order to talk about the bigger piece of it."

Allen's perspective on when and how to pursue an explicit agenda is not shared by every Southern nonprofit leader or activist. Allen herself recognizes the plurality of personal and organizational agendas that converge in work like hers across the region.

"I don't kid myself – I think the state correctional people were at the table because they would be overwhelmed with having too many people in the system," she said. "It's about checking your ego at the door in order to make sure that you're looking at the long battle of what we're trying to do. In the South, we do that every day."

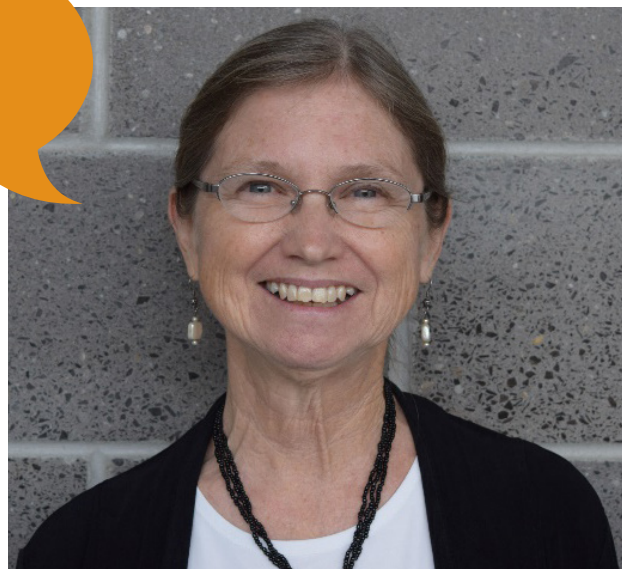
*Despite the strong hold conservative politicians have on state governments across the South, Southern nonprofit advocates and community leaders are working to change policies and address the impacts of structural racism and sexism in Southern community life.*



## CAROL BURNETT

### BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI

*Women's economic security advocate*



Three hours down Highway 49 from Ivey Allen's office in Jackson, Carol Burnett is in Biloxi at the Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative strategizing ways to make Mississippi women more economically secure.

Burnett – like many nonprofit leaders in the South – wears many hats. She's an ordained minister, a Center for American Progress Fair and Reproductive Justice Leader and director of another local nonprofit. Her experience as a faith leader, a direct service provider, a state agency director and now statewide advocate is reflected in her deep, nuanced analysis of the ways race and gender intersect to disadvantage Mississippi women.

The Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative (MLICCI) was born out of Burnett's experience as a provider of child care and job training for low-income women. She recognized that many of the challenges her organization faced were policy challenges – policies need to be changed so the women they worked with and for could experience the economic security they deserved.

"You have evidence that shows that investments in [child care] are good from everywhere you look at it, whether you're looking at it from the perspective of the child or the parent or the employer or the economy," said Burnett. "And yet there is still complete resistance to investing money in this program."

By learning from women affected by poverty, sexism and racism and translating that learning into a state-level campaign for increased access to child care, job training and other supportive services, Burnett linked together grassroots direct service and grass-tops advocacy. It's a link common in the South, where organizations have to get by with little resources.

Burnett, as with Allen and other Southern nonprofit leaders, is pragmatic about the challenges her work is up against and knows that it's important to read between the lines.

"Much of the work we're trying to do is to change policy and that means appealing to elected officials or state agency people to do things that they don't really want to do," she shared. "Most of the time the reason they don't want to do them isn't the reason they articulate. It has more to do with underlying values and prejudices in my opinion."

The Initiative's longest battle has been the fight to secure more state money to support child care programs for low-income working mothers. Despite gathering extensive evidence about the tremendous benefits of such policies, like better education outcomes, lower absenteeism and turnover, higher worker productivity and less reliance on public assistance, officials and policymakers in Mississippi continue to strongly resist

such programs.

"So you have to ask 'why is that?'" said Burnett. "The only conclusion that you can draw based on the conversations and the decisions that people make, the opinions they express, is that there is a real mix of attitudes that women should be home taking care of their children and that these poor women of color shouldn't have had the kid in the first place because they can't afford it. The program suffers from all those attitudes about race, poverty and gender."

The MLICCI has a consistent and committed group of funders, but Burnett's role as a Southern nonprofit leader gives her valuable perspective about the ways the Southern nonprofit ecosystem is often misunderstood by foundations.

"I think there are organizations that have done some really good work that are frequently not recognized. Because they're not known to outside entities, the assumption is they're not here or if they are here they don't really know what they're doing, and the best thing to do is to bring somebody national here to introduce a resource because there couldn't possibly be one here," shared Burnett. "That has happened so many times I can't tell you. It's not only insulting, but it fails to work because of the attitude toward outsiders. People come here with assumptions that there is not already a floor of resources or a floor of infrastructure, and by the time they've learned that, their grant is up and they're gone."

She also shared one valuable tip for foundations: gender is key.

"My advice to foundations is to add an analysis of gender to their toolbox to understand the problems facing the South," said Burnett. "And find ways to support cross-issue organizing in this environment where all our issues, and I think our entire democracy, are at stake."

## THE BOTTOM LINE

*Southern communities are rich with natural leaders and existing organizations – whether incorporated as a 510(c)3 or not – but often funders don't recognize them.*

Sometimes, foundations and donors disregard Southern leaders because these individuals seem to lack the educational credentials or formal capacity that grantmakers expect from experienced nonprofit executives. Sometimes foundations and donors defer to existing power structures by working only with established political, business or social sector leaders.

Southern leaders who come from and are deeply connected to those affected by poverty, racism, sexism and other injustices are those most well-equipped to lead positive change in their communities.

And the capacity to effectively relate to, persuade and represent communities is more important than the capacity to write a grant proposal or speak a funder's language. Southern leaders understand what is and is not possible in their communities. They understand what rhetoric can push the boundaries of the possible in a productive way and what rhetoric may push them to the breaking point.

Southern foundations – like Foundation for the Mid South – have a crucial role to play in convening partners around a "big table." Southern funders also can help bridge the gap between how work in their communities is described and how national organizations expect it to be described.

# PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FOUNDATIONS AND DONORS FOR GREATER IMPACT IN THE SOUTH



*Based on conversations with nonprofit leaders, advocates and funders across the South, there are certain characteristics foundations need to look for when they seek a Southern organization that will leverage philanthropic investments for greater impact. And there are some qualities that funders over-emphasize in their search for Southern partners, to the detriment of the foundation, grantee and community.*



## DO's:

*1. DO search for and fund Southern organizational leaders who represent the communities they serve.*

For example, an organization that purports to serve the African-American community and is led only by white people may not be the most effective way for a grantmaker to invest in a better future for that African-American community. This is not to say that white leaders cannot be advocates for their Black neighbors, nor is it to say that men cannot do so for gender justice work nor heterosexual people for their LGBTQ friends and family. Indeed, they can and they do so in the South. But any Southern funding strategy must reckon with the importance of organizational leadership that is drawn from the communities the organization serves.

*2. DO prioritize leaders and organizations that have the trust of their community as represented in relationships and the influence to get people to show up and speak out.*

Organizations without the sufficient trust capital – built with time and hard work – to fill a funder listening session, for example, may not be able to leverage foundation resources effectively. Relationships, often those that go beyond professional transactions and into the territory of personal trust and mutual understanding, are a crucial cultural component of nonprofit work in the South. In fact, without them, sustainable long-term progress will be impossible. This kind of trust capital can be difficult to measure, which is why relationships with nonprofit and community leaders are so important to understanding this dynamic.

*3. DO support Southern community leaders and organizations that are able to articulate how identity, history and politics combine to suppress the power and prosperity of their communities.*

Their analysis may not be communicated in ways a foundation program officer is used to hearing from sector thought leaders or academics. But the analysis is there if one listens. How are women, LGBTQ people, people of color, immigrants and poor people excluded from community life? How does a community's history live on in decisions made today? One doesn't need an advanced degree in sociology to answer these questions thoughtfully and informatively.

*4. DO look for networks of collaboration, resource-sharing and co-strategizing that already exist.*

It took the authors of this report more than six months of conversations with community organizers and nonprofit leaders across the rural Deep South to begin to perceive the breadth and depth of the connections among them across issue and geography. It required the full-time work of more than two staff members and the development of trusting relationships. Often national organizations (which may not have as much time or resources to spend) look for formalized, publicized networks of nonprofits as evidence of power-building infrastructure. But Southern history is fraught with examples of well-meaning organizations provoking detrimental and long-lasting backlash. Funders need to consider the impact of that history on Southern nonprofit infrastructure.

Before deciding that no network capacity exists there, ask what you may not be seeing. Southerners themselves understand how to live within, build power without and change unjust systems. And Southerners themselves must lead philanthropic strategy development and execution.

*5. DO provide flexible, multi-year funding and capacity-building support.*

Grantees need long-term commitments from foundations and donors to plan for long-term strategies. This doesn't mean support should come without concrete expectations.

Funders can empower Southern organizations by providing capacity-building support that enables them to secure more funding (e.g., setting up a fiscal sponsorship).



# PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FOUNDATIONS AND DONORS FOR GREATER IMPACT IN THE SOUTH



## DON'Ts

*1. DON'T assume formal education and nonprofit management capacity are necessary to engage one's community in an inclusive vision for a more just and sustainable future.*

Isolated and impoverished Southern communities often lack access to quality higher education, training on nonprofit board development, grant writing and compliance, for example. But they do have access to extensive networks of community resources and knowledge that makes them a smart philanthropic investment.

Sometimes, funders overlook the formal qualifications when they do exist because of prejudice. When funders expect a college degree or a polished grant proposal to justify an investment, they exclude Southern organizations in need of philanthropic resources that are led by people who are most capable of organizing their communities. Funders often misconstrue signs of privilege for signs of capacity.

*2. DON'T assume the community leaders and organizations most well-adapted to affecting systemic change in a given community are those already well-connected to political, economic and philanthropic power.*

In fact, where traditional perceptions of race, gender and class dominate, relying on the leadership of well-connected organizations may be counterproductive. Foundation staff and donors need to seek out authentic relationships with affected communities, not just relationships with the mayor or the county commissioner.

*3. DON'T rely only on established 501(c)3 organizations to leverage your Southern investments.*

Southern organizations and networks take on structures that may be unfamiliar to foundation staff and donors. Securing 501(c)3 status is beyond the resources of some community organizations. And, if a particular organization grows out of a faith community or other organic social network, achieving 501(c)3 status may not be a priority.

Where advocacy, civic engagement, mutual aid and leadership development are woven into the fabric – for example, communities with legacy Civil Rights Movement infrastructure – foundation staff and donors do their work a disservice if they engage only with established 501(c)3 organizations. Fiscal sponsorships and other creative funding vehicles are often better adapted to the reality of work in the South.

Some leaders and organizations may appear at first to be monolithic or independent of any supportive network, but behind and beside most Southern leaders is an informal network of other leaders and community members who may, with support, represent an opportunity for philanthropic investment.

*4. DON'T treat your grantees like contractors.*

Southerners themselves must lead philanthropic strategy development and execution. Funders need to work harder at nurturing equitable partnerships between grantee and grantor, especially in those Southern communities where the balance of power between philanthropic capital (funders) and labor (grantees) has hindered Southern leaders' autonomy, efficacy and sustainability. Foundation staff and donors must recognize that pattern of mistreatment and begin by listening humbly to the prospective grantee partner.

A funder-grantee partnership that is based in honesty will ensure that setbacks are opportunities to learn, adjust strategy and recommit, instead of fractures in an investor-investee relationship. Funders should embrace the differences in experience and perspective that their grantee partners bring to the relationship as opportunities to learn.

Ultimately, partnerships between Southern grantees and foundation staff and donors need to be transformative, not transactional. They need to draw on the South's culture of community, hospitality and mutual aid to ensure that both grantee and funder learn and grow because of the relationship.

And, in surpassing a transactional form of relationship-building, they need to go beyond an exchange of grant dollars to include network-building and capacity-building in both directions.

*5. DON'T burden your grantees with unreasonable goals and reporting requirements.*

Funders and grantees can work together on sensible expectations and evaluation methods that don't unduly burden the grantee. Measuring the impact in small, rural Southern communities can be challenging, especially on the scale that funders often expect. But if foundation staff and grantees have honest, trusting relationships, they can find ways to build evaluation strategies that don't exclude work in the rural South from consideration.

And, if a funder cannot afford the time and resources this sort of relationship-building and paradigm-adjustment requires, there are philanthropic institutions – such as the Foundation for the Mid South, the Black Belt Community Foundation and other community-based philanthropies all over the South – that stand ready and able to help facilitate and, if appropriate, re-grant investments.

# GETTING STARTED

*Are you ready to engage in high-impact philanthropy in the South? Here is a quick guide that applies the Do’s and Don’ts and suggests resources from the region.*

We understand that the recommendations from Southern leaders are ambitious, so we’ve included some first steps and a list of people and organizations to turn to for help. They are a good jumping off point, and they can point to other Southerners who will be able to help, too.

## UNDERSTAND CONTEXT, BUILD AUTHENTIC TRANSFORMATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS.

HOW TO START	WHO CAN HELP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be physically present as often as possible, and leave assumptions behind so that you can be emotionally and mentally present, too.</li><li>• Ask open-ended, curious questions instead of pointed or leading ones.</li><li>• Leave space and time for storytelling and relationship-building by imagining yourself a curious, welcomed guest and not an anxious traveler on a tight schedule.</li><li>• Trust the experience of local leaders from affected communities and the information they convey, even when it is uncomfortable</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nonprofit staff</li><li>• Faith networks</li><li>• Local artists and historians</li><li>• Community foundation staff</li></ul>

## APPRECIATE COLLECTIVE POWER. EXPLORE ADVOCACY FUNDING AS A COMPLEMENTARY STRATEGY TO FUNDING DIRECT SERVICE.

HOW TO START	WHO CAN HELP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spend time to understand the ways community organizing is different in Southern communities</li><li>• Find out where are the existing organizing spaces.</li><li>• Ask Southern community leaders how you, your funding, your trustees, and staff can be most supportive, understanding that because of resistance to outside interference, your role will often be as a background player.</li><li>• Don’t make assumptions about what is or isn’t possible – Southern community leaders are adept at nurturing unlikely alliances.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Project South</li><li>• Highlander Center</li><li>• Southern Movement Assembly</li><li>• Local labor networks</li></ul>

## FOCUS ON SHARED GOALS AND VALUE DIFFERENT APPROACHES. SET A “BIG TABLE” INCLUSIVE ENOUGH FOR DIVERSE LOCAL AND NATIONAL PARTNERS.

HOW TO START	WHO CAN HELP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Begin with the big picture: What are the community’s priorities, their vision? Where do these goals overlap with the funder’s? A difference in preferred strategy should be secondary to identifying the places where funders and grantees can agree on a vision for the future.</li><li>• Don’t expect grantees to articulate their values or goals in the language you might use yourself. Spend time processing community-based strategies and goals to understand their origins and their context.</li><li>• Use your foundation’s political and trust capital to benefit grantees. Lean on reluctant partners to practice patience, to come to the table with an open ear and to bring the weight of their own institutional resources to bear.</li><li>• Be bold. Foundations can be nimbler and more experimental than government or business partners when they are bold in their vision and their approach to their work and when they think about long-term action.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Southeastern Council on Foundations</li><li>• State funder networks like Alabama Giving</li><li>• Southern Partners Fund</li><li>• Foundation for the Mid South</li><li>• Foundation for Louisiana</li><li>• Black Belt Community Foundation</li><li>• Grantmakers for Southern Progress</li><li>• Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation</li></ul>

## MAKE LONG-TERM, FLEXIBLE COMMITMENTS OF CAPITAL, TIME AND CAPACITY





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# WHAT'S NEXT?

*In 2016, hundreds of nonprofit leaders and community advocates gathered at the Selma Center for Nonviolence, Truth & Reconciliation, jamming that room outside Ainka's office in sight of the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The 51st Anniversary Jubilee had just concluded and the national philanthropic and civic leaders it attracted had begun their journey back home. Those Southern nonprofit leaders stayed in Selma, though, because they had work to do.*

Across the Deep South – where building democratic accountability and collective power for disenfranchised communities was once a globally recognized specialty – there are exciting opportunities for philanthropic investment. If Southern and national funders as well as individual donors come together and identify specific places and causes that align with their values, Southern leaders in the Deep South can and will change their communities for the better.

Building collective power in Southern communities is the seed for a fruitful harvest of equitable change in the South. But, without philanthropic support to build assets and institutions for marginalized communities, power quickly can be eroded by those opposed to shared prosperity.

How can foundations and donors support the work of building community assets and institutions that can protect those assets, especially in parts of the South undergoing dramatic economic transition? Find out in the next report in the *As the South Grows* series when we explore asset-building work underway in the Lowcountry of South Carolina and the Coalfield of Eastern Kentucky.



# APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

NCRP and GSP’s goal in this research was to collect and elevate the voices of nonprofit and community leaders across the South who represent great potential for positive progress in their communities but who have to date been passed over by most philanthropists. To that end, we embarked on a wide-sweeping interview process with grantmakers, grantees and community leaders that generated rich, nuanced qualitative data that we will synthesize and present in context in the reports to follow.

Because of finite capacity and time, we chose to focus on eight “sub-regions” within the South that we believed would produce representative, diverse, relevant, timely, compelling stories about the opportunities of working for equity across the South. Our advisory committee members guided the choice of sub-regions. The sub-regions include some that have historically seen very little philanthropic investment, and some that have lately seen a marked increase in philanthropic investment. Together they reflect the geographic and demographic diversity that exists in the South. They include coastal wetlands, fertile farmland, rugged mountains, small towns and big cities. Many of them represent large clusters of what the USDA labels “persistently poor” counties, but they also include wealthy enclaves of Atlanta and Charleston.

We began by studying Foundation Center grantmaking data in each sub-region. We investigated two types of grantmaking: Grants that benefit underserved and marginalized communities, broadly defined, and grants for systemic change strategies. These grant categories are not mutually exclusive, and they did not represent all or even most of the total grantmaking in a given region. But together they were our starting point for exploring the philanthropic ecosystem in each region.

## Populations

- *African Americans*
- *Youth*
- *Economically Disadvantaged People*
- *Immigrants*
- *LGBTQ People*
- *Women and Girls*

## Strategies

- *Capacity-building*
- *Community Economic Development*
- *Policy, Advocacy and Systems Reform*
- *Community Organizing*

With this data, we began identifying “hubs” of both grantmakers and grantees that were central to each sub-region’s philanthropic ecosystem. These hubs became the first in a snowballing outreach and interview process in each sub-region. “Hub” interviews led us naturally to other key actors in each sub-region’s ecosystem – especially to those organizations and community leaders working in and for underserved communities and systemic change outcomes. Our outreach and interview process generated at least five, and as many as 13, interviews in each sub-region; including at least two each from funders and grantees working in that sub-region. All told, our interview process captured:

- *5 corporate foundations*
- *7 national foundations*
- *15 Southern independent foundations*
- *16 Southern community foundations*
- *39 grantees and other community organizations*

The interviews themselves were intentionally conversational in order to encourage participants to tell stories and to speak about issues most pressing for them, not issues the interviewer thought were most pressing. Each interview covered – in broad terms – these subjects: equity, capacity, challenges, grantee-funder relationships, funding opportunities and vision. All interview transcripts were coded for common themes and analyzed for cross-region similarities and differences.

These findings were presented at four focus groups, one each in Selma, Alabama; Charleston, South Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; and Hindman, Kentucky. Each focus group included representatives from grantees and other community organizations from the surrounding area, including some who had been interviewed previously and some who had not. The focus groups gave input on the findings, helping us hone them for accuracy, concision and clarity. Ultimately they were synthesized into a cohesive framework of recommendations for national and Southern funders to better engage in equity work in the South.



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