Investing in the Grassroots: Real People, Real Places, Real Results

SAFSF
2016 Annual Forum
Key Programs

• Research and Publications

• Philamplify

• Philanthropy’s Promise

• Impact Awards

• Presentations
Accountable and Transparent

Employs Effective Grantmaking Practices

Responsive Philanthropy = Philanthropy at its Best

Benefits Marginalized Communities
Today I’ll provide evidence for why you should fund people . . .

1. in *Rural Places*
2. from *Underserved Communities*
3. that are using *Social Justice strategies*
4. in their *Grassroots Organizations*. 
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Do You Know the Answer?

- Percent of grant dollars to rural organizations: **5.5%**
  - $5.45 billion, vs. $93.4 billion for urban areas
  - The overall trend is declining

- Per capita, rural grants are **half** as valuable as those made to urban areas *

- How many Americans live in rural areas? **20%**

* Source: 2005-2010 data, USDA’s Economic Research Service
Meanwhile, rural Americans are more likely to be poor on nearly every measure.

- **1 in 5** rural children
- **1 in 3** rural Black Americans
- **1 of every 2** rural households headed by a single mother
- **85 percent** of the “consistently poor” counties over the last **30 years**
Why the disparity?

- Geography and relationships
- Bias about rural areas and people
- Perceived lack of capacity (catch-22)
- Narrow issue areas
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Nationally, the median funder gives 25% of its grant dollars to **underserved communities**.

We recommend at least 50%.
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Nationally, the median funder gives 3% of its grant dollars to social justice strategies.

We recommend at least 25%.
Philanthropy Under-Invests in Social Justice—In or Out of Issue Silos

Source: NCRP analysis of Foundation Center data, 2013.
So Much Potential

- 5 years
- 13 states
- 110 organizations
- Return on investment: $115 to $1

- Best results often came not from single, large groups, but from networks of smaller, grassroots organizations.
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History Supports It

WHAT DO YOU CALL BLOCKING 166 COAL PLANTS? A START.

Of the 231 coal plants proposed since 2001, only 33 are operating, 166 have been blocked, and the rest are in various stages of the permit application process.
Why are grassroots groups so effective?

1. Leaders are from the community
2. Relationships are key
3. Multi-issue, because people are multi-issue
4. In it for the long haul
5. Builds the climate for change elsewhere
What’s holding funders back?

• Geography and relationships
• Bias about grassroots groups and the people they represent
• Perceived lack of capacity (catch-22)
• Narrow issue areas

Look familiar?
Recommendations

1. Challenge your **assumptions** about rural people and places.

2. Be **accessible** enough to meet people where they are, rather than expecting them to come to you.

3. Fund **grassroots** leaders from the most affected **underserved communities**.

4. Support these leaders as they **organize and advocate** alongside their communities to improve local policies and practices.

5. Lastly, fund **general operating support** over **multiple years**.
So you can provide support to people . . .

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• Email: Ben Barge, Field Associate: bbarge@ncrp.org
• Website: www.ncrp.org
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