

THE
NEW YORK
WOMEN'S
FOUNDATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FOR THE EVALUATION
OF THE NYC FUND
FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG
WOMEN OF COLOR

PREPARED FOR

THE NEW YORK
WOMEN'S FOUNDATION

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A LETTER FROM THE FUND

Dear Partners and Allies—

The NYC Fund for Girls and Young Women of Color (“the Fund”) is proud to share the following report, which highlights the impact of the Fund to date and outlines recommendations for the field of philanthropy interested in investing in this important work.

The Fund was launched in 2015 during a critical moment in the city’s history when advocates, as part of the citywide Young Women’s Initiative, called for bold investment in a community that had been marginalized by funders, policymakers and social institutions for too long - young women, girls, and trans and gender non-binary youth of color.

The first of its kind in the United States, it put forth a bold vision: to build a generation of girls, young women, and gender non-binary youth of color across spectrums of race, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexuality to take full leadership on their own terms, as social change experts, crossing the threshold from individual surviving to collective thriving and community transformation.

From its inception, it has aimed to shift the historical under-investment in work led by and for youth addressing timely issues at the intersection of racial, gender and economic justice - combating both the immediate and collective harms of generations of historical trauma, while also fighting for change to address the root causes of inequities they face. To support these leaders, the Fund has also brought together funders of diverse backgrounds to learn from each other, champion each other’s work, and push ourselves collectively to a higher standard of community-centered, participatory philanthropy than may be possible on our own.

Over the past five years, we have been immensely proud of our grantee partners’ successes in strengthening the inherent leadership of thousands of girls, young women, and trans and gender non-binary youth across the city, while advancing key policy wins on issues such as immigration justice, education access, and criminal justice reform. The successes of the Young Women’s Initiative have also been replicated in seven localities across the country to date through partnership with other women’s funds - with the potential for many more.

We recognize that this report launches in a unique moment in the landscape, as youth leaders fight harder than ever to demand racial justice in their communities while adapting to the changes brought to the sector as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic in NYC and across the country. It is also a moment of change in the philanthropic landscape, as funders heed the call of community leaders to operate in ever more equitable and transformative ways. One thing is clear: never has the value of these leaders and their work been more crucial - nor their need for increased investment more urgent. We hope that the findings and recommendations support you as you advance your own commitment to girls, young, women, and TGNC youth of color.

In solidarity,

Ana L. Oliveira
President & CEO
The New York Women’s Foundation

ABOUT THE NYC FUND FOR GIRLS & YOUNG WOMEN OF COLOR

In May 2015, members of the New York City Council announced the establishment of the New York City Council's Young Women's Initiative (YWI). The New York Women's Foundation (The Foundation), along with the YWCA of New York City (YWCA) and Girls for Gender Equity (GGE), was asked to lead this initiative that would leverage the collective assets of government, philanthropic, and grassroots partners to improve the lives of girls and young women in NYC.

Buoyed by this renewed citywide commitment to investing in the lives of girls and women in NYC, The Foundation set out to amplify the reach and impact of the Fund. In 2015, New York Women's Foundation, in collaboration with Novo Foundation, launched the NYC Fund for Girls & Young Women of Color (the Fund), a fund dedicated to centering and resourcing young women leaders of color as they advance the goals and priorities of their communities. In its first year of pooled grantmaking, the Fund provided \$500,000 in grants to seven organizations.

In the five years since its founding, the Fund has grown to include 21 donor partners and provide over \$10 million dollars in grants to 60 grantee partner organizations. The Fund has also expanded its impact by providing a number of capacity-building, networking, and technical assistance opportunities to its grantees.

Housed and managed by The New York Women's Foundation, the Fund is characterized by its collaborative and participatory approach to grantmaking. Donor partners, led by a steering committee of donors, are involved in strategic visioning and decision-making for the Fund. The Fund also leverages a Participatory Review Committee (PRC), which is a committee of young women and TGNC people of color who are interested in learning more about philanthropy. PRC teams conduct site visits on behalf of the Fund and deliver feedback that is essential to the grant review process.

THE GOALS OF THE FUND ARE TO:

- Shift philanthropic practices through increased sustained investments for girls and young women of color and shared knowledge on effective strategies and approaches
- Grow and sustain resourced organizations led by/for young women of color in NYC toward long term generational shifts
- Advance life outcomes of girls and young women for successive generations through structural change efforts while addressing individual immediate harms and historical trauma

THESE GOALS ARE UNDERGIRDED BY FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

• PARTNERSHIP

As a new pooled fund, the Fund strives to engage multi-sector (community, government, philanthropy and corporate) partners at various levels. The Fund uses an asset-based approach to expand and enrich the pie and unify allies through collaboration and learning. Focused on girls and young women of color across race and ethnicity, the Fund is also an ally to boys and young men of color work.

• SYSTEMIC CHANGE

The Fund supports advocacy, community organizing, and policy change strategies necessary to advance the systems with which girls and young women interact, as well as the cultures in which they live, while addressing immediate harms and historical trauma.

• ACCOUNTABILITY

The Fund both partners with and holds government accountable to address the needs of the most marginalized girls and young women of color, while also supporting them as leaders and community assets.

• PERSPECTIVE

Issues of gender, race, and class are critical to any strategy for change with intentional inclusion across race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, non-binary gender identities, and differently-abled (physical, cognitive, emotional ranges).

• YOUTH LEADERSHIP

The Fund supports youth leadership and centralizes the voices of young women of color as active and compensated advisors. It prioritizes organizations led by and for young women of color across race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, and physical/cognitive abilities in the most economically challenged communities.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

In May 2019, The Foundation commissioned TCC Group (TCC) to conduct the first ever evaluation of the Fund. The objectives of the evaluation were to understand the impact of the Fund on:

- **Grantee partners' infrastructure and organizational effectiveness;**
- **Grantee partners' capacity to engage young women, girls, and transgender and gender non-binary youth of color;**
- **The lives of girls, young women and TGNC of color in NYC; and**
- **Philanthropy, both within the Fund and in the field at-large.**

In addition, the Fund approached this evaluation as an opportunity to distill important learning and insight to be shared with the broader philanthropic community

METHOD:

The evaluation used a variety of sources to address the objectives above. True to the ethos of the Fund, we employed a participatory approach that involved grantee partners, funder partners, and members of the PRC throughout the evaluation. As part of the evaluation planning process, TCC worked with the Fund to convene a grantee evaluation advisory board and a funder evaluation advisory board. Both advisory boards provided feedback and guidance throughout the process of the evaluation.

The first step of the evaluation was to develop a logic model that clearly articulated the Fund's active inputs and strategies and associated these strategies with the Fund's expected outcomes. The logic model was collaboratively developed with guidance and feedback from the grantees, the funders, and the Fund staff. The chart on page 6 depicts the logic model for the NYC Fund for Girls & Young Women of Color.

Following the development of the logic model, TCC worked with the Fund staff to formulate the evaluation questions of interest and developed tailored data collections tools to answer these questions. The data collection tools used in this evaluation are presented below. One limitation of the data collection was the limited number of interviews and participants in the grantee focus groups.

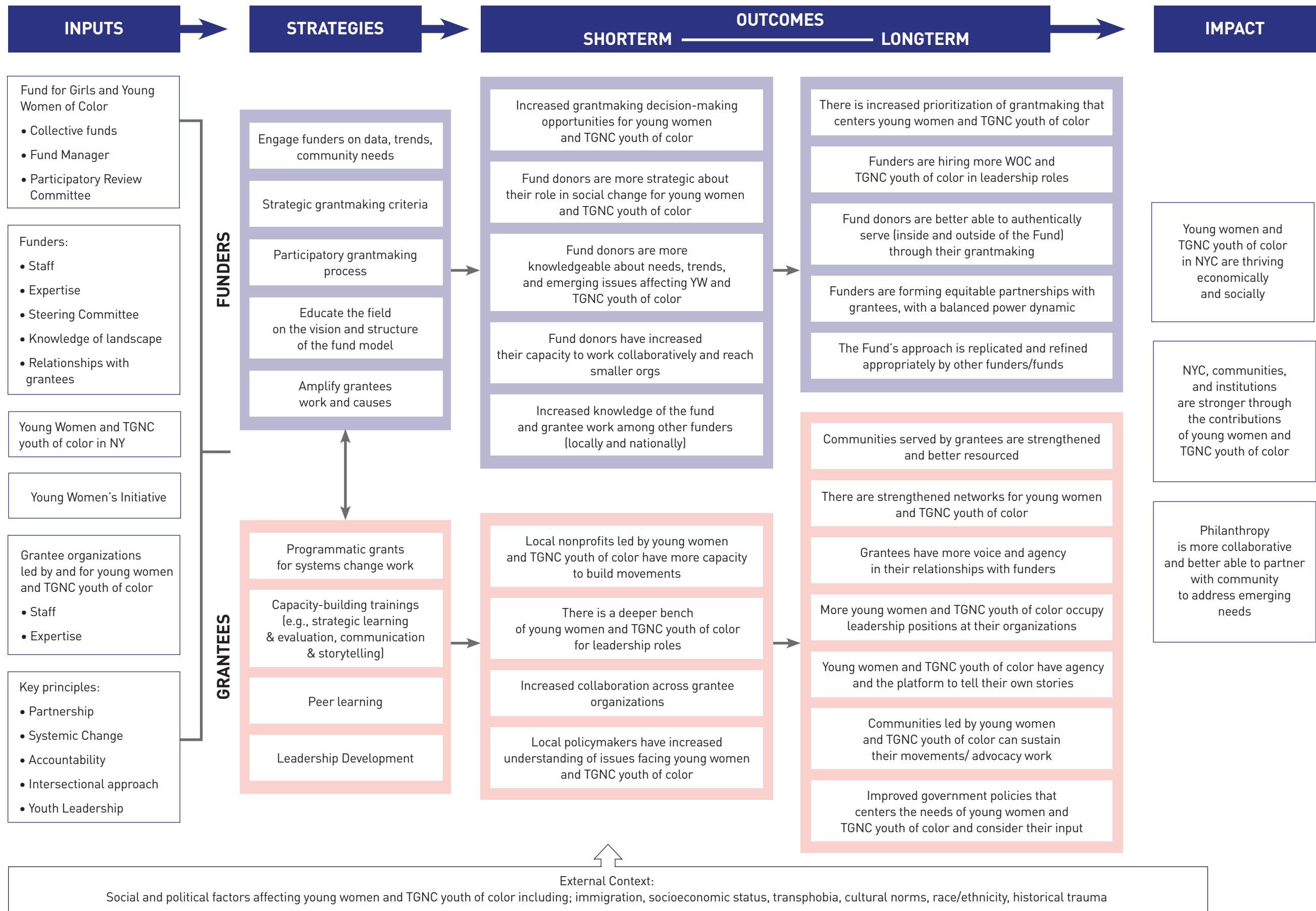
Data Collection Tool	Participation	Description
Grantee Evaluation Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completed by 38 grantees, for a 78% response rate	A survey was administered to all grantees to evaluate impact and capacity changes related to participation in the Fund.
Grantee Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 14 individuals in total participated• Represented 11 grantee organizations¹	We conducted four in-person focus groups. All grantees were invited to participate. The focus groups were intended to provide a deeper look at grantee experiences and explore areas of convergence and divergence in experiences.
Fund Grant Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completed by 48 grantees, for a 98% response rate	Summative grant report administered to all grantees to capture grant-related activities covering grantees' entire period with the Fund.
Donor Collaborative Funder Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8 interviews² conducted	Interviews were conducted with a strategically selected group of funders. All selected funders participated.
PRC Members Focus Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7 PRC members participated	We conducted one in-person focus group with PRC members. All PRC members were invited to participate.

¹ Arab American Family Support Center, Black Alliance for Just Immigration, Black Women's Blueprint, Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project, Girl Vow, Inc., Girls for Gender Equity, New York State Youth Leadership Council, Sadie Nash Leadership Project, The Center for Anti-Violence Education, Turning Point for Women and Families, Welfare Rights Initiative

² NoVo Foundation, The Scherman Foundation, The New York Community Trust, Andrus Family Fund, Foundation for a Just Society, Fondation CHANEL, The New York Women's Foundation, Surdna Foundation

CHART

LOGIC MODEL FOR THE NYC FUND FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN OF COLOR



IMPACT OF THE FUND ON GRANTEES

The following findings reflect the impact of the Fund on grantee organizations' capacities. The findings are broken down into the Fund's impact on grantees' organizational capacity and the Fund's impact on grantees' capacity to engage in systems change work.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IMPACT

The increased funding allowed grantees to effectively pursue their leadership, programming, and policy change goals. By centering grassroot organizations that are focused on women, youth, trans and non-binary people, and people of color, the Fund provides an invaluable resource to organizations that have historically been marginalized in traditional philanthropy. Grantees, funders, and PRC members all recognized the Fund as being unique in its approach in its support of organizations that traditionally have challenges accessing resources from funders.

Most grantees agreed that their organizational capacity and their capacity to engage in systems-change work has improved since joining the Fund. The Fund's contribution to organizational capacity was primarily through increased operational support, which allowed grantees to sustain or develop new programming, hire new staff, increase community outreach, and provide stipends to members, among other things. In some cases, the funding also resulted in grantees being able to leverage additional funding.

The Fund has had a positive impact on grantee organizations' capacity to grow leadership opportunities for young women and TGNC youth of color. With the support of the Fund, grantees have increased leadership opportunities through a number of means, including providing leadership and professional development trainings to existing staff; expanding their board to allow for more young women and TGNC youth of color to lead; and prioritizing young women and TGNC youth of color in their hiring.

“

Overall, the Fund is absolutely needed because working with communities that are directly impacted has been an issue with grassroots organizations and philanthropy. Funding [from the Fund] comes from an intersectional approach, understanding that the lives of young women and girls of color is multifaceted...the Fund get it, which is important. A lot of people give money to the issue but doesn't understand. ”

- Grantee

“

We have given more youth a permanent spot on our board to enhance our programming according to their needs and perspectives. ”

- Grantee

Since joining the Fund my organization's capacity has improved in the following areas...
(% of Agree/Strongly Agree)

Programming (e.g., the ability and flexibility to run programs to help us meet our organizational goals) (N=38)

97%

Communications (e.g., the ability to clearly communicate about our work and impact) (N=38)

79%

Strategic Learning/ Evaluation (e.g., the ability to collect data to guide our future decision-making) (N=38)

74%

Financial Management (e.g., the ability to properly manage our programmatic and organizational funding) (N=38)

66%

Fundraising (e.g., the ability to raise funds from both major and grassroots donors) (N=38)

63%

Board Governance (e.g., having an effective board in place that helps with organizational leadership, but not programmatic work. (N=38)

45%

SYSTEMS CHANGE IMPACT

The impact of the Fund on grantees' systems change capacity is evident in the increase in opportunities for grantees to share their authentic stories publicly, as well as, to speak on the issues affecting them in public forums. Additionally, the Fund has supported many grantees in sustaining an active agenda of thought leadership via invited talks, media interviews, and written articles, for example. Finally, grantees' efforts to engage policymakers as part of their system change strategies has improved since joining the Fund, with grantees reporting that they have had more opportunities to engage policymakers at the community-level, in particular, and have successfully achieved a number of legislative and policy change in their communities since joining the Fund. On the following pages are examples of how grantees are changing the system.

Grantees have had success affecting policymakers and policy change at the community-level but have not seen as much change at the state and federal levels. Feedback from grantees indicates that the work leading up to many of their policy wins pre-date their participation in the Fund, but since joining the Fund the increased resources have allowed them to target their advocacy efforts. Additionally, since joining the Fund, few grantees agree that there have been improvements in policies focusing on issues facing young women and TGNC youth of color in New York City since becoming grantee partners of the Fund.

Since joining the Fund, grantees have generally not perceived more attention to grantmaking centered on their issues. One of the goals that undergirds the Fund is to "shift philanthropic practices through increased sustained investments for girls and young women of color." Yet, grantees have not found that the Fund has been a catalyst for more funders attending to their issues or for more cultural responsiveness in funders' grantmaking among the philanthropic community at-large. Per one grantee, "Comfort to have necessary conversations with these and other funders listed has not shifted because of the Fund, its actual funder or efforts to shift philanthropy from the inside out."

“

The external landscape remains incredibly challenging and competitive. It is very burdensome to adapt our programming and work to each funders' particular format and lens and we do not get clear feedback about the fit of our work for various funders. ”

- Grantee

Since joining the Fund...

(% of Agree/Strongly Agree)

YW and TGNC YoC have stronger interpersonal networks (N=37)]

90%

there are more opportunities for YW and TGNC YoC to share their stories from their own perspective (N=37)

89%

YW and TGNC YoC have stronger organizational networks (N=37)

87%

there are more opportunities for YW and TGNC YoC to speak on their own behalf regarding the issues affecting them (N=37)

78%

there are more opportunities for YW and TGNC YoC to share their stories in public forums (N=37)

76%

HOW GRANTEES ARE CHANGING THE SYSTEM

In a demonstration of their leadership and expertise, grantee organizations were very active in disseminating a variety of thought leadership.

40



Spoke as an Issue-Based Expert or Served on a Panel

35



Media Mentions (e.g., in articles or interviews)

27



Provided Testimony at a Policy-Related Hearing

22



Articles and Op-Eds Published

16

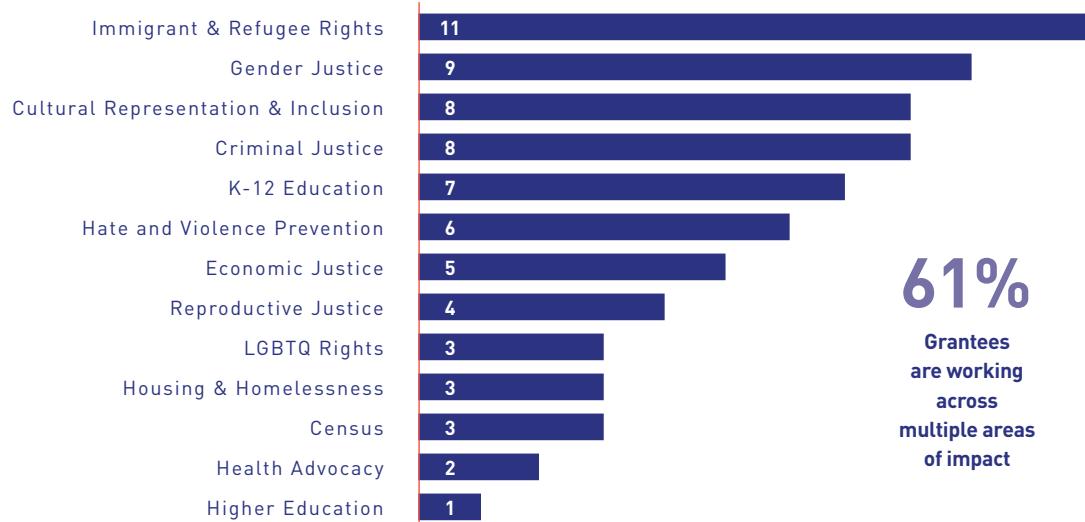


Reports Published

Grantee organizations' thought leadership and visibility activities had diverse, wide-reaching impacts for the organizations, their communities, and the systems they sought to change.



The range of issues grantee organizations are working on speaks to the systemic approach to change that undergirds the Fund. Not only are grantees working in many different areas, most are working across multiple areas.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Below grantees provide examples of how they are changing the system in a variety of ways and on a number of social issues.

HEALTH ADVOCACY

"The HEAL Act...removes the 5-year bar on green card holders' access to programs like Medicaid and lets undocumented immigrants access the ACA marketplace. [Our] NY leaders met with legislators on Capitol Hill in September....2 signed on...Fellows drafted a campaign plan. Members are visiting legislators' offices in NY."

IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE RIGHTS

"Extension of Liberian DED and Somali TPS for one year for nationals living in the U.S."

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

"In Feb...we held an AAPI Equal Pay Day workshop on how AAPIs in low-wage jobs struggle for livable pay due to the model minority myth...25 legislators joined our March...Twitterstorm, including Reps. Velasquez (NY-07), Maloney (NY-12), Clark (NY-09), and Meng (NY-06)."

GENDER JUSTICE

"Our gender justice committee testified at the City Council's Land Use Committee's hearing on the mayor's jail expansion plan."

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

"2 young people testified at the Eric Garner rally calling for Mayor Bill DeBlasio to fire Officer Pantaleo."

K-12 EDUCATION

"[Our organization] reaches out to those [NYC] schools to support their internal development of LGBTQ programing."

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

"The NYC chapter began a campaign for a City Council resolution against a sex-selective abortion ban introduced at the state level. Members got CM Chin to introduce it."

LGBTQ RIGHTS

"The lack of safe space for LGBT POC in NYC as gentrification cruises on is alarming, a lot of our work is centered around space right now."

HOUSING AND HOMELESS

"The Rent Guidelines Increase in 2019, some young women provided testimony on how it impacts their communities, we worked informally with many organizations from the Lower East Side in this common progress."

HATE AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

"The Coalition...has been organizing a Day Against Hate for Feb. 13, in which are [sic] goal is to create visibility and awareness across all five boroughs around ways to be Upstanders to Hate Violence without increasing policing."

CULTURAL REPRESENTATION & INCLUSION

"We are advocating for 6MM to ensure older immigrant English Language Learners are able to find an adequate seat...and not turned away because they are older and thought to not be able to graduate by 21 years old when they are forced out of the public school system."

CENSUS

"[Our organization] actively protested the potential use of the Citizenship question on the Census. We testified at 2 hearings on the issue, led a rally at City Hall, and drafted letters to protest its inclusion."

HIGHER EDUCATION

"As a result of [our] ongoing policy working group discussions with HRA and other CUNY allies, CUNY EDGE now allows remote enrollment documentation. Prior to this policy change, our students had to report, several times before the start of a new semester, directly to their campus CUNY EDGE office. With remote enrollment, stress is significantly reduced for our students."

GRANTEES IN ACTION

Grantees are building leaders and championing change in their communities



Girls for Gender Equity



New York State Youth Leadership Council



SOUL Sister Leadership Collective



SOUL Sister Leadership Collective



Turning Point for Women and Families



W.O.W. Project

IMPACT OF THE FUND ON FUNDERS

As the Fund also had the goal of “shift[ing] philanthropic practices,” the evaluation also sought to look at the impact of the Fund on its donor partners and the philanthropic community at-large.

Many funders indicated the primary impact of the Fund on them as funders was the improvements in their professional growth and learning. Namely, participation in the Fund has helped increase funders’ knowledge about the needs and emerging issues affecting young women and TGNC youth of color. In addition, through the Fund many donor partners have become aware of many more grassroot organizations working on issues of salience to young women and TGNC youth of color.

For several funders, membership in the Fund’s donor collaborative also served as a vehicle to enhance their other philanthropic activities. For example, funders have identified partners for other projects, discussed shared grantees with other funders, and sharing learnings from the Fund with other funder collaboratives. In addition, for some funders, membership in the Fund has encouraged them to make their own grantmaking more participatory, as well as, to review board and leadership composition more intentionally during due diligence.

The Fund has had limited impact on funders outside of the Fund. Among the philanthropic community at-large, the Fund has had very little impact. Few funders have shared information about the Fund with others outside of their own organization and no funders were aware of the Fund’s model being replicated by other funders in the field.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUND’S PROCESS FROM GRANTEES

In addition to reflecting on the impact the Fund has had on grantee organizations, grantee organizations shared insights on their experience of the Fund and its approach to grantmaking.

Providing grantees with general operating support (GOS) and multi-year grants was considered one of the most important ways the Fund can continue to strengthen grantees’ movement-building work. This sentiment came up frequently among grantees. One grantee explained that “[the Fund’s] approach to funding more than one year is really helpful. It’s pretty rare and one year goes by so quickly so being able to have funding to feel secure in that to plan ahead [is helpful].” Another grantee added that “multi-year funding [has been really helpful] but noted that “not all grantees are able to get that and everyone should be able to get [that].” The importance of multi-year funding was underscored by another grantee who shared their frustration that “...the fact we have to apply every year when our struggles are multi-year fights and organizing makes it really difficult. It would be great to map out our work for 3 years and get funding [for all those years].”

Of all the aspects of the grantmaking process, grantees experienced the grant application process as the most laborious. Grantees who received multi-year grants were particularly confused about the need to renew their applications annually. Concerns about the burden of the grant application on grantees were raised by funders, as well.

The grant money was considered the most helpful component of the grantmaking process, though grantees did not believe that the amount of money awarded was appropriate for the extent of impact the Fund sought to have. In addition to grantees, funders also raised concerns around the amount of money awarded, albeit in terms of whether the amounts awarded to grantees justified the burden of the application.

“

We are incredibly grateful for the Fund’s support [but] the application...is a bit more burdensome and clunky than other applications. The multiple required reports on top of reporting within the grant application and re-applying for multi-year funding is a bit confusing. ”

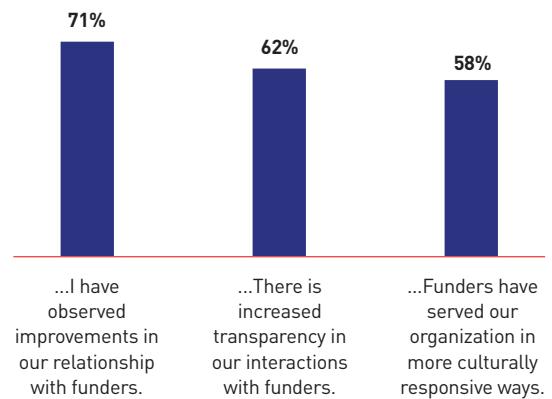
- Grantee

The site visits conducted by the PRC were also viewed as a helpful component of the Fund's grant-making process. Grantees felt that the site visits brought value to the grantmaking process because they provided an opportunity for grantees to engage directly with members of the Fund and showcase the work of their organization. One grantee put it this way, "The site visits are helpful because you get to speak to real people that seem to understand the work."

Participation in the Fund has helped improve some grantees' relationships with donor partners of the Fund. Along with PRC members, some donor partners have participated in the site visits. As such, grantees have observed that some funders are demonstrating more interest and knowledge during their engagements with grantees. Grantees reported the benefits of these improved relationships are that funders have provided grantees with advice, informed grantees about upcoming funding opportunities, or are more open to hearing about grantees' successes and challenges. Grantees expressed a desire for The Foundation to be more proactive in facilitating connections between grantee and donor partners of the Fund.

While communication with Fund was generally seen as positive by grantees, there was less agreement among grantees that the Fund was consistent in their follow up with grantees. Communication between grantee partners and the Fund is almost consistently seen by grantees as positive, accessible, and friendly. However, grantees are more mixed on the extent to which these communications between grantee partners and the Fund translate into action. While some grantees have found that the Fund regularly acts on their requests and feedback, other grantees assert that the Fund has a history of receiving but not being responsive to their communication. Some grantees reasoned that those with longer-standing relationships with The Foundation likely had better experiences than those who were granted solely through the Fund.

Since becoming a Fund Grantee...
(% of Agree/Strongly Agree)



PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUND'S PROCESS FROM FUNDERS

The donor partners of the Fund also shared their perceptions of the Fund's strategic approach to grantmaking and donor collaboratives.

One of the highlights of establishing and growing the Fund has been its ability to engender a true collaborative ethos among the donor partners. Across the Fund, there was almost unanimous agreement among the donors interviewed that there was good collaboration among donor partners of the Fund. Funders consistently reported that they felt there was "a very strong spirit of collaboration." Funders also felt that equal participation was strongly encouraged across the board.

"To be honest I've attended most of the funder meetings and I have no idea who is contributing more and less. It's super egalitarian. Everyone weighs in equally. That's really beautiful. **"**

- Funder

“

We've raised a lot of money and made a lot of grants. That's not always easy to do in funder collaboratives. That's the #1. I think we've also...enabled grantees to build capacity to do their work better and get their message out...I do think that...that there are long-term impacts that are hard to gauge around elevating the issues related to girls in NYC. ”

- Funder

Despite the perception among funders that the Fund is characterized by a spirit of collaboration, perceptions about funder engagement in the Fund are mixed. Compared to the initial years of the Fund, there are indications that engagement has improved, but for several funders, funder engagement is still uneven. Per one funder: “I also think there is uneven participation in the Fund from fund members. It would be useful to have commitment from specific point people for the Fund. Sometimes it's a revolving door of people, not always the same people. It's hard to build a dialogue if we're having to bring people up to speed at every meeting, and how do we all have equal voting rights if we haven't all been there from the beginning and done our due diligence.”

Though funders believed the Fund's process had improved, they were still unclear on their individual roles and responsibilities within the Fund. Funders noted that the structure, process, and organization of the Fund had improved over the years; and yet, they were still unclear on what role they, as donors, were supposed to play in the strategic planning and decision-making for the Fund. For some donors, the balance of leadership for the Fund between the donor collaborative, steering committee, and the The Foundation as the fund managers was not fully explicit. As one funder said, “The Foundation staff has a lot to manage, it is clear they are the managers. [I'm] still trying to figure out who plays what role. [It's] not always super clear”

Funders felt that there remained a need for ongoing work to articulate the strategic impact the Fund hoped to have on grantees. Most funders articulated that the success of the Fund has been its ability to raise more dollars for young women and TGNC youth, but for several funders what specific change the Fund hoped these dollars would lead to for grantees and NYC youth at-large was not well-defined for them. One funder expressed excitement that the evaluation would serve as an “action plan” to help the Fund clarify its impact and “envision next steps.”

RECOMMENDATIONS – FOR THE FUND AND THE FIELD

The below recommendations reflect learnings and takeaways from a variety of stakeholders involved in the Fund since its inception, including donors, grantee partners, volunteers, and Fund staff. They are broken into two categories: recommendations regarding **grantmaking strategy** when investing in work to impact young women, girls and trans and non-binary youth of color, as well as recommendations regarding the **process** for grantmaking, grantee relationship management, and collaborative funding efforts. These recommendations offer guidance to field of philanthropy-at-large, as well as the Fund towards its goal of continuous improvement.

GRANTMAKING STRATEGY

Keep your eye on the bigger vision of impact that you want to create in the world, while allowing flexibility for community leaders to determine specific strategies and tactics for action. Leading with a lens of investing in “leadership” and “systems change”—instead of creating restrictive parameters or silos for the type of work you are looking to fund—allows communities more room to define and address issues important to them, while creating unique strategies for action that are more likely to be impactful. This approach can allow for bolder investments in solutions for complex, intractable issues at intersections of gender, racial and economic justice that funders might otherwise be unaware of, or unsure how to articulate within grantmaking strategy.

The ongoing and evolving nature of systems change and movement-building work naturally calls for a funding model that provides long-term support that can be used as needed. Multi-year, general operating support grants provide grantees with the flexibility to be nimble in their systems change efforts – and this requires a long-term commitment on behalf of the funder when launching a new funding strategy. Any considerations about moving from annual program-specific funding to more multi-year, general operating support will also necessitate that donors ponder the balance of asserting their own strategic priorities with their desire for their grantees to be unencumbered in their pursuit of social change. If for some reason general operating support is not possible, providing program-specific grants with minimal restrictions and a large percentage allowed for overhead can also be extremely valuable.

Find ways to invest in true “by and for” approaches that value and support the leadership of young women, girls and trans youth of color at all levels of the organization. This includes their active and intentional presence and leadership in positions such as Board, senior staff, and compensated and visible advisory positions and other stakeholder roles. It also means ensuring that young women, youth, and trans and non-binary youth of color have had and will continue to have leading roles in the origin, design, implementation, and evaluation of the work being funded at every step of the way, as opposed to just being program participants.

Be intentional about building a truly intersectional lens regarding “who” is included as a target of investment – with particular attention paid to those most at the margins. When investing in young women, girls and trans and non-binary youth of color, it is important to understand the overlapping ways that oppression and potential show up in their lives due to intersecting identities and lived experiences. Power dynamics inherent in society and in the field often mean that those communities who most need investment are the least likely to receive it; thus, it is important to consistently assess who exactly is being reached and who may be intentionally or unintentionally left out. Important factors for consideration may include youth from particularly marginalized backgrounds due to race and ethnicity, gender identities, education level, language and immigration level, disability, and/or specific age groups. Even completely open RFP processes can overlook these communities—thus, it may be necessary to invest additional resources to ongoing, year-round outreach to ensure that grantmaking reaches all potential groups of interest.

Be bold and intentional about redefining “risk” within the context of grantmaking. Youth-led work and organizations addressing issues impacting young women, girls and trans youth of color may not fit the typical “profile” of organization that funders feel comfortable supporting – due to factors such as their size, the professional and educational background of staff and leadership, and “track record of success”—and thus are often deemed to be more “risky” investments. Yet, significant investments in such work can bring tremendous results just as they do in larger, better funded organizations—and often more so—if given the chance. Funder collaboratives, in particular, offer an opportunity to redefine what “risk” means when investing collectively, setting a new standard that goes beyond what any funding institution might be able to implement on their own.

GRANTMAKING PROCESS

Crystallize the impact the donor collaborative seeks to have for both the donors, grantee partners, and other involved stakeholders. Once developed, the strategies to achieve these goals should be well-aligned with the desired impact. This includes spending time and resources as needed to figure out how to operationalize the collaborative’s shared values, goals and strategies within the ongoing processes of the Fund—beyond a theoretical framework. It is also important that the desired impact, the strategy for achieving this impact, and the rationale behind these strategies is effectively communicated to both members of the donor collaborative and grantee partners. This is also an opportunity for ongoing assessment and learning among stakeholders, which itself can be an added value of participating collectively in such a Fund.

To truly advance social justice for this and other similar communities, efforts should be made to involve grantee and community voice into the overall operation of the fund—and this requires significant time, resources, and intentionality. In order to truly achieve greater leadership and equity for young women, girls and trans youth of color—both now and in the future—their opinion and expertise can be leveraged on a number of matters related to the implementation of the fund’s work – including strategy setting, participation in grantmaking processes, evaluation efforts, and capacity building and community-building efforts among grantees and funders. To do this well requires significant planning and resource allocation but can go a long way to ensure that the mission of such funds are advanced in impactful ways, including providing concrete ways to intentionally shift power from funders to communities of focus.

Every effort should be made to minimize undue burden on grantees vis-à-vis the grantmaking process, and in particular, the grant application and grant reporting. To the extent that donor collaboratives allow opportunities to model more radical and impactful ways of philanthropic giving, its application and reporting processes present a very tangible means by which to initiate these shifts. Doing this will involve decoupling the function from the form of the application and reporting tools to determine if the former could still be served with a streamlined version of the latter. This may also include considering strategies such as accepting proposals for funding already used for other funders, allowing for verbal conversations to substitute lengthy applications or interim reports, and providing additional supports to grantees to document and archive their successes and lessons learned in alternative formats that strengthen their own organizational culture and history.

Consider building in room for rapid-response or other urgent grantmaking opportunities to allow grantees the opportunity to respond and adapt to unanticipated needs in their communities. Even the best-designed grantmaking strategy cannot account for the myriad shifts in the political, social, and economic landscape that may arise during the grant period. If possible, holding resources that are accessible to grantees as significant changes occur can have a tremendous impact on their ability to respond to newly-arisen community needs, partnership opportunities, or organizational hardships that were unforeseeable at the time of application. Doing so can help create improved outcomes by both “protecting” existing gains made, while also accelerating impactful strategies that may only be feasible within certain windows of time.

Efforts to create ongoing opportunities for interaction, familiarization, and storytelling between grantees and funders should be prioritized. Grantees appreciate the monetary resources provided by donors, but they also value engaging directly with donors. These interactions should exist outside the grant review period (i.e., site visits should not be the only opportunity for grantee/funder interaction). This may include opportunities such as monthly happy hour for donors and grantees, in-person or virtual webinars and discussion on topical issues, invitations to participate in programming or community-building activities held by grantees, or invitations for grantees to participate as colleagues and experts in funder-hosted events. In addition, strong consideration should be given to compensate grantees for their time and labor as appropriate when the primary purpose of such interaction is funder education and learning.

Recognize that there is a lifecycle to a donor collaborative and to understand the shifting needs and priorities of the collaborative, time should be allowed for ongoing reflective practice. A “young” fund will encounter certain logistical issues and ambiguities in their vision that a more “seasoned” fund might not. Taking time to evaluate where a funder collaborative is at in its lifecycle provides opportunity to chart a course for how the fund will continue to refine its goals, strategies, and practices. By not doing this, members of the fund might be left feeling unclear and uncertain about their role and the impact of the fund.

Donor collaboratives provide an opportune means for accelerating the shifting philanthropic culture—and this should be leveraged both within and outside the collaborative funding space. This evaluation revealed that donors learned new and better practices through their experiences in the Fund. However, catalyzing long-term, systemic shifts in the culture of philanthropic giving will require commitments from donor partners within the collaborative to champion more radical changes in their own giving organizations and to help spread the message and model of the Fund to their other funder networks. As part of their engagement, participating funders can create goals and commitments for how they will enact and champion these lessons elsewhere – and work together toward holding each other accountable for such efforts moving forward.

APPENDIX

LIST OF GRANTEES & DONORS

GRANTEES OF THE FUND

African American Policy Forum
American Indian Community House of New York
Ancient Song Doula Services
Arab American Association of New York
Arab American Family Support Center
Atlas: DIY
Black Alliance for Just Immigration
Black Feminist Project
Black Trans Media
Black Women's Blueprint
BlackFem, Inc.
Brown Girl Recovery
CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities
Casita Maria Center for Arts & Education
Communitlife
Community Connections for Youth, Inc.
CONNECT, Inc.
DRUM – Desis Rising Up & Moving
FIERCE
Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project
Girls for Gender Equity
Global Action Project
Hetrick-Martin Institute
Jahajee Sisters: Empowering Indo-Caribbean Women
La Colmena
Lilly Awards Foundation
Make the Road New York
MASA-MexEd
Mekong NYC
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum
New York City Anti-Violence Project

New York State Youth Leadership Council
New York Transgender Advocacy Project
RAISE: Revolutionizing Asian American Immigrant Stories on the East Coast
Resilience Advocacy Project
Restaurant Opportunities Center United (ROC)
S.O.U.L. Sisters Leadership Collective
Sadie Nash Leadership Project
Sakhi for South Asian Women
South Asian Youth Action
Sylvia Rivera Law Project
The Alex House Project, Inc.
The Audre Lorde Project, Inc.
The Brotherhood/Sister Sol
The Center for Anti-Violence Education
The New York City Urban Debate League
The W.O.W. Project
The WomanHOOD Project
Theatre of the Oppressed NYC
Truthworker Theatre Company
Turning Point for Women and Families
United We Dream
viBe Theater Experience
Visual Arts Research & Resource
Welfare Rights Initiative
Women of Color in Solidarity
Young Women of Color HIV/AIDS Coalition
YWCA/The Young Women's Christian Association of The City of New York

DONORS OF THE FUND

Andrus Family Fund*
Brooklyn Community Foundation
Cricket Island Foundation
Ford Foundation*
Foundation CHANEL
Foundation for A Just Society*
Harnisch Foundation
Jessie Noyes Smith Foundation
Ms. Foundation for Women
New York Community Trust*
New York Foundation

North Star Fund
NoVo Foundation*
Pinkerton Foundation
Schott Foundation
Stonewall Community Foundation
The New York Women's Foundation*
The Scherman Foundation
The Surdna Foundation
Third Wave Fund
William T. Grant Foundation

* Steering Committee Member Organizations

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