

The coolest equity-focused family foundation you've probably never heard of

By Aaron Dorfman

This mid-sized philanthropy provides grassroots organizations in California and Washington with 6-figure multi-year core support grants.

*Editor's Note: This piece was written before the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis and the subsequent uprisings in more than 400 cities. Please see **A message from the Vice President and Chief Engagement Officer** that accompanies this issue of Responsive Philanthropy for more context.*

Family foundations have long played an important role to provide resources for social change. NCRP explored this in depth in our 2015 report *Families Funding Change*.

Most people in the field know about social justice leading family foundation funders including Nathan Cummings, Surdna, Libra, Arca, Mary Reynolds Babcock, Hill-Snowdon, Overbrook, Jessie Smith Noyes and McKnight foundations plus Unbound Philanthropy, Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, Melville Charitable Trust, Moriah Fund and others.

In recent years, there's an important new entity on the scene that's quietly making a huge difference. You've probably never heard of them if you don't live in Washington, California or Arizona. It's the Satterberg Foundation.

Satterberg is a family foundation headquartered in Seattle. It had assets of \$424 million at the end of 2019; an-

nual giving has been above \$20 million since the foundation received an influx of assets in 2015.

Its wealth comes from the Pigott family [pronounced pig-ott] who have a substantial ownership stake in a major trucking company. PACCAR, Inc. is an American Fortune 500 company and global leader in the design, manufacture and customer support of light-, medium- and heavy-duty trucks. It is traded on the Nasdaq stock market under the symbol PCAR.¹

The Satterberg Foundation was created and named by the founder, Virginia Satterberg Pigott Helsell. Virginia and her husband, Bill Helsell, spent the 1960s, '70s, and '80s bringing together the children of their blended family and committed to ensure that connection far into the future.

All the details of how the Satterberg Foundation was to grow and mature were left in the care of their children who are the foundation's founding board. Today, the board is comprised of multiple generations of family members.

The foundation leaders seek to help build a just society and a sustainable environment.

"Our mission of promoting a just society and a sustainable environment

is critical," said Sean Boyd, a board member. "A society that builds trust in the public and private institutions that protect people's rights, health and their environment by treating everyone fairly and with respect creates a neighborhood, community and a world that we all want to live in. When this mission statement was adopted it was with incredible and sadly necessary foresight that the founding board members saw the role [the foundation] could play in helping alleviate some of the inequities of the world."

MULTI-YEAR CORE SUPPORT GRANTS ARE THE CORNERSTONE OF SATTERBERG'S APPROACH

What I find most impressive about the foundation is that in just the past few years the foundation has funded 183 organizations in Washington and California with multi-year general operating support grants.

Importantly, we're not talking about small, 2-year grants. The 2018 grants were each for \$300,000 over 3 years.

The 2019 grants to a different set of organizations were for \$500,000 each over 5 years. Research by the Center for Effective Philanthropy has shown that large, multi-year grants like these contribute to organizational effectiveness.

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—Rich Stolz, OneAmerica

This is exactly the kind of grantmaking that helps grantees build power to achieve justice and equity.²

Every grantee I contacted noted how incredibly important this kind of funding is.

“Satterberg walks the talk in terms of being responsive to grantees and putting the work first,” said Zach Norris, executive director of the Oakland-based Ella Baker Center for Human Rights. “They are about racial justice and understand making their own processes clear and painless allows us to focus on and transform the pain we see in our communities.”

“The impact of the 5-year grants is instrumental,” Norris added. “How many times have we said we need long-term support? Too few funders listen. We fought an 8-year campaign to close youth prisons across the state of California. Without long-term support we couldn’t win campaigns like that one. That proved to be important not just here in California but across the country. If we want to transform the conditions we are living under, we have to be able to play the long game in order to win.”

Rich Stolz, executive director of OneAmerica (the largest immigrant and refugee advocacy organization in Washington state), said: “Satterberg’s commitment to grassroots, people of color-led organizations is a model for philanthropy. I can’t tell you how much it matters to have multi-year general support funding that we can count on. The funds have allowed us to pursue strategic organizing priorities in rural communities in Washington state where there are limited resources available for that work.”

Stolz also noted that the multi-year general support funding has “created space for longer term financial planning, and it’s allowed us to be more bold and nimble in our response to crises. It makes a difference knowing that the foundation trusts us to know what

our communities want, that it respects that we need to be accountable to our base and that it isn’t trying to use us to advance its own boutique strategies or institutional ego.”

Roxana Tynan, executive director of Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy also praised the foundation’s long-term support. “Satterberg is helping to lead the field with long-term general support grants, aimed at organizing. They have also been great about minimizing reports and making the administration of the grant super easy. They are great listeners!”

“The Satterberg Foundation’s general support has allowed us to be responsive to the needs of immigrant communities, especially as everything around us has been changing constantly even before the coronavirus crisis,” said Angelica Salas, executive director of Coalition for Human Immigrant Rights. “One programmatic example is how we have been able to respond to the needs of immigrant youth after the federal government revoked their legal immigration protections, which engaged us in a state and national campaign to

keep them protected along with their families. That fight still continues.”

Salas also noted that the Satterberg funding “has allowed us to build our organization’s infrastructure to be able to reach more immigrants in underserved regions and to expand our services throughout the state of California for hard to reach individuals and families who need our protections desperately.”

PAYOUT DOUBLE THE LEGAL MINIMUM

Another thing I find impressive about the Satterberg Foundation is that they have committed themselves to a 10% payout – double the legal requirement.

“Our board of directors made a commitment decades ago to go above and beyond the 5% payout,” said Sarah Walczyk, the foundation’s executive director. “This decision is rooted in the foundation’s mission and vision to ‘Live in a world in balance with vibrant communities in which all people enjoy the opportunity to grow and thrive.’”

Walczyk added: “We know the world we want to live in today and 20 years from (continued on page 10)



Members of OneAmerica encouraged Washington State lawmakers to adopt pro-immigrant positions during a visit to the state capital in January of 2020. Photo by Mel Ponder.

JASON FRANKLIN

Most of my personal giving and that of the donors I advise is c(3) giving supporting community organizing and advocacy to advance racial, social, economic and environmental justice. But I have increasingly layered in c(4) (and political) giving alongside that c(3) funding to help build a more robust ecosystem of work towards social change.

Tax-deductible c(3) giving remains critical for so much work as it supports community building, research, issue education, communications and more. But all of that work gets a powerful boost when we also fund movements to expand into the c(4) realm with lobbying, ballot measure campaigns and electoral work from endorsements to independent expenditures. Growing our c(4) investments into social change movements yields bigger wins and that is worth far more than the tax deduction that we lose.

Take for example Amendment 4 in Florida, the Voting Rights Restoration for Felons Initiative that passed in 2018 and stands to restore the right to vote to an estimated 1.4 million people. We have funded civic engagement efforts in Florida for years (and will continue to do so!), but it took a major investment of c(4) resources into the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, New Florida Majority and others to pass the biggest voting rights enfranchisement campaign in a generation. And we must continue to fund their work to implement this landmark law as conservatives attempt to undermine it with illegal modern-day poll taxes and other tactics.

When I review my own giving or help a client develop their philanthropic strategy, a key question I ask is whether shifting types of giving could lead to greater change. Over and over, increasing c(4) and political giving is the answer.

Jason Franklin

Co-Founder & Co-Chair, Solidaire Donor Network and President, Ktisis Capital



A major investment of 501(c)4 resources in groups like Florida Rights Restoration Coalition enabled the Voting Rights Restoration for Felons Initiative to be passed in Florida in 2018.

Satterberg Foundation

now. The only way this will be possible is if we are responsive to the urgent needs of our communities, trusting them as experts to build power and sustainability rather than preserving our life span.”

ADVANCING EQUITY

In addition to their core support grants and their high payout, the foundation’s board has other interesting and impactful ideas to advance equity.

For example, they wielded their power by convening an Equity Summit in April 2019.

In addition, the board has provided multi-year grants over \$1 million each to regional associations of grantmakers and others in the communities they work in to advance racial equity work.

“Satterberg Foundation’s trust and

the flexibility of its Community Partnership Grant propelled our organization to a new level of impact both within our membership and in the larger philanthropic ecosystem,” Christine Essel, president and CEO of Southern California Grantmakers, said in an email. “The foundation’s investment gave us capacity to patiently plant and grow the seeds for effective cross-sector partnerships between grantmakers, government and grassroots leaders. In addition to creating a strong statewide alliance and bolstering our advocacy arm, we also built a network of members who increasingly center equity as the powerful driver of deep and lasting change.”

Satterberg Foundation builds power by funding community-based organizations whose leaders work to build a just society and a sustainable environment.

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The board shares power by giving those groups multi-year core support, and they wield power through convening their peers and their community.

I encourage other family foundations and foundations of all types to follow their lead to find ways to partner with Satterberg, a not-yet-well-known but successful philanthropy. ■

Aaron Dorfman is president and CEO of NCRP.

Notes

1. To learn more, visit <https://www.paccar.com/about-us/history/>.
2. For full list of Satterberg’s grantees, visit <https://satterberg.org/grantees/>.
3. Learn more about the Equity Summit at <https://satterberg.org/seattle-equity-summit-2019/executive-summary/>.