![ncrp National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy logo]

Three lessons 2020 taught us about the state of philanthropic data

By Stephanie Peng

Hardly a day goes by that I don't read the words "impact," "evaluation metrics" or "return on investment" in one of the many reports and white papers that inundate the sector – and with good reason. Data can help us understand how funding is flowing to the most urgent social movements of our time and give us insights on how to fund movements in the long-term.

A significant portion of my time in the last few years has been devoted to understanding how the sector's current philanthropy data infrastructure measures – or more often doesn't measure – movement support, and how NCRP can help change that.

And while every movement has its own set of qualitative and quantitative collection and analysis challenges, one thing is certain. If foundations are going to continue to center movement organizations and leaders in their grantmaking, they must delve deeper – and more equitably – into what many think is the boring side of data.

DATA AS A BRIDGE TO CHANGE

Philanthropy's growing interest in movements comes amidst an unprecedented public health crisis, last year's uprisings following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many more Black lives, and a recent coup attempt. But as we can see in the recent NCRP/Candid analysis of their COVID giving data, data on philanthropic support for social movements can be challenging to come by.

The sector doesn't have much experience – at scale anyway – in measuring support for intersectional movements. For example, the reproductive justice movement crosses issue area, population and strategy in ways that our current grants classification systems aren't designed to handle. Support for social movements also moves in indirect ways – a grant could be distributed amongst a coalition via an intermediary or funding for a national community organizing umbrella organization can supply financial or capacity support to chapters around the country.

NCRP has spent a good portion of its 45 year history trying to get better at providing non-profit and foundation members and allies with the data in-

![Photograph of Stephanie Peng]

Stephanie Peng

sights they need to hold philanthropy accountable. In service of that mission, NCRP released "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" an interactive data dashboard that shows how local foundations were supporting their immigrant communities and organizations dedicated to advancing the immigrant rights movement.

The 2020 dashboard includes visualizations of local-to-local funding for all 50 states, with 4 different metrics of funding. The data included over 20,000 data points, all packaged into one fancy dashboard that allowed you to view a big picture national view, then zoom in to a specific state's data. In short, it was a data lover's dream.

It was the first time that NCRP released such an extensive, community-requested dataset in an interactive digital format. We created the tool after our initial release of "The State of Foundation Funding," which provided a broader national look at funding for the pro-immigrant and pro-refugee movement. When we heard feedback from organizations and foundations that localized data would be more helpful in finding gaps in funding, we created a tool that would be easy to use and could also show an accurate picture of funding for local immigrant communities.

In doing this kind of deep data dive, we came away with three key takeaways, not just for our own future efforts, but for any foundations looking to use data to inform strategies to fund movements:

FIRST: WE NEED TO RE-BUILD OUR DATA INFRASTRUCTURE WITH MOVEMENTS IN MIND.

Movements like racial justice, migrant justice, reproductive justice and others evolve quickly to meet constantly emerging threats, and they are inherently intersectional, encompassing multiple identities, strategies and issues. Foundation grantmaking, and the systems used to track those grants, are not.

Our colleagues at Candid can attest to the challenge of tracking charitable dollars down to the grassroots in a complicated ecosystem of funders, recipients and pass-throughs – often of varied legal status – that usually comprise a social movement. Candid's work is made even harder because most foundations don't even directly provide Candid with this data. Candid instead has to rely on getting it circuitously via public disclosure 1 to 3 years after the grant has been made.

In fact, neither Candid's Philanthropy Classification System nor GivingUSA's philanthropy taxonomy – both of which were understandably influenced by the IRS's National Taxonomy of (tax-) Exempt Entities (NTEE)– were ever designed to describe complicated, modern social movements.

While some foundations' grantmaking are starting to center the priorities and needs of movement organizations, the systems to track the funding to go to these organizations still overwhelmingly reflect the generally siloed and rigid structures of foundation strategies that are often divided by populations, strategies and issues. The structure of grantmaking data does not reflect the funding explicitly for organizations led by communities most impacted (i.e. Black-led organizations) or the intersectionality of populations and issues of movements. By the time the data is publicly available, it is often 2 or more years behind.

More foundations are starting to realize the importance of funding organizations led by BIPOC – who are often the ones most impacted by inequitable structures and policies – instead of funding large white-led organizations. However, it is still not possible to track grants specifically for BIPOC-led organizations.

Foundation grantmaking data also cannot track the intersecting populations that grants are designated for. The pro-immigrant and pro-refugee

movement includes Black LGBTQ immigrants, and we can track funding for Black people, LGBTQ people and immigrants, but not all 3 identities together. When philanthropy relies on data that only captures one part of a movement instead of the whole spectrum, it will only fund part of a movement.

Detailed and timely grantmaking data should not be an afterthought. We know anecdotally how communities are constantly threatened and that funding for movements generally needs to increase, but old data capture realities from a different time – like when federal funding for refugee resettlement or federal funding for health services, was still available. Our most recent and complete year of funding data is 2017, which means it misses 3 years of communities defending themselves against racism and harmful policies by the Trump administration as well as 3 years of increased foundation funding to those communities.

Foundations need to ensure their grantmaking data is public, up-to-date, and accurately reflects the populations and communities at the center of movements and the whole spectrum of issues involved in a movement. Accurate, timely and public data on grantmaking designed with movements in mind will not only help inform foundation strategy, but it will also help grassroots organizations hold foundations accountable to their commitments. Current data that is also coded for the specific issues and populations it is intended for increases transparency and accountability in the sector and helps communities advocate for better funding and resources to help their communities thrive.

Yes, longer-term work and investment is needed to ensure that the sector's data infrastructure can accurately track grantmaking on a large scale in real-time. In the meantime, it is each foundation's responsibility to ensure its data is up-to-date with grant descriptions that specify details about

specific beneficiary populations, issues and strategies.

SECOND: NUMBERS CAN ONLY TELL 1 PART OF THE STORY.

In our research, our data showed that many states had no immigrant deportations. Upon first glance, a funder might think "Great news! That state must care about immigrants. We don't need to fund in that state."

In reality, a state likely shows 0 deportations because residents of that state were processed and then deported from another state. The data source we used only included deportations that occurred in a given state, and not where individuals may have been transferred from. This method of tracking data was flawed from the beginning as so much of immigration enforcement process, from processing to detention centers to legal cases to the actual deportation of an individual, takes place in several states.

After our dashboard launched, we received feedback from organizers in multiple states telling us that our that our data did not capture the realities of the threats that communities face. This feedback made complete sense. How could the stress and trauma of seeing a beloved family member, friend or community member transferred through detention centers and court systems and finally deported be summed up as 0 deportations for a state?
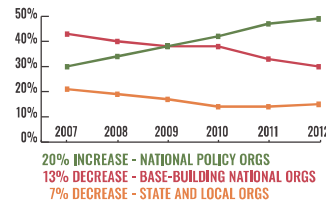
A similar challenge surface last summer when NCRP published "Black Funding Denied," an analysis of explicit community foundation grantmaking to Black communities. The brief report was created in response to the recent uprisings for Black lives as well as calls from NCRP nonprofit members and movement allies for philanthropy to support Black communities.

The response from the majority of foundations was to question our methodology. In defining our scope, we only included grants that were *explicitly* designated for Black communities instead
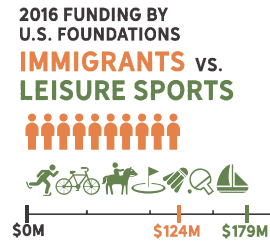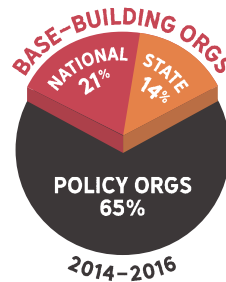
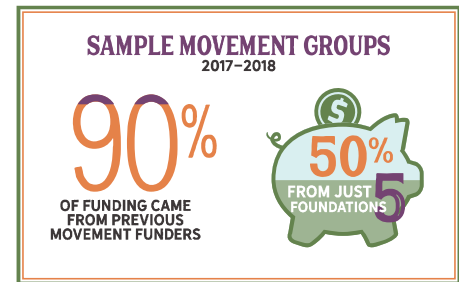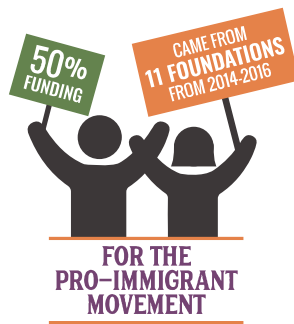# LEARNING FROM THE PAST

THE MOVEMENT IS UNDER-RESOURCED

IMMIGRANT RIGHTS FUNDING FLOW
INCREASES & DECREASES (2007–2012)

20% INCREASE - NATIONAL POLICY ORGS
13% DECREASE - BASE-BUILDING NATIONAL ORGS
7% DECREASE - STATE AND LOCAL ORGS

FUNDING FROM 1000 LARGEST FOUNDATIONS
1% OF FUNDING FOR IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES
2011–2015

BASE-BUILDING ORGS
NATIONAL 21%
STATE 14%
POLICY ORGS 65%
2014–2016

2016 FUNDING BY U.S. FOUNDATIONS
IMMIGRANTS vs. LEISURE SPORTS

$0M $124M $179M

POOL OF FUNDERS IS SMALL

50% FUNDING
CAME FROM 11 FOUNDATIONS FROM 2014-2016

FOR THE PRO-IMMIGRANT MOVEMENT

SAMPLE MOVEMENT GROUPS
2017–2018
90% OF FUNDING CAME FROM PREVIOUS MOVEMENT FUNDERS
50% FROM JUST 5 FOUNDATIONS

FUNDING IS NOT RESPONSIVE TO THE THREAT

SAMPLE ▶ POLITICAL CHANNELS IN 2017

VIEWS OF EXPLICITLY
ANTI-IMMIGRANT CHANNELS GREW 2X FASTER THAN OTHER POLITICAL CHANNELS

DOLLARS OF FUNDING
(PER IMMIGRANT)

CALIFORNIA
NEW YORK
ILLINOIS
SOUTH EAST
SOUTH WEST
FLO-RIDA

$0   1.32 2.26 2.89 $6.00

IMMIGRANTS DEPORTED
(PER LOCATION)

= 120,000 IMMIGRANTS
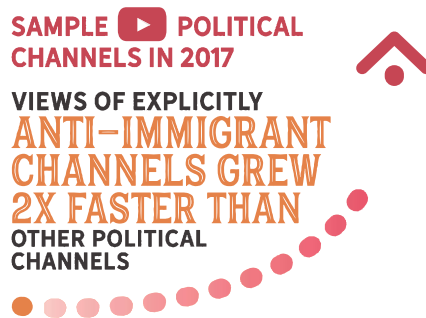
of grants that included Black communities as one of many intended beneficiaries, such as a grant to an art museum or food bank, which could have multiple intended beneficiaries.

While this definition was – and still is – a key metric in ensuring long-term equitable foundation support for Black and other communities, the question still brings up the overall challenges of how to accurately track *all* the philanthropic funding to specific communities, knowing that funding might flow through indirect channels. With many grantmakers leaving their grant descriptions blank, and Candid's own coding of data using its Philanthropy Classification System to fill in the blanks, details about grantmakers' intents behind each grant are bound to be lost in translation, ultimately leaving us with an incomplete picture of the full grantmaking data.

Numbers may not necessarily lie, but they can only tell part of the story. We encourage movement organizations to share their experiences that provide further nuance to the numbers that we publish. Any foundation that wants to use data to inform its strategy to fund movements should look beyond the numbers and listen to the experiences and strategies proposed by movement organizations and communities. They are the experts on the issues and solutions in their communities, and letting them explain how closely publicly available data reflects their experiences – as well as amplifying their voices and experiences – is much more powerful than just publishing numbers.

When making funding decisions, foundations should not rely only on statistics and numbers. In addition to the structural challenges described above, there is always more to the story than just numbers. Use the data as a starting point or a point of context – but listen to what communities have been saying for years. Listen to their experiences, and follow their lead.

THIRD: IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME.

Perhaps the most valuable takeaway from spending over 1 year on a project that is "unsexy" and mundane in the eyes of many funders is that if we invest the time and resources to build a tool that empowers communities to advocate for more funding and points out gaps in funding that could inform foundation strategies, everyone will use it.

Since we released our dashboard, we have worked with organizations in several states to start conversations with their local foundations to increase funding for their work. Foundations also have responded and appreciated the opportunity to fill the gaps in the funding that we highlight. Of course, that's only for foundations seeking to address funding gaps and fund the strategies that the movement has indicated it needs, rather than the strategies the foundation wants to fund. Others, unwilling to hold themselves accountable to their grantmaking, defend their actions. Either way, foundations and nonprofits have indicated that they are interested in and ready to take action using the data we've published.

With "Black Funding Denied," we received a huge response from the philanthropic sector – largely positive from nonprofits, along with some backlash from foundations. Nonprofits saw the data as a tool to hold foundations accountable to their commitments and press for more funding, while initial foundation responses ranged from being privately appreciative of the accountability to outright public denial of their lack of funding for Black communities by attempting to discrediting the data in the report. However, even among critics in the sector, there was an acknowledgement that despite the supposedly "flawed structure" of the data, substantial increases of grantmaking to Black communities are necessary.

IMPROVING DATA IS ONLY THE BEGINNING.

There are more than enough quantitative and qualitative reports on how movements have been underfunded for decades. We also know that communities on the frontlines of these movements know best how additional funding and resources can help build power toward a more equitable future. Data can be an important tool to get us the better world we are all striving to make by having it as an active tool that movements can use to hold foundations accountable to their commitments to equity and justice.

But the responsibility of leadership does not rest on movements alone. It is time for foundations to pay attention to more than just the fancy and aesthetically pleasing "after" of the research process and time to examine the nuts and bolts of its data. They need to reconsider how their own data methods are structured if they are going to use it to make informed decisions about funding communities on the frontlines of social movements.

Publishing accurate and up-to-date data is only the beginning. Foundations should also invest in long-term data infrastructure by funding research and improving methods of data collection. The return on investment of data that can capture the totality of resources that are and are not flowing to movements creates better insights that lead to better funding decisions and more resources for movements.

At the end of the day, investing in the communities most impacted by structural barriers provides them – and all of us – the resources and power to succeed and thrive. ■

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