



Assessing the Funding Landscape for Programs in Support of Black Girls

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This brief provides an overview of past and current trends in philanthropic giving to causes supporting women and girls, particularly Black girls. In our research, we sought to identify emerging and long-standing sources of financial support for organizations, programs, and movement building. This involved a robust, though not comprehensive, analysis of funders investing to support Black girls and women and/or racial justice and equity, including funders with a history of giving in that space and those emerging because of the current social environment.

The Black Girl Freedom Fund (BGFF) was founded by Black women leaders from around the United States to call attention to and center the needs and experiences of Black girls. Recognizing the ways that Black girls have been rendered invisible in social movements but also in policymaking, advocacy, and philanthropy, these leaders established BGFF to center, lift up, and advance causes and efforts that support Black girls, and to address long-standing, pervasive racial and gender inequities. Catalyzed by the urgent demands of the COVID-19 crisis and its disparate impact on Black Americans, the fund also works to ensure that programs, initiatives, and resources intended to strengthen, nurture, and support Black girls receive robust, targeted funding.

To accomplish its mission, BGFF set its first funding target: raise \$1 billion over the next 10 years. With these funds, it will prioritize organizations led by Black women that focus on the experiences of Black girls. By prioritizing these organizations, BGFF centers the knowledge, expertise, and experiences of Black women in its efforts and demonstrates a comprehensive commitment to developing the distinct talents and contributions of Black girls and women. To inform its planning and its fundraising strategy for this initiative, BGFF requested that the Urban Institute conduct an independent examination of the

philanthropic landscape to determine past and current trends in giving to Black girls, and to identify the greatest opportunities for the fund. We found that private philanthropy, corporate funders, and high-net-worth people are well positioned to advocate for or lead the design of new giving strategies that direct significant investments to projects, programs, research, and advocacy in support of Black girls.

We also found that there is no reliable mechanism for tracking or identifying the rate of philanthropic giving to Black girls because most funders do not disaggregate giving by race and gender. As such, we recommend that funders investing in gender justice, racial equity, and/or causes that support Black girls begin tracking their investments in a way that allows for this kind of disaggregation.

Moreover, more disaggregated data are needed to make the case for increasing investments for Black girls. According to the most recent [Social Genome Model estimations](#) conducted by Urban, only one in five Black children are born into advantageous circumstances and only two in five Black children are on track at age 30, rates that are far lower than those among white children. Moreover, only 18 percent of Black girls are born into advantageous circumstances and only 39 percent are in advantageous circumstances as they transition to adulthood. These disparities have cumulative effects for Black girls and support the case for targeting investments to strengthen and support them and their families, which some foundations are doing. There have been some efforts by funders to support gender equity through grantmaking that supports girls in the areas of health, education, and other key areas. For example, we found that most foundation giving for women and girls primarily supports health equity, and organizations and programs devoted to addressing the vast inequities in health for Black girls address a range of intersectional issues, including education, employment, criminal justice, and wealth equity (in addition to health).

Research Methods

We conducted this research from December 2020 to February 2021. The research team (which comprised five Black women) completed a literature review in two key areas. First, we examined philanthropic trends and investments made for girls and women overall, then narrowed the search to Black girls specifically. Second, we examined the most recent trends on quality-of-life indicators for Black girls across several dimensions including education, mental and physical health, justice, and employment to examine the extent to which racial and gender disparities create inequitable outcomes for Black girls and women. The research team also evaluated extant research on the history of philanthropic investments in women and girls and documented the primary motivations for giving to causes supporting them, on how social movements have influenced foundation investments, and on the ways that philanthropy has fallen short in supporting Black girls specifically.

Using our findings on philanthropic trends and investments in Black girls, we also identified recent investments in programs and organizations that benefit them. Based on this analysis, the project team developed discrete categories of funders that have invested to support Black girls (“core”), those that are well positioned to do so (“emerging”), and those whose priorities are shifting toward racial equity

(“potential”). After identifying these categories, we conducted a comprehensive review of philanthropic and nonprofit publications, news outlets, funder announcements, and funding profiles of Black-led organizations. We also conducted a comprehensive search to identify prospective funders that may not be currently investing in Black girls but whose positions as foundation executives, Black-owned finance firms, or high-net-worth individuals suggest they may be motivated to invest in BGFF’s mission, if presented with a case for doing so backed by rigorous data.

Our team also reviewed [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) to explore current federal grant priorities and to determine the extent to which those opportunities explicitly target or otherwise benefit Black girls. In addition to understanding the federal funding landscape as it relates to Black girls, we wanted to identify which of their needs federal agencies are funding, and what upcoming federal priorities and opportunities we can anticipate based on current competitive grant opportunities.

Using the site’s search feature, we located current, forecasted, and archived competitive grant opportunities across agencies and explored the type of work or service each opportunity funds, as well as the populations it targets. We focused on opportunities from the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Education. We searched for opportunities that had been posted at any point before our search date (January 30, 2021) and were still open. If the search for current notices yielded few results, we also searched archived opportunities. We used key words to identify funding opportunity notices containing the terms “Black,” “girls,” “youth,” “African American,” “women,” “African American women,” “Black women,” “Black girls,” and “African American girls.”

In addition to these targeted searches and analyses, members of our project team drew from our lived experience as Black girls and women. We reflected on the programs and organizations that supported Black girls in our own childhoods—organizations that we support today through volunteer service and membership affiliation—and on the vibrant tapestry of community organizations that support our families and neighbors.

In Supplement: A List of Current and Prospective Funders

In a separate deliverable for the Black Girl Freedom Fund, the research team developed a robust list of current and prospective funders based on recent funding announcements and initiatives, and it also identified prospective contacts at the organizations. The list is designed to be an iterative and evolving document that can be used by the fund’s marketing, outreach, and engagement teams over the next several months to catalyze new funding commitments to help it reach its \$1 billion funding goal.

Philanthropic Investment in Black Girls and Women

Although philanthropic funding for women and girls has been growing, certain issue areas still lack the investment necessary to have real impact. For example, in the criminal justice sector, resources focused on women and girls (especially Black women and girls) are lacking. Funding has generally been provided to reform prisons and to reduce prison populations without focusing on women (Bryan et al. 2015), meaning an opportunity exists to target not only women’s specific needs but also other areas of criminal justice, such as reentry. As a concrete example, the Ford Foundation used to provide support for concerns related to policing and civil rights, but ended programs in those areas in the 1980s. There is still a noteworthy lack of funding for the direct services that people reentering the community need (Bryan et al. 2015). In the sphere of health, foundation giving for women and girls has been more pronounced. In 2006, a sample of grant dollars focused on benefiting women found that 46.1 percent supported health-related activities (followed by education at 9.7 percent, youth development at 9.5 percent, and human services at 9.0 percent), although these numbers exclude estimates on grant dollars directed solely to the needs of Black women and girls (Atienza et al. 2018).

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for funding among nonprofits led by people of color, which significantly increased after the pandemic hit the United States. In a May 2020 survey, Building Movement Project found that 46 percent of nonprofits with Black leadership had experienced decreased funding during the pandemic, compared with only 38 percent of all nonprofits (Douglas and Iyer 2020).

Philanthropy has strived—at best—to follow a color-blind approach, and it has consequently not sufficiently addressed or understood the systems that have created extreme disparities for Black girls. This has led to chronic underfunding for Black girls and women, which in turn contributes to the systemic inequities they face. In one example, recent Urban research on the loss of learning among US students owing to pandemic-related educational disruption shows that relative to white girls and boys, Black girls and boys are less likely to be on track to start once schooling resumes and more likely to experience steeper declines in learning (Werner et al. 2021). This is just one indicator of the disparities Black girls face because of responses to the pandemic, which span issue areas (including education, health care, mental health, and criminal justice) that profoundly affect their development and long-term outcomes.

Challenge

Owing largely to the competitive nature of grant funding and historical biases among funders, Black-led organizations are left at a significant disadvantage, and efforts focused on Black girls in particular struggle to secure funding. In 2020, foundations invested just 0.5 percent of \$66.9 billion in women and girls of color. The median size of grants made by foundations to organizations by and for women and girls of color is less than half the median size of all foundation grants. Moreover, no FY2020 federal solicitations explicitly focused on or named Black girls.

A 2020 study led by the Ms. Foundation for Women revealed that the total philanthropic giving to women and girls of color is just \$5.48 a year for each woman or girl of color in the United States, accounting for just 0.5 percent of the \$66.9 billion that foundations give. Moreover, the median size of grants made by foundations to organizations founded by and for women and girls of color is \$15,000, less than half the median grant size (\$35,000) for all foundation grants reported to Candid in 2017.

Because of the competitive nature of grant funding and biases among funders, Black-led organizations are often at a disadvantage, and efforts focused on Black girls particularly struggle to secure funding. Funding efforts led by women of color often struggle to obtain support because of what Vanessa Daniel calls “misdirected philanthropy,” or philanthropy that overwhelmingly favors the funding of white-led organizations. These stark disparities in investment often marginalize Black women and girls in the discussions, relevant policies, and justice movements that are so critical to making progress to advance equity for Black girls.

Federal Funding Streams Targeted to Black Girls and Women

The lack of targeted federal funds for Black girls in general makes it difficult to account for how much funding goes to efforts to support them. Urban’s search of grants.gov yielded 1,571 notices of current and forecasted grant opportunities from the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Education, none of which explicitly focus on or name Black girls. Many involve requests for research (particularly from agencies that focus on health, such as the National Institutes of Health) and some announce competitive funding opportunities for human services programs. With one exception, the key words “Black” and “African American” did not yield solicitations that primarily target this population. Instead, most search results included six or fewer instances of these words. Solicitations mentioning the key words Black or African American most often came from the Centers for Disease Control and prevention or the National Institutes of Health and usually involved opportunities to research health or public health. Searching for the terms “youth” and “women” yielded the most funding announcements (102 each) among all search terms, still a small share of the more than 1,500 funding notices across the five agencies we studied.

We conclude that though many of the notices do not call out specific target populations, the relevant topics—including human services such as employment and education, health, housing, and criminal justice—impact a range of populations, including Black girls (again, though, Black girls are not specifically targeted). For example, the notices of grant opportunities concerning youth focused on topics including runaway and homeless youth programs, family violence prevention, domestic violence and dating violence, human and sex trafficking, postsecondary education, special education and people with disabilities, and youth employment programs. Each of these is highly relevant to Black girls, but federal funding targeting Black girls in these areas is scarce.

Opportunity

In 2020, social unrest and calls for racial justice and equity have had profound effects on philanthropic giving, resulting in sharp increases in giving focused on racial equity. Foundations gave more to support racial justice and equity in 2020 than in the previous nine years combined. According a July 2020 survey of 250 foundation leaders, respondents planned to allocate an average of 16 percent of foundation giving to racial equity initiatives, and 60 percent of respondents were focusing their racial equity work on Black communities.

The Obama administration's White House Council on Women and Girls served to launch a federal focus on advancing equity for girls of color, including specific targets for Black girls. Founded in 2009, the council's mandate was to "ensure that each of the agencies in which they're charged takes into account the needs of women and girls in the policies they draft, the programs they create, the legislation they support and that the true purpose of our government is to ensure that in America, all things are still possible for all people."¹ The executive order that established the council yielded several policy success stories.² Between 2009 and 2014, the high school dropout rate for Black girls decreased 16 percent, the graduation rate among Black women at four-year colleges and universities increased by 0.9 percentage points, and the earned-income tax credit and the child tax credit raised the incomes of roughly 2.9 million Black women and girls. However, that focus was not extended or sustained after the Obama administration.

The Shifting Landscape of Racial Equity Funding

The social unrest and calls for racial justice and equity that defined 2020 resulted in sharp increases in giving focused on racial equity. Although much work remains to increase investment in communities of color, the current philanthropic environment presents an unprecedented opportunity to call attention to the need to invest in organizations led by people of color. Giving trends in 2020 signal that many funders recognize the need to fundamentally shift their grantmaking to focus on racial justice and equity and to greatly increase their support for Black-led organizations. This change creates a promising space for funding dedicated to programs, policies, and practices that support Black women and girls.

Before 2020, funding focused specifically on racial justice and equity constituted less than 1 percent of overall foundation funding in the United States.³ By contrast, as of September 2020, \$6 billion in racial equity funding was being awarded or pledged by institutional funders and other large donors, representing a 22 percent increase in 2020 grantmaking alone. In 2020, foundations gave more to support racial justice and equity than they had in the previous nine years combined.

Some funders used the rapid response grant process that arose during the pandemic to elevate racial equity and increased funds directed to Black leaders and service areas. Through a partnership with the Greater Washington Community Foundation, Urban researchers found that after the foundation explicitly centered racial equity in its funding announcement and asked applicants to include the racial, ethnic, and gender composition of their senior leadership team and board of directors, 52 percent of grantees funded were organizations led by Black people or other people of color.

Moreover, regarding priorities, according a Council on Foundations [survey](#) of 250 foundation leaders conducted in July 2020, respondents planned to allocate an average of 16 percent of total giving to racial equity initiatives. Sixty percent of respondents were focusing their racial equity work on Black communities, with many applying an intersectional lens to their efforts to support marginalized groups within Black communities.

Corporations have [led the philanthropic response](#) to the racial reckoning that has occurred since the beginning of the pandemic, moving faster than foundations to provide billions of dollars in grants for racial justice. More than half of the \$5.9 billion pledged in 2020 by institutional grantmakers and other large donors has come from corporations. Nearly half indicated they were making grants for general operating support for the first time rather than for specific projects.⁴ As of the beginning of 2021 corporate cash has been flowing to Black-led nonprofits, scholarships for Black students, and investments in Black-owned enterprises. This corporate giving has included the following:

- Walmart announced the creation of a \$100 million center for racial equity. Apple rolled out its own \$100 million effort, which will focus on economic opportunity, education, and an overhaul of the criminal justice system. And in mid-June 2020, Google laid out a \$175 million plan consisting of a mix of grants and investments.
- Many recent workforce commitments from corporations have been equity commitments, including \$10 million from Morgan Stanley to the National Urban League; racial justice pledges from Amgen, including partnerships with historically Black colleges and universities; and \$10 million from AT&T to expand economic opportunity in underserved communities.
- To address growing gaps in income and wealth among Black Americans, OneTen recently launched an ambitious initiative to source and retain Black talent at scale. Its aim is to use seed capital to partner with leading chief executive officers and corporate leadership to hire 1 million Black Americans over 10 years into living-wage jobs and to be accountable for their retention, development, and advancement. OneTen will accomplish this work by partnering with employers, providers, and the Black labor movement.

In addition to this new energy and focus, there is an opportunity to form a coalition among the growing number of Black philanthropic leaders, Black high-net-worth individuals, Black fund managers, and Black leaders of community development financial institutions to create an infrastructure to sustain focus on and direct resources to the needs of Black girls. Such resources are needed in several domains, including efforts to end racism, bias, and discrimination; programs and policies that support Black girls' healthy development and that support them in the workforce and the justice and education systems; and efforts to develop new pathways that allow girls to participate in their own empowerment, creativity, and self-expression.

A Sample of Well-Aligned Prospective Funders

Through our research, we identified well-aligned funders that fall into three categories: core funders, emerging funders, and potential funders. These categories represent where funders are in relation to racial equity funding and support of women and girls. Core funders have established a commitment to funding Black women and girls, whereas emerging and potential funders have funded in the racial equity space and could expand their giving priorities to include Black girls.

Core Funders

Although they are still relatively few, several foundations have explicitly invested in and strengthened programs and organizations that specifically serve Black girls. Many of these funders have supported activists, grassroots organizations, and community leaders working to advance social movements for Black girls and women. In some cases, they have created infrastructure for local and regional grantmaking and movement building and have supported local organizations dedicated to working with Black girls. In addition to direct grantmaking, they have funded civic and political education projects and programs, have funded organizational capacity building for efforts and movements that center or are directed by Black girls and women, and have created spaces for Black girls to build and nurture community.

We found that there is considerable opportunity to establish deeper, more targeted investments to strengthen and benefit Black girls with funders that have demonstrated a commitment to gender equity and justice, that aim to create a portfolio of investments in gender and racial justice, or that want to engage with Black-led nonprofits and community organizations serving and uplifting Black girls. Sample core funders include the following:

- **Groundswell Fund** supports grassroots organizing that advances reproductive justice policy, systems change, and cross-movement alliances with other organizations in other social justice fields to build power toward collective liberation. Those fields include the following: labor, environmental, and economic justice; intersectional organizing by women of color and transgender people of color across a diversity of social change movements; and Black transgender, gender nonconforming, and nonbinary communities.
- **Marguerite Casey Foundation** supports leaders who work to shift the balance of power in their communities toward people who are excluded from sharing in society's resources and benefits and who have the vision and capacity to build a truly representative economy.
- **The Nathan Cummings Foundation** focuses on finding solutions to what it considers the two most challenging problems of our time—the climate crisis and growing inequality—and aims to transform the systems and mind-sets that hinder progress toward a more sustainable and equitable future for all people, particularly women and people of color.
- **Jack and Jill Foundation** addresses issues affecting African American children and families by investing in programs and services that create a strong foundation for children to thrive long

term. It supports services, programs, and organizations that focus on impacting root causes of social problems affecting African American children and families.

Emerging Funders

Motivated by calls for racial justice and increasing pressure on philanthropy to address structural racism, more foundations have committed to advancing racial equity or have clarified their racial equity strategies. As attention to racial justice has increased, many funders have gone further to address the intersections of racism and sexism by articulating priorities and investments that focus specifically on Black girls and women. By identifying additional funders who focus on women and girls and/or racial equity, the Black Girl Freedom Fund can align itself with organizations that have existing commitments to efforts that are translatable to their efforts to uplift and center Black girls. Examples of emerging funders that have specifically supported Black girls and women include the following:

- **The Southern Black Girls and Women’s Consortium** was established to design a 10-year campaign to raise \$100 million (through the Black Girls Dream Fund) to create the infrastructure for movement building and regional grantmaking for Black girls and women in the United States. With investments from NoVo Foundation, Women Donors Network, Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, Lucy and Isadore B. Adelman Foundation, the Collective Future Fund, and the Momentum Fund, the Black Girls Dream Fund seeks to fundraise and shift current grantmaking efforts in the South, channeling resources toward organizations that are intentionally supporting and empowering Black girls and women.
- **The Heising-Simons Foundation** facilitates the creation and strengthening of early childhood systems necessary for children from low-income families and children of color to reach their full potential by the year 2044. It also supports systems that shift power from punishment systems to communities of color impacted by mass criminalization, dismantle these systems in the United States, reimagine approaches to justice, and support fundamental research (primarily in the physical sciences).
- **Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation** supports grassroots organizing and advocacy, analyzes power through the lenses of race and gender justice, and creates collaborative and cross-issue strategies for long-term, systemic change.
- **The JPB Foundation** aims to provide people in poverty financial security by increasing their access to good jobs, protecting and strengthening the safety net, and alleviating financial hardship.

TABLE 1

Potential Sources of Funding in Support of Black Girls

Foundations

We identified a core list of funders that have already made investments in or commitments to programs, strategies, and/or advocacy on behalf of Black girls. We also identified a subset of funders focused on racial justice that may not explicitly mention Black girls but may be motivated to direct funds in explicit support of Black girls and young people who have experienced girlhood.

Corporate funders and initiatives

In response to the recent reckoning with racism and calls for social justice, many corporations and corporate foundations have responded with new racial equity investments. In fact, in recent months, corporate funders have catalyzed billions of dollars in funding for racial justice and grantmaking for rapid response to the pandemic. This is the time to leverage these commitments and secure targeted investments in programs that support Black girls.

Black foundation executives

Organizations like ABFE have elevated the need for grantmaking that specifically builds power and agency in the Black community, advances structural change, and targets racial disparities. Recently, foundations have been explicitly called on to focus on the intersections of race and gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. We see Black foundation executives as key advocates in this work and believe building relationships and partnerships with them can help to advance the Black Girl Freedom Fund's causes.

High-net-worth individuals

Many of America's high-net-worth individuals (including those of color) have established funds and investments to support a diversity of programs, initiatives, and projects intended to address racial equity. Recently, several major investments have been made in historically Black colleges and universities that signal an interest in expanding postsecondary education and professional training for Black students. These kinds of investments can be expanded to integrate K-12 education and to include other key focus areas including health, justice, arts and culture, and employment.

Finance firms owned by Black people or other people of color

This list includes banks, investment banks, asset managers, and private equity firms. These firms work with individual and institutional clients by managing and directing trillions of dollars in assets. By identifying overlapping interests in these firms' corporate responsibility programs with the Black Girl Freedom Fund's mission, firm leadership and staff could be motivated to guide and direct funding and investments to organizations and projects with like-minded missions.

Federal initiatives that include Black girls and their families

In addition to philanthropic funding, many entities receive funding through federal grants and contracts. Though Black girls were not explicitly mentioned in FY2020 solicitations, many federal programs currently support funding for Black families and children. The White House Council on Women and Girls comprises the head of every federal agency and major White House office. With the Biden administration's explicit focus on equity—as demonstrated by Executive Order 13985—we anticipate that federal funding will be noticeably expanded for programs directly addressing the issues that Black girls and women face.

Source: Urban review of the funding landscape for Black girls.

Potential Funders

In addition to core and emerging funders, we identified a set of funders that are positioned to make direct investments in efforts to support Black girls. In response to the long-standing activism of Black women leaders, recent global protests and calls for racial justice, and acts of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, a unique opportunity exists to partner with corporate funders to catalyze new, sustainable investments. Examples of potential funders include the following:

- **The Adobe Foundation** emphasizes technologically based economic security projects and programs focused on girls and women.
- **Citi Foundation** aims to increase financial inclusion, catalyze job opportunities for youth, and reimagine approaches to building economically vibrant communities.
- **The Bank of America Charitable Foundation** supports programs that advance pathways to economic mobility, with special emphasis on workforce development and education, community development, and basic needs.

There is also a growing group of **Black foundation executives** who can champion funding for Black girls. Examples of these leaders include the following:

- Crystal Hayling, Libra Foundation
- Jamie Allison, Walter & Elise Haas Fund
- Virginia W. Harris, National Coalition of 100 Black Women
- Michelle J. DePass, Meyer Memorial Trust

In addition to institutional funding, BGFF's mission and scope of vision could attract support from the robust and growing ecosystem of **Black high-net-worth individuals** and **Black funding collaboratives**.

Charting the Way Forward

Despite the significant challenges that Black-led organizations in the philanthropic space are facing, the current social environment and funders' growing focus on racial equity present promising opportunities for the Black Girl Freedom Fund. Considering the current philanthropic environment, funders' continuously emerging commitments to racial equity, and the growing recognition of the urgent need to support women and girls as well as Black-led organizations, BGFF is well positioned to take advantage of this moment. The intersectional nature of its mission is strongly aligned with the recent recognition among many funders that the complexities of structural inequities have devastating, long-term intersectional impacts. Its bold commitment to Black girls aligns well with the missions and priorities of many Black philanthropic leaders; as such, it should immediately prioritize outreach to these groups.

Notes

- ¹ “The White House Council on Women and Girls,” Obama White House Archive, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/administration/eop/cwg>.
- ² “Fact Sheet: Advancing Equity for Women and Girls of Color,” The White House Office of the Press Secretary, November 13, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/13/fact-sheet-advancing-equity-women-and-girls-color>.
- ³ Anna Koob, “What does Candid’s grants data say about funding for racial equity in the United States?” Candid, July 24, 2020, <https://blog.candid.org/post/what-does-candid-grants-data-say-about-funding-for-racial-equity-in-the-united-states/>.
- ⁴ Alex Daniels, “Companies Lead Philanthropic Response to Calls for Racial Justice, but Will It Last?” *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, August 24, 2020, https://www.philanthropy.com/article/companies-lead-philanthropic-response-to-calls-for-racial-justice-but-will-it-last?cid2=gen_login_refresh&cid=gen_sign_in.

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