

Our approach to measuring how much power was built incorporated qualitative and quantitative metrics that aimed to capture the full spectrum of connection, growth, and movement that built power. By including both procedural and outcomes-based indicators such as whether campaigns activated new organizers, registered voters, created new organizations or coalitions, adopted new frameworks or organizing models, or shifted who has leadership in the ecosystem, we believe we offer a more comprehensive picture of how and why certain campaigns built power while others did not.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHILANTHROPY


Drawing on the expertise and experience of the organizers who participated in this study, we invite foundations and others working in philanthropy to consider the following eight recommendations:

1 Develop relationships closer to the ground with people who are most impacted by the issues.

While approaching an organization's Executive Director may feel most accessible, respondents reflected that building new relationships with people closer to the ground would allow foundations to deepen their analysis of what is really happening. One interviewee from Florida said succinctly that foundations need to "get better friends." He went on to say that if national foundations paid attention to who was moving things in each state, reached out to the organizations that are working on the ground, and acknowledged when they do not know something, it would facilitate more fruitful relationships.


2 See trusted messengers as trusted leaders.

People are the experts on their own experiences and they are best positioned to create their own solutions. Community members who are seen as trusted messengers are often closest to both the pain and the solutions. Thus, trusted messengers should be viewed as leaders—trusted to know what they and their communities need, as well as how to meet these needs.



3 Resource organizations to choose their own consultants.

Some consulting groups may have more prominence in national ecosystems, however, giving local organizations the agency to decide who they would like to work with leads to better working relationships and outcomes. Choosing consultants directly from the ecosystem also flattens the learning curve, as Gladys Washington explained. She also shared how people who come from outside a place start at a deficit, with “preconceived notions about what that place is, and what its people are as well.” Washington concluded, “Realities of place and race matter, realities of experience matters.” Sometimes, foundations providing a list of consultants or offering to make introductions may be helpful, but the decisions should always be made by the organizations. Local organizers or organizations that have been working on the ground are best positioned to take on a consulting role, but are often overlooked. Approaching this work with cultural humility [46] is also essential and residents who already have existing roles and relationships in their communities are often most equipped to do this well. This model also allows organizations to build relationships directly with consultants rather than rely on foundations to broker these relationships.





4 Have processes in place to move money quickly, early, and often.

Organizers need time to build out infrastructure. Respondents shared their frustrations with receiving donations at the tail end of the campaign when it was too late, whereas investments at the beginning of the campaign would have had a much greater impact.

5 Take a long-term view and prioritize power building over short-term wins.

Transformational change requires ongoing, deep, consistent and relational organizing. Many organizers complained that consultants or funders had a tendency to focus on winning specific campaigns rather than advancing narratives and taking action that furthered their long-term goals. Funders interested in advancing health equity will need to invest in initiatives that build power and shift public consciousness, and focus on priorities and metrics that emphasize this over winning specific campaigns.





6 Let BIPOC organizers lead and avoid tokenizing their stories.


Our case studies uplift the incredible work BIPOC have been doing around the country. This finding affirms the need to follow BIPOC's leadership and ensure that BIPOC are at the table from the start. Similarly, funders must believe and invest in BIPOC. Nia Weeks made this call to action: "When you're funding people, it's not just the dollars, it's a statement that you believe them, that you believe in them, and that you trust that they will be what you believe that they can be... Believe people and believe in people."

7 Give general operating support.

Here, we add our voices to the many other research teams and organizers who have called for this, recognizing that general operating support gives organizations freedom and enables them to work year-round which is essential to build power.

8 Support new and emerging strategies and be willing to fund the unknown.

Local organizations and leaders know how to meet people in their communities where they are and should have the autonomy to carry out new strategies. Organizers recounted how some of their plans emerged as they were campaigning and how having the space to try new things was invaluable. The ballot initiative campaigns in Louisiana and Florida departed from traditional organizing blueprints and led to tremendous wins—both in terms of the power they built and the voter turnout. One funder who supported VOTE's work in Louisiana explained that, "the strategy doesn't have to be fully formulated... We went in clearly, with the understanding that we were going to leave it up to them to decide how they needed to use the money towards strategy." Funders would do well to follow this approach and trust local organizers to determine their own strategies.



CONCLUSION **FOR PHILANTHROPY**

Healthy communities require policies, infrastructure, and resources that support our collective well-being. As we reel from the devastation from COVID-19 and see how policymakers' decisions are not always in our best interest, there seems to be growing interest in new forms of leadership and direct democracy. This study 1) highlights the need for political strategies that build power, and 2) explores the role that ballot initiatives can play in this process. Ultimately, our findings point to the need to trust people on the ground to know what is best for them and to then resource them to do the work. By deepening our understanding of power-building ecosystems and sharing the lessons from these campaigns, we hope to create strong foundations for future efforts to leverage ballot initiatives as tools for creating and sustaining community power. Following the leadership of people who have traditionally been excluded from political processes and focusing on building long-term power could radically shift the balance of power and usher in a new world where we all have access to the conditions that will allow us to thrive.

