

Social Justice Fund Grantmaking Case Statement

Distinctive features of our grantmaking philosophy and practice:

- ▶ Funding decisions are made through a democratic process by engaged, educated volunteer grantmakers.
- ▶ Funding is limited to community-based groups, led by those most directly affected by the issues that the organization addresses, which engage in community organizing around social justice issues.
- ▶ The majority of our grants are for general operating funds, which provide grantees with the greatest degree of flexibility, and self-determination.
- ▶ Special consideration is given to groups committed to racial justice, especially those based in communities of color. This reflects an organizational commitment to combat racism by building political power in communities of color. Among organizations with primarily white constituencies, our grantmaking process prioritizes those that actively participate as white allies in racial justice struggles.
- ▶ We aim to distribute funds broadly throughout the region. While most community organizing funding criteria advantages urban organizations, we give special consideration to rural groups. This ensures the most even distribution of funds possible within our strategic priorities.
- ▶ Grants decisions are values based. We make grants to groups that share our values.

Why prioritize community organizing?

We prioritize those organizations whose primary work is building grassroots power by organizing people on the downside of power to act collectively, exercising power in numbers. We recognize that there are many other ways of making change happen and achieving important social justice victories. However, we prioritize community organizing because we believe that lasting change comes from the bottom-up, affecting not just the political and economic system but the culture of communities. We also believe that community organizing involves the most people, allowing for the greatest diversity and numbers of perspectives to be expressed. Community organizing is the exercise of democracy in action.

All grantees must demonstrate that they are community-based and led by the people most directly affected by the issues the organization is working on. “Leadership” is defined by membership on the board of directors *or its equivalent* in terms of policy-setting, governance, and other meaningful decision-making for the organization. Community-based organizations:

- empower those who have been left out of decision-making processes affecting their own lives,
- are democratically organized and responsive to their community’s needs,
- involve the affected community in shaping issue priorities and helping to sustain the organization, and
- develop and renew their own leadership from the community being organized.

We give the highest priority to organizations representing communities who have suffered from a historical pattern of discrimination resulting in impoverishment, vulnerability to abuse and economic

exploitation, continuing social prejudice, and/or outright disenfranchisement. We prioritize these groups because addressing their extreme vulnerability to injustice demands the most broad-reaching reforms with the most far-reaching political, economic, and social impacts.

Social Justice Fund gives particularly priority to organizations led by people of color, reflecting our members' moral and strategic commitment to racial justice. We believe that racism is among the most potent and divisive forces in society; it stands in the way of the broad unity necessary to build powerful and effective movements for progressive change.

Building a progressive vision of change:

We believe that justice requires the elimination of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status, economic status, religion, disability, age, or any other arbitrary prejudice that tends to create or perpetuate imbalances of power. We are against militarism and colonialism, and stand opposed to business and government practices that exploit workers, undermine cultural diversity and freedom of expression, damage the environment, limit the self-determination of people and the sovereignty of nations, and restrict fair and equitable access to the resources necessary to live full and meaningful lives.

We believe that basic needs such as health care, nutritious food, adequate shelter, meaningful education, full employment and equal employment opportunity, reproductive self-determination, and personal security are fundamental to living a full and meaningful life, and that the opportunity to live fully is a right rather than a privilege. The fair distribution of the resources necessary to insure these rights requires the full and equitable participation of everyone in democratic decision-making.

Social Justice Fund NW provides grants to groups that share our vision and use culturally competent, bottom-up educational strategies for popularizing and expanding this vision as an integral part of their organizing practice.

Investing on the cutting edge of change:

In addition to the philosophical considerations, our funding priorities reflect practical concerns. Community organizing is not generally supported by mainstream philanthropy. Even progressive funders often avoid funding grassroots groups because they either lack the capacity to make and monitor many small grants, or they are unwilling to face the risks involved in funding relatively fragile organizations.

With a membership spread out over the five states we fund, Social Justice Fund is able to make and monitor many small grants. Our members also recognize that the benefits of this strategy far out-weigh the risks. Grassroots groups facilitate participation by those who are the most affected by injustice, but who are the most likely to be excluded from efforts to seek out solutions. We believe that those who stand to gain the most from justice enrich the dialogue, bring new perspectives, and are more likely to introduce creative and effective solutions.

We don't believe this is the only work involved in building a progressive movement. But we do believe it is the work most lacking in broad support and most needing visionary, progressive philanthropy on its side to survive and thrive.