



# RESOURCING RURAL ORGANIZING INFRASTRUCTURE: A NEW YORK CASE STUDY

April 2021



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**INTEGRATED RURAL  
STRATEGIES GROUP**  
NEIGHBORHOOD FUNDERS GROUP

# FOREWORD

## A Message from NFG's Integrated Rural Strategies Group and Engage New York

Dear Friends,

We are glad you are here. There is work to do, and we need strategic thinkers and active participation to change the trajectory of rural America. While nearly one in five Americans lives in a rural community, less than 6 percent of philanthropic dollars is invested in these communities.<sup>1</sup> Of that small amount, only a fraction of those resources is directed to supporting community organizing work, particularly that led by and serving Indigenous, Black and rural communities of color. At the same time, research shows that the key to improving the conditions for communities impacted by injustice is by investing in community organizing, a practice that most funders do not fund. When you combine these facts, you will see why the contents of this report are key to unlocking solutions to improving the outcomes of rural America related to food systems, health, democracy, essential workers, water, climate change, and more.

In 2018, Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG) and Engage New York partnered to inform, connect, and mobilize

funders to shift how philanthropy is resourcing rural communities. The fact that you are reading this indicates that you understand the degree to which philanthropy overlooks and under-invests in rural communities, and perhaps you are equally concerned with the growing inequities rural communities face. Your foundation may be aware of how the intersections of racial inequities; persistent poverty; lack of access to healthcare, education, transportation, and quality employment; and the impacts of a changing climate are experienced in compounded and disproportionate degrees by rural people. And you may be asking, “What can philanthropy do?”

It is our hope and goal that this report serves as a guide – an *action agenda* – for funders. We offer it as a tool deepen philanthropy’s understanding of the landscape and context in which rural communities can, and should, participate in the design, implementation, and enforcement of people-centered policies to address the inequities faced by rural Americans. This report is purposefully thorough to provide the reader the opportunity to gain a comprehensive look at how rural organizers are managing and thinking about their work, and how they see their work in the larger nonprofit ecosystem.

The enclosed report is divided into five sections to allow the reader to process the information, dissect the findings and develop questions relevant to your own foundation as it considers ways to adopt the report’s recommendations. The report encourages your foundation to consider how it might change its policies, approaches, and grantmaking so that leaders in rural communities have the resources, tools, and relationships to address the needs in their communities. To achieve this, the report

<sup>1</sup> Grants by large foundations during the period 2005-2010 going to rural organizations. Grants from smaller foundations to rural communities were slightly higher, at 7.5 percent in 2005 and 7 percent in 2009. John L. Pender. *Foundation Grants to Rural Areas From 2005 to 2010: Trends and Patterns*. USDA Economic Research Service, 2015. [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/43991/53166\\_eib141.pdf](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/43991/53166_eib141.pdf)

calls on foundations to create deeper bonds with rural leaders via authentic relationships and equitable access to funding opportunities, technical assistance resources, and participation in statewide tables.

**NFG, through its Integrated Rural Strategies Group, and Engage New York are committed to supporting philanthropy to actualize the findings and recommendations presented here.** While this report uses rural organizing infrastructure in New York State as a case study, its contents are readily

adaptable for funders doing work nationally or with a place-based focus elsewhere. It is our intention to develop complementary resources, toolkits, and programming to build a community of practice for funders across the country to put this report's words into action. We know your foundation cares about democracy, equity, and justice. There is an urgency to this work. We invite you to join us to learn, build relationships, and take action in support of thriving rural communities.

In community,



**LINDSAY RYDER**

*Senior Program Manager  
Integrated Strategies Group  
Neighborhood Funders Group*



**LISA FASOLO FRISHMAN**

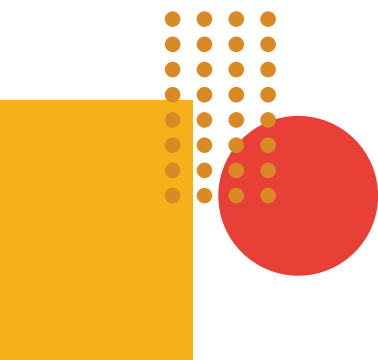
*Project Director  
Engage New York*



*Photos: New York State  
Summit hosted by IRSG and  
Engage NY in 2019*

*narrative shift  
around what  
access, inequity &  
poverty look like @  
a real rural level  
(Gifford)*

*Intentional &  
inclusive  
Comm. engagement*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York State's progressive movement has accomplished much in recent years, including passage of the Driver's License Access and Privacy Act (Green Light NY), the Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act (FLFLPA), and the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). These three examples demonstrate the capability of people-powered movements to effect social change. The ability to grow and sustain a progressive movement in New York State will depend on the strength of organizing infrastructure in rural communities and the grassroots groups that organize within those rural communities. Furthermore, the ability to achieve equitable outcomes through policy implementation and enforcement will require robust organizing infrastructure throughout all regions of New York State. The demographic, social and political landscape in all of New York State is changing. With it comes tremendous opportunity to create a more equitable future by shifting power to the people and communities most impacted by injustice, specifically Black, Indigenous and people of color (POC). But continued progress is not a certainty; it will take dedicated and coordinated efforts by many individuals

and organizations over the long term to achieve transformational change.

Interviewees for this landscape scan described the status quo in philanthropy, broadly speaking, as centered on transactional models for power building and systems change. Without an intentional focus on equity, funders risk slipping into the mindset of "What do we get for our money?" and approaching prospective grantees with the attitude "How would you like to fit into our model?" Funders will need to embrace a transformational movement approach to create a more equitable future for all New Yorkers. This requires establishing a servant-leader relationship with the communities that funders seek to support. To achieve this, interviewees suggested funders ask grassroots organizations questions such as, "How may we help you to achieve your goals?" and "What do you need us to do?"

Most importantly, funders must ensure that grantmaking to increase equity is in itself done fairly. Grassroots organizations that are rural, led by people of color (POC),



Catskill Mountainkeeper is on the steering committee of NY Renums and their coalition was one of several that had the strongest case and methodology for bottom-up agenda setting (they use the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing). Graphic Recording by Chrissie Bonner of Illustrating Progress. NY Renums, Bottom Up Climate Policy.

or just newer face challenges in accessing funding. Evidence shows that funding cycles reinforce legacy policy and advocacy organizations, which are often urban-based and white-led, at the expense of rural, POC-led and newer organizations. When this occurs, it often sidelines the importance of lived experience and fails to center the work on the communities most impacted by injustice. Every effort should be made to create on-ramp opportunities for underrepresented rural, POC-led, and newer grassroots organizations to achieve sustainable funding for their long-term work.

To help build the infrastructure for transformational change, funders should prioritize: 1) allocating multi-year, general operating grants that fill regional and other gaps in rural community organizing and base-building work, 2) addressing the technical assistance and capacity-building

needs of rural organizers, and 3) helping rural organizers connect to or build statewide tables to advance the progressive movement across New York. To do this well, funders will need to deepen their understanding of place and community across rural New York; structure grants to help build power from the bottom up; and coordinate and align grantmaking across a network of funders to build end-to-end infrastructure for people-powered progressive movements.

# BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

It is widely recognized that rural communities play a vital role in advancing - or stalling - statewide progressive systems change. Despite that, philanthropy has historically underinvested in community organizing and power building in rural communities. In response, the Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG) and Engage New York (ENY) have jointly commissioned this landscape scan to elevate the work and needs of rural community organizers and grassroots groups. NFG and ENY recognize the need for system change propelled by the people power of oppressed communities and acknowledge the increasing rural diversity of New York's rural communities.<sup>2</sup> As such, this landscape scan has prioritized the input of organizations led by people of color wherever possible.

The four goals for this landscape scan are:

- 1) Actionable recommendations for resourcing multiracial organizing infrastructure in rural New York;

<sup>2</sup> For more information on demographic change in New York State please refer to: Karen Scharff and Darren Sandow. *Big Apple Turnover: A Philanthropic Recipe*.

- 2) A greater understanding of the rural “ecosystem” of philanthropy, organizing and statewide advocacy;
- 3) Identification of the challenges and opportunities that exist when implementing progressive policy change in rural New York;
- 4) An inventory of rural organizations and community leaders who center their work on Black, Indigenous and people of color communities.

To achieve these goals, 26 community organizers and advocates participated in a total of 30 hours of interviews. Individual interviews ranged from 40 minutes to two-and-a-half hours, with most running for about an hour.<sup>3</sup> Initial interviews were seeded by grassroots organizations that contributed to the campaigns for the Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act (FLFLPA), the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), and the Driver's License Access and Privacy Act (Green Light NY). Additional interviews were scheduled using snowball sampling, with each interviewee providing several referrals to other grassroots and community organizing groups across rural New York.

The snowball method yielded the following sample of grassroots organizations:<sup>4</sup>

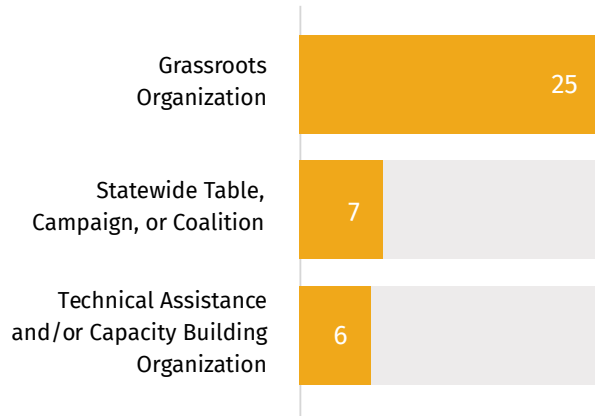
<sup>3</sup> The interview and coding protocol for the landscape scan is included in Appendix 2

<sup>4</sup> A full listing of organizations included in this landscape scan can be found in Appendix 1

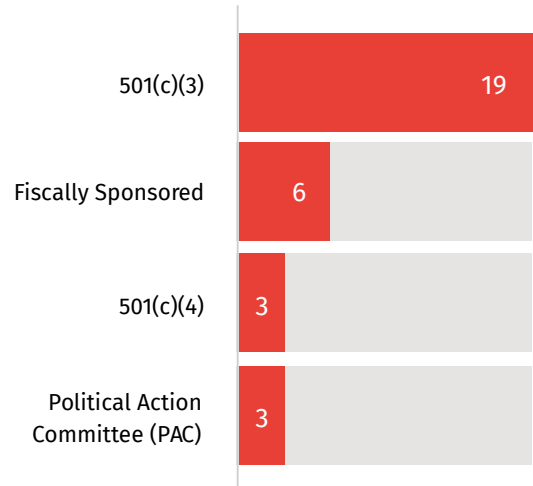
## Organization Leadership by Race



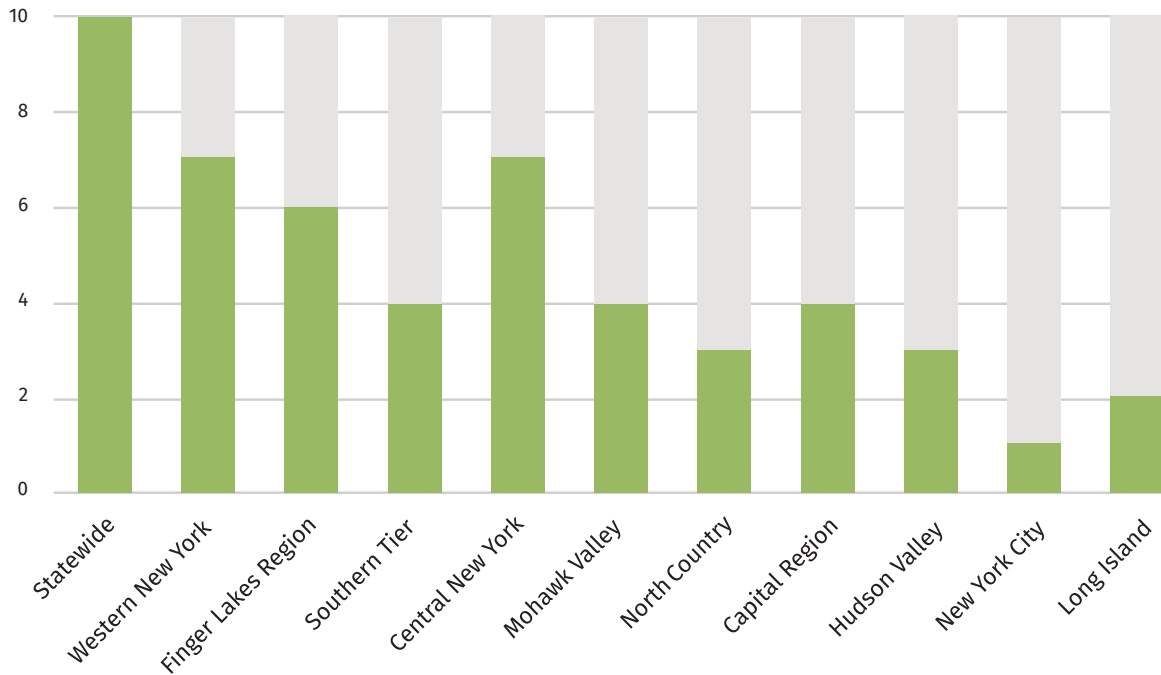
## Organizations by Type of Work



## Organizations by Tax-Exempt Status (including affiliate organizations)

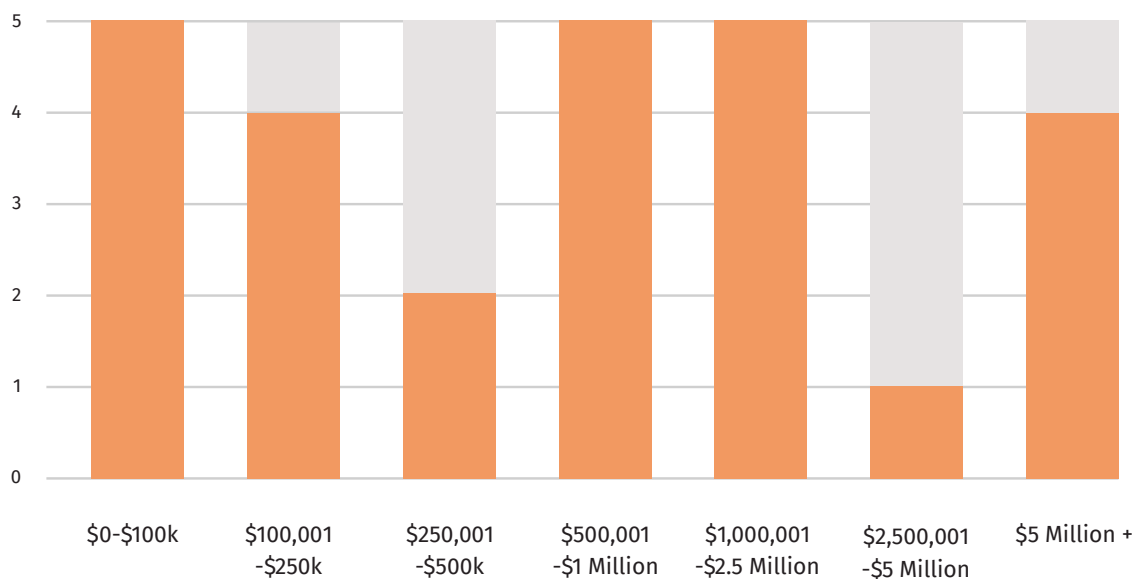


## Organization Presence by Region



## Organizations by Budget Size

(Median Budget \$586,500)



For this landscape scan, “rural” was defined using the Census Bureau definition: any area that is not urban.<sup>5</sup> Not all organizations interviewed are located in rural communities. Technical assistance and capacity-building organizations and the main hubs for statewide campaigns are often based in urban communities. Furthermore, several statewide campaigns involve coordinated grassroots engagement that crosses urban and rural boundaries. Lastly, several organizations engage in rural organizing but have offices in more urban areas.

Through the interview process the following thematic areas emerged:

- 1) Characteristics of New York’s Rural Communities and Rural Organizing
- 2) Policy Priorities for Rural New York

- 3a) Rural Organizers’ Technical Assistance and Capacity-Building Needs
- 3b) Developing, Using and Aligning the Full Range of Vehicles for Advocacy
- 4a) Transactional Models vs. Transformational Movements
- 4b) Funder Focus: Transactional Models vs. Transformational Movements
- 4c) Statewide Table Focus: Transactional Models vs. Transformational Movements

<sup>5</sup> Judy Hatcher. *Voices from the Field: Rural Organizers on What They Need from Funders*. Neighborhood Funders Group, 2018. <https://www.nfg.org/resources/voices-from-the-field>

# CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL COMMUNITIES AND RURAL ORGANIZING

## **Power of Personal Relationships When Starting Out**

**47 Mentions, 16 Interviews (64%)**

The most common topic discussed regarding the characteristics of rural communities and rural organizing was the importance of personal relationships. Respondents said all community organizing work is based on developing public relationships to build power and exercise that power for positive change in their communities. Expanding on this idea, respondents discussed the camaraderie among people in smaller rural communities, a sense of knowing everyone and sharing a common local identity. Many interviewees discussed how their organizations benefited from their first organizers bringing an existing network of connections and of being “a known entity” in the community they sought to organize. Several respondents attributed the existing relationships of their first organizers as being a significant

determinant of success in their organization’s fledgling years.

## **Community Recognition of the Organization’s Leadership**

**29 Mentions, 13 Interviews (52%)**

Slightly more than half of the respondents talked about how it took several years of base-building and advocacy<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this landscape scan, advocacy is defined broadly using the Bolder Advocacy definition: *Advocacy can take many forms. In simple terms, it means making the case for your cause or mission. When we talk about advocacy for nonprofits, we usually mean making your case in a way that will change public policy to help your cause. That means reaching audiences in a position to help make those changes. Advocacy could be any one of a number of things from research and public education to lobbying elected officials and voter engagement. These activities are especially important when you want to make sure that underrepresented and vulnerable communities have a voice in decisions that affect them.* For additional information refer to: <https://bolderadvocacy.org/advocacy-defined/>



Photo: SEPA Mujer canvassing and community outreach

work before becoming widely known as leaders on the issues they sought to address in the community. Furthermore, they said that once their organization achieved that “go-to” status in their community, it served as a momentum-building tipping point for their local advocacy work. Interviewees also discussed how achieving and maintaining this community recognition requires the organization to have in-depth knowledge of the local community, including its people, history, challenges and opportunities. While respondents agreed that this was vital to their work, one respondent expressed frustration in accessing funding, saying, “It can just be really challenging to bridge the gap between giving a good statistical sort of analysis of what was accomplished versus a personal anecdote. . . it can be hard to represent what sort of change got created [because] you don’t get specifically funded to build an organization that people now know as the go-to resource [in the community] when there’s nobody else to go to.”<sup>7</sup>

Having this unofficial recognition as the local leader was also helpful when these organizations chose to get involved in statewide coalitions for policy change. When an organization is trusted in the community, it increases the likelihood of buy-in by local partner organizations on statewide policy campaigns. Additionally, when these leaders represent their communities and members on a statewide issue, the local knowledge and credibility they bring to the table cannot be quickly or easily “astroturfed” by a statewide campaign or advocacy organization. Because of these dynamics, respondents suggested that statewide policy campaigns include rural communities at the outset,<sup>8</sup> identifying and inviting organizations seen as local leaders before setting statewide policy agendas. Respondents also suggested that policy agendas be set in a bottom-up or participatory fashion.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>The sentiment in this quote is further explored throughout the *Funder Focus* section, particularly *Burdensome and Unaligned Grant Applications and Reporting*, and *Charity Mindset*.

<sup>8</sup>See *Statewide Table Focus* section: *NYC-Centric Attitude with Upstate Afterthought* for additional information on including rural communities early in the agenda-setting process.

<sup>9</sup>See *Statewide Table Focus* section: *Need for Greater Use of Bottom-Up/Participatory Agenda Setting* for additional information on grassroots-centered agenda setting for statewide policy campaigns

## Rural Isolation and Opportunities for Empowerment

28 Mentions, 13 Interviews (52%)

These respondents discussed how rural communities can feel incredibly isolating for members of BIPOC, Queer, and migrant populations. Additionally, there are limited options and access to employment, transportation and human services in rural communities, which causes many people to feel trapped in a bad situation. Among the examples raised in interviews: employers committing wage theft and getting away with it due to the limited availability of workers’ employment alternatives; migrant farmworkers who are rarely able to leave the farms where they live and work;<sup>10</sup> victims of domestic and gender violence without access to support services including shelters; new Americans who have limited English proficiency and no language access in rural communities, including at local government offices and nonprofit service providers. All of these characteristics contribute to feelings of isolation, being trapped and general disempowerment.

However, nearly all these respondents also described how becoming a member of a community organization, participating in power-building efforts, and then exercising power through direct action, lobbying or electoral work, can completely transform a person’s outlook and instill a sense of empowerment and hope. Several respondents, particularly those working in BIPOC communities, said they start organizing activities by focusing on trauma healing as the first step to feeling empowered. Respondents noted that policy campaigns could take years to achieve “success.” Still, the experience of becoming an involved member of a grassroots organization can have an immediate transformational impact on an individual and their family. While these efforts are critically important to building power for transformational movements they are all too often underfunded in rural communities.

<sup>10</sup> For more information, refer to: Carly Fox, Rebecca Fuentes, Fabiola Ortiz Valdez, Gretchen Purser and Kathleen Sexsmith. *Milked: Immigrant Dairy Farmworkers in New York State*. 2017. [https://nmcdrn.io/e186d21f8c7946a19faed23c3da2f0da/a29f2f1c37e543079c60fb7823277a44/files/resources/milked-immigrant-dairy-farmworkers-in-new-york-state/milked\\_053017.pdf](https://nmcdrn.io/e186d21f8c7946a19faed23c3da2f0da/a29f2f1c37e543079c60fb7823277a44/files/resources/milked-immigrant-dairy-farmworkers-in-new-york-state/milked_053017.pdf)

## From the Roots: Holistic Approaches to Building Power

Joe Soto, of the Traditional Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Healing, said this when discussing trauma healing work through connecting people to the land, growing food and Indigenous sovereignty:

“When people come to the land to get involved in growing their own food, and they’re going through their own stuff [with trauma], whatever it is, there’s an almost immediate change of behavior and attitude. All of a sudden, this person, whether male or female, or a young person, we started to see them being withdrawn or depressed or upset, and you know after an hour or two start to speak more, sharing more, doing more. Then when they see what they’re growing is actually coming out of the ground, there’s a complete change of attitude.”

As described by Martha Maffei of SEPA Mujer,

“It is beautiful because you can see the whole transformation. Somebody reaches out to you for services, maybe somebody that was in a shelter, maybe somebody that was in crisis, maybe somebody that has all the needs you can imagine escaping domestic violence, but they got involved in the organization. They know, as they meet a group of other women that went through the same situation, that they speak the same language, have the same culture, and they find a network of support that many of us, we don’t have a family in this country, you know, so the organization became that. You can see this transformation of becoming a survivor of domestic violence but also becoming a leader in your community. So, we have members that are now organizers and others who work and lead in other organizations that were former clients.”

### Importance of Being from the Local Community

15 Mentions, 11 Interviews (44%)

Building on the earlier topic of personal relationships, close to half of the interviewees discussed how important it is to hire rural organizers from the local community. Interviewees provided examples of times when organizations brought in organizers from another part of the state, especially an urban rather than rural area,

and how they struggled to build rapport with community members.<sup>11</sup> Respondents spoke about organizers hired from elsewhere and how they frequently are seen as “outsiders,” who may have significant difficulty building a base due to a lack of trust. One respondent reflected on the outsider dynamic while working in Penn Yan, NY: “...I could live here for 50 years, and I’m still [seen as]

<sup>11</sup> See *Advocacy Organization Lack of Consistent Local Presence* for additional information on top-down models of “parachuting” organizers into rural communities for short term issue-based campaigns



Photo: In March 2020, the Citizen Action-Western New York Chapter endorsed Adam Bojak, a tenants' rights attorney and an outspoken progressive activist, for NYS Assembly.

the new kid on the block.” Another respondent noted, “It’s authenticity. You know I live here, I have a local reputation, I live on family land, and so I’m rooted in this place. . . it’s not just a job because there’s a career opportunity, you know, or a stepping stone to someplace else.”

### **Cultural Differences across Rural Communities**

**11 Mentions, 9 Interviews (36%)**

Interviewees discussed the significant differences in the cultures of various rural communities and regions across New York State. All nine respondents stressed that rural New York is not a monolith. They asked urban-based community organizations, funders, technical assistance providers, and statewide tables not to paint rural communities with a broad brush. Respondents discussed the difference in the culture of rural communities in the Hudson Valley compared to that of the North Country; they also pointed out that rural communities surrounding Ithaca can differ from others in large swaths of the Southern Tier and the Finger Lakes. Due to these cultural distinctions, different regions of the state may be more or less receptive to progressive policy change and to various types of direct-action tactics. Rural New York is no exception.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See *Negative Reaction to Direct Action in Some Rural Communities* for

### **The Necessity of Developing Partnerships**

**12 Mentions, 7 Interviews (28 %)**

These respondents discussed how a lack of financial resources combined with large geographic footprints requires organizations to partner with each other out of necessity, such as having grassroots organizations work with direct-service organizations. Working together, grassroots organizations can help direct-service agencies achieve greater reach within affected populations; in turn, direct-service groups can help grassroots organizations identify potential new members. In other cases, it also becomes necessary, for financial reasons, for direct-service work and organizing to take place within the same entity. As one respondent explained, “There aren’t that many of us doing this work in the large geography outside of New York City . . . and it’s something that makes us unique because we do provide direct services and that brings us into contact with a lot of service providers that aren’t necessarily able to do the direct advocacy work, but that turn to us for leadership and expertise, both on legal issues and on public policy.”<sup>13</sup> Interviewees also described a general openness to working with any organization that

additional information on how cultural differences in rural communities can impact the effectiveness of direct action

<sup>13</sup> While this quote speaks to building partnerships out of necessity to stretch resources further given the scope and scale of the work, it also speaks to *Community Recognition of the Organization’s Leadership*, which was explored earlier in the report.

shares their values and goals. They said they must be open to partnership because the need is too great relative to their capacity to “go it alone.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Geographic Sprawl of Rural New York** **12 Mentions, 6 Interviews (24%)**

Unlike densely populated cities, rural areas have lower population densities and significantly more land. As a result, rural grassroots organizations must cover a considerably larger physical footprint to build a similarly sized base as an urban grassroots organization. At least two respondents described how they spent at least two hours providing transportation for every hour spent in an organizing meeting with their members. Another respondent noted that a statewide policy campaign’s meetings in New York City could be scheduled with only a few days’ notice and still achieve high turnout rates. In contrast, similar meetings in rural parts of New York might take weeks of planning and coordination due to logistical challenges surrounding transportation, employment schedules, child care and other issues. Several respondents wanted to impress upon funders that due to differences in population density and geography, it could take longer to achieve similar organizing outcomes in rural communities than in larger metro areas.

### **Negative Reaction to Direct Action in Some Rural Communities** **12 Mentions, 6 Interviews (24%)**

These respondents described how they found aspects of direct action to be off-putting in their communities and counterproductive to achieving their goals. Much of this was attributed to rural communities being small and having the sense that everyone knows each other; thus confrontational tactics can alienate those who otherwise might have joined a campaign’s efforts. One respondent explained what happens when their organization engages in these tactics, “. . . It just makes us seem like jerks.” While this was true for some respondents, others described how direct action work was vital to their

<sup>14</sup> The general openness of many rural organizers to work with anyone, largely out of necessity, stands in direct contrast to the dynamic some organizers describe regarding Statewide Tables in *Territorialism/Turf Issues*.

success. All respondents emphasized how important it is that the organization’s direct action work be rooted in a deep understanding of the local community and of the *Cultural Differences across Rural Communities*. The most significant examples cited of when this might go awry were statewide campaigns or non-grassroots advocacy organizations that temporarily “parachute” organizers into a rural community and engage in approaches that do not feel authentic or resonate with the local community.<sup>15</sup>

### **Faith-Based Partnerships** **7 Mentions, 5 Interviews (20%)**

Interviewees noted how critical partnerships with faith-based organizations, especially places of worship, can be in rural communities. Given a lack of investment in infrastructure building for community organizing across many parts of rural New York, churches and other places of worship often fill this role within their communities. The strong ties that places of worship have with their members provide an existing base ready to be mobilized. Frequently, houses of worship provide organizations with meeting space, child care or a free place to stay overnight when traveling to lobby days in Albany. That being said, examples also were cited when the participation of certain faith-based groups created challenges for intersectional organizing, particularly concerning LGBTQ issues and reproductive rights.

Faith-based partnerships have played, and will continue to play, an essential role in rural organizing and advocacy work. These partnerships, much like any other partnership, have worked best when there is upfront alignment on values and goals. When talking about the hesitance of working with faith-based organizations, one interviewee stated, “There probably are some organizations that are reluctant to reach out to faith communities because there’s an assumption that they’re the religious right.” The interviewee continued to provide a counter example: “Sure enough, when we had rallies in Albany, the church folk showed up. And we said [to the skeptics], that’s what happened in the civil rights movement, people of faith have a commitment. So, whether you stand with people of faith or not, it doesn’t

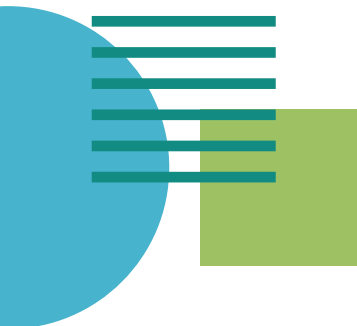
<sup>15</sup> See *Advocacy Organizations’ Lack of Consistent Local Presence* for additional information

really matter as an organizing strategy; people of faith show up. We see that on all sorts of issues, from the right and from the left.”

## **Recommendations**

### ***Develop a deep understanding of place and community***

- ▶ Program officers should dedicate time to build a deep understanding of the communities supported through organizing grants
- ▶ Grantmaking strategies should acknowledge that rural communities, like urban communities, are not monolithic
- ▶ Foundations should give deference to local organizers and organizations; they are the foremost experts of their communities and their own lived experience
- ▶ Funders should recognize that organizing models will differ across communities and cultures; for example, trauma healing work may be most effective in one community, while door-to-door canvassing and phone banking may be more productive in another community
- ▶ Building grassroots power will take time and resources; there are no sustainable short cuts through top-down technocratic funding strategies



## 2 – POLICY PRIORITIES FOR RURAL NEW YORK

Respondents were asked to describe the most salient policy issues facing rural New York, and a wide array of responses and ideas were raised. It is important to note that there are diverse needs across the various regions of New York and among different sub-populations and communities within those regions. It is also important to point out that no single policy issue was raised by a majority of respondents. That being said, the largest

plurality of responses (11 interviewees or 44 percent of the sample) concerned the lack of opportunities to earn a living wage and lack of access to reliable and affordable transportation in rural New York.

The table below delineates the array of responses regarding the policy priorities of rural communities in New York:

Rural Policy Areas	Total Number of Mentions	Total Number of Interviews	Percentage of Interviews
Living Wage	18	11	44%
Transportation	17	11	44%
Driver's License Access and Privacy Act Implementation	31	10	40%
Immigration	31	10	40%
Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act Implementation	26	10	40%
Worker Justice	17	10	40%
Healthcare Affordability and Access	15	8	32%
Digital Divide/Broadband Access	13	8	32%
Food System – Sustainability and Resilience	13	8	32%
Community-Supported Agriculture	19	7	28%
Carceral System Reform	14	7	28%
Housing	14	7	28%
Climate	11	7	28%
Support for Existing and New Farmers of Color	22	6	24%

Rural Policy Areas	Total Number of Mentions	Total Number of Interviews	Percentage of Interviews
Language Access	18	6	24%
Deportation/ICE	11	6	24%
Farmland Access/Farmland Preservation	13	5	20%
Education Access	7	5	20%
Environmental Justice	5	5	20%
Census Equity/Complete Count	8	4	16%
Energy	9	3	12%
Soil Health	7	3	12%
Indigenous Justice	5	3	12%
Domestic Violence/Gender Justice	8	3	12%
Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act Implementation	5	2	8%
NY HERO Act	4	2	8%
White Nationalism	2	2	8%
Access to Mental Health Services	1	1	4%
Opioid Addiction	2	1	4%
Student Loan Debt	1	1	4%
Securing Wages Earned Against Theft (SWEAT) Bill Campaign	1	1	4%
Universal Legal Representation for Immigration	1	1	4%

## Recommendations

### ***Funding strategies should center on building power rather than specific policy issues***

- ▶ Policy-specific funding makes it more difficult for grantees to build intersectional movements given issue-specific funding limitations
- ▶ Multiracial and intersectional organizing can build more sustainable power over the long run than issue-specific organizing and advocacy
- ▶ Grassroots organizations build power and set agendas based on the needs and desires of their members; however, their members do not experience challenges in isolated ways

## RURAL ORGANIZERS' TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY-BUILDING NEEDS

One theme that emerged strongly was the need for additional technical assistance and capacity building for organizing and advocacy work in rural communities. Twenty-one interviewees (84 percent of the sample) saw this as a critical need. The specific technical assistance and capacity-building needs are explored in the following sections.

### **Transitioning to Digital Organizing**

**44 Mentions, 20 Interviews (80%)**

The COVID pandemic has upended traditional ways of working in virtually every sector, and organizing and advocacy work has proven to be no different. Many respondents discussed how they had transitioned much of their in-person organizing work to digital organizing with varying degrees of success. Some organizations were already using significant digital engagement and communication tools before the pandemic.

Yet for every organization that was either well prepared or managed to transition quickly, many others have struggled with identifying and scaling digital organizing tools now that in-person interactions have been significantly reduced. Furthermore, while digital organizing tools are helpful for working with an existing member base, many grassroots organizations that have recently launched or are looking to expand are having difficulty growing their base through exclusively digital channels.

Across nearly all interviews, respondents thought that hybrid models of digital and in-person organizing would become a permanent fixture of their organizing work. Given the transportation challenges and the *Geographic Sprawl of Rural New York*, digital organizing may be of particular value for rural organizations.<sup>16</sup> Respondents suggested that peer learning, sharing and training in digital organizing tactics would be immensely beneficial. Organizations could learn from one another's successes and failures rather than have each organization reinvent the wheel in isolation.

### **Making Connections across the State**

**44 Mentions, 19 Interviews (76%)**

Most respondents discussed the need for assistance in making connections across the state. Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ) organizers working on public transportation issues in Buffalo have been looking to identify similar organizations in other parts of the state that are also focused on transportation policy issues. Organizers from Black Love Resists in the Rust (BLRR) and the Alliance of Families for Justice (AFJ) emphasized the need for urban-based carceral system reform

<sup>16</sup> While this landscape scan surfaced many examples of rural organizers using technology and digital engagement tactics to overcome transportation and other barriers, it is not a universal solution as one-third of respondents described rural broadband access and the digital divide as a key policy area to be addressed.

## The Power of Digital Organizing

Food for the Spirit's use of Zoom was always necessary, given that its membership lives across the state. When the pandemic struck, Food for the Spirit had an easier time transitioning to digital organizing due to its prior use of a hybrid online and in-person organizing model.

Before the pandemic, the Worker Center of Central New York addressed its members' transportation challenges by creating online communities through secure mobile communications apps such as *WhatsApp*. This approach made sustaining engagement during the pandemic a bit easier.

Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson, with support from the New York Civic Engagement Table, has made enormous strides in digital organizing work, which has also created subsequent benefits for its data tracking and analysis. Through tools such as the relational organizing application Reach, the phone banking platform ThruTalk, and the campaign texting platform Spoke, volunteers have made 265,000 calls and sent 620,00 texts as part of their campaign work.

organizations to work in partnership with rural groups, especially in rural communities currently dependent on the prison economy. AFJ is headquartered in New York City, but has an organizer in Ithaca due to the number of prisons located in more rural areas of the state. And Black Farmers United NYS is working to build its membership in every region of New York. Given the challenges of rural isolation, rural organizers are seeking help in finding counterparts in other communities to create statewide campaigns and benefit from peer learning and support when confronting new challenges.

### Expanding Power Building and Base-Building Work

**56 Mentions, 18 Interviews (72%)**

Respondents noted that more organizers are needed to expand power building and base-building work to more regions of the state and to deepen engagement levels in each region. While respondents discussed the need for more organizers everywhere, nearly all respondents acknowledged that there is very little funding to meet the level of need in rural communities. This was the topic mentioned most often in the entire landscape scan.

### Small Organizations with Limited Capacity

**49 Mentions, 16 Interviews (64%)**

Nearly two-thirds of interviewees described their organizations, or critical partner organizations, as being small and having limited capacity. Several felt they did not have enough funding to maintain adequate staffing levels, with a few organizations unable to maintain paid staffing consistently. These respondents' most significant need is for substantially more funding for community organizers across rural New York. Some organizations noted re-grants from statewide tables to compensate for time participating in those tables as being helpful. Still, given difficulties maintaining a sufficient staffing level, they suggested it would be more useful to get direct funding for a full-time organizer independent of any requirements to participate in statewide tables.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See *Funder Focus: Transactional Models vs. Transformational Movements*, especially *Long-Term View and Multi-Year Funding*, *Funding the Grassroots Directly*, and *General Operating Support* for additional information on structuring grant support to build organizational capacity.

## A Winning Formula: Policy Wins + Rural Organizing = Equitable Implementation

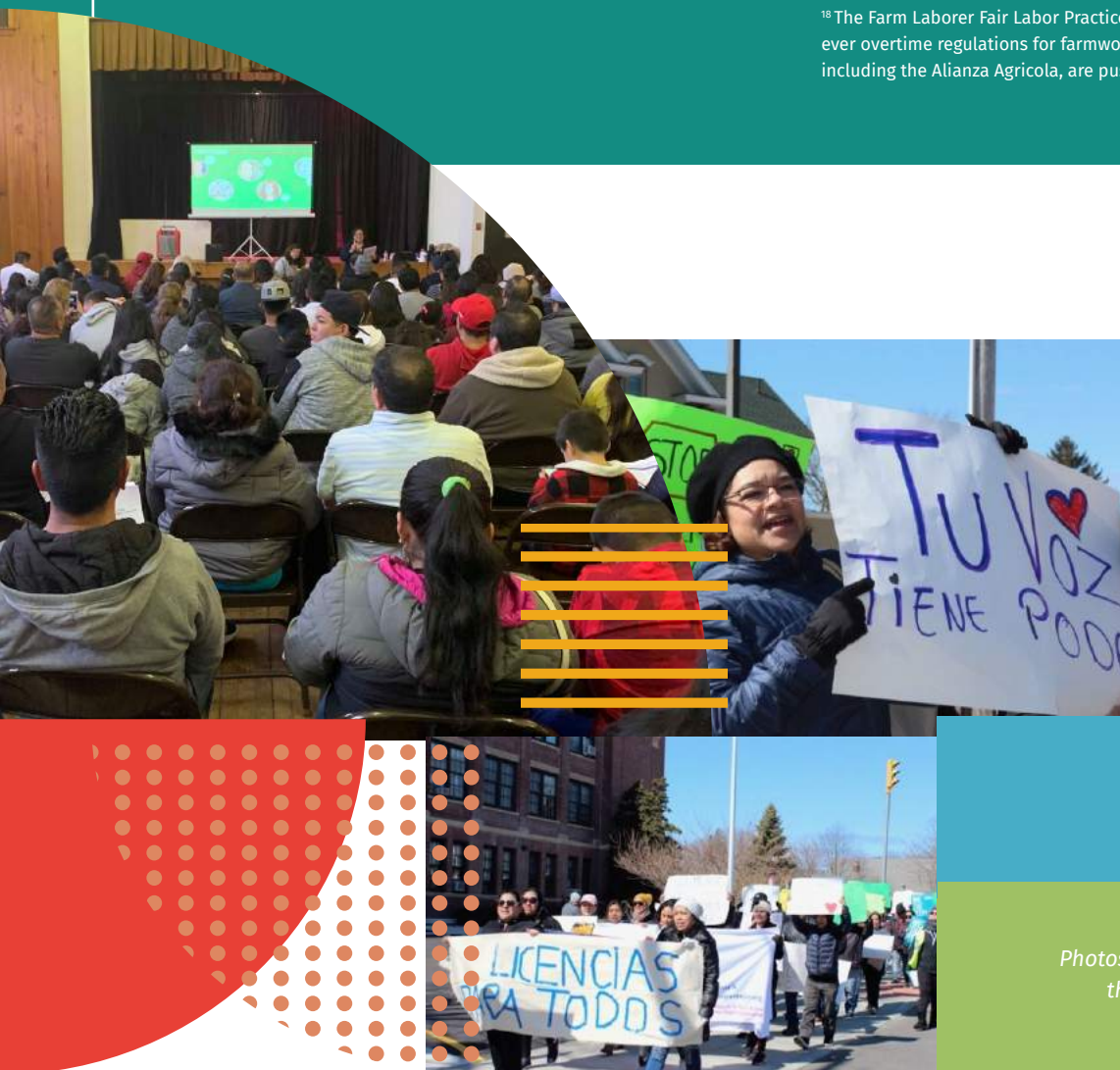
Several interviewees acknowledged that investing resources in another locality might be wiser during a policy campaign; however, without parallel investments in all regions to prepare for implementation, the necessary organizing infrastructure may not be in place to ensure that policies are applied effectively and equitably. Interviewees explained that organizing infrastructure is a prerequisite to holding officials accountable for policy implementation in all regions. As an example, several respondents described how some county clerks were at best dragging their heels and, at worst, directly impeding the implementation of driver's license access for undocumented New Yorkers as required again by the Driver's License Access and Privacy Act (Greenlight NY).

A few respondents noted that rural organizations are uniquely situated to help turn out their base when regulations are being drafted and public comment periods are open after a legislative win. As one respondent shared:

“ *There will be some public comment periods that are an opportunity to organize in rural areas. [The public comment hearings provide] an opportunity to raise your voice too. . . whereas a lot of the work has been in urban areas that are an easy place to get 500 people in the street. . . rallying around something and going to an elected official's office. That's just harder to do in a rural area. I can't get 500 people outside Senator Gillibrand's office; it wouldn't happen.* ”

Another example cited was Alianza Agrícola's work to compel the Department of Labor's Wage Board to bring parity to farmworker overtime regulations.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The Farm Laborer Fair Labor Practices Act (FLFLPA) established first-ever overtime regulations for farmworkers at 60 hours a week; advocates, including the Alianza Agrícola, are pushing for the 40-hour standard



Photos: SEPA Mujer organizing during the Greenlight NY campaign

## **Need for Focus on Policy Implementation and Regulation in Rural New York**

**48 Mentions, 12 Interviews (48%)**

These respondents stated that there is not enough focus on policy implementation work in rural communities. Several respondents expressed their belief that an over-emphasis on passing legislation without sufficient attention to its implementation reduces the effect of its intended impact. Furthermore, several respondents said they felt investments in base building and organizing in their communities were insufficient because a power analysis determined that their elected officials were not likely “winnable.”

## **Organizer Development Pipeline and Retention**

**28 Mentions, 11 Interviews (44%)**

Slightly less than half of the interviewees discussed challenges and successes with hiring, training/developing and retaining community organizers. Larger, older, and well-funded organizations tended to address all organizer training and development in-house with as-needed supplementation by organizations such as the Midwest Academy or the Highlander Center. Smaller, newer, and less funded organizations had a nearly diametric experience. Due to limited funding for organizing in rural communities, several respondents described their organizations as primarily direct-service organizations that had expanded to include community organizing work over time. These organizations explained how it was challenging to find experienced community organizers since there were few within a reasonable driving distance to meet with, learn from or receive peer support. This operating reality leads to a highly isolating experience that makes it difficult for some organizations, especially direct-service organizations, to sustain organizing work.

Other, newer grassroots organizations said it was difficult to expand paid organizing work beyond the initial founders of the organization.

Related to *Making Connections across the State*, in particular building partnerships around policy issues, many respondents discussed the desire for organizers to connect with one another to ask questions, seek support and guidance, and engage in peer learning. Virtual learning opportunities and training for digital organizing and engagement tactics were presented as concrete examples of how organizers across regions could come together.<sup>19</sup>

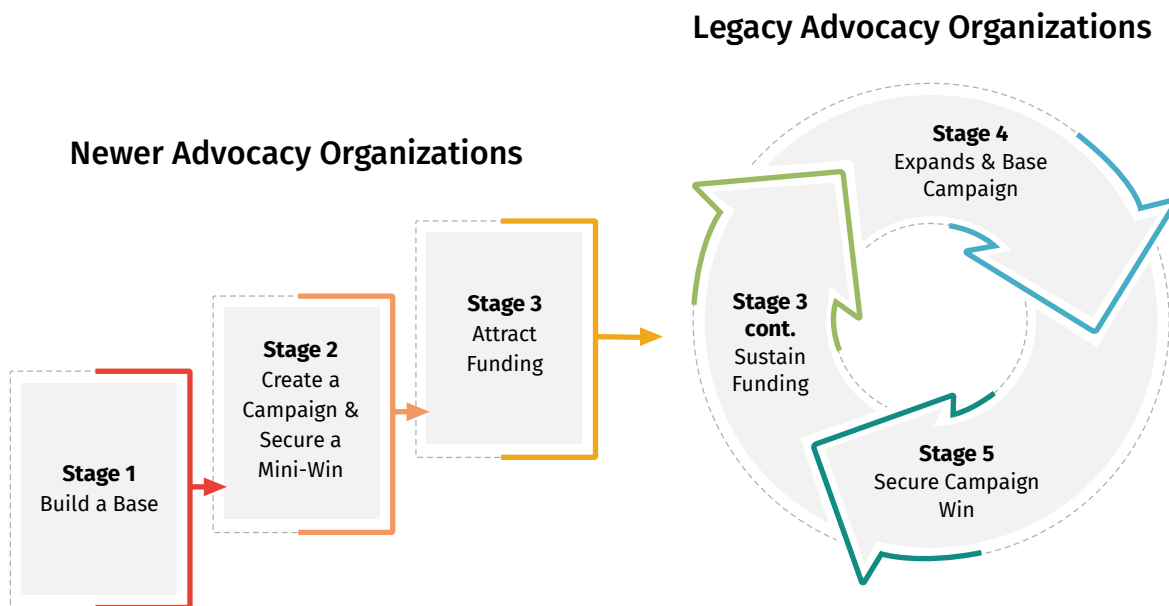
## **Challenges due to Starting without Funding**

**17 Mentions, 11 Interviews (44%)**

Nearly half the interviewees discussed the frequency with which both local organizing and statewide campaigns have to start with little or no funding. A similar pattern emerged across interviews. Participants described having to build a base using volunteer time and monetary contributions, followed by getting “points on the board” via a clear campaign win. Most respondents provided examples where this process took three to four years of unpaid or underpaid work to achieve. Only after having accomplished this with little to no grant support did these organizations succeed in obtaining sustainable grant funding. This situation presents somewhat of a paradox because the funding and other resources that newer organizations have difficulty accessing are the same capacity-building resources that are often necessary to secure those “early wins.” Interviewees suggested that philanthropy set aside funding for new organizations and new campaigns, especially those in rural communities and those led by people of color.

<sup>19</sup> See *Transitioning to Digital Organizing* for additional information

## Note on Structural Inequalities to Accessing Funding



Respondents noted that legacy organizations are more likely to receive funding from foundations due, in part, to a prior grantor/grantee relationship and familiarity at the staff and board level; exposure to and history of collaborating with other legacy advocacy organizations, which may have a prior grantor/grantee relationship with the same or similar foundations; and a greater probability of using the relevant “funder jargon” to describe their work. Interviewees also observed that legacy organizations are frequently white-led, urban-based, well connected, and credentialed in technocratic approaches to change. Respondents from newer organizations or newer policy campaigns that are seeking to address unmet community needs through building power in oppressed communities said they do not have the same structural advantages as legacy organizations. Thus, they have a difficult time navigating the system and achieving sustainable funding, as shown in the chart on this page. Part of the challenge is that the sustainable funding dynamic appears to be a reinforcing feedback loop with few “on-ramp” opportunities.

While this dynamic creates barriers for newer organizations to access philanthropic funding, regardless of whether they are based in urban or rural communities, several respondents acknowledged the compounding barriers for rural organizations and organizations led by people of color.

Interviewees noted that rural organizations have their own barriers to funding as well. Rural organizations are less likely to be located in close physical proximity to their funders, have fewer social connections in common, and are more likely to work with other organizations that do not receive grants from the same funders. Therefore, organizations that are both newer and rural face multiple barriers to sustainable funding.

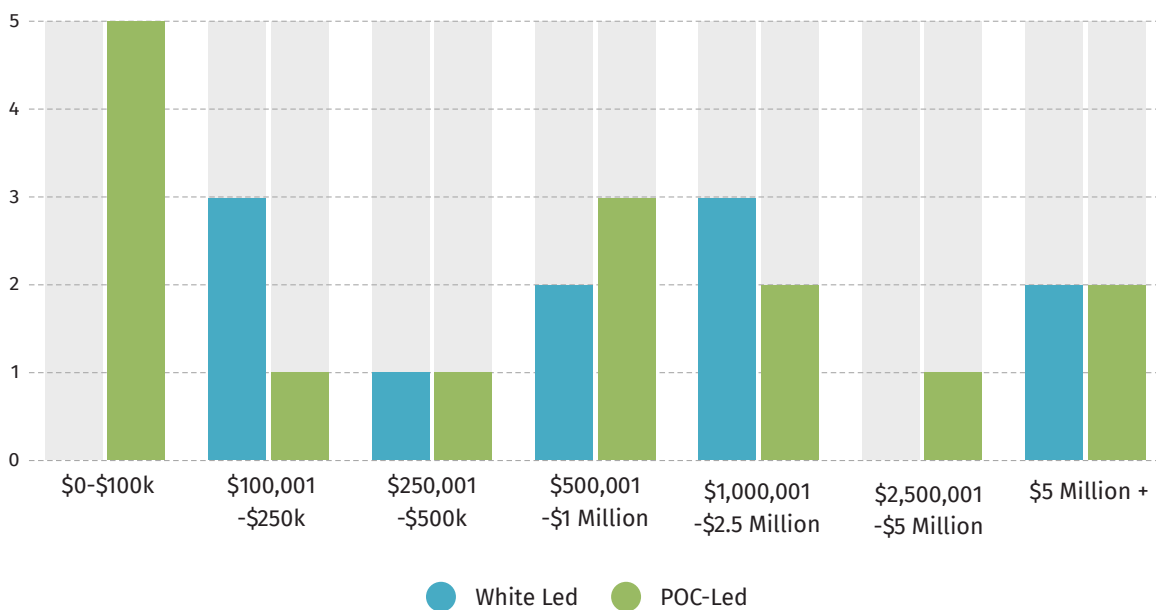
In addition to having few social or professional connections in common with funders and working primarily with other non-legacy organizations, interviewees from organizations led by people of color described employing tactics rooted in cultural practices

that run counter to established technocratic models preferred by some funders. While newer organizations deal with numerous obstacles to sustainable funding, those led by people of color in rural communities have the least amount of access.

Below is a chart of organizations included in this scan by budget size, cross-tabulated with the race of the

organization's leadership. People of color lead all organizations with budgets of \$100,000 or less. Thus, the dynamic described in this note likely exists across this sample. Funders should set aside funding in their grant portfolios for newer organizations and newer statewide campaigns. Funders also should be intentional in centering the needs of BIPOC-led and rural organizations for grants.

**Organizations by Budget Size and Race of Leadership**



## Fiscal Sponsorship Access and Implementation Challenges

19 Mentions, 8 Interviews (32%)

About one-third of interviewees talked about the importance of fiscal sponsorships as their organizations were getting started. Much like *Challenges due to Starting*

*without Funding*, a very similar pattern emerged across these interviews. Most described starting an organization via fiscal sponsorship, and within approximately three to five years deciding to pursue either 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) status, with 501(c)(3) being the most common by far. Around years five to seven, the organization would mature and scale, and afterward serve as the fiscal sponsor to a



Photo: Food for the Spirit's outreach efforts on behalf of the NYS Black Farmers Co-Op



Photo: Moss Family Fruits & Veggies, Albion, New York

## In Their Voice: Funder Recommendations Direct from BIPOC Organizers

In 2020, HEAL Food Alliance, Soul Fire Farm, Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust (NEFOC), and other BIPOC leaders in food and agriculture work issued a thoughtful critique of several of these funder dynamics.<sup>20</sup> Their letter offered suggestions on how funders can be more equitable in their food-system-related grantmaking. Their six recommendations have significant commonality with the feedback gathered through interviews for this report.

Those recommendations to funders are:

- 1) Cultivate authentic partnership with BIPOC communities by acknowledging the work of BIPOC-led orgs in these communities and listening to what they see on the ground and what their needs are;

- 2) Stop crafting RFP processes that are not equitable for and accessible for BIPOC-led orgs, and instead craft grantmaking strategies informed by community needs and shaped by BIPOC-led organizations accountable to frontline communities;
- 3) Stop funding larger, more well-resourced white-led orgs that put together proposals for work in communities of color;
- 4) Examine your own funding trends;
- 5) Invest in unrestricted multi-year grants and move towards using a participatory grantmaking model with BIPOC-led orgs from and doing work in BIPOC communities; and
- 6) Use the Justice Funders' "Just Transition for Philanthropy" framework and consult with Justice Funders and/or their members to support you on your journey.

<sup>20</sup> HEAL Food Alliance et al. An Open Letter from BIPOC Leaders in Food and Agriculture to Food Systems Funders. July, 10 2020. <https://healfoodalliance.org/an-open-letter-from-bipoc-leaders-in-food-agriculture-to-food-systems-funders/>

new group of organizations. While the exact time frames varied among interviewees, a clear pattern of these three stages of development emerged.

Organizations that followed this path pay it forward by supporting the next generation of organizers working on complementary policy issues. For other respondents, the inability to access a reasonably priced, simple-to-administer fiscal sponsorship remained one of the biggest hurdles to the sustainability of their organization. This was particularly the case in rural communities where awareness of and access to fiscal sponsorship opportunities appear more limited. A few downstate respondents discussed how the Lawyers Alliance for New York has helped guide them through processes like these. Farther upstate, there did not appear to be a universal go-to organization to help provide this type of support.

## **Lack of Policy Enforcement in Rural New York**

**7 Mentions, 6 Interviews (24%)**

Related to the *Need for Focus on Policy Implementation and Regulation in Rural New York*, about one in four respondents discussed their work to compel local and state governments to fully enforce existing law. These respondents described a lack of enforcement and oversight by government agencies in rural communities, bordering on neglect. Examples of remedies to this situation include media coverage of direct actions aimed at raising awareness and organizing to induce the NYS Attorney General's Office to pursue litigation. Such examples were seen most often among environmental and workers' rights organizations. One respondent said their organization rarely participated in statewide tables because their members saw more immediate value in compelling the government to enforce existing law in their community.

Photo: A young member of Rural & Migrant Ministry's 2020 Statewide Caravan in support of farmworkers during the pandemic



## DEVELOPING, USING AND ALIGNING THE FULL RANGE OF VEHICLES FOR ADVOCACY

Within the theme of supporting technical assistance and capacity building, a sub-theme emerged for developing, using and aligning organizing, policy and advocacy, and electoral strategies. These findings suggest that once organizations have established a base, many look for technical assistance in building out 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), and creating political action committees (PAC) for maximum effectiveness in their advocacy work. Other organizations choose to work in partnership or coalition with others to use and align each individual member organization's 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), and PAC activities across the coalition. Refer to *Appendix 3 – Developing, Using and Aligning the Full Range of Vehicles for Advocacy* for additional findings and recommendations.

### Recommendations

#### ***Increase support for organizers***

- ▶ Fund organizers
- ▶ Prioritize grassroots organizations that are BIPOC-led and located in rural communities as part of an equity-centered grantmaking framework
- ▶ Fund organizer training provided by entities such as the Midwest Academy or the Highlander Center for grassroots organizations seeking those opportunities
- ▶ Support peer learning opportunities and forums for organizers working on similar issues or facing similar challenges; digital organizing strategies would likely be a productive starting point
- ▶ Fund digital engagement tools for organizations that are seeking to increase their online and digital organizing work

***Allocate a portion of grant portfolios for newer organizations, rural organizations and organizations led by people of color to create “on-ramps” for sustainable funding and to recognize the structural inequities that exist in accessing funding under the status quo***

#### ***Expand access to technical assistance and capacity-building organizations***

- ▶ Respondents who spoke highly of their experiences with the Advocacy Institute, the New York Civic Engagement Table, or the Lawyer's Alliance for New York were usually working in Long Island, New York City, the Hudson Valley, or Western New York
  - » Most respondents in other parts of the state were not familiar with these organizations, but many described technical assistance needs that these organizations might serve. This suggests a regional bifurcation in awareness of and access to technical assistance organizations
  - » Additional organizations may be able to meet these needs. For example, Bolder Advocacy provides helpful guidance on lobbying compliance and other legal issues

#### ***Assist organizations in making connections***

- ▶ Funders should invest in creating directories or maps that help grassroots organizations working on statewide policy change identify organizations with similar missions and values
- ▶ Program officers should work with grantees to determine whether they are looking to make connections across the state and to which types of organizations

#### ***Fiscal sponsorship***

- ▶ Assist in providing technical assistance resources to organizations that seek to become fiscal sponsors
- ▶ Assist newer organizations in identifying fiscal sponsors appropriate for their mission and work if local fiscal sponsors are not available

# TRANSACTIONAL MODELS VS. TRANSFORMATIONAL MOVEMENTS

Having examined characteristics that differentiate New York’s rural communities from urban ones, the policy priorities for rural New York, and the technical assistance and capacity-building needs of rural organizers and grassroots organizations, the last and, arguably most important, set of findings came from interviewees’ evaluations of the status quo. They described a transactional model for policy change and called for moving in the future to a model for transformational

movements. Respondents discussed how transformational movements could achieve a long-term rebalancing of power toward the communities most impacted by injustice. Rural organizers and grassroots groups said this dynamic is present in both philanthropy and statewide tables centered on non-grassroots policy and advocacy groups. Key descriptors from interviews are detailed in the following table.

Funders	
Transactional	Transformational
Current State	Desired Future State
Short-Term View	Long-Term View
1 to 3-year Funding	5 to 10-year Funding
Top-Down Strategies	Bottom-Up Strategies
Campaign Centric	Grassroots/People Powered
Top-Down/Technocratic Grantmaking	Bottom-Up/Participatory Grantmaking
Getting Wins	Shifting Power
“How do you want to fit into our model?”	“How may we help you achieve your goals?”
“What do we get for our money?”	“What do you need us to do?”

Statewide Tables, Coalitions and Campaigns	
Transactional	Transformational
Current State	Desired Future State
Empire Building	Mutually Supportive Networks & Coalitions
Top-Down/Technocratic Agenda Setting & Decision Making	Bottom-Up/Participatory Agenda Setting & Decision Making
Insider Powered	Grassroots/People Powered
Expert Opinion	Lived Experience
Getting Wins	Shifting Power
NYC-Centric with Occasional After-the-Fact Outreach to Upstate Cities	Statewide



Photo: 1199 SEIU employee walk out in Utica, NY

## 4b FUNDER FOCUS: TRANSACTIONAL MODELS VS. TRANSFORMATIONAL MOVEMENTS

### **Long-Term View and Multi-Year Funding** **44 Mentions, 18 Interviews (72%)**

Respondents explained that it could take organizations several years to build a base and exercise their power on local issues. Achieving statewide policy victories based on the people power of a coalition of grassroots organizations requires several additional years of coalition building to: expand relationships, create a bottom-up agenda, implement equitable governance structures, and design and execute a campaign all the way through successful implementation. Meanwhile, the indictment of a bill sponsor, a once-in-a-hundred-year pandemic, or a viral news story can create new opportunities or upend strategies in a moment, illustrating the importance of remaining highly adaptable to ever-changing circumstances.

Given these operating realities, interviewees noted that the short-term nature of one-to-three-year funding and renewal cycles shifts the focus from building grassroots power as part of a long-term transformational movement to one that is highly transactional -- making the most in the short term using the political cards they have been dealt. Campaigns operating through transactional models focus more on funder-related deliverables to keep up the renewal of short-term grants. Respondents said they sense that most funders would not be interested in

long-term infrastructure building and power building as part of movement work because those proposals would compete with others promising “a photo opportunity” of newly passed legislation or executive action. Funders who follow an approach based on “What do we get for our money?” or “How do you want to fit into our model?” will see transactional results, respondents said, possibly impressive in the short run but likely unsustainable and underwhelming over the long run. Whereas funders who take an approach that asks “How may we help you achieve your goals?” and “What do you need us to do?” will likely see transformative and more sustainable results, respondents said, albeit over a longer time frame.

Respondents said the recent trend toward three-year grants, especially general operating support grants, was constructive in reducing the “short-termism” resulting from one-year grants; however, that still was not enough to carry most campaigns from launch to implementation, let alone focus on the longer-term movement work of power building to yield a more enduring power shift. Interviewees suggested that five-year grants and 10-year funding strategies would allow grantees to focus more intensely on long-term movement building. Several interviewees noted how difficult it was to engage in power shifting work when, in their experience, funders were focused on shorter time horizons and more concrete “wins.” Yet many of the oppressive systems they are

working against have been supported by multi-decade strategies in organizing, messaging and policy campaigns by right-wing funders.

## **Funding the Grassroots Directly**

**35 Mentions, 15 Interviews (60%)**

This item is strongly related to grassroots organizations' need to build capacity, especially in under-invested rural areas, for base-building work<sup>21</sup> and the challenges associated with being a small organization with limited capacity.<sup>22</sup> To help address these challenges, 60 percent of respondents said they wished they could obtain more grant support for organizer salaries and wanted to work directly with the foundations rather than through a re-granting program or other intermediaries. Part of the rationale for direct funding is the desire by grassroots organizations to develop a deeper working relationship with their funder and the sense of being in a true partnership.<sup>23</sup> The one exception to the preference for direct funding was the availability of pooled funds. The aggregation of multiple grant opportunities into one pool allows grassroots organizations to access a larger sum of money through a single application process rather than applying to each foundation separately and for smaller grants.<sup>24</sup>

## **Funding Coalition and Collaboration including Re-Grants for Grassroots Participation**

**29 Mentions, 14 Interviews (56%)**

While 60 percent of respondents asked for direct funding, a nearly identical number (56 percent) of respondents mentioned how important it was to maintain funding for the “connective tissue”—working on coalition building to harness the collective power of

various grassroots groups across the state. Respondents suggested that foundations could work together to do more collaborative grantmaking. For example, one foundation's grant investments in statewide collaboration and coalition building across grassroots groups could leverage another foundation's direct investment in base building and organizing the efforts of an organization in the coalition. While increasing direct investments to grassroots organizations clearly is needed, these respondents cautioned against simply shifting current resource allocation away from statewide coalitions toward grassroots organizing. Instead, they suggested that funding for coalition building and collaboration should be sustained, and that philanthropy should “grow the pie,” in the words of one respondent, by working to bring other funders into the organizing and advocacy “ecosystem.”<sup>25</sup>

## **Burdensome and Unaligned Grant Applications and Reporting**

**23 Mentions, 11 Interviews (44%)**

Slightly less than half of the respondents described their grant application and reporting experiences as being unaligned or too burdensome. Challenges ranged from foundations' application and reporting processes that were designed more for direct-service or charity-oriented work (such as soup kitchens, food pantries and after-school programs) rather than organizing, power building and movement work<sup>26</sup> to technology issues with specialized grant application platforms. When reporting on recently passed legislation, one respondent received skepticism from a funder who doubted that the organization reached as many people as it claimed to reach. “One of the questions I saw on most grant forms is how many people do you serve? And sometimes maybe they say directly serve, and we answered that a year ago, 75,000. [The foundation said] what do you mean 75,000? [I said] well, that's how many benefited from the bill,” the respondent reported. This example demonstrates the skewed situation that often exists: some grantmakers seeking to support organizing and movement work are trying to fund a movement-building framework through

<sup>21</sup> See *Expanding Power Building and Base-building Work* for additional information.

<sup>22</sup> See *Small Organizations with Limited Capacity* for additional information.

<sup>23</sup> See *True Partnerships and Listening to Grassroots Organizations* for more information on the desire for a partnership-based funder relationship.

<sup>24</sup> See *The Effect of a Piecemeal Approach to Funding Organizers* for more on challenges around pulling an organizer salary from many grants and the ways in which pooled funds could alleviate some of that challenge.

<sup>25</sup> This topic is further explored in *Funder-to-Funder Advocacy for Equity Work and Movement Building*.

<sup>26</sup> For more information on challenges to grassroots organizations seeking funding from charity-oriented and direct-service funders please see *Charity Mindset*.



Photo: Farmworkers and allies gather in Albany for Farmworker Albany Day 2019. Photo provided by Rural & Migrant Ministry.

their direct-service grant application and reporting processes. This substantially de-emphasizes both the efforts that organizations accomplish through collective rather than individual action and the value of organizing, power building and advocacy.

When interviewees were asked which foundations have ideal application and reporting processes, the one mentioned most often was *Ben & Jerry's Foundation*. When asked for examples of foundations with less-than-ideal grant processes for grassroots organizations, several respondents replied, “the metric-focused ones.” Respondents across several regions described trying to obtain funding from their local foundations and being declined. Among the reasons given: “There’s no way to measure if your work is successful” and “You can’t guarantee outcomes.” Several respondents spoke of grants for a few thousand dollars that required as much reporting, and sometimes more, than their five- and six-figure grants. These respondents requested that foundations adjust reporting requirements to match the value and duration of the grant. Many respondents gave their funders credit for being flexible, understanding and

true partners during the COVID pandemic and suggested that foundations continue many of these new practices.<sup>27</sup>

### **Campaigns Based on Funder Interests, Not the Grassroots Organizations**

**23 Mentions, 11 Interviews (44%)**

Respondents described situations in which the strategies selected by impacted individuals, and meant to center on their needs, conflicted with the preferred tactics or objectives of funders. As one respondent noted, “I’ve had experiences, which have been extraordinarily frustrating, which is a foundation mandating these deliverables that . . . may not necessarily be the right things in the moment for the volunteers in that area, for the people who live there. And it’s like we’re just kind of forced to go through with it versus what would naturally come up in a strategy session with [our] leaders.” Another respondent shared similar frustration: “I’ve been told by program officers not to canvass because it doesn’t work. I’ve been told by

<sup>27</sup> For more on this topic please refer to *Maintaining COVID/Pandemic Flexibility*.

program officers, ‘Why are you phone banking people? That doesn’t work.’” Respondents suggested that funders familiarize themselves more thoroughly with organizing methodologies and approaches. All respondents requested that foundations trust in the organizers to know how best to develop local leaders and advocacy campaigns in their specific community or organization. This relates to earlier findings of the sections: *Importance of Being from the Local Community*, *Negative Reaction to Direct Action in Some Rural Communities*, and the *Cultural Differences across Rural Communities*.

## **Involving Impacted Individuals in Grantmaking Decisions**

**21 Mentions, 11 Interviews (44%)**

These respondents felt that the best grantmaking approaches were carried out by foundations engaged in participatory strategies that involved, and centered on, grantmaking decisions by those most affected by the issue being addressed. For example, when making grants to support organizers, foundations could include organizers on grantmaking committees. Several interviewees suggested *North Star Fund*’s grantmaking processes as a potential model. Other respondents indicated that if foundations were engaging in issue-based support or specific campaigns, then they should work with individuals most impacted by the proposed policy change and focus grantmaking decisions on those individuals. Some interviewees suggested that foundations might adopt for their grantmaking committees the approach taken by the Consejo in directing the campaign work of Green Light NY.<sup>28</sup>

## **General Operating Support**

**18 Mentions, 11 Interviews (44%)**

Close to half of the interviewees discussed the need for more general operating support and flexible funding. This builds on the earlier finding that foundations should have a *Long-Term View and Multi-Year Funding*. Conversations included descriptions of unpredictable external events

having a positive or adverse effect on a policy campaign. Such occurrences could require budgets to be re-allocated to maximize an opportunity or minimize the potential risk for a policy campaign’s objectives. Related to *Expanding Power Building and Base-building Work*, providing multi-year, general operating support grants was highlighted as the best type of funding for organizers while allowing for adaptability to changing circumstances. Unrestricted general operating support grants also give flexibility to the grantee to dial-up or dial-down their lobbying expenditures without cumbersome restrictions by the funder. This would give campaigns more leeway should opportunities or threats to their advocacy work arise. It was also suggested that general operating support be paired with technical assistance to help 501(c)(3) organizations make maximum use of their 501(h) election before they must transition to, or partner with, a 501(c)(4) organization to carry out additional lobbying work.<sup>29</sup>

## **True Partnership and Listening to Grassroots Organizations**

**24 Mentions, 10 Interviews (40%)**

Respondents discussed some of their best partnerships with foundations as well as those that were less than satisfactory. The most rewarding partnerships occurred with foundations that centered their work on affected and impacted individuals; that were mindful of the grantor/grantee power imbalance; and that assumed the role of a full and true partner by acting as a servant-leader to the organization’s grassroots agenda. Several respondents identified the *Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation* and the *Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock* as foundations that exemplify this true partnership with their grantees.

At the other end of the spectrum, interviewees noted practices of unsatisfactory partnerships: program officers who rarely responded to questions from a grantee; foundations that acted as if they knew better or were more expert; foundations that tried to micromanage grassroots organizations’ work; and foundation staff

<sup>28</sup> For more information on the Green Light NY campaign and the role of the Consejo: Alexa Kasdan. *Streets to Statehouse: Building Grassroots Power in New York*. <https://nyf.org/files/2020/01/Streets-to-Statehouse-Building-Grassroots-Power-In-NY.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> See *Developing 501(c)(4) Organizations* for more on lobbying expenditures. General operating support grants would provide to 501(c)(3) organizations using a 501(h)-election for limited lobbying expenditures the flexibility to expend grant funds on lobbying if/when necessary.

that would not have preliminary conversations with a prospective grantee. Respondents, especially those who belonged to oppressed communities, described these experiences as highly reminiscent of their members' encounters with inequitable government agencies, nonprofits and local policymakers. Some respondents from Indigenous and migrant communities explained that their organizing work is rooted in cultural practices of building relationships and trust through conversations and partnership over time. They felt that foundations with rigid, corporate-like cultures would not be interested in supporting their work. Another respondent described the field of philanthropy as "feel[ing] obscured and closed and mysterious and maybe nefarious in some ways." Respondents suggested that many of these concerns could be avoided by creating a culture of true partnership, one that is transparent and centered on impacted and affected individuals.

### **Need for Connections to be Considered for Funding**

**14 Mentions, 6 Interviews (24%)**

These interviewees described the sense that chances for funding required a prospective grantee to have connections to a foundation's staff or board. Respondents said that rural organizations were less likely to have connections to foundations in larger cities, yet there often was limited funding support through local funders. One respondent, who noted that the increased use of Letters of Intent (LOIs) seemed to have the unintended consequence of favoring organizations that had an existing relationship with the funder, would prefer submitting a full application to be considered. Several respondents said they perceived a trend away from open application processes toward invite-only grantmaking as limiting access to funders.

Several people of color pointed out that the reliance on connections and social networks meant that majority-white foundations were unlikely to create new relationships with Black- or Indigenous-led organizations because they were less likely to have personal or professional connections in common. This dynamic is further amplified for BIPOC-led and newer organizations in rural communities, as noted earlier in *A Note on Structural*

*Inequalities to Accessing Funding*. Several respondents noted that receiving awards, attending the correct conference, or being selected for a foundation-funded fellowship was the tipping point for their organization when pursuing foundation funding. Reflecting on the relationship dynamic, one interviewee said: "And I hear [foundation staff] saying things like, 'If you know of any other organizations that you think are really cool, let me know.' And I'm like, okay, that's how this happens. Right. That's how I get in. And that's hard. I feel like there's a lot left on the table when that's how we do our work."

### **Charity Mindset**

**13 Mentions, 6 Interviews (24%)**

These respondents described the difficulties they experienced working with philanthropies focused on a charity-oriented or direct-service strategy. They defined the charity mindset as one focused on meeting human needs through direct-service work such as food banks, shelters and after-school programs. Interviewees said they found it difficult to apply for some grants because the funders' process did not know how to evaluate organizing, power building and movement work. Two respondents said they felt that philanthropy was more about alleviating the symptoms of oppression and inequity rather than getting to the root cause, which requires a shifting of power and long-term systems change. Two other respondents noted how the "nonprofit industrial complex" ensured that most philanthropic resources would go to direct-service work rather than movement work.<sup>30</sup> Interviewees said that funders with a charity mindset oftentimes have *Burdensome and Unaligned Grant Applications and Reporting*, as explored earlier in this report.

### **The Effect of Piecemeal Grants for Organizers**

**6 Mentions, 6 Interviews (24%)**

Due to a lack of access to sufficient funding for organizing, interviewees said that, at best, they could offer a full

<sup>30</sup> These interviewees recommended the following book for a more in-depth exploration of this topic: *Incite! The Revolution will not be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*. Cambridge MA: South End Press, 2007.

organizer salary by taking piecemeal bits of four to five smaller grants and putting them together. When factoring in the time to apply and then provide regular reporting -- sometimes quarterly on all the small grants -- the organizer spent a significant amount of time on administrative grant requirements rather than in the community. While most respondents wanted to see foundations fund more organizers, and fund them directly rather than through intermediaries, the one exception was creating pooled funds to alleviate the need for piecemeal grants altogether. Several respondents suggested that foundations unable to fund a full organizer position join with others to pool funds so that grantees can access a larger sum of money with a single application and streamlined reporting.

### **Competition for Resources**

**10 Mentions, 5 Interviews (20%)**

Respondents pointed to a problem at the local level: organizations that could have fruitful partnerships are sometimes reluctant to establish them because they

perceive a scarcity of funder resources and feel they are in competition for those resources. At a statewide campaign level, coordinating entities and their grassroots members may sometimes inadvertently compete for the same foundation grants. A few interviewees noted that organizations must self-promote and continually secure “wins” to sustain their funding. Such a dynamic could lead larger and better funded organizations in a coalition to engage in empire building, using the coalition’s collective work to increase their organization’s power and authority and thereby increasing their likelihood of receiving future funding.

Respondents suggested that funders find ways to decrease the competitive nature of grantmaking to grassroots groups and statewide coalitions. Coalition members might be more likely to share credit and recognition, set up decentralized power structures, and build a culture where all members focus on being mutually supportive if the competitive funding dynamic was reduced. Regarding coalitions, one suggestion was to make grants to an entire statewide coalition rather than



*Photos: SEPA Mujer organizing during the Greenlight NY campaign*

to specific lead agencies within the coalition. Additionally, it was noted, providing coalitions with funding for re-grants could help decrease intra-coalition competition, although it is not a replacement for direct funding for organizers. Interestingly, respondents in multi-region organizations described how some regions were more likely to get funding for grassroots work,<sup>31</sup> and they were the ones expressing more of a competitive feeling than people in other regions that were less funded. In regions with less grassroots funding, partnerships become imperative because the work greatly exceeds the capacity of the individual organization (as explored earlier in *The Necessity of Developing Partnerships*).

### **Funder-to-Funder Advocacy for Equity Work and Movement Building**

**8 Mentions, 5 Interviews (20%)**

These respondents requested that individual foundations and associations such as Engage New York and the Neighborhood Funders Group encourage more foundations to support equity and movement building work. As one respondent noted, “There’s funding that one entity can do. For example [a foundation] gave us a [six-figure grant] to do some [coalition building] work. [The foundation] could have given us a [much larger grant] to do it. But I don’t actually think that’s all that helpful. . . Partnering with these funder groups and making sure that they’re opening doors I think is really crucial. Having [the foundation] go up to [another foundation in a different region] to meet was really important. And basically say, ‘Look, I’m [supporting this coalition] you should too.’ That’s an example of door opening that doesn’t require a specific grant but helps in the long term . . . Making the pie bigger is going to be really important.”

<sup>31</sup>This dynamic is explored further in *Geographic Inequity in Funding*.

### **Geographic Inequity in Funding**

**7 Mentions, 5 Interviews 20%**

These respondents claimed there is an inequitable distribution of philanthropic resources across the state. In general, they pointed to a bifurcation between the regions of Long Island, New York City, the Hudson Valley, and Western New York and other areas of the state. It should be noted that all the organizations represented by these respondents work in at least one of the four regions mentioned and in at least one other area of the state. These respondents pointed out that their organizations’ work in one of those four regions was more likely to receive funding than their work in other parts of the state.

### **Maintaining COVID/Pandemic Flexibility**

**6 Mention, 5 Interviews 20%**

Five interviewees noted that their funders demonstrated tremendous flexibility and understanding of their grantees’ needs to change approaches during the pandemic. Among the examples: extending reporting time frames; re-examining grant deliverables; being available for problem solving; connecting grantees to organizations, partners and other funders to help address their challenges; simplifying grant reporting requirements; and emergency increases in grant budgets. These respondents described the feeling of “being in it together” with their funders. Referring back to feedback on *Burdensome and Unaligned Grant Applications and Reporting*, many respondents suggested that their funders could make the process less burdensome by making these practices permanent. These also provided examples of *True Partnership and Listening to Grassroots Organizations*, which was explored earlier.

## Recommendations

### ***Make multi-year, general operating support grants for community organizing and other grassroots work***

- ▶ Wherever possible, fund organizations directly instead of through intermediaries
- ▶ Partner with other foundations to pool funds when available grant funds are insufficient to meet an organization's needs so the organization can avoid taking a piecemeal approach to patching together money from small grants to hire an organizer
- ▶ Be mindful of how funding opportunities can create competitive dynamics across coalitions and partnerships

### ***Incorporate impacted and affected individuals in grantmaking decisions***

- ▶ Potential models include the NorthStar Fund's grantmaking model or adaptation of the Consejo model from the Green Light NY campaign

### ***Take proactive and affirmative steps to reduce barriers to funding for rural, POC-led, and newer grassroots organizations***

- ▶ Be intentional in considering the current inequity of funding access for rural, POC-led and newer grassroots organizations across New York State

### ***Build meaningful relationships with grantees and adopt a servant-leader mindset when partnering to support their work***

- ▶ Foundations should support the work of grassroots organizations; grassroots organizations should not be required to adapt to support their funders -- this merely perpetuates existing inequities

### ***Solicit feedback from grant applicants on the foundation's application and reporting processes***

- ▶ Consider using human-centered designs or other end-user frameworks when improving grant application and reporting processes

### ***Work through funder collaboratives and associations to increase the number of foundations engaged in equity and movement-building grantmaking***



## STATEWIDE TABLE FOCUS: TRANSACTIONAL MODELS VS. TRANSFORMATIONAL MOVEMENTS

### **Need for Greater Use of Bottom-Up/ Participatory Agenda Setting**

**50 Mentions, 15 Interviews (60%)**

These interviewees emphasized that a bottom-up or participatory process for building statewide power and setting statewide policy agendas was absolutely vital to sustaining the work over the long term. While this was mentioned in only 15, or 60 percent, of the interviews, it came up 50 times, making it the second most mentioned item in the entire landscape scan. Respondents identified the following coalitions as having exemplary participatory processes: New York Renews, which uses the Jemez Principals for Democratic Organizing;<sup>32</sup> the New York Immigration Coalition, which conducts interviews and surveys with its members in a multi-step process to setting agendas and objectives; and the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York, which employs a robust member-driven process for campaign development.<sup>33</sup>

Across all interviews, respondents said participatory

<sup>32</sup> The Jemez Principles were developed at a meeting hosted by the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice in Jemez, New Mexico, December 1996. For more on the Jemez Principles please refer to: <https://www.ejnet.org/ej/jemez.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> For more on the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York's decision-making processes please see page 12 of the member handbook, "Decision Making & Organizational Structure," which can be accessed here: <https://www.cacwny.org/become-a-member/member-handbook/>

agenda setting was essential to ensure that the work remained both people powered and centered on impacted and affected individuals. All agreed that it should not be focused on funder requirements, the needs of an empire-building policy and advocacy organization, or on expert opinion at the expense of input from impacted individuals and their lived experience. Respondents said coalitions and campaigns using participatory models could increase their membership, raise levels of engagement of individual members, and sustain their coalitions over the long run. Respondents noted that coalitions not employing these approaches were likely to be unsustainable over time, especially after setbacks. Furthermore, these coalitions usually have blind spots regarding a policy's efficacy because they have failed to adequately incorporate knowledge from people's lived experiences. Also pointed out: coalitions that do not hold space for new members and representatives of oppressed communities will fail to grow power over time.

### **Urban-Rural Connection**

**27 Mentions, 11 Interviews 44%**

When discussing issues too significant to be solved through an exclusively local strategy, these respondents pointed to the need for statewide tables, coalitions and policy campaigns that cross the urban-rural divide in New York State. It was frequently noted that the solution to a



*Photo: Northeast Organic Farming Association-New York during a farm field day*

problem in an urban community could be better achieved with involvement by rural communities, and vice versa. For example, Black Loves Resists in the Rust (BLRR) works on carceral system reform and systemic racism within the Buffalo Police Department. BLRR recognizes that many of the state's prisons are located in rural communities that depend in part on the prison economy for their economic survival. The Alliance of Families for Justice, which has a New York City headquarters, NYC-based staff attorneys and an organizer in Ithaca, takes a similar approach in organizing families, who often live in New York City and have loved ones incarcerated upstate.

The imperative to organize across the urban-rural divide is not limited to carceral system reform. Food system advocates are working across urban-rural divides as well. Soul Fire Farm addresses food apartheid in the Capital Region by ensuring that much of the food they produce is available to people in neighborhoods with limited access to affordable, healthy food. Soul Fire Farm and other BIPOC-led food system groups amplify their individual organizations' work through Black Farmers United New York State, which is sponsored fiscally by Farm School NYC. Rebekah Williams of Food for the Spirit, another member organization of Black Farmers United NYS, spoke about driving to meet and work with farmers of color across the state.

Rural climate activists noted how frequently climate solutions are focused on strategies to decarbonize energy generation and consumption in cities. While those strategies are critically important in the fight for climate justice, rural activists working at the intersection of climate change and agriculture, including the Catskill Mountainkeeper and Northeast Organic Farming Association-New York (NOFA-NY), said reducing corporate agriculture's contributions to climate change through a focus on improving soil health and quality could not only boost climate solutions but improve the food system as well. As these examples demonstrate, statewide policy change efforts must be inclusive of rural and urban communities.

## **Interrelationship of Local Campaigns and State Campaigns**

**12 Mentions, 10 Interviews 40%**

These respondents discussed ways that local campaigns can scale into a statewide campaign and described statewide campaigns whose efforts help set the conditions necessary for a local campaign's success. For example, Black Love Resists in the Rust (BLRR) explained that local efforts to implement independent oversight of the Buffalo police department hinges on the success of a

statewide campaign to reform the Taylor Law.<sup>34</sup> The Worker Justice Center implemented a community ID program for undocumented people who needed photo IDs; this ultimately led to its involvement in the Green Light NY campaign. Catskill Mountainkeeper's local work to combat hydrofracking led the organization to take on increasingly larger roles in statewide and national policy campaigns. This shows that statewide tables can enhance work in local communities to build momentum for state policy campaigns and that statewide campaigns can unlock new advocacy opportunities at the local level.

### **Need for Multiracial and Intersectional Coalitions**

**21 Mentions, 9 Interviews (36%)**

These respondents described the best statewide tables as multiracial, both in leadership and membership, and intersectional in regard to the policy issues being addressed. In their examples, interviewees explained their use of a popular education framework to examine how oppression and marginalization affect everyone, and how privilege is reinforced in part by dividing people along the lines of race and class. They noted that multiracial and intersectional coalitions can build and sustain power over time. As examined earlier in *Policy Priorities for Rural New York*, most of these respondents also called for less focus on issue-specific campaigns and more attention to intersectional movement work through the building of grassroots power. As stated by one respondent, "It's all interconnected."

Interviewees also described coalitions that were multiracial on paper but not in practice. These were instances where the coalitions were not sufficiently engaged in the *Use of Bottom-Up/Participatory Agenda Setting* and lacked authentic partnerships with BIPOC-led organizations. In these examples, statewide tables invited BIPOC-led organizations after the agenda had

been set. Often these tables included a token BIPOC-led organization to provide a "stamp of approval" on their agenda. As explored in part in the section, *A Note on Structural Inequalities to Accessing Funding*, there also were instances of white-led legacy advocacy organizations co-opting the ideas and work of BIPOC-led groups to pursue coalition funding that would be used at the discretion of the white-led organization.<sup>35</sup> These approaches perpetuate the inequities embedded in systemic racism and are inherently exploitative. Statewide tables, coalitions and campaigns must be intentional in their commitment to multiracial and intersectional coalition building. Additionally, member organizations' contributions must not be exploited to sustain empire building by a few lead (oftentimes white-led) organizations.

### **Advocacy Organizations' Lack of Consistent Local Presence in Rural New York**

**9 Mentions, 8 Interviews (32%)**

About one-third of the respondents spoke of situations when policy and advocacy organizations leading statewide campaigns determine that support is needed, often but not always for legislative campaigns, by a policymaker from a particular region. To help shore up that support, the statewide campaign "parachutes" in a community organizer. Once the campaign ceases, the commitment to organizing within that community may come to an abrupt end.

In their examples, organizers expressed their members' frustration with the time and investment made in identifying new members, developing relationships, training volunteers and building a base that can win, only to have most or all of that unravel at the end of the policy campaign. These interviewees said they would prefer to develop their own grassroots organizations focused on their communities' most pressing needs rather than only

<sup>34</sup>The Public Employee's Fair Employment Act, also known as the Taylor Law, governs the collective bargaining rights of New York State's public employees. The Taylor Law provides significant protections for members of public unions including police unions. For more information refer to: Ken Girardan. *Double Insulation: How New York Law Shields Public Employees from Accountability*. Empire Center, 2020. <https://www.empirecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Discipline-Paper-Final-1.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> This dynamic and others like it are explored in greater depth in: HEAL Food Alliance et al. *An Open Letter from BIPOC Leaders in Food & Agriculture to Food Systems Funders*. July, 10 2020. <https://healfoodalliance.org/an-open-letter-from-bipoc-leaders-in-food-agriculture-to-food-systems-funders/>

on those needs that happen to align for a limited time with the goals of another organization's statewide policy campaign.

One respondent explained: "I still see that [mindset] . . . that you can drop into a community, you can get in and out of the community in a few years, and you can win a thing, and then you move on. And it's like I am the consultant, I have all the answers, I can come in here and [solve it]. . . I don't see that work to be as efficient as it could be. I think it's also compounded with philanthropy only funding on year-long cycles for grants. If we're talking about actually building anything real in a community that's been completely cut off from resources for generations, it's going to take more than five years."<sup>36</sup>

There were, however, examples of statewide campaigns that brought in organizers and did not create challenges for the local community. In these examples, the campaign recognized the *Importance of Being from the Local Community* and committed to hiring an organizer from the locality. These campaigns were also clear about the duration of their commitment to the community

<sup>36</sup> While the quote speaks to statewide campaigns making short-term commitments to communities it also speaks to the need for a *Long-Term View and Multi-Year Funding*.

and encouraged their organizers to use *Bottom-Up/ Participatory Agenda Setting*. If community members identified local issues related to the statewide campaign's scope, the organizers continued to work with members on those local issues and assisted local partner organizations. In these instances, respondents felt that the statewide campaign was a true partner to the local community. They did not experience the same post-campaign ramifications that other respondents described previously.

### **NYC-Centric with an Upstate Afterthought 9 Mentions, 7 Interviews (28%)**

These respondents noted that they felt many of the statewide campaigns, tables and coalitions in which they participated were very much centered on New York City and the "insider" perspective in Albany. Only occasionally was there outreach to include upstate communities after the table and agenda had been set, they said. These interviewees stressed they would prefer a culture shift where statewide campaigns include, at the outset, rural communities and organizations to assist



Photo: Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson members registering people to vote

with setting agendas,<sup>37</sup> recruiting other organizations to join the coalition, and participating in overall campaign governance.

## **Territorialism and Turf Issues**

**26 Mentions, 6 Interviews (24%)**

The interviewees called these challenges a clash between grassroots organizations and conventional policy and advocacy organizations or “grasstops” organizations. Organizers recounted times when statewide coalitions had a path to success blocked due to territorialism and “tuff issues” among the Albany-based “insider” organizations. Respondents told of situations where advocacy organizations refused to work together or undermined each other’s work due to a prior grievance from an unrelated campaign or their belief they were in *Competition for Resources* from funders. Others cited a refusal to work with specific bill sponsors due to previous issues on an unrelated initiative.

Organizers said this kind of campaign infighting is detrimental to their work. They expressed frustration when having to tell members that their work has stalled due to infighting, alleged empire building, and other non-collaborative stances taken by advocacy organizations. These respondents reiterated the *Need for Greater Use of Bottom-Up/Participatory Agenda Setting* by statewide tables, coalitions and campaigns to ensure campaign agendas and decisions were centered on impacted and affected individuals.

## **The Power of Industry, Corporate and Police Union Lobbies**

**14 Mentions, 6 Interviews (24%)**

About one-fourth of interviewees noted that rural communities needed a sufficiently large base of active members to counterbalance the tremendous entrenched power of industry and corporate lobbies, as well as police unions. This topic came up often in relation to agriculture, food system policy and carceral system reform. It takes a significantly large people-powered movement to overcome entrenched power, respondents said, because

this power bloc has considerable insider connections and funding to carry out their work.

One respondent discussed working with some of these interests on agriculture policy. Even though the respondent disagreed with corporate interests on most issues, the parties were able to identify some issues of agreement: “We’ve been disagreeing for 30 years, but that doesn’t mean we don’t talk to each other.” Elaborating further, the respondent said, “When [they] tried to insist we talk about changing our [policy platform], we threw [them] out because we didn’t want to argue over the things on which we disagree.”<sup>38</sup> When asked why the organization partnered with these groups on this particular issue, the interviewee responded that their organization did not have the same level of power as the corporate-funded interests and thus the collaboration was necessary to pursue the limited issues on which they agreed.

## **Recommendations**

***Statewide tables, campaigns and coalitions should use bottom-up or participatory processes to set agendas and make decisions***

- ▶ Examples of potential models include: NY Renew’s use of the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing; the Green Light NY campaign’s Consejo; the New York Immigration Coalition’s agenda-setting process; and the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York’s member-driven decision-making process
- ▶ Continually centering and re-centering work on impacted and affected individuals should help alleviate territorialism and turf issues within statewide advocacy efforts

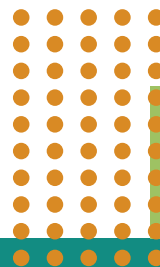
***Statewide coalitions should include grassroots organizations, particularly rural and POC-led organizations, at the outset before agenda and governance structures are set***

- ▶ Multiracial and intersectional coalitions are likely more sustainable and more powerful over the long run

<sup>37</sup> For additional information please refer to: *Need for Greater Use of Bottom Up/Participatory Agenda Setting*.

<sup>38</sup> This quote also speaks to *The Necessity of Developing Partnerships* faced by many rural grassroots organizations.

- ▶ Statewide efforts should partner with existing grassroots organizations wherever possible
- ▶ When statewide tables, campaigns, and coalitions identify regional gaps in their statewide base, efforts should be made to support communities in building their own local organization, with local members and under local control.
  - » When this is not possible statewide tables, campaigns and coalitions should be clear upfront regarding the scope and duration of their commitment to organizing in any community
  - » Organizers for statewide campaigns should be hired from the local community and should help develop and support local leaders seeking to sustain community organizing work beyond the duration of the campaign
- ▶ Agendas for statewide efforts should bridge urban and rural divides; problems frequently have interconnected causes and solutions that cut across urban and rural communities
- ▶ As demonstrated in this report and *Streets to Statehouse: Building Grassroots Power in New York*, statewide people-powered movements may take longer to develop, but are necessary to overcome the entrenched power of industry, corporate and police union lobbies



Photos: Mohawk Valley Latino Association at mutual aid and community events

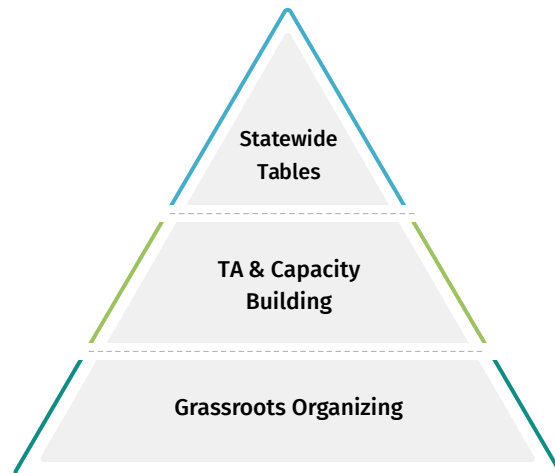


## THREE OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GRANTMAKING

Funders seeking to support rural grassroots organizations as part of a larger transformational movement strategy to build statewide power should consider the following:

### 1) Develop a deep understanding of place and community

- a) Program officers should dedicate time to truly understand the communities supported through organizing grants
- b) Grantmaking strategies should acknowledge that rural communities are not monolithic, just as all urban communities are not the same
- c) Foundations should give deference to local organizers and organizations; they are the foremost experts of their communities and their own lived experience
- d) Funders should recognize organizing models will differ across communities and cultures; for example, trauma healing work may be most impactful for organizers working in one community, but door-to-door canvassing and phone banking may be most effective in another community
- e) Building grassroots power will take time and resources; there are no short cuts through top-down technocratic funding strategies



### 2) Structure multi-year, general operating support grantmaking to build transformational power from the bottom up while removing funding barriers for rural, POC-led and newer organizations

#### a) Grassroots Organizing

Increase funding for multi-year, general operating support grants to address the following gaps in community organizing

- 1) Geographic Inequity – in general, rural communities have less access to grant resources than urban ones. Regionally, it

seems that more resources are going toward Western New York, the Hudson Valley, New York City, and Long Island than to other areas of the state

- 2) Racial Inequity – POC-led organizations have less access to grant funding than white-led organizations
- 3) Legacy Inequity – legacy organizations, which are frequently white-led themselves, have greater access to funding than newer organizations seeking to build power in oppressed communities

**b) Technical Assistance (TA) and Capacity Building**

Increase awareness of and access to relevant technical assistance and capacity-building organizations

- 1) Geographic Inequity – in general, rural communities have less access to technical assistance and capacity-building

organizations. Regionally, it appears access is best in Western New York, the Hudson Valley, New York City, and Long Island.

**c) Statewide Tables**

Support statewide tables that are committed to transformational movements rather than transactional models for change

- 1) Help connect rural organizers to statewide tables and other advocacy partners to build power from local communities all the way to the state capital
- 2) Support efforts to bridge urban and rural divides on statewide policy issues

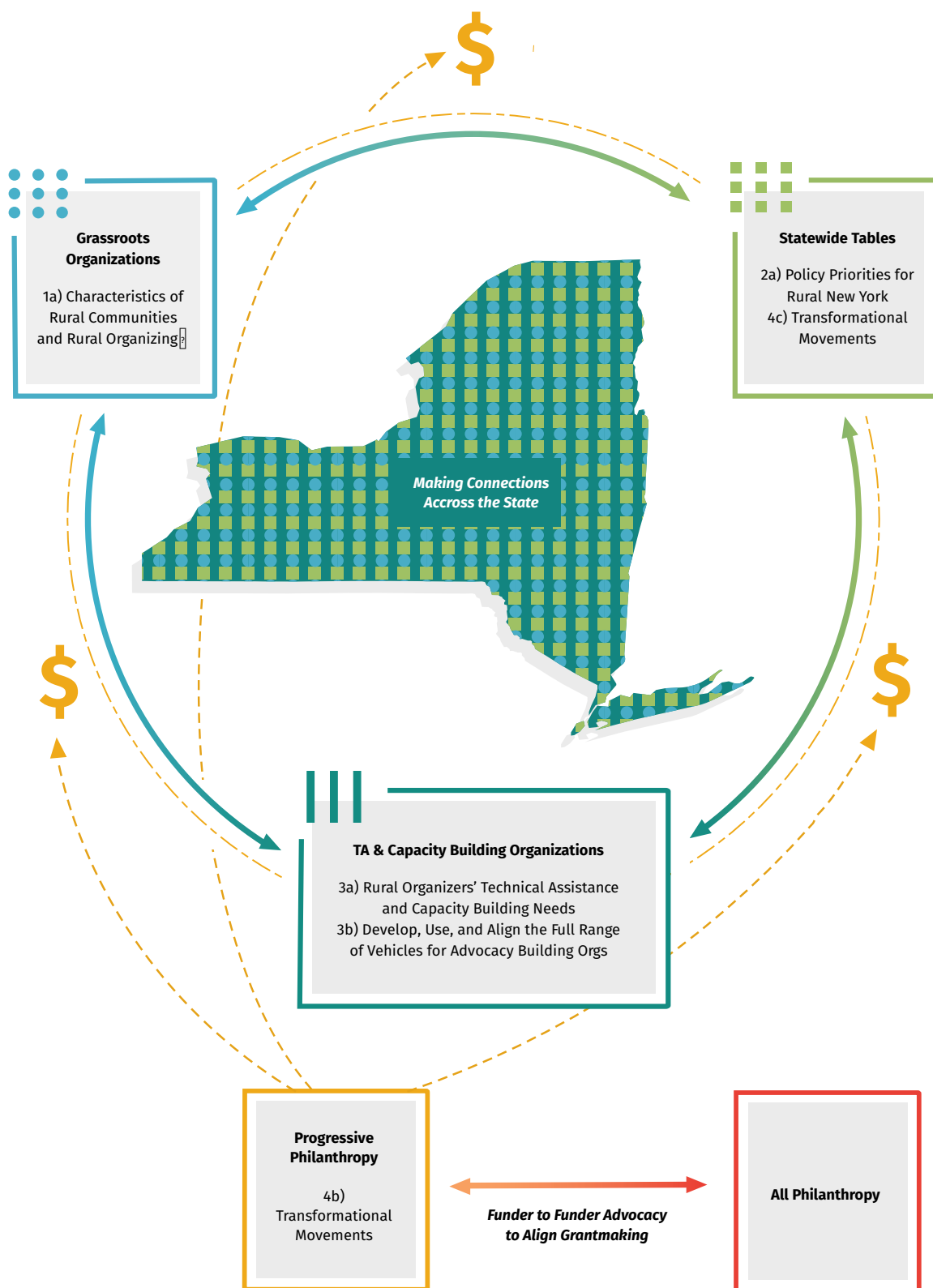
**3) Align Grantmaking across a Network of Funders to Build Infrastructure for Transformational Movements**

(See chart on following page.)



Photo: Farmworkers and allies demonstrating inside the Capitol in Albany for Farmworker Albany Day 2018. Provided by Rural & Migrant Ministry.

## A Bird's Eye View: A New Model for Philanthropic Resourcing of Rural Power



### Three Overarching Recommendations for Grantmaking

By combining these three recommendations, funders can better support equitable statewide power-building efforts through: **1) a deep understanding of place**, **2) structuring grants to build power from the bottom up**, and **3) aligning grantmaking through a network of funders** to help build the necessary infrastructure for transformational people-powered movements.

The imperative for building transformational movements cannot be understated. The words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. remain as true now as they were in 1967:

“ *We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late.*<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam,” April 4, 1967.

The demographic, social and political landscape is changing all over New York State. With that comes tremendous opportunity to create a more equitable future by shifting power to the people and communities most impacted by injustice, specifically Black, Indigenous and people of color. But continued progress is not a certainty; it will take dedicated and coordinated efforts by many individuals and organizations over the long term to achieve transformational change.

***We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. We must not be too late.***

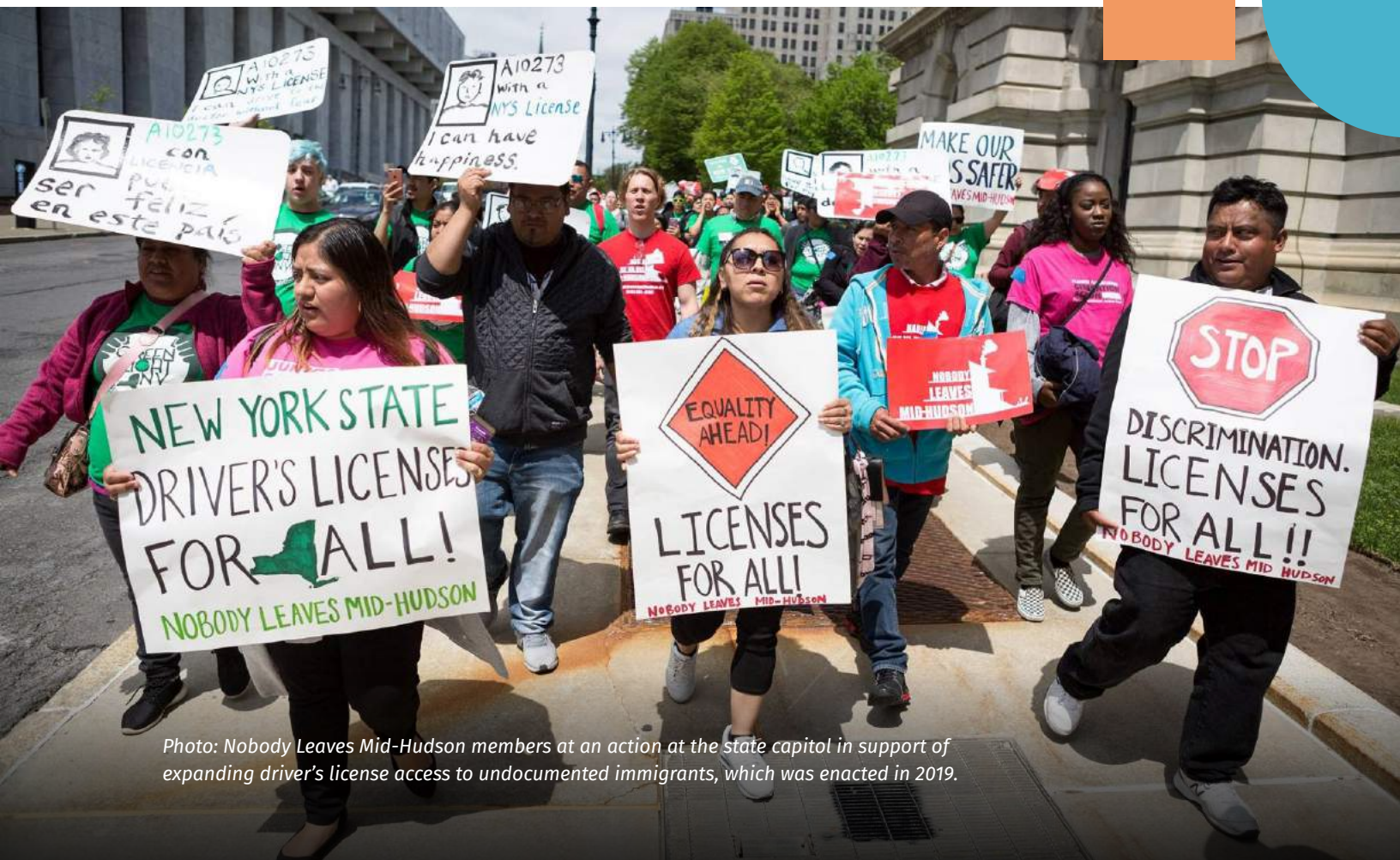
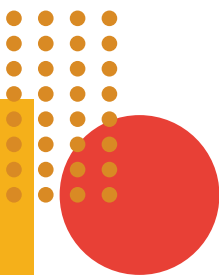


Photo: Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson members at an action at the state capitol in support of expanding driver's license access to undocumented immigrants, which was enacted in 2019.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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And most importantly, my deepest thanks to all interviewees who were so generous with their time and knowledge: Emma Kreyche – Worker Justice Center; Steven Choi and Murad Awawdeh – New York Immigration Coalition; Wes Gillingham – Catskill Mountainkeeper; Jonathan Bix – Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson; Elizabeth Henderson – Northeast Organic Farming Association-New York; Erika Rincon – National Young Farmers Coalition; Marcos and Matt – Alianza Agricola; Marissa Martin – Advocacy Institute; Richard Witt – Rural & Migrant Ministry; Pete Meyers – Tompkins County Workers' Center; Jessica Maxwell – Workers Center of Central New York; Rebecca

Newberry – Clean Air Coalition of Western New York; Larisa Jacobson – Soul Fire Farm and Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust; Sonia Martinez – Mohawk Valley Latino Association; Martha Maffei – SEPA Mujer; Holly Nowak – Coalition for Economic Justice; Phylcia Brown – Black Love Resists in the Rust; Kristina Androetta – Citizen Action of New York; Rebekah Williams – Food for the Spirit; Mark Spadafore – 1199 SEIU; Onika Abraham – Black Farmers United NYS and NYC Farm School; Alexas Esposito and Joe Soto – Traditional Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Healing; Melanie Goldberg – Legal Services of Central New York; and Phoebe Brown – Alliance of Families for Justice. Thank you to all. Your work is truly inspiring.

In Solidarity,

**JOHN MONAGHAN**

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# APPENDIX 1: ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED FOR THIS REPORT

<b>Organization:</b>	<b>1199 SEIU</b>
<b>Region:</b>	Statewide
<b>Legal Status:</b>	Political Action Committee (PAC)
<b>Type of Organization:</b>	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group
<b>Mission:</b>	We are a union of private sector healthcare workers. We organize, advocate and educate healthcare workers to create more equitable communities.

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<b>Organization:</b>	<b>The Advocacy Institute</b>
<b>Region:</b>	Statewide
<b>Legal Status:</b>	Fiscally Sponsored
<b>Type of Organization:</b>	Technical Assistance and/or Capacity-Building Organization
<b>Mission:</b>	At the Advocacy Institute (AI), our mission is to support the legislative advocacy of social justice and movement-building organizations in New York City and State. We offer dynamic trainings on the legislative process and provide cutting-edge interactive tools, visual aids, and information to support successful legislative advocacy. We also engage organizations through a membership model to help them refine and reach their campaign goals through strategic and customized 1-on-1 campaign support.

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<b>Organization:</b>	<b>Alianza Agrícola</b>
<b>Regions:</b>	Finger Lakes, Western New York
<b>Legal Status:</b>	501(c)(3)
<b>Type of Organization:</b>	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group Statewide Table, Campaign or Coalition
<b>Mission:</b>	Alianza Agrícola is a group formed and run by Agricultural Workers, mostly dairy, and the group was founded to fight for labor rights and improve the living conditions of undocumented immigrants, and have a better future.

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**Organization:** **Alliance of Families for Justice**

**Regions:** Statewide

**Legal Status:** 501(c)(3)

**Type of Organization:** Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group

**Mission:** The Alliance of Families for Justice seeks to end mass incarceration by empowering the formerly incarcerated and their families through re-entry support services, legal support, advocacy and communication skills training, and voting rights.

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**Organization:** **Black Farmers United New York State**

**Region:** Statewide

**Legal Status:** Fiscally Sponsored

**Type of Organization:** Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group

**Mission:** Black Farmers United NYS is a coalition of Black farmers, educators, food justice advocates, and Black-led farming organizations and farms from across the state. Without serious investment and intervention, Black farmers in New York State will be marginalized out of existence. Our nine solutions aim to protect the legacy and ensure the future of Black farmers. They hold the power to radically change how Black communities control access to safe, healthy food and build a collective wealth and health in New York State.

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**Organization:** **Black Love Resists in the Rust**

**Region:** Western New York

**Legal Status:** Fiscally Sponsored

**Type of Organization:** Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group

**Mission:** Black Love Resists in the Rust is a Black and POC grassroots organization in Buffalo, NY. We organize at the intersection of embodied leadership, healing justice, transformative organizing, and political education. Our work has focused on reducing the harms of the Buffalo Police Department, redefining safety, and building an intergenerational political home for Black and POC individuals.

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**Organization:** **Catskill Mountainkeeper**

**Region:** Statewide

**Legal Status:** 501(c)(3)

**Type of Organization:** Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group

**Mission:** Catskill Mountainkeeper's mission is to protect our region's wild lands and natural resources, support smart development to sustainably grow our economy, nurture healthy communities, and accelerate the transition to a 100% clean energy future in New York and beyond.

Mountainkeeper fights to safeguard our region's unique natural heritage, pristine beauty, and abundant natural resources, including the Catskill Park and the watershed that provides drinking water for many millions of people in the New York City area. We also work to grow outdoor recreational tourism, support farmers and build more resilient and sustainable local food systems, and stand behind local businesses to lift our communities and build a stronger and more sustainable economic future.

Since our founding in 2006, we have worked with a network of concerned citizens and strategic partners to protect our region's pristine wild areas and open spaces from threats ranging from fracking to outsized development projects to the invasion of dirty and dangerous fossil fuel infrastructure, while also advancing renewable energy policy solutions and pathbreaking on-the-ground demonstration projects.

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Organization:	<b>Citizen Action of New York</b>
Region:	Statewide
Legal Status:	501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), Political Action Committee (PAC)
Type of Organization:	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group Statewide Table, Campaign or Coalition
Mission:	To achieve our vision, we fight for social, racial, economic and environmental justice. We are battling against the forces of capitalism and racism that show themselves through inequality and bigotry and work together to oppress most people. Greed, racism, patriarchy and other systems of oppression permeate the fabric of our lives – through economics, education, housing, technological advancements, health care, the environment, and our criminal legal system.

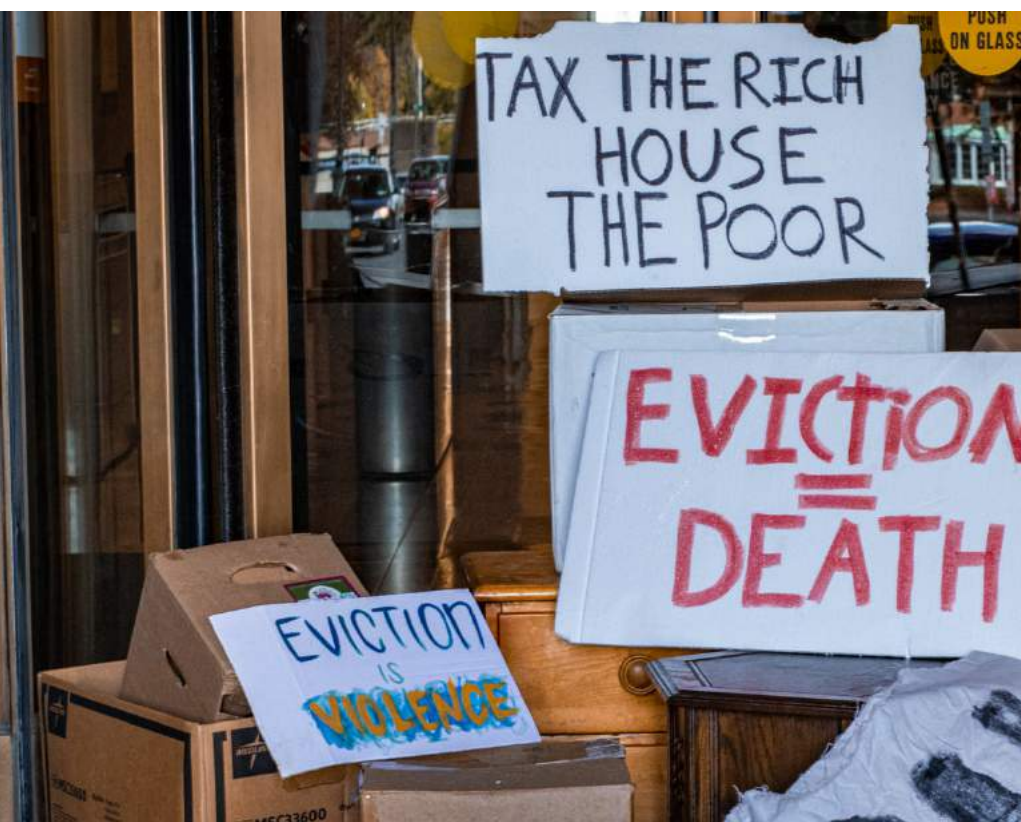


Photo: On October 1, 2020, Citizen Action joined tenants and housing rights advocates outside the NYS Capitol to demand an end to all evictions for the duration of the pandemic. Advocates blocked the Washington Avenue entrance to the Capitol with moving boxes and furniture to demonstrate the dehumanizing nature of evictions.

We build power for justice by working in strategic alliance with other organizations that share our vision. As we unite with other organizations, our focus remains on communities that are most impacted. We focus our organizing on low-income communities and communities of color as we build a multi-racial organization. We approach our issue work on a trajectory of structural reforms, taking on issues that make people's lives better today while creating the political and ideological environment for transformational change. We work statewide to elect progressive candidates who will enact our priorities into legislation, and strategically integrating issue and electoral work.

Our strategic approach to our work combines grassroots organizing, leadership development and political education while strategically communicating with the people. We win campaigns that have a direct impact on people's lives, we build the infrastructure to develop more power, and we are constantly changing hearts and minds across New York State in order to spread our vision and change what's possible to win.

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<b>Organization:</b>	<b>Clean Air Coalition of Western New York</b>
Region:	Western New York
Legal Status:	501(c)(3)
Type of Organization:	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group
Mission:	The Clean Air Coalition builds power by developing grassroots leaders who organize their communities to run and win environmental justice and public health campaigns in Western New York.

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<b>Organization:</b>	<b>Coalition for Economic Justice</b>
Region:	Western New York
Legal Status:	501(c)(3)
Type of Organization:	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group
Mission:	The Coalition for Economic Justice unites our member labor, faith, and community organizations and activists with allies and resources to win campaigns that promote economic justice for all through building strong, diverse, sustainable communities.

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<b>Organization:</b>	<b>Farm School NYC</b>
Region:	New York City
Legal Status:	501(c)(3)
Type of Organization:	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group

**Mission:** Farm School NYC trains local residents in urban agriculture in order to build self-reliant communities and inspire positive local action around food access and social, economic, and racial justice issues. Farm School NYC offers urban agriculture training through certificate program as well as individual courses. We also organize as part of an ecosystem of BIPOC-led organizations creating a web of educational, capital and land linking services for Black farmers, and organize statewide as the fiscal sponsor of Black Farmers United NYS.

**Organization:**

**Food for the Spirit**

**Regions:** Central New York, Finger Lakes, Southern Tier, Western New York

**Legal Status:** Fiscally Sponsored

**Type of Organization:** Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group  
Technical Assistance and/or Capacity Building Organization

**Mission:** Food for the Spirit is a nonprofit organization that uses the arts and creative facilitation to support racial healing, ecological justice, and equitable food systems.



Photos: Food for the Spirit's  
Black Women's Retreats

**Organization:** **Legal Services of Central New York**

**Regions:** Central New York, Mohawk Valley, North Country

**Legal Status:** 501(c)(3)

**Type of Organization:** Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group

**Mission:** For more than 50 years, Legal Services of Central New York has fought to help people overcome obstacles, achieve goals, and pursue justice. Our team of 40 attorneys offers expertise in confronting community-wide problems and representing individuals. In 2018 we helped more than 17,000 people in 5,600 cases. We serve a 13-county region of Central New York (Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Otsego, and Oswego), fighting for justice and opportunity for all.

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**Organization:** **Mohawk Valley Latino Association (MVLA)**

**Region:** Mohawk Valley

**Legal Status:** 501(c)(3)

**Type of Organization:** Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group

**Mission:** MVLA's mission is to educate and empower the Latino residents through various basic and emergency services and ensure a better quality of life in the Mohawk Valley.

**Organization:** **National Young Farmers Coalition**

**Region:** Statewide

**Legal Status:** 501(c)(3)

**Type of Organization:** Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group  
Statewide Table, Campaign or Coalition  
Technical Assistance and/or Capacity-Building Organization

**Mission:** The National Young Farmers Coalition (Young Farmers) is a grassroots network of beginning farmers, ranchers, and supporters working together for a bright and equitable future for U.S. agriculture. We envision a country where young people who are willing to work, get trained and take a little risk can support themselves and their families in farming.

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**Organization:** **New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC)**

**Region:** Statewide

**Legal Status:** 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4)

**Type of Organization:** Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group  
Statewide Table, Campaign or Coalition  
Technical Assistance and/or Capacity-Building Organization

## Appendix 1: Organizations Interviewed for this Report

**Mission:** The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) envisions a New York State that is stronger because people are welcome, treated fairly, and given the chance to pursue their dreams. Our mission is to unite immigrants, members and allies so all New Yorkers can thrive. Our work specifically addresses the needs of New York's most marginalized immigrant communities, including newly-arrived immigrants, low-income parents, and those with limited English proficiency. With member organizations located in every borough in New York City and every county in the state, collectively serving communities that speak more than 65 languages, the NYIC has a long history and track record of coordinating collaborative efforts with members and key allies to reach target populations and respond to issues. Our organizational values are: inclusive and representative, fair and just, and accountable and trusted.

**Organization:** Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson

**Regions:** Capital Region, Central New York, Hudson Valley, Mohawk Valley, Southern Tier

**Legal Status:** 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), Political Action Committee (PAC)

**Type of Organization:** Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group

**Mission:** We are a multiracial, intergenerational organization building power for justice through community organizing, civic engagement, and leadership development.



Photo: A Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson member at a Poughkeepsie City Council meeting in support of the creation of a Municipal ID available to all residents regardless of immigration status. A Poughkeepsie Municipal ID was enacted in 2018.

<b>Organization:</b>	<b>Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust (NEFOC LT)</b>
Region:	Statewide
Legal Status:	Fiscally Sponsored
Type of Organization:	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group Statewide Table, Campaign or Coalition Technical Assistance and/or Capacity-Building Organization
Mission:	The Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust* (NEFOC LT) is a hybrid model land trust, bringing together a community land trust model and a conservation land trust model to reimagine land access as well as conservation and stewardship of communities and ecosystems with the goal of manifesting a community vision that uplifts global Indigenous, Black, and POC relationships with land, skills, and lifeways.
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<b>Organization:</b>	<b>Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY)</b>
Region:	Statewide
Legal Status:	501(c)(3)
Type of Organization:	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group
Mission:	NOFA-NY is an organization of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working together to create a sustainable regional food system that's ecologically sound and economically viable. Through demonstration and education, we promote land stewardship, organic food production, and local marketing. We bring consumer and farmer together to make high-quality food available to all people.
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<b>Organization:</b>	<b>Rural &amp; Migrant Ministry, Inc.</b>
Region:	Capital Region, Finger Lakes, Hudson Valley, Long Island, Western New York
Legal Status:	501(c)(3)
Type of Organization:	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group Statewide Table, Campaign or Coalition Technical Assistance and/or Capacity-Building Organization
Mission:	Rural & Migrant Ministry works for the creation of a just rural New York State through: 1) Nurturing leadership, 2) Standing with the disenfranchised, especially farmworkers and rural workers, 3) Changing unjust systems and structures. We carry out our mission through four worker education centers, a youth leadership development program and the accompaniment of workers through advocacy and civil rights litigation.



Photo: Rural youth gather at Rural & Migrant Ministry, Inc.'s 2019 Overnight Summer Leadership Camp

<b>Organization:</b>	<b><u>SEPA Mujer, Inc.</u></b>
<b>Region:</b>	Long Island
<b>Legal Status:</b>	501(c)(3)
<b>Type of Organization:</b>	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group
<b>Mission:</b>	SEPA Mujer stands for the well-being and success of Latina immigrant women on Long Island. Our objective is to raise and unite our voices to be heard by social and political systems in our communities. Through our work, we strive to nurture and improve civic engagement by way of leadership skills and legal representation.

<b>Organization:</b>	<b><u>Soul Fire Farm</u></b>
<b>Region:</b>	Capital Region
<b>Legal Status:</b>	501(c)(3)
<b>Type of Organization:</b>	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group
<b>Mission:</b>	Soul Fire Farm is an Afro-Indigenous centered community farm committed to uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty in the food system. We raise and distribute life-giving food as a means to end food apartheid. With deep reverence for the land and wisdom of our ancestors, we work to reclaim our collective right to belong to the earth and to have agency in the food system. We bring diverse communities together on this healing land to share skills on sustainable agriculture, natural building, spiritual activism, health, and environmental justice. We are training the next generation of activist-farmers and strengthening the movements for food sovereignty and community self-determination.

Our food sovereignty programs reach over 10,000 people each year, including farmer training for Black and Brown growers, reparations and land return initiatives for northeast farmers, food justice workshops for urban youth, home gardens for city-dwellers living under food apartheid, doorstep harvest delivery for food insecure households, and systems and policy education for public decision-makers.

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<b>Organization:</b>	<b><u>Tompkins County Workers' Center</u></b>
<b>Region:</b>	Central New York, Finger Lakes, Southern Tier
<b>Legal Status:</b>	501(c)(3)
<b>Type of Organization:</b>	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group
<b>Mission:</b>	The Tompkins County Workers' Center stands up with all people treated unfairly at work. We will support, advocate for, and seek to empower each other to create a more just community and world.

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<b>Organization:</b>	<b><u>Traditional Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Healing</u></b>
<b>Region:</b>	Central New York, Finger Lakes
<b>Legal Status:</b>	Fiscally Sponsored
<b>Type of Organization:</b>	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group
<b>Mission:</b>	The Traditional Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Healing exists to provide a place in which all people can seek refuge, sharing an understanding of the world through traditional culture and healing practices, while providing and maintaining a culturally safe place for the Indigenous community. The Traditional Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Healing believes in the preservation of Indigenous culture through a matrilineal-based community.

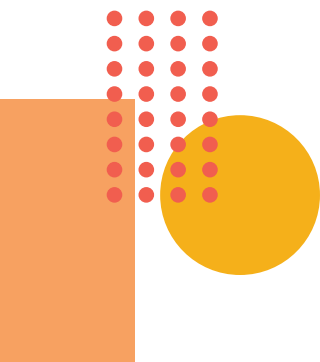


Photo: SEPA Mujer canvassing during the pandemic

<b>Organization:</b>	<b><u>Worker Justice Center of New York (WJCNY)</u></b>
Region:	Capital Region, Central New York, Mohawk Valley, Finger Lakes, Hudson Valley, North Country, Southern Tier, Western New York
Legal Status:	501(c)(3)
Type of Organization:	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group
Mission:	WJCNY supports people who are denied human rights with a focus on agricultural and other low-wage workers, through legal representation, community empowerment and advocacy for institutional change. Originally founded in 1981 as Farmworker Legal Services of New York, WJCNY was established in late 2011 through the merger of Farmworker Legal Services with the Hudson Valley-based Workers' Rights Law Center. WJCNY is now widely recognized as the premier legal services organization serving farmworkers and other low-wage workers in Upstate New York. Among immigrant communities in our region, we are widely regarded as a trusted source of information and legal assistance, as well as grassroots advocacy. We serve approximately 15,000 people each year, most of whom are migrant or immigrant individuals and families. Our programs integrate to support a largely rural, marginalized population with legal, human trafficking, survivor, outreach, advocacy programs through direct service, advice, education, consultation, and referrals.

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<b>Organization:</b>	<b><u>Workers' Center of Central New York</u></b>
Region:	Central New York, North Country
Legal Status:	501(c)(3)
Type of Organization:	Grassroots Organization/Community Organizing Group
Mission:	The Workers' Center of Central New York is a grassroots organization focused upon workplace and economic justice. It is part of a nation-wide network of innovative workers' centers affiliated with the Chicago-based Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ). It operates in and around the city of Syracuse, a city with one of the highest rates of poverty in the country, driven by deindustrialization and deunionization, the entrenchment of widespread joblessness and the proliferation of low-wage jobs. Through community organizing, leadership development, popular education and policy advocacy, the Workers' Center of Central New York empowers low-wage workers to combat workplace abuses and improve wages and working conditions throughout the community. The Workers' Center facilitates worker empowerment and leadership development through trainings related to workers' rights and occupational health and safety, orchestrates campaigns to combat wage theft and to promote employer compliance with the law, and engages in organizing and coalition-building to push for policies that will increase wages and workplace standards and promote human rights.



## APPENDIX 2: RURAL LANDSCAPE SCAN INTERVIEW AND CODING PROTOCOL

The interview protocol consisted of eight questions across three topic areas with ad hoc follow-up questions as the interviews unfolded:

### **I) Organizing Capacity and Partnership Development**

- 1) What work does your organization do regarding community organizing, base building, mobilization, advocacy or legislative lobbying?
- 2) Do you focus on local (town/county) advocacy or statewide advocacy? If both, how do these efforts overlap?
- 3) Does your organization work in coalition or partnership with others? If so, which organizations or coalitions?
- 4) What has helped enable these partnerships? What would make it easier to work in partnership with other organizations?

### **II) Policy Issue Areas**

- 5) What do you think are the significant challenges facing rural communities in New York State?
- 6) What issues facing rural New York are of greatest importance to your organization, and how do you address these issues?

### **III) Funding and Resourcing**

- 7) How is your organization funded? Do you receive support from grantmaking foundations?
- 8) What training, tools or other resources are needed to improve your advocacy work?

Each interview was recorded, transcribed and then coded using an inductive coding method. Codes were aggregated across the sample to determine the number of times each coded topic was mentioned across all interviews, as well as the total number of interviews in which the topic was discussed. Coded topics addressed in at least five interviews, or 20 percent of the interview sample, were included in the thematic analysis. Through the coding process, the following thematic areas emerged:

- 1) Characteristics of New York's Rural Communities and Rural Organizing
- 2) Policy Priorities for Rural New York
- 3a) Rural Organizers' Technical Assistance and Capacity-Building Needs
- 3b) Developing, Using and Aligning the Full Range of Vehicles for Advocacy
- 4a) Transactional Models vs. Transformational Movements
- 4b) Funder Focus: Transactional Models vs. Transformational Movements
- 4c) Statewide Table Focus: Transactional Models vs. Transformational Movements

# APPENDIX 3: 3B) – DEVELOPING, USING AND ALIGNING THE FULL RANGE OF VEHICLES FOR ADVOCACY

Within theme 3a) *Rural Organizers' Technical Assistance and Capacity-Building Needs*, a sub-theme emerged of developing, using and aligning strategies for organizing, policy and advocacy, and electoral work. These findings suggest that once organizations have built a base, many look for technical assistance in building out to 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4) status and political action committees (PAC) for maximum effectiveness in their advocacy work. Other organizations choose to work in partnership or coalition with others to use and align individual members' 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), and PAC activities across the coalition.

## **Developing 501(c)(4) Organizations** 20 Mentions, 8 Interviews (32%)

About one-third of interviewees spoke of their 501(c)(4) work or their desire to create or partner with a 501(c)(4) organization. Much of this discussion surrounded the 501(c)(3) limitations surrounding lobbying expenditures. However, at least a couple of organizations said they also use their 501(c)(4) to engage in electoral and partisan work in addition to lobbying. One respondent described their coalition's challenge in coordinating lobbying work across all of their 501(c)(3) members to ensure that the collective lobbying work can be done without any one organization exceeding its 501(h)-election cap. A few respondents were unaware of the 501(h)-election as a tool for limited lobbying by a 501(c)(3) organization. This suggests the need for greater awareness and access to technical assistance organizations such as the Lawyers Alliance for New York or Bolder Advocacy.

## **Legal Advocacy and Other Litigation** 11 Mentions, 7 Interviews (28%)

These interviewees discussed the importance of litigation in their advocacy work. Some respondents noted their use of impact litigation (such as class action lawsuits) alongside organizing and legislative advocacy. They said a coalition's coordinated use of all of these strategies, including litigation, can be extremely powerful. Other respondents described campaigns to address a lack of policy enforcement by compelling the New York State Attorney General to take legal action against those who violate the law.

## **Lobby Days** 8 Mentions, 6 Interviews (24%)

These respondents said the use of lobby days in Albany was vital to their organization's work or statewide coalition. A recurring theme was the challenge of engaging the full participation of rural communities in lobby days. Much of this surrounded the lack of available transportation and the economic inability of people to take unpaid time off from work to participate. Other respondents mentioned instances when rural organizers received assistance for transportation and stipends for members' participation. When those barriers were removed, those rural organizers turned out far more people than a similarly funded group in a larger metro area. Respondents attributed this to both the strong ties people have in smaller communities and the pent-

up feeling among rural community members of being overlooked and neglected by policymakers.

## **Budget Advocacy**

**11 Mentions, 5 Interviews (20%)**

Except for one organization, these respondents were all statewide tables/coalitions, key steering committee members of statewide policy campaigns, or technical assistance organizations. They noted that state budget advocacy was a crucial component of their work. In most instances, these organizations targeted policies that had budgetary impacts, as opposed to those organizations that chose, as part of an intentional strategy, budget-neutral policies seen as more “winnable.” A couple of examples involved the preservation of state funding for rural needs, often through state grants and contracts to direct-service organizations. The fact that only one grassroots organization discussed budgetary advocacy suggests there may be a lack of awareness and technical know-how about the New York State budget process in parts of the state.

## **Electoral and Partisan Work including Political Action Committees**

**11 Mentions, 5 Interviews (20%)**

These respondents discussed their work to get out the vote (GOTV), with some organizations using candidate

endorsement processes and other voter engagement efforts. What was interesting about these respondents is that all but one came from Western New York, the Hudson Valley, New York City, and Long Island. This also suggests there may be a regional bifurcation in capacity and technical expertise when it comes to establishing and operating PACs, GOTV work and candidate endorsements.

## **Recommendations**

- ▶ Do not limit grantmaking to legislative campaigns; instead, make grants across the spectrum of advocacy, including base building, coalition building, campaign development, budget advocacy, policy implementation, and policy enforcement
- ▶ Expand access to legal technical service providers such as the Lawyers Alliance for New York or Bolder Advocacy to build advocacy capacity across grassroots organizations
- ▶ Ensure equal access to technical assistance providers, especially in rural communities



Photo: Mohawk Valley Latino Association members during a Christmas toy donation

# APPENDIX 4: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## Books, Articles and Other Resources Recommended During Interviews

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