



**GROUNDSWELL**  
ACTION FUND

# BLENDPRINT



**2020-2025**



## FROM OUR SENIOR DIRECTOR

Women of color (WOC) are the highest turnout, most progressive voters in the country, and among the most civically engaged in their communities year-round.

The boldness, and the moral and strategic clarity that WOC, transgender, and gender-nonconforming (TGNC) people of color demonstrate in advancing progressive social change – from the ballot box to the policy arena to street protest – is unmatched by any other demographic in the United States. And yet, they are almost completely shut out of the multi-billion-dollar field of “progressive” electoral 501(c)(4) funding. This shut out is responsible for countless electoral defeats and for slowing progress toward a truly participatory, reflective democracy.

At this critical time for our country and the planet, we can no longer afford these losses. Resourcing women of color-led organizing in the electoral arena is not an addendum to winning – it is a requirement, and 501(c)(4) organizations are key.

Launched in the aftermath of the 2016 election, Groundswell Action Fund (GAF) gives donors the opportunity to support the strongest and most promising WOC-led 501(c)(4) organizations across the United States.

The sister fund to Groundswell Fund – a nationally recognized 501(c)(3)

foundation with a 15-year track record of resourcing high-impact women of color-led organizing – Groundswell Action Fund offers donors an equally strategic channel for their giving in the 501(c)(4) arena.

While 501(c)(3)s are critical to many aspects of grassroots social change, their limitations – which range from limits on lobbying for policy change, to prohibitions on candidate endorsement and speaking publicly on “partisan” issues close to an election – severely restrict the power of organizations to effect change. Having 501(c)(4) tax status results in a different range of power: unlimited lobbying capacity, and the ability to support “partisan” issues, such as abortion access and climate justice right up to election day, and to directly challenge policy makers for their stances on these issues, influencing electoral outcomes. The capacity of 501(c)(4) work is critical to helping people connect the dots between voting and the issues that impact their daily lives, a connection that is essential to building their motivation to stay civically engaged as voters and activists.

Groundswell Action Fund offers donors a new opportunity. We invite you to join us!

In solidarity,



Quanita Toffie  
Senior Director



**Groundswell Action Fund complements short-term campaign investments by giving donors a way to support a more durable, participatory democracy. Groundswell’s track record of bolstering women of color-led organizing with general support funding and capacity building is unparalleled in the philanthropic sector.**

CONNIE HELLER

Groundswell Action Fund donor and Board Member





MPower Change Action Fund

## GROUNDWELL ACTION FUND WAS FOUNDED ON A SIMPLE BUT REVOLUTIONARY PROMISE:

In order to achieve a fair and just society, those who are most excluded from our democracy must be at the center of transforming it. We believe that the people

living at the sharpest crosshairs of race, class, and gender injustice often have the clearest insight into systemic oppression and the best solutions for dismantling it for all people.

**Our mission is to strengthen U.S. movements for reproductive and social justice by resourcing intersectional electoral organizing led by women of color, low-income women, and transgender and gender nonconforming people of color.**

## Our grantee partners lead the field in three areas:

### 1 DURABLE POWER

Philanthropic giving to one-off electoral mobilization may be the norm, but it produces paper-thin wins at best: candidates elected without a base to hold them accountable, and good laws passed without a community to ensure their implementation or defend them from repeal. Giving to grassroots work that engages voters year-round produces more wins in the short term and more durable changes in people's lives over the long run.

### 3 BOLD DEMANDS

In order to save our country and the Earth, we must move from fear-based demands to those that are grounded in the fullness of what communities deserve, and what the survival of the planet requires. From "The Squad" in Congress, to the Black women who founded #metoo and #blacklivesmatter, to the leaders who have mainstreamed the push to repeal the Hyde Amendment - women of color are the clear leaders in making bold demands.

### 2 360° VISION

Intersectional organizing that uses a race, class, gender, and decolonization lens is the most effective approach for both energizing a broad grassroots base of support and blocking right-wing attempts to use wedge issues (such as abortion and transgender rights) to erode the rights of all people.

Trans United Fund



**If there's one funder we can count on to continue to fund us even as our community speaks its most courageous truth to power, it's Groundswell.**

MICHELLE TREMILLO  
Texas Organizing Project





CHIRLA Action Fund

**We support organizations and leaders who are paving the road to liberation and harnessing elections as part of a broader strategy of transformation and power building.**

While we and our grantee partners understand the importance of winning individual elections or policy fights, the long-term prize is creating and sustaining a truly inclusive, participatory democracy with leaders who come from and reflect our communities, and who are rooted in progressive values of interconnectedness, structural inclusion, and an economy for the common good.

Groundswell Action Fund and our sister 501(c)(3) organization Groundswell Fund are unique in philanthropy for being founded and led by women of color who come directly out of community, labor, and electoral organizing.

Our work is grounded in the shared lived experience of the majority of our board, staff, and grantee partners.

**Our structure, methodology, and ethos - a commitment to trusting and uplifting the self-determination of women of color, transgender and gender nonconforming people of color - model philanthropy as reparations.**

The board members and advisors who set the strategies for Groundswell Action Fund include some of the most prominent and respected WOC leaders of our time, and the staff team that supports both Groundswell Fund and Groundswell Action Fund has decades of grassroots organizing experience and relationships across a diversity of social justice movements.



**Groundswell is an unprecedented foundation that is fighting for women of color to get the respect and resources we need to actualize the change that our families, our communities, and our country desperately need.**

ANDREA MERCADO  
New Florida Majority





Care in Action

# 3 THERE ARE THREE KEY ASPECTS TO OUR NEW BLUEPRINT

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## GRANTMAKING

### **BENCHMARK: Award a total of \$15 million in grants.**

Groundswell Action Fund will provide unrestricted general support grants that allow organizations to build their infrastructure and avoid the harm caused by boom-and-bust electoral funding. We will also provide short-term rapid response funding in moments of extreme challenge or unexpected opportunity, for example, during final push moments of a campaign when one more radio slot or extra canvassers may make the difference.

## Criteria for Funding

### **REFLECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

We will center funding for WOC-led 501(c)(4) organizations across social justice movements. Grantee partners must have an engaged and growing membership base of people directly affected by the conditions that the organization seeks to transform.

We may also support individual WOC staff leaders within organizations that are white or cis-male led and white women-led organizations that demonstrate solidarity with communities of color and play a critical role in movement ecosystems.

### **HIGH-IMPACT ORGANIZATIONS**

with a strong record of accomplishments, and for which our funding can leverage impact or scale.

### **PROMISING EMERGING ORGANIZATIONS**

that have a grassroots base of support and are ready to build the infrastructure and capacity needed to scale up impact. This includes a deep commitment to support the reproductive justice movement to build its 501(c)(4) capacity.

### **YEAR-ROUND 501(C)(4) GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING CAPACITY**

Organizations must have strong, year-round, long-term grassroots organizing rooted in base building, leadership development, and strategic campaigns. They must enable those most affected by injustice to hold elected officials accountable and transform the policies, systems, and material conditions that affect their lives.

### **INTERSECTIONAL ORGANIZING**

Organizations must have a strong race, class, gender, and decolonization analysis of the political landscape that informs strategic campaign plans and internal organizational practices, for example, creating an environment where staff and constituents are supported to bring their whole selves and their complete identities.

### **SOLIDARITY-BASED APPROACH**

Organizations must stand in solidarity with vulnerable communities. Groundswell does not support organizations that work against reproductive justice or LGBTQ rights and justice.

**Under our new Blueprint, Groundswell Action Fund will move \$20 million to the field between 2020 and 2025.**

## A Note on Evaluating Success

Conventional electoral philanthropy puts a premium on work that advertises a low “cost-per-vote.” Cost-per-vote formulas are an inadequate measure of what is needed to advance liberation.

Just as fast food is cheaper than a nutritious meal, but costs your health in the long-run, so too is one-off, low-cost-per-vote engagement cheaper than year-round, grass-rooted voter engagement, but costs us our participatory democracy over the long-term.

In communities of color in particular, one-off voter engagement operations that don’t stick around long enough to help people realize changes in their daily lives can actually decrease voter turnout in the future by leaving people feeling used.

**Short-term wins are important, but metrics and indicators for effective power building must go beyond a narrow focus on winning elections to measure the growth of base/members, leaders, and infrastructure, among other benchmarks.**

By learning from our sister organization, Groundswell Fund, which has conducted the largest annual, nationwide evaluation of the U.S. reproductive justice movement for over a decade, GAF will develop an evaluation tool for electoral philanthropy that provides a similar utility for funders, grantee partners, and other supporters of WOC-led power-building work.



**There are many funders who have our back to win the next campaign or election. Groundswell Action Fund is a funder who has our back on the path to liberation.”**

JESSICA BYRD  
Movement For Black Lives Electoral  
Justice Project



## OUR BENCHMARKS

- 1) **Provide \$5 million** in direct capacity building support to the field.
- 2) **Grantee partners** will engage approximately 2.5 million New American Majority voters during major election years.
- 3) **100% of grantee partners** will win significant policy changes that improve the material conditions of their communities.
- 4) **10 reproductive justice organizations** will establish 501(c)(4) operations comprising year-round base-building and electoral campaigns.
- 5) **15 WOC grantee leaders** will develop advanced data and analytics expertise that will result in improved voter data quality, enabling organizations to better track, target, and engage with communities of color.
- 6) **25 organizational leaders** will be featured in national news media outlets to change the narrative on electoral organizing.
- 7) **30 organizations will have an advanced legal understanding** of 501(c)(4) strategies to innovate in the field boldly and safely. Organizational leaders will understand the opportunities and limitations of running a 501(c)(4), ensuring they operate within the law and take full advantage of the opportunities possible within the 501(c)(4) structure.

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One Fair Wage

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## CAPACITY BUILDING

The health of organizations that are doing year-round electoral organizing is critical to the health of the United States' democracy.

Boom-and-bust funding that only shows up to elect certain candidates during key election years stresses and cracks organizational staff and infrastructure.

When dollars disappear after an election cycle, organizations struggle to advance momentum for those newly activated voters and leaders, and have to start from scratch to retrain and rebuild. This is

incredibly inefficient, not to mention demoralizing for communities.

**We plan to stand in the gap for organizations, providing them robust infrastructure support in a number of areas.**

For reproductive justice organizations that are actively considering stepping into the 501(c)(4) space, we will provide tailored support to help them either set up their own 501(c)(4)s or access fiscal sponsorship. All capacity building offerings are optional and not mandatory for grantee partners.

### Areas of Support



#### Data, Digital, and Tech Infrastructure

The lack of WOC data practitioners hinders both WOC-led electoral efforts and social justice movements at large. **We will build a deep bench of WOC data practitioners across our grantee partners by making previously out-of-reach training, coaching, and support available.** We will support organizations to own their own data; improve data quality; and use data effectively for strategic targeting, modeling, digital organizing, and campaign adjustments in real time.



#### Media Amplification

The 2016 and 2018 election cycles demonstrated how important the digital space has become to meaning making, narrative dissemination, and voter engagement and mobilization. It is essential for power-building organizations to shape the national narrative both proactively and in response to key political moments. Lack of communications support is a barrier to this that we plan to remove. **We will make strategic communications coaches and other resources available to grantee partners, enabling them to succeed in crafting effective messaging, engaging traditional media (op-eds, press releases), and compelling digital media platforms (blogs, social media).**





### Political Education

Failure to address wedge issues such as transphobia, attacks on abortion, Islamophobia, or anti-Semitism has made progressive movements vulnerable to attacks from the Right, which routinely weaponizes these issues to erode the rights of everyone. GAF grantee partners are already leaders in intersectional organizing with a race, class, gender, and decolonization lens, but most organizations are stronger in some areas than others. **We will collaborate with values-aligned movement thinkers, leaders, and training organizations to offer curriculum, popular education tools, and in-person and virtual training spaces to deepen shared analysis on race, gender, class, and decolonization.**



### Legal Compliance

A deep understanding of the rules governing 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations and activities, particularly the federal Treasury Regulations, is necessary for the effective use of resources to support a range of tactics and organizing modes, for example, properly connecting legislative, electoral, and issue work. Because the organizations GAF funds are often testing bold new tactics and strategies, legal support is critical to ensure these organizations take risks safely and within the letter of the law. However, the price tag for ongoing legal counsel is hefty and, in fact, building a legal compliance structure within each organization is impractical and not cost

effective. As a result of building 501(c)(4) organizations of their own, **many movement leaders and practitioners have developed practical compliance skills that they are willing to share with emerging organizations to help them prepare critical questions and develop understanding of the type of legal counsel needed.** GAF will foster learning opportunities to help grantee partners access this information to leverage scarce 501(c)(4) dollars for program delivery. GAF will also provide access to legal support for grantee partners through our own legal counsel.



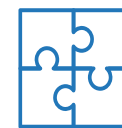
Black Voters Matter Fund



### Lifting Leadership

WOC and TGNC POC leaders of movement organizations have a depth and breadth of expertise in strategic organizing across the progressive movement. They are involved in larger movement-wide strategies to transform democracy while running the day-to-day operations of their organizations. GAF sees a responsibility to honor their contribution by creating space and a platform to amplify WOC expertise as a way to advance the collective path to liberation. This may take the form

of connecting leaders to fellowships that allow space to think, reflect, teach, and/or write; supporting the creation of a network that connects leaders with one another before, during, or after transitions from their organizations; and helping leaders to build a bench of leadership in the organization to back them up. **We will build and support the container for convening WOC leaders to come together to recharge, connect, hash out big ideas, sharpen thinking together, or self-organize the best use of time together.**



### Electoral Plan and Strategy Development

**We will make a set of leading WOC strategists available as coaches to grantee partners who request help with strengthening their electoral/issue campaign plans.** Coaches will support groups to build campaign plans that win while maximizing membership recruitment, leadership development, constituent mobilization, and infrastructure development. When appropriate, GAF will partner with other capacity builders to provide 501(c)(4) startup assistance.



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## FUNDER ORGANIZING

Funder organizing is a hallmark of Groundswell's work.

On the 501(c)(3) side, Groundswell Fund has been a bold thought leader in the philanthropic sector. We have maintained a strong presence within at least ten funder and donor affinity groups and networks, presented at dozens of meetings and events every year, regularly hosted educational events for donors and foundation staff, and raised the visibility of our grantee partners and the reproductive justice movement as a whole through an ongoing communications program.

Our central goal is to increase resources to intersectional organizing led by women of color, regardless of whether those resources come to us or go directly into the field. Groundswell Action Fund has the same goal for the 501(c)(4) field.

**In the long term, Groundswell Action Fund envisions a 501(c)(4) field in which the transformative political strategies and vision of progressive women of color and transgender and gender non-conforming people of color are supported.**

We invite you to join us in bringing this vision into being!



## OUR BENCHMARKS

Continued from page 11

- 8) **Increase GAF's annual budget from \$1.5 million to \$5 million**, moving at least 80% of revenue back out to the field.
- 9) **Achieve a funding ratio of 80% from individual donors and 20% from institutional funders** to maintain maximum giving flexibility to support bold progressive change.
- 10) **Play a key role in galvanizing increased giving** to WOC-led 501(c)(4) work within at least three donor networks.
- 11) **Publish at least 50 op-eds or blog posts** highlighting GAF grantee partners.
- 12) **In five metro, regions, and/or states, build donor communities** that see GAF as a home for their electoral giving and engage through local gatherings featuring political education and an opportunity to meet key local grantee partners.

One Fair Wage



Resourcing women of color-led organizing in the electoral arena is not an addendum to winning – it is a requirement.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would like to thank all of our board, staff, and partners who have informed the 2020-2025 Groundswell Action Fund Blueprint. They include:

All Past and Present Groundswell Action Fund Grantee Organizations who are on the frontlines of innovation and change every day.

Board Members who contributed to this most recent Blueprint design process, including: Jessica Byrd, Three Point Strategies; Latosha Brown, Black Voters Matter Fund; Michelle Tremillo, Texas Organizing Project; Connie Heller, Linked Fate Fund for Justice; Silvia Henriquez, All\* Above All; Rye Young; Margaret Chapman Pomponio, West Virginia FREE

Consultant: Adrienne Shropshire

Past and Present Staff who contributed to this most recent Blueprint design process, including: Quanita Toffie, Vanessa Daniel, Meenakshi Menon, Charlene Sinclair

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Cover images: The left image is from Advance Native Political Leadership courtesy of Jonathan Sims. The top image is courtesy of Black to the Future Action Fund, and the right image is courtesy of Mijente.

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