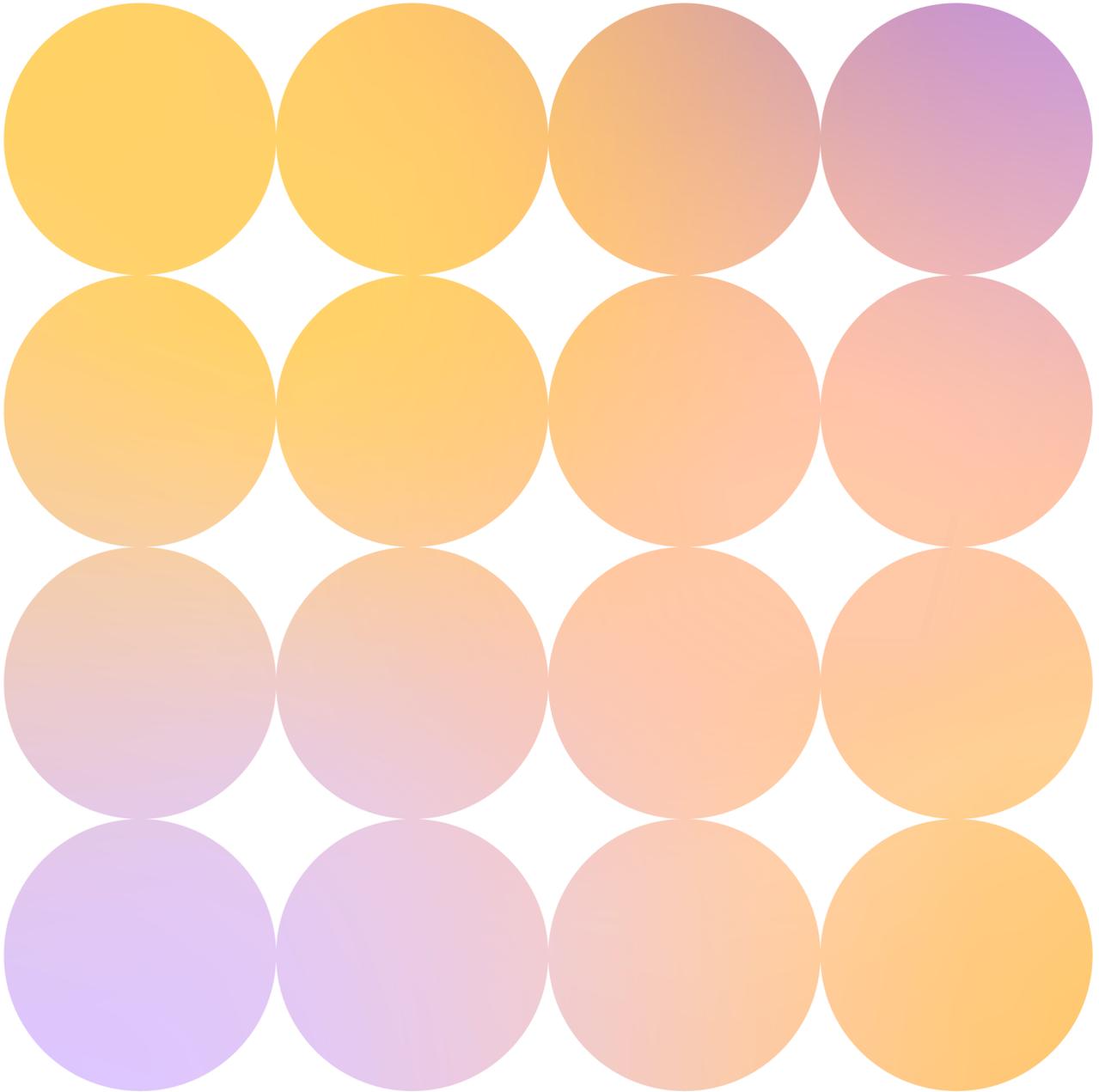


# WORKING WITH INTERMEDIARIES STRATEGICALLY

ADAPTED FROM A REPORT PREPARED FOR THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

November 2023



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## Introduction

As philanthropic practice is reexamined through a racial equity and social justice lens, foundations are taking a fresh look at intermediaries as a potentially fundamental component of strategy. In particular, there is a desire among some to redefine the role of intermediaries from transactional agents of the foundation to agents of transformation that advance power building and racial equity as core functions.<sup>1</sup>

Some large foundations are increasingly turning to intermediary organizations that have knowledge and proximity—and the trust of the communities in which they are operating—to serve as a bridge between them and their intended beneficiaries. Generally, these foundations use intermediaries for regranting, pooled funding, capacity building, program design and management, and fiscal sponsorship. While important, these functions are commissioned by funders to serve funders, usually with a goal of improving efficiency, providing capacity-building assistance to grantees, and/or diversifying their investment portfolios to include small or community-based organizations.

In the fall of 2022, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) commissioned Cynthia Gibson and Maria Mottola to explore and make recommendations as to how it could better partner with intermediaries in ways that reflect a commitment to power sharing, racial equity, and community voice, as well as with the values and goals of its current and potential grantees. The RWJF team was particularly interested in intermediaries working with organizations that (a) have total operating budgets of \$2 million or less, (b) are advancing health and racial equity and social justice, and (c) are BIPOC-led.

Eliciting this information involved two components: an extensive field/literature scan and interviews with 30 informants, including practitioners, funders, researchers, consultants, and foundation staff members (see appendix B). This report summarizes findings from this scan and makes recommendations for foundations to consider in identifying and working with intermediaries that it believes are important to support in light of its commitment to racial equity and community voice. An adaptable tool was also created to help program staff navigate decision-making points and options for determining when and how to best use intermediaries.

## Starting Point: Definitions and Barriers

The starting point for this effort was twofold: (1) to clarify definitions, especially intermediary, which the foundation defined as “nonprofit organizations (and, on occasion, for-profit entities) that have reach and credibility in specific areas, skills, populations, and/or communities, as well as capacity to manage financial oversight;” and (2) identifying barriers that prevent program staff from reaching smaller organizations (and that lead them to consider working with intermediaries to do so).

Clarifying the above is important because there is a tendency for foundations to rush in and start brainstorming shopping lists of potential intermediaries. The assumption is that there are clear types of intermediaries that are better at helping funders reach smaller organizations more strategically and systematically.

An inspection of the landscape, however, suggests this assumption is deeply flawed. Practitioners and funders interviewed for this project emphasized that almost every organization has the potential to be an intermediary, depending on what it’s doing, for whom, and under what circumstances. Community foundations are funders, but they also serve as intermediaries. Organizations such as the [Local Initiatives Support Coalition](#) (LISC) are nonprofits but also serve as regranters. State nonprofit associations are capacity-building and advocacy intermediaries. Regional intermediaries like [Propel Nonprofits](#) are regranters, lenders, and fiscal sponsors. [NEO Philanthropy](#) is an intermediary for both donors and the nonprofits they support through NEO’s collaborative funds. In short, there are a vast number and variety of organizations that can and do serve as intermediaries.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom David, “Power and the Changing Role of Intermediaries,” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, April 1, 2021, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/power-and-the-changing-role-of-intermediaries/>.

## What is an intermediary anyway?

Intermediaries can take many forms. At the broadest level, there are intermediaries that work with/serve philanthropy and others that work with/serve nonprofits. And there are some that do both.

A scan of the literature reveals that even though there is “no single, accepted definition of [intermediary] in philanthropy,” it is often viewed as an entity that meets the needs of donors.<sup>2</sup> In a paper for the Foundation Center (now Candid), Peter Szanton calls and defines *philanthropic intermediary* as one that meets any of three tests: 1) it funds a grantee(s) directly, 2) performs a function so important that absent the intermediary, the funder would have to perform itself, and 3) relates to grantees or a field of interest in any way that makes it act as a grantmaking advisor.<sup>3</sup> *Inside Philanthropy* sees a philanthropic intermediary as “an entity that link funders to the groups they fund.”<sup>4</sup> PEAK Grantmaking describes it as a “mission-driven organization that . . . links donors . . . with organizations and individuals delivering charitable services.”<sup>5</sup>

Some of the types of intermediaries that serve the philanthropic sector include donor-advised funds, community foundations, fiscal sponsors, collaboratives, or pooled funds, fund aggregators, and independent companies that provide program design/management services to donors. Respondents also mentioned “hybrids” (philanthropic intermediaries that serve both donors and nonprofits), management support organizations, law firms, research and development entities, capacity builders/trainers, and advocacy groups.

While all of these are valuable and needed services, respondents expressed concern that the default definition of *intermediary continues to center the needs of institutional philanthropy without regard to the needs of the sector as a whole*. They pointed to two specific issues.

First, there are hundreds of intermediaries whose primary purpose is to serve nonprofits—especially those that are small to mid-sized (about 95 percent of all nonprofits have budgets under \$5 million). Although often supported by foundations, these kinds of “infrastructure organizations” operate at the local, state, regional, or national levels and offer management support, advocacy, data, training, technical assistance, and other services to grantees and thousands of other nonprofits that benefit from them.<sup>6</sup>

There are also intermediaries that serve nonprofits but are focused on supporting the larger movements in which those organizations are working.

*An intermediary is an organization that serves as a bridge between a funder and an on-the-ground grantee. There are two broad types: donor-centered (developing programs for donors—creating these because a donor has a need they can't meet on their own) and movement building-centered groups (supporting advocacy, movement building or service groups that have a specific mission and need a back office to help them so they can focus on their missions). Each is defined differently depending on which side you're looking at.*

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Szanton, *Toward More Effective Use of Intermediaries*, Foundation Center (now Candid), September 2003. [https://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/research/pdf/practicematters\\_01\\_paper.pdf](https://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/research/pdf/practicematters_01_paper.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Inside Philanthropy, “What Is a Philanthropic Intermediary?” *IP Explainer* (blog), December 12, 2022, <https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2022/2/22/ip-explainer-what-is-a-philanthropic-intermediary>

<sup>5</sup> Krista Batey, “An Introduction to Intermediaries,” Peak Grantmaking, issue 12, October 9, 2017, <http://www.peakgrantmaking.org/insights/an-introduction-to-intermediaries>.

<sup>6</sup> “Investing in Infrastructure: A Letter from Infrastructure Organizations to Funders,” May 13, 2016, [https://avpn.asia/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Investing-in-Infrastructure\\_digital.pdf](https://avpn.asia/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Investing-in-Infrastructure_digital.pdf) and Cynthia Gibson, “Why Every Foundation Should Fund Infrastructure,” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, January 25, 2008, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/why-every-foundation-should-fund-infrastructure>.

Second, in recent years, the definition of intermediary has become more complex and fluid. According to Tom David, author of a recent report on philanthropic intermediaries for the California Endowment:

*Some of the largest and most established philanthropic intermediaries can encompass multiple subunits and operations and cover the entire spectrum from program design and management to regranteeing to fiscal sponsorship. Community foundations also historically positioned themselves as intermediaries to help grow and strengthen their local nonprofit infrastructure. Other organizations that do not necessarily identify themselves as philanthropic intermediaries can take on one or more of these functions to augment their primary mission (e.g., public foundations). Increasingly, experienced movement organizations are assuming philanthropic roles as a natural extension of their organizing and power-building work.<sup>7</sup>*

There are also platforms that are “challenging and disrupting old definitions of intermediary and are poised to provide enhanced forms of strategic partnership.” These include models that evolved to support power building by people of color or what Change Elemental calls “constituent-led groups” who are led by and supporting historically oppressed communities.<sup>8</sup>

The term intermediary itself is being questioned, including by many interviewees:

*I’d love to see the term chucked. It’s the wrong semantic paradigm because it assumes the reigning goal is for organizations to have independent financial and legal tax status or governance structures because these things are essential to ‘growth’ or programs. It also assumes there’s this thing that sits between the funder and the ultimate end user. That’s a tripartite system and reinforces the assumption, again, that the goal is establishing freestanding entities with their own governance. We’re not going to change anything without changing that ontology.*

*We don’t use the word intermediary. We refer to them as partners. We see that relationship as center to the work. We think of organizations that have similar goals or intention. In that way, we invite people to be in partnership with us. When you say ‘intermediary,’ you’re asking an organization to do your bidding or your work. You’re directing the intervention or strategy. You’ve defined that. That’s the rub, though: How much do you name or own that or let the community direct what they think the money should be used for, etc.? What do YOU mean by intermediary? Philosophically? We use the word partners because it gets to the spirit we want with those orgs. Intermediaries is more transactional. Language matters.*

*We don’t say we’re an intermediary even though we play that role. Intermediary is perceived as neutral and it’s not. It implies that the functional power and determinative decision-making power is in the hands of the originating source or owner of the money. The intermediary is there to grease the wheels and distribute the money according to a plan that’s been decided by some other entity.*

*We don’t see ourselves as a purely for-service organization. We don’t see ourselves as an entity that creates the infrastructure or provides back-office function for donors to distribute their funds. We are in praxis with the giving community so our participation is about trying to organize and change the behaviors of the participants.*

## **What are the barriers that lead foundation staff to consider working with intermediaries?**

Given that organizations that serve as intermediaries resist neat categorization, respondents said that a better place for funders to start is with clarifying and prioritizing the wide variety of functions foundation staff members say they need and then creating a process to identify and support intermediary partners appropriately and effectively. But what do foundations need and what is leading them to consider working with intermediaries to meet those needs?

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<sup>7</sup> Tom David, *Philanthropic Intermediaries in This Age of National Reckoning*, California Endowment, November 2020, <https://www.scribd.com/document/500779871/Philanthropic-Intermediaries>

<sup>8</sup> Natalie Bamdad and Susan Misra, *Centering Equity in Intermediary Relationships: An Opportunity for Funders*, Change Elemental, 2020, [https://changeelemental.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Centering\\_Equity\\_Intermediary\\_report\\_WEB.pdf](https://changeelemental.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Centering_Equity_Intermediary_report_WEB.pdf).

Research indicated that foundation staff members' needs fall into three general categories:

#### **Administrative barriers**

Foundations want to fund nonprofits that do not have a current 501(c)(3) status or the financial oversight and management large foundations require. Foundations' application guidelines, reporting, timelines, and processes are confusing or irrelevant to under-resourced organizations. Foundation programs are complex or not fully transparent to potential grantees, making it difficult to understand what is expected of them, how decisions will be made, and the process/criteria that will be used to make those decisions. Large foundations have broad scope, with limited staff capacity to manage and administer large numbers of small grants.

#### **Programmatic barriers**

Grant deliverables may be designed around strict accountability and measurable outcomes that potential organizations need the capacity to meet. The foundation may have limited risk tolerance. Larger national, national, and/or legacy foundations may have difficulty identifying smaller, community-based organizations to support, and their grantmaking criteria and approach may advantage larger, resourced, or well-established organizations that are often White-led. Program staff members may have insufficient knowledge of available intermediaries when potential grantees seek advice about how/where to find one. Foundations can inadvertently cause competition and rifts in a field, locality, or issue-specific network when its grantmaking strategy/criteria is perceived as unclear or detached from the work on the ground.

#### **Relational barriers**

Larger foundations may have limited staff capacity to operate and communicate relationally (as people), rather than transactionally (as an institution), with diverse grantees and applicants. Foundations may struggle with mitigating power differentials between large national funders and smaller local groups while also honoring their obligation to ensure that funds are used appropriately, legally, and responsibly.

## Needed: An Expanded Perspective and Intentional Thought Process When Making Decisions about Working with Intermediaries

As noted, addressing these barriers by working with an intermediary requires foundations to stipulate their needs and then align those with the functions an intermediary might provide (e.g., fiscal sponsorship, management assistance, regranteeing, back-office services, fund aggregation, donor support, program design, and technical assistance).

In short, when making decisions about intermediaries, form should follow function.

But is that all foundations need to think about? According to respondents, the answer was a resounding no. While they agreed that identifying needs and functions is an important and necessary first step in these decisions, it is insufficient if funders want to reach BIPOC-led, social justice organizations by working with intermediaries.

Respondents suggest the reason for this is that intermediaries and grantees don't always see themselves, the work they do, and the problems they are asked to address the same way that funders may see them. Foundations, intermediaries, and grantees can and do have different perspectives that are often highly nuanced and that can pose direct challenges to existing assumptions and practices about intermediaries and funders' work with them.

What is needed, respondents said, is for funders to expand their perspective and be more intentional when it comes to working with intermediaries. That will require funders to take a more holistic view of not only what they need but also of what the organizations, networks, movements, and fields they are supporting need to achieve their goals—and doing so before they make decisions about how intermediaries can help do that. Essentially, the intermediary becomes a means to a greater end rather than an end unto itself.

*Funders need to start by thinking about the intersections between the issues they want to address, which will determine the kind of groups and also networks to consider—funders sometimes forget about networks, which are important. Who is active in that intersection? Is it important that they have a racial justice lens? Who can we partner with? Who are other funders supporting? Where’s the energy in the donor community? Basically, what does the space or ecosystem look like as a whole and where are there gaps and opportunities to strengthen it?*

Therefore, the most important question for funders to ask is, **Why do we want to use an intermediary?** Specifically: To what end do we think that working with intermediaries will be most beneficial to all parties: the intermediary, and the grantees?

This question reflects a growing desire for more reciprocity among philanthropic, intermediary, and community partners. Reconceptualizing the traditional transactional approach that foundations have taken with intermediaries and their grantees, this perspective sees each partner as having assets and resources as well as needs, and affirms that naming and exploring these reciprocal relationships will lead to better structures and outcomes for our common mission-focused work.



This reconceptualization challenges funders who assume that asking why they want to work with intermediaries is obvious. According to respondents, it's anything but. As one said, "There's still a tendency for funders to rush to the toolkit and start brainstorming long shopping lists of the potential benefits of working with a particular intermediary or creating directories of organizations that can serve as intermediaries. A better approach is asking, 'Why do we want to use an intermediary and to what end?'"

A program staff member shared how this sometimes plays out at their foundation:

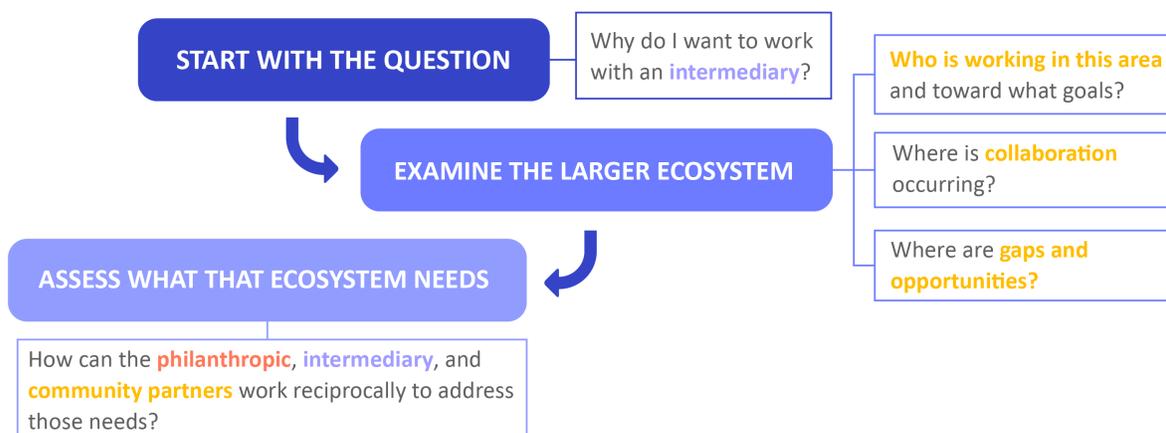
*Program officers will say, 'Here's what I want to do. Do you think I need an intermediary and if so, which one should I use?' That's instead of asking 'What am I trying to do in the field? What groups need to be supported in that field and do they even exist? And would intermediaries be helpful in responding to their needs? Which ones?' Or, they'll have a strategy in mind and want to find an intermediary to make this happen. That usually means just deploying money which is very transactional. If program officers are saying that for this field to survive and flourish there are existing organizations that just need to be bigger and more powerful than they are, just start with an investment in them; don't tie yourself in knots to do this kind of intermediary grant. Basically, they need to start out with clarifying the goals of the project, its scope, or its ecosystem, and then ask what it needs? What does it look like? Where are the gaps? Would intermediaries or sourcing intermediaries help to fill those gaps and what do they need?*

Respondents agreed, pointing out the difficulty in talking about intermediaries without an understanding of the funders' goals:

*Is the goal system change at the community level, and are intermediaries needed to achieve that? If so, the function of the intermediary would be to support power-building capacity in those communities. If you hold that as your North Star, it's easier. Stipulating it as the primary goal allows funders to better clarify the kinds of capacities local networks need to drive social change. That's very different from a goal of helping some small organizations strengthen their fundraising or management systems so they can be more effective, which would require a different kind of intermediary.*

*It can't be overstated how important it is for a foundation or program area to be very clear about what it's trying to accomplish. Intermediaries are most effective when they have a clear design structure and capacity. But some foundations are just trying to off-load their grantmaking. Foundations need to ask if that's really what they're doing or what they mean when they say they want to use intermediaries. When they say 'community voice' or 'decision-making,' how serious are they? Are they open to funding something they'd never fund if there weren't any community involvement? If you look at their list of grantees and see some on there that you can say, 'Wow, we didn't expect that,' that means it's authentic.*

*The key question is: What is it that these groups have that could help make the foundation stronger? Even if their only reason is 'we can't fund groups that small,' it's important to still examine what their greater hopes for those groups are!*



Another important question for foundations to ask is if and how they will center racial equity into decisions about intermediaries. Some foundations that are attempting to become inclusive, antiracist organizations are making it a priority to center communities most affected by structural racism and other forms of inequity.

This requires a shift in how they fund social change—one that moves away from testing “scalable” solutions to removing the structural barriers that cause inequity. How this shift will be realized comes with many questions. Foundations wanting to make this shift will need to make it a practice to ask questions such why racial equity, power sharing, and/or community voice are important to its funding strategies and approaches. Program staff members can ask, “How do these priorities manifest in my choice of grantees, the decision to use an intermediary, and the relationship I want to have with the intermediary and the ultimate grantees?”

Foundations will also have to decide whether equity will become the overarching—rather than one of many—criteria they will use for grantmaking decisions and/or whether that priority will be applied across the entire foundation’s grantmaking.

## Assumptions That Need Rethinking

Our interviews and research surfaced several assumptions often made by foundations’ use of intermediaries that are important to consider as part of answering the why question. These are described below.

**Intermediaries are useful in reaching BIPOC-led or -focused organizations.** Some respondents felt foundations held smaller, BIPOC-lead organizations to different standards than other grantees. As one respondent noted: “When foundations think something is important, they hire staff for it. When it comes to small BIPOC organizations? ‘Oh, let’s use an intermediary.’”

*There are a lot of foundations saying they want to use intermediaries to reach BIPOC organizations. That’s ok if they’re clear about it, but at the same time, it sends a message to people outside the foundation that it’s more than that. Also, some foundations say they want to do this to be ‘transformational,’ but they’re talking about transforming themselves, not us, because we’re already doing transformational work. Again, if they want to be transformed, that’s fine, but they need to be clear about it. Internal clarity matters.*

*Foundations say, ‘We want to make grants to small BIPOC organizations, can you help us?’ but most of the time, they just want to make their portfolios look good. Why not help bigger BIPOC organizations get even stronger? Foundations sometimes come to intermediaries like us and ask us to regrant to smaller BIPOC groups just so they can say they did it. They don’t care where the money goes.*

*There’s a difference between BIPOC-led and being based in communities of color. Organizations that are rooted in communities of color are different in a way that’s not noticeable to the naked eye. Yes, they provide services but they do more: they’re the power brokers for their communities.*

*I always ask funders whether they can name the two strongest Black organizations in my city. They never know because they’re always looking for small BIPOC organizations instead of looking at the strong BIPOC organizations that are already doing good stuff and may be larger. They keep setting up intermediaries focused on moving money to the small groups.*

*If you really want to fund these organizations, don’t immediately say ‘we want to fund small, BIPOC organizations.’ Say: ‘There’s an important Black organization in this community that doesn’t have the support or networks they need. We need to give them support so they can get to those networks and the other things they need to get even stronger. And put someone at that foundation in charge of that kind of funding. If you care about Detroit, hire someone to do Detroit grantmaking.*

**Relatedly, respondents questioned the assumption that smaller organizations are the best strategy for grassroots- or community-based social change.** While a number of respondents agreed that **small intermediaries are better able to see trends and gaps, support cohorts of community leaders, “move funds quickly,” and provide wrap-around assistance, they cautioned that funders not jump to these assumptions without looking at the broader ecosystem.** “For funders who say they want to support power building, that may not entail funding small

grassroots groups. It may be about supporting power-building organizations of all sizes that are building that power in communities of color.” **That includes working with larger intermediaries that may have “the financial stability, size, and heft to take more risks, innovate, and build more diverse networks that lead to stronger collaborative efforts among smaller groups.”**

*If I could advise funders who immediately jump to thinking they have to support small and BIPOC organizations to get social change, I’d ask them to use a different starting point. Start by looking at a specific community. See what’s there—like a struggling senior organization, a promising Meals on Wheels, etc. **Map the community. Look at its institutions and support the larger ecosystem, rather than scattering money around to BIPOC organizations. For example, a community preschool program could triple in size if they knew how to secure government funding, but the impact of that goes beyond the preschool. That funding will help three times as many kids, allowing three times as many parents to go to work.** Foundations, pick ten communities and test this ecosystem approach to strengthen those communities.*

*There’s a tendency to think all BIPOC organizations are small. That’s not true all the time. Some have a lot of employees. We work with a large Asian American primary care provider, which is their primary service, but they play a much bigger role by being an anchor for the community in other ways. Not to mention that assuming “all BIPOC, Asians, Latinos, etc. are anything is wrong. They aren’t monoliths”.*

**Still others say they are still unsure about this issue:**

*One of the tensions I struggle with is how to balance the goal of rooting solutions that are entirely grassroots-oriented with also seeing that there are good solutions that have come from looking across patterns at what works, even at the national level. When you talk about large foundations making financial investments that are supporting community power by using intermediaries so they can do it more efficiently, that raises questions for me and gets to the heart of the critique of White capitalist philanthropy. On the other hand, is it an efficient stewarding of financial resources to always have everything be community-led?*

**Intermediaries provide learning opportunities for the foundation.** Respondents pointed out that community partners can be valuable informants for funders by bringing them together with philanthropic institutions in a more authentic way. One national funder, for example, mentioned several ways in which using an intermediary helps them learn:

*[The intermediary we’re using] does network surveys and designs learning circles around what groups need, which we give them stipends for doing. They’re in a community with others doing similar work. They’re diverse ethnically and racially. They have trusted connections at both the community level and with larger organizations, which they connect with community residents. We learn a lot from them.*

A handful of interviewees, however, felt that when foundations use intermediaries, **they immediately become one step removed from the grantmaking and relationship building that they believe is essential to funders being able to meet their and their grantees’ goals.** One stated that **“The problem is that the more layers you put in between these institutions and grantees, the more diluted the money and impact get.”**

*As a program officer that is supporting a national intermediary that regrants to racial justice and disability groups, I’m not able to have a direct relationship with those grantees, so there are things I’m not learning. The experience of understanding more directly what’s being experienced in communities and by groups on the ground is a missed opportunity. **From an internal change management perspective, funding through intermediaries makes my work harder because it doesn’t allow for relationship building.***

**Intermediaries are better equipped than larger foundations to move funds more efficiently to small groups.** Some respondents disputed the assumption that intermediaries are a more efficient path to supporting small organizations.

*This is a long path and process so there have to be benefits to the foundation that are greater than efficiency—things like proximity to partners they don't have. Knowledge of the local landscape. Expertise in funding health equity. Expertise in systems change work and what that looks like.*

*Being an intermediary needs to be more than being a convenience for foundations. **And intermediaries need to be more thoughtful about saying yes before considering all the ramifications. I think the less effective intermediaries are those that are just a pass-through or arm for the foundation to do what they want to do.***

**An intermediary's primary and most useful function is regranting.** Several respondents were frustrated that much of the current discussion about working with intermediaries centers on funders' tendency to view them primarily as regranting mechanisms rather than organizations that provide a wide array of services and functions—not only for donors but also for nonprofits. A review of recent publications about intermediaries substantiates that perception, with the majority defining these organizations in terms of how they help donors with regranting, fund aggregation, pooling funds, and/or assistance with strategy development, evaluation, and other services donors might need.

In contrast, nonprofit organizations, in fact, **have long used the term intermediary to describe organizations that provide a range of capacity-building assistance, advocacy, network building, information, research, strategy advice, and other services, including those at free or reduced cost to other nonprofits** (especially the 92 percent that have annual budgets under \$5 million).<sup>9</sup> Generally referred to as the social sector infrastructure, these intermediaries work at the state, regional, and national levels are widely seen as the “backbone of the social sector,” despite being continually under-resourced.<sup>10</sup>

*I was talking to a funder yesterday who told me that while listening to some of the folks participating in a webinar on equitable intermediaries, **she had a flash of insight that she should be thinking of intermediaries as partners rather than vendors.** That's a critical shift for funders to make. It would also be helpful if we could coin a different term for the organizations that are in ongoing backbone relationship with the projects versus groups whose mission is to help nonprofits, rather than foundations, many of which still don't understand the importance of supporting that intermediary infrastructure.*

*There is a really strong infrastructure that already supports small and mid-sized nonprofits directly, but funders either don't know much about it, don't see the importance of allocating some of their funds for it, or see it only as the narrower group of infrastructure organizations that serve philanthropy like the Council on Foundations or the funder affinity groups. Why not contract with these organizations so they can turn around and provide services to small organizations? Like the [Nonprofit Technology Network](#) for technology, [Social Impact Commons](#) for fiscal sponsorships, or [BoardSource](#) for governance issues?*

## Are There Times When a Simpler Approach Is Warranted?

Some argue that the kind of deeper questioning raised above is unnecessary because there are circumstances in which foundations' use of intermediaries is more transactional (fiscal sponsorship or regranting are the most commonly cited examples of this). As one respondent observed, **“Sometimes intermediary arrangements are strictly transactional and that's ok. Sometimes, funders just need or want an intermediary to get funds out the door quickly, and sometimes, nonprofits just want fiscal sponsorship.”**

<sup>9</sup> National Council of Nonprofits, “Nonprofit Impact Matters: How America's Charitable Nonprofits Strengthen Communities and Improve Lives,” 2019, <https://www.nonprofitimpactmatters.org/site/assets/files/1015/nonprofit-impact-matters-infographic-sept-2019.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Laura Tomasko et al., “The Social Sector Infrastructure: Defining and Understanding the Concept,” Urban Institute, 2023, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/social-sector-infrastructure-definition>; and Cynthia Gibson, “Gaps in Infrastructure: Identifying the Essentials for a Stronger Social Sector,” Fidelity Charitable Trustees' Initiative, 2020, <https://www.fidelitycharitable.org/content/dam/fc-public/docs/insights/gaps-in-infrastructure.pdf>.

*United Way did a survey in one of the communities our intermediary was working and that was BIPOC-majority. Nonprofits voiced what they wanted out of a resource center that was being proposed for development. Nearly half said they just wanted back-office support and ‘trade association stuff like insurance and fiscal sponsorship’ no matter who was providing it as long as they were good.*

Others, however, challenge the assumption that because things like fiscal sponsorship or regranteeing appear to be more clear cut and straightforward, the funder needs to merely focus on “which intermediary,” rather than why one is needed and for what purpose. Several respondents felt that it shouldn’t be assumed that these seemingly transactional arrangements are always without complexities that need to be considered as part of the decision-making process. **They pointed out that concentrating primarily on which intermediary to use ignores the importance of considering whether the intermediary “can deal with the more nuanced problems that can pop up in these relationships, can make what seemed like an ‘easy decision’ eventually implode.”**

**Examples of these nuances are below.**

## **Fiscal Sponsorships**

There are several fiscal sponsorship models, but two are most often employed. **In the first, (Model A), the sponsored organization becomes part of the sponsor organization, relieving the sponsored organization of having to build their own financial management and oversight systems. In the second, (Model C), the sponsored organization is separate from the sponsor, which regrantees funds to the sponsored organization.**<sup>11</sup>

Several issues can come into play when making a decision about which fiscal sponsor to use and why. First, some fiscal sponsors provide both back-office support and a range of capacity-building services. As one intermediary director says, “We not only do what most fiscal sponsors do—make sure the money is spent properly—we also provide capacity building because we want to help nonprofits start out well with their board development, strategy, and fundraising so when they are able to be independent, they’re ready.”

*We see the spectrum of this practice moving from transactional work toward transformation—going beyond back office to being more about comanaging the projects and not being as passive as fiscal sponsors usually are. It’s collective capacity building.*

There’s also the issue of risk. **Model C carries less risk for the fiscal sponsor because, as a respondent notes, “If the money is spent well, that’s great. Or if the organization fires someone illegally, it’s their employee so the sponsor doesn’t bear the risk. But if it’s Model A, the risk is all there. In short, the difference is all about risk and purpose.”**

Several respondents also challenged the perception that fiscal sponsorship arrangements are more values-neutral than other kinds of services because of their administrative focus and more transactional way of operating.

*We see fiscal sponsors as well positioned to dig into diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. The fastest-growing fiscal sponsors are being founded by, for, and of communities of color. Why? Communities of color have a more communitarian approach. They’re meeting people on the values plane first, there’s a foundation of trust built in because the people they’re working with are of their community, and they allow sponsored groups to hold on to their independence.*

***Eighty percent of fiscal sponsors are White-led and governed. To change that ratio of who’s holding power, if you create one BIPOC-governed, staffed, etc., fiscal sponsor, you’re changing the power of not just one organization but over a hundred organizations that live under it. That board becomes a point of trust and identity.***

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<sup>11</sup> George Colvin, “Fiscal Sponsorship: The Models,” 2022, <https://fiscalsponsorship.com/the-models-summary/>; Colvin, G. (2019). *Fiscal sponsorship: 6 ways to do it right* (Third ed.) <https://fiscalsponsorship.com/auto-draft/fiscal-sponsorship-6-ways-3rd-edition/>

These kinds of issues, one respondent said, “illustrate why it’s important that funders don’t assume fiscal sponsorship and regranting are always without complexities when it comes to making decisions about which to use.” Another agreed, reiterating that funders “need to take the time to ask the why and to what end questions even with what may seem like more straightforward functions.”

*If you’re a funder you shouldn’t be looking to work with a fiscal sponsor. You should look to movement groups and then support or create a fiscal sponsor for them. We need to give these fiscal sponsors adequate funding for this because if they go under, all the organizations they’re sponsoring go under. Identify your strategy and realize that a lot of these groups are fiscally sponsored and then support that fiscal sponsor.*

## Regranting

Regranting is the process through which donors provide funds to an intermediary organization to make grants to other organizations (or subgrantees). Sometimes the intermediary makes the actual grantmaking decisions, but others are merely an administrative arm for funders wanting more efficiency or a faster turnaround.

Like fiscal sponsorship, regranting is increasingly becoming more than just a transactional service for funders. A number of intermediaries, for example, couple regranting with capacity building or management assistance for grantees. While this combination is beneficial to both donors and grantees, it can also come with some minefields.

*As a funder, we’re always tempted to use intermediaries that do both regranting and capacity building. But being a pass-through and capacity builder at the same time raises other issues. If an intermediary is in the market as a capacity or community builder and then adds that financial aspect/power to it, it changes the dynamic. It would be very naïve to think that this doesn’t change their relationships.*

The perception that regranting is primarily an administrative service—and that the intermediary’s capacity to provide that service is all funders need to make decisions about which one they will use—also needs to be challenged, some respondents said. One said, “Even though an intermediary may have the systems and administrative capacity to make regrants efficiently, the way in which they do that work may be detrimental to grantees or their communities.”

*As a funder, I think regranters know how to make the grants efficiently and are a way of getting money to organizations we want to fund. There’s a difference between a pass-through and a cocreator, though. Sometimes it’s more than just building the portfolio; it’s about values-alignment. It’s looking for an intermediary that can take over a set of existing partners, work with them to develop the strategy, and create a community of grantee partners. The regranter becomes the facilitator of that community.*

*As an intermediary that regrants, we don’t see this as ‘Thank you for the money, we’ll take our 10 percent and do whatever you want us to do.’ We won’t do that kind of relationship. The regranting a funder wants us to do has to align with our purpose and values. Effective intermediaries understand that regranting is an opportunity to amplify our own goals and values through regranting, and, especially, when it’s coupled with capacity building. All of that leads to major impact.*

Funders also sometimes neglect to think about the time frame or urgency for regranting arrangements, which “influences—or should—which intermediaries they consider.” As one funder notes, “If you’re really just needing an organization to get funds out the door really quickly or you know you’re not going to stick around, you may just want to pick an intermediary and get the job done. But if you want to be around for a long time, you may want to invest in the intermediaries ‘tending the garden’ for organizations working on the issues you care about.”

In short, like fiscal sponsorship, regranting is another function that requires more than just deciding which intermediary but why is one needed and for what purpose.

*Funders can help an intermediary become more community-oriented or they can help a community organization that already has that orientation construct an infrastructure that allows them to also do the regranting. For example, there’s a coalition of Asian American leaders in our state that’s deeply into program, policy, and leadership development. They’re constantly being called in to help bigger organizations getting money from foundations to regrant. They’d like to develop the ability to be a*

*community grantmaker, but they don't get the support to do so. If these kinds of community-based organizations are wanting and ready to do all of it, why not help those groups—especially those that are BIPOC-led or focused—build that infrastructure?*

## BEFORE YOU ASK “HOW” ASK YOURSELF:

### TACTICAL QUESTIONS

Are smaller organizations the best way to address the issues/values the foundation wants its support to reflect?

If so, for what purpose: the foundation's own strategy, those of the grantees, or both?

What can an intermediary do that we can't?

Is there a clear added value to working through an intermediary rather than making the grant directly?

### STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

What do I know about the ecosystems relevant to the issue/region/constituency I am trying to resource?

Why would my program strategy benefit from supporting smaller, community-based and BIPOC-focused organizations?

Why are we proposing to work with intermediary and have we been explicit about that internally and externally?

What assumptions am I making that ought to be tested?

What assumptions am I making that ought to be tested?

How important is working through an intermediary to our strategy? Added value to our portfolio?

### RELATIONAL QUESTIONS

Do our primary goals suggest that collaborating with other funders could leverage more support?

How will staff work with intermediary? How much is staff willing to cede decision-making power to intermediary?

Is the intermediary required to have an explicit commitment to racial equity, community voice and power-sharing?

## The Value Intermediaries Provide and the Challenges They Face

Intermediaries play an important role in the sector—both for foundations that seek their partnership to implement strategy and for grassroots groups that value funders’ support and resources. Still, it is important to recognize that intermediaries themselves often face considerable challenges in managing these relationships.

### Value of Intermediaries

**They help donors do what they can’t do themselves.** This includes supporting small hard-to-reach groups, offering a range of capacity-building services, providing donors with information about what’s occurring “on the ground,” and, **because they’re public charities, there are fewer restrictions around how they can support legislative advocacy.** They can also be a conduit for helping grantees exit a grantmaking strategy more responsibly.

*We started out as a funder that provided capacity-building grants to individual nonprofits to work with and strengthen them. But we really got into the weeds with this, so we turned to intermediaries to deliver that support because it was more cost effective for the foundation and created a safer space for the nonprofits as well.*

*We can help a program officer or team at a foundation wanting to move more quickly into a certain area but whose organization isn’t there yet, so using an intermediary is the best way to do it. We can help them make the case internally. We’ll talk to national funders, senior staff, and board members to demystify what it means to fund these kinds of groups and issues, which provides reassurance and makes what seems very abstract real.*

**They are able to identify, understand, and respond to a wide variety of their grantees’ (and other nonprofits’) needs.** Several respondents underscored the importance of having “intermediaries in the communities they’re serving because they know better than anyone what the needs of those communities are.” That includes both small and large intermediaries “which may not have the level of grassroots entrenchment but do have the ability to see the big picture as to trends across small groups and where the money—including government funding which is 80 percent of nonprofits’ revenue<sup>12</sup>—is going.”

*We bring the ability to be a grantmaker but we also bring in leadership development training, convenings, coaching, and lots of other things that nonprofits, especially small ones, need. Small groups are especially hungry to connect with other small groups, so we connect them. And we help them deal with conflicts when they arise. We also do co-assessments with organizations to identify where they need to build their internal structures. We’re high touch—not high barrier.*

*We put community-design groups together to find out what’s happening and what’s needed in their communities. Our capacity-building programs all start out with ‘what does the community say they need and how can we be helpful?’*

**They build bridges between small organizations and large foundations.** As one intermediary notes, “Intermediaries can often become middle managers that get in the way of grantees’ relationships with larger funders. **We disrupt this by building bridges because we see ourselves as resource mobilizers.**” Intermediaries can also help grantees that may not be ready to receive larger grants “get ready for those relationships.”

*A core value we bring to the sector as an intermediary is not just that we have relationships and proximity to underfunded communities that a larger funder wouldn’t know.*

**They can absorb risk.** Intermediaries can help protect organizations, especially small groups working on controversial issues, from groups that may be trying to harm or discredit them. Also, they can shield grantees from donors who may have questionable views or are engaging in “bad behavior.”

<sup>12</sup> National Council of Nonprofits, *Nonprofit Impact Matters: How America’s Charitable Nonprofits Strengthen Communities and Impact Lives*, 2019, <https://www.nonprofitimpactmatters.org/>.

*We can absorb restrictive grants and not pass on those restrictions to grantees. For example, one of our funders won't fund Native groups directly. We can accept the funds so that grantees don't have to reabsorb the trauma.*

**They can help strengthen larger movements and advance broader visions.** Funders “sometimes forget about the broader movements that individual organizations or networks are working on” or a broader vision such as “disrupting traditional philanthropy overall.”

*We have a drastically different approach to what we're building through our philanthropy. The organizations we work with aren't just focusing on issues; they promote power building and liberatory futures. We see everything as an organizing opportunity for us to engage with the individuals and institutions who we are interacting with to actually make cultural and behavioral change.*

*The most valuable intermediary relationships result in meaningful change of power in how the resources are being distributed. If you are interested in a broader social justice vision, then wouldn't you want to be in a relationship with an intermediary that can result in some transformation for your own space so that you are actually as a funder not just a learning journey, but on a transformation journey?*

**They free up nonprofits to focus on their work.** Intermediaries help movement groups “stay true to their missions without being forced to become a nonprofit that then has to have a board and file for incorporation. It frees these groups to focus on the work while someone else is handling the financial and administrative stuff.”

*Our program managers provide massive support. We do grantmaking but also provide a ton of human resources, finance, and legal support through our teams who work closely with grantee organizations. A lot of these groups don't have this kind of management experience. We help them put their budgets together and every month we go over this using real-time budget information. This kind of operational support is ingrained in our model. It's not transactional.*

**They can promote and advance more power-shifting in philanthropy.**

*Our role as intermediary is to show donors ways to undertake constructive shifts of power, which can be uncomfortable. Two years into operating a project that previously brought in donors who raised funds and then helped decide where the funding goes, we radically changed our approach. Now donors raise the money and then move it to a community-led committee that allows the activists, rather than donors, decide where the money goes. Donors were like, 'I raised thousands of dollars, and you're saying I don't get to decide how the money is distributed?' We answer, 'No.'*

*The power dynamic tension comes when the funders say they hand it over for a participatory process and then they keep control.*

## Challenges Intermediaries Face

**Power dynamics.** The same power differentials that permeate relationships between “regular” donors and nonprofits/grantees can play out when intermediaries become the (re)granter. As one foundation staff member observed, “I worked for an intermediary that was a reganter and capacity builder, and it didn't feel any different than working for a foundation, except in this case, the power was held by an intermediary.”

*Intermediaries technically have two customers: the foundation and the grantees, but sometimes they only focus on the foundation. One big intermediary I worked with got so into bed with funders, they went way off-track in being able to serve smaller nonprofits. They were really hard to call or reach, even for midsized nonprofits. They went adrift because of the money from funders and being able to talk about 'big ideas' with them. Like big foundations, they started focusing on funding 'the best,' instead of those that needed help the most.*

*Increasingly everyone's business model is focused on regrating. Some big foundations, for example, want to give money to, say, grassroots/Latino organizations. So they give a bunch of money to regrant. But the foundation sets up the 'governing grantmaking body,' and then never discloses how much money that organization is getting. And that organization becomes a 'kingmaker.'*

**Difficult “middle person” role for intermediaries.** It can be difficult for intermediaries, especially those that are working with community- or issue-based groups and networks “who all know each other,” to be perceived as a fair or unbiased representative of the larger foundation that is providing the funding.

*The problems are similar to what happens with big funders. We have nonprofits angry at us if they didn't receive a grant. At the same time, the program staff at the foundation that's funding us can get upset because some of the organizations they thought would be funded weren't. Still other program staff want us to give away more money, but they aren't able to convince the foundation's leadership that it's needed. It was really difficult to work under the constraints the funder passed on to the intermediary we were part of. Their funders forced grantees into a cohort model facilitated by that intermediary that didn't know the community or context. It was a condition of them and us getting the grant money, though. It ended up being time consuming, irrelevant to the work, and left bad feelings behind between all participating groups.*

*There is sometimes tension between meeting the needs of the grantees for multiyear support and the lack of commitment from donor partners to fund more than year to year. Donor partners can be well-intentioned, but they have their own constraints, beliefs, and assumptions. We're left having to be a buffer between our movement partners and larger institutions.*

**Unrealistic expectations.** Just because a foundation is working with an intermediary, one respondent noted, “doesn't mean their expectations change.” In fact, it can make foundations' expectations even more unrealistic because “they think that because intermediaries are making things more efficient for them, it'll be just as efficient for the intermediary, forgetting that those organizations usually end up doing more than just regrating and are often doing so with inadequate resources.”

*In the past couple years, we've seen funders demanding more rapid deployment of funds so that there's 'quick' impact. These timelines are often unrealistic, making it challenging to do things well. Getting funders to understand that is difficult.*

**Little or no funding to support the intermediary itself.** Several intermediaries voiced frustration over funders' lack of understanding or unwillingness to provide adequate financial support for their staffing and operating costs, including the wide range of services they provide grantees. “They don't always realize you need resources to deploy resources.”

The problem has become even more pronounced in recent years as more funders have decided to use intermediaries. *In response, several intermediaries—including well-established firms—are organizing a consortium aimed at “getting the word out that we need this support. We need to advocate to get funders to understand what we do and why and how much it costs.”*

*Our intermediary got a Mackenzie Scott grant for each of the funds we worked with. That was the only general operating support grant we'd ever received in seven years. That meant that for seven years we were running too lean of a shop to provide the quality and quantity of services we needed to provide. We tell our grantees, 'Don't starve infrastructure for program,' and yet we were doing that ourselves! A big challenge for us is that funders don't see us as part of the social justice movements we're building. One big foundation, for example, said, 'Oh, you're taking money away from the field.' But we ARE part of the field! Groups we support couldn't afford the legal and other support we provide. Our staff are constantly on the phone talking to grantees, helping them with fundraising, and connecting them with donors. We're not just a grants manager!*

**Risk.** Intermediaries can provide a shield for grantees from various kinds of risks, but that also means they are taking on that risk themselves and it “isn't always minor.” *As one intermediary director said, “We have no way of*

predicting risk, which often comes with unanticipated expenses that funders don't want to cover. We have to do a better job at explaining these risks with potential funders."

*We're working with XX organization that focuses on a really hot-button issue in a really volatile climate because other intermediaries and funders don't want to take them. That means we're going to have to bring in a lot of legal assistance to make sure our staff doesn't get prosecuted. We were involved in a defamation suit because one of our grantees said something publicly about XX issue. Even though we weren't the institution being sued directly, we still had to pay a fortune for legal representation. But we take on the risk because who else is going to do it?*

*We're also getting approached by people who don't want to start up family foundations. So they're coming in on our donor service side, asking if we can provide them with that support, like hiring staff for them. All of that pushes risk onto us.*

WHAT DO COMMUNITY PARTNERS SAY THEY NEED FROM PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERS AND INTERMEDIARY PARTNERS?	WHAT DO INTERMEDIARY PARTNERS SAY THEY NEED FROM PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERS?
Sustained unrestricted funding and simplified processes	Sustained, unrestricted commitments that understand and support intermediaries' own operating and administrative costs, which are often not covered by their fees
Responsive technical assistance, training, networking and capacity-building opportunities	Support for evaluations that assess "If end users are getting what they need"
Space/time for frontline organizers to regroup	More trust from—and less paperwork requirements by—funders
Back office support and fiscal sponsorship	Understanding of and investment in infrastructure-supporting intermediaries at the local, state and regional level
Facilitation of cross-issue organizing and power building	Funding to intermediaries that rely on government reimbursement for regranting—which is often delayed—to close the gap
More attention to transforming philanthropy and philanthropic systems, processes and practices	
Willingness to absorb risk	
Relationship building with funders and other organizations	
Being proximate to the work	
Values-aligned capacity building and cultural competency	

## A Tool to Help Foundations Adopt a More Expansive and Intentional Approach to Working with Intermediaries

To help foundations experiment with this approach, the authors have developed an adaptable tool (see Appendix A). The tool is preliminary and starts with the traditional premise of identifying a function for which the funder believes it needs an intermediary and what it should look for, but it doesn't stop there. Instead, it prompts the funder to think about a set of questions aimed at encouraging deeper analysis about the why behind the presumed function(s).

## Case Studies

### A Cautionary Tale: When Things Go Awry

Transparency, honest communication, and power sharing can go a long way in addressing a lot of problems that crop up between grantees and funders, but they are particularly important in an intermediary relationship that involves both. That's not always an easy line to walk. Just ask the leaders of a large intermediary and nonprofit consortium who had been partners for years. **The relationship ended abruptly and very publicly when the intermediary fired the executive director of the consortium with what the consortium claimed was little prior notice and justification. In a letter to all their supporters, the nonprofit consortium said that because they had had "no choice or voice in the matter," they would be moving to a new fiscal sponsor and had engaged legal counsel to review options that would safeguard their organization from further disruption.**

Soon thereafter, another letter was sent to the same group, this time from a former employee who had worked at both organizations. The writer argued that the termination was hardly without reason and evidence, given the "toxic and bullying environment brought on by the Consortium's director." According to the writer, rather than take accountability for this behavior that the "Consortium had enabled and knew about for years," it decided to focus on the "disruptions this person's firing had on the organization's program and fundraising," something that "reflected where its priorities are."

To date, not much has changed. The consortium moved to a new fiscal sponsor, and the intermediary director continues to grapple with tying up the administrative loose ends this move created. In the meantime, the intermediary's board fully supports the decision to dismiss the consortium's executive director, given evidence of an abusive culture and the lack of attention to staff's concerns about their working environment. The takeaway: **these kinds of relationships are complicated and fraught with potential minefields. Even when both parties have formal guardrails in place, ongoing check-ins, communication, and transparency are essential.**

### Intermediaries that Center Racial Justice and Equity

In recent years, collective frustration and anger about racial inequities and injustice have mushroomed, leading to a surge of public critique over traditional structures and institutions, including philanthropy and the nonprofit sector in general. At the same time, these inflection points can be opportunities to highlight the work of grassroots, constituent-led groups that are often the first responders to events like the COVID-19 pandemic or the uprisings sparked by the killing of George Floyd.

According to [a report by Change Elemental](#), a nonprofit management support organization, **those groups also are more likely to lack formal 501(c)(3) status and be led by young people, people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, immigrants, and other historically oppressed groups. As such, they tend to rely on donor intermediaries and fiscal sponsors to connect them to philanthropic institutions and secure grant funding, develop strategy, and/or manage key back-office functions needed to do their work well.**

Many of these groups, however, struggle to find fiscal sponsors and other intermediaries that share their values and provide services that are deeply rooted in racial equity. **Funders who can't otherwise support constituent-led groups often prioritize partnering with intermediaries with a high capacity for scaling services and distributing resources and funds.** Though equity values may be important to a funder when selecting intermediaries to partner with, many don't know what equity-centered services look like or how to support intermediaries in deepening this work.

**Each party is also prioritizing different needs: funders want efficiency and scale, constituent-led groups want to find intermediaries that are equity-aligned and have the capacity to take on new sponsored projects and/or grantees, and intermediaries want to support scale that both serves the right constituent groups to maximize their impact and deepens their equity capacity to better support constituent-led groups.**

The answer: funders need to support a strong network of intermediaries that are working with constituent-led groups to not only meet the demand for their services but also to embed equity into their business and service models. Through better coordinated and values-aligned engagement with intermediaries, funders have an

opportunity to strengthen the existing ecosystem of equity-capable intermediaries with the capacity to address the pressing needs of constituent-led groups.

To address these issues, in 2021–22, a small group of funders, including the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation and Ford Foundation, created the **Equitable Intermediary Project, a learning cohort of organizations providing equity-focused intermediary services**. The goals of the projects are to help participants (1) learn and deepen their offerings, (2) increase the quality of their equitable intermediary services, and (3) engage other funders in building a stronger infrastructure for supporting equitable intermediaries and this approach.

*The above includes excerpts from “Centering Equity in Intermediary Relationships: An Opportunity for Funders” by Natalie Bamdad and Susan Misra. Published by Change Elemental, August 2020.*

<https://changeelemental.org/resources/centering-equity-in-intermediary-relationships/>

## Community Foundations as Intermediaries

Respondents consistently cited community foundations as important for funders to consider when trying to reach organizations that may be hard for them to identify and support directly. In addition to having deep experience in, knowledge of, and relationships with a wide range of community organizations and residents, community foundations are often “trusted partners” that “bring people together in ways that wouldn’t happen otherwise.”

*The best community foundations do a lot of different things besides regrant. They advocate, provide training and skills building, and are able to bring everyone—providers, politicians, activists—to the table. They can do that because they have credibility in the community. They’re also able to document what they’re doing and why it’s having an impact. They know their communities.*

*I’m a funder who lives in Minneapolis. When George Floyd was murdered, no amount of TV coverage could’ve captured what was going on in the community. No amount of paperwork was going to match the experience of someone living in this community. If you wanted to do something in South Minneapolis or with the police here, the community foundations were the place to go because they were super connected to the leaders, the work, the institutions, and what was happening. If your desire is something community-centered, then you should absolutely go to your community foundation.*

Like other intermediaries, however, community foundations need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis when deciding which to use and for what purpose.

*We’re a large social justice intermediary that works with hundreds of small community-based groups, but we will also refer donors who want to focus their support on their communities to community foundations because they’re more embedded in those places than we are. A key [criterion], though, is whether they do social justice work and aren’t risk averse. But there are also projects that come to us that just don’t require our expertise or are working on things that aren’t in our wheelhouse, like arts. So we’ll find community foundations that can do that. We have a list of intermediaries that work with small arts organizations.*

*If you’re doing advocacy or policy stuff, community foundations may not be the right fit, depending on how issue agnostic they are. The Saint Paul Foundation is different from the Minneapolis Foundation. What is the level of expertise? Which one can do advocacy? What do you want these dollars to do? It always comes back to being clear about what you want the money to do.*

*I was on the board of an intermediary that supports BIPOC organizations and issues. Even though they were a national organization, they were extraordinarily connected to the communities that were grantees. They were very different from professional community foundations on the fifteenth floor of some office building.*

*The number of intermediaries that are run or staffed by BIPOC is a very small number. Funders need to think about how they can identify and build up these intermediaries that are really connected to the community and, especially, strengthen their capacity as an infrastructure network.*

*One of the downsides of community foundations is that they're rarely led by BIPOC but sometimes foundations use them because they're a 'safe bet.' If you keep using them and not looking at their commitment to racial equity or BIPOC leadership, you could be perpetuating this.*

## Examples of Intermediaries

Although organizations that act as intermediaries do not lend themselves to neat categorization, it is helpful to see in more detail how various kinds of intermediaries carry out their roles.

### **Independent foundations: Private charities, one source of funding, professional staff, assets held in an endowment**

#### ***Bush Foundation***

[www.bushfoundation.org](http://www.bushfoundation.org)

Established in 1953, the Bush Foundation supports organizations in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and the 23 Native nations that share the same geography. Funding programs include community innovation efforts, ecosystem grants to support the “organizations that support the people doing this work” (i.e., infrastructure), the Partnership Fund (for special opportunities), Bush Prize grants for “highly valued nonprofits in their communities,” and a fellowship program for individuals who are selected by former fellows and community leaders.

The foundation has had a deep commitment to community voice and racial equity based on its belief that “those closest to the problems are going to have the best solutions,” which has led them to working with intermediaries to reach local communities and organizations. From 2014 to 2021, for example, the foundation partnered with Headwaters Foundation for Justice, South Dakota Community Foundation, and the Consensus Council as intermediaries for its Community Innovation grant program. In 2021, Bush Foundation President Jen Reedy announced that this program and the Bush Fellowships would shift from using one intermediary in each of its three states—all of which used the foundation’s criteria and didn’t allow for “differentiation across communities”—to engaging community partners to design their own grantmaking programs. They are also adding an intermediary to support increased grantmaking by and for Native communities.

In 2021, the Bush Foundation committed \$100 million to seed two community trust funds that will address wealth disparities caused by historic racial injustice. Two intermediaries were selected to steward the initiative through an RFP process: the Indigenous-led NDN Collective and Nexus Community Partners. Working with intermediaries, one senior foundation leader says, “helped us get better ideas about what we should be funding to make the most of what we’re stewarding. Internally, it’s helped us hire better, talented, community-connected staff. And we’re getting a reputation of operating in a way that connects more to the community, which is important in a region where there’s not a lot of philanthropy happening.”

See also: Oak Foundation, California Endowment, Marguerite Casey Foundation

## Community foundations: Public charities, multiple sources of funding, professional staff, donor-advised funds, geographic focus

There are hundreds of community foundations, and evaluating which have the potential to serve as an intermediary requires research. CFLeads is an intermediary itself—a national umbrella organization of community foundations explicitly committed to community/resident engagement by “moving beyond grantmaking and acting as valuable partners driving positive change in the area(s) they serve.”

### *CFLeads*

[www.cfleads.org](http://www.cfleads.org)

While every community foundation is unique, a growing number have become explicitly committed to building strong communities through resident engagement, strategic partnerships, and participatory efforts that involve the entire community—not just donors. In 2007, this group became part of CFLeads, a national network of community foundations dedicated to centering and advancing what it calls a “community leadership approach” to community foundation’s work.

CFLeads was created out of a need to distinguish itself from the increase in alternative donor platforms such as for-profit companies (e.g., Fidelity and Schwab) and other nonprofits (e.g., United Ways) that emerged in the early aughts with a value proposition centered on efficiency and tax benefits. In 2005, a Monitor Institute report described community foundations’ strategic advantage as community knowledge, relationships, and leadership—a value proposition that led to the establishment of CFLeads by a group of community foundation leaders eager to see it diffused across the field.<sup>13</sup>

The group’s first effort was developing a new community leadership approach for community foundations through which community foundations would not only provide grants but also partner with community stakeholders in identifying important issues, commissioning research, convening decision-makers, engaging in advocacy, and helping to marshal needed resources.

To operationalize this approach, CFLeads designed and developed several tools and resources, including its Framework for Community Leadership by a Community Foundation. This widely disseminated framework outlines building blocks of practices that community foundations can adopt to integrate community leadership as a core competency. An additional competency, resident engagement, was added after learning that some community foundations were seeing a need to involve residents more as partners in all facets of their work. In light of the racial reckoning occurring across the country, CFLeads is taking this work one step further by ensuring that resident engagement efforts include sufficient representation of residents from underserved communities.

CFLeads has worked with several large foundations as an intermediary, including the Gates Foundation (a partnership of six community foundations focused on economic mobility) and Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (convenings and peer advising). **Because of their extensive networks, CFLeads has also been able to help larger foundations identify and broker connections with community foundations working on issues or in places funders want to support because, as one senior staff person says, “We know the community foundations that are doing this community engagement work. And they have the local knowledge about and are able to reach marginalized communities. We’re a trusted partner.”**

See also: [Boston Foundation](#), [Groundswell Fund](#), [New York Community Trust](#)

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<sup>13</sup> Lucy Bernholz, Katherine Fulton, and Gabriel Kasper, *On the Brink of New Promise: The Future of US Community Foundations*, Blueprint Research and Design Inc. and the Monitor Institute, 2005, <https://cfinsights.issuelab.org/resource/on-the-brink-of-new-promise-the-future-of-u-s-community-foundations.html>

## Alternative foundations: Public charities, multiple sources of funding, professional staff, donor-advised funds, identity, issue or value focus

### *North Star Fund*

[www.northstarfund.org](http://www.northstarfund.org)

The North Star Fund (NSF) supports grassroots organizing led by communities of color aimed at building power in New York City and the Hudson Valley. Since its establishment in 1979 by a group of young heirs committed to social justice grassroots organizing, NSF has given more than \$100 million to nearly 2,750 organizations through its donor-advised funds, a participatory grantmaking committee/process, and other philanthropic partnerships. One of those partnerships with Change.org in 2021 moved \$5.5 million to 35 Black-led nonprofits throughout the US. The fund's support comes from a community of about 2,400 donors; more than half of that support comes from individual gifts of under \$250.

One of NSF's core programs is the Let Us Breathe Fund, which supports Black-led organizations in New York City and the Hudson Valley working for community safety, economic investment, and racial justice. Rapid response grants are also available in the face of urgent threats or opportunities. Another program, the Future of Organizing Fund, was launched in response to COVID-19 and ended in 2022 after awarding more than \$3.6 million to 140 nonprofits. NSF also hosts donor-advised funds in the area it serves but it has a different take on administering them: funds must be spent down in three years, align with NSF's mission, and they are prohibited from participating if they are anti-LGBTQ+ or a hate group.

In all of its grantmaking, North Star focuses on nonprofits dedicated to building "people power" via community organizing. Their top criterion for funding is that they are led by the people most affected by the problems they're working to solve. NSF administers the money, while funding decisions are made by volunteer-led committees of community organizers, including current and former grantees. A fund executive believes that for funders that are interested in power-shifting and "aren't able to change the way they themselves operate, a simple and more direct approach is for them to move resources into social justice funds like North Star, which has already built relationships with effective nonprofits on the ground."

See also: [Headwaters Fund for Justice](#), [Haymarket People's Fund](#), [Fund for Southern Communities](#)

## Funder networks, funder collaboratives: Public charities, multiple sources of funding generally earmarked for foundation-driven initiatives to pool funds and regrant, professional staff, multi-issue

### *NEO Philanthropy*

[www.neophilanthropy.org](http://www.neophilanthropy.org)

Founded in 1983, NEO Philanthropy (formerly Public Interest Projects) is a national philanthropic intermediary that "bridges the gap that often exists between funders and organizations doing a range of social justice work." NEO supports different types of foundations (community, private, corporate, national, and international) as well as individual donors. Through its funder collaboratives, fiscal sponsorships, donor services, special initiatives, and capacity-building programs, NEO develops sustainable partnerships among philanthropic donors and social justice advocates working at the local, regional, and national level that ultimately build stronger movements. NEO is deeply committed to social justice, racial equity, and human rights, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusivity in its own organization.

Capacity support "of all kinds is ingrained in NEO's model," a senior staff member says, because the bulk of the more than 350 social justice organizations they work with are small to midsized and often unable to access the kind of high-touch assistance NEO provides. NEO also serves as a fiscal sponsor for more than 80 organizations, requiring that they have only a \$250,000 minimum annual budget (some other intermediaries working with social justice groups require at least a \$1 million budget).

NEO's funder collaboratives are often seen as some of the most successful in advancing important social justice issues at the local, state, regional, and national levels. **For example, NEO is home to the Four**

**Freedoms Fund, a 20-year-old award-winning donor collaborative that has built a nationwide movement for immigration justice/reform through its support of 144 grantees in over 30 states.** NEO's State Infrastructure Fund is a 41-member donor collaborative that has provided more than \$150 million during the past 20 years to networks of state-based nonpartisan organizations doing grassroots organizing to increase civic and voter participation among BIPOC and other underrepresented communities.

See also: Borealis Philanthropy (Disability Inclusion Fund, etc.), Proteus Fund (RISE Together Fund, etc.), Common Counsel (Native Voices Rising)

### **Field support organizations (national): Public charities, constituents are generally nonprofits, practitioners, generally broad geographic area**

#### *Social Impact Commons*

[www.socialimpactcommons.org](http://www.socialimpactcommons.org)

Social Impact Commons (SIC) is an incubator and shared service provider for the fiscal sponsorship field, the first of its kind in the country. It strengthens the field by (1) incubating and encouraging the creation of new fiscal sponsors—especially those serving, run by, or of BIPOC and underserved communities; and (2) supporting the growth and capacity of established fiscal sponsors through shared resources and effective practices. SIC also provides a wide range of direct services for a diverse group of fiscal sponsorship entities needing assistance with developing financial management systems, shared impact metrics, training curricula, and staffing/strategy.

SIC believes that by sharing resources, fiscal sponsorship can become a platform for more equitable access to nonprofit resources and greater economic and social sustainability for the sector. Its use of a “management commons” approach—which includes bottom-up and peer-led governance, ongoing learning, mutuality, resource sharing, and participant ownership—reflects that belief.

SIC also has a membership program for both individuals (staff, funders, board members of fiscal sponsors, activists and others interested in “communing”) and intermediaries offering fiscal sponsorship to small and/or community-led nonprofits around the country. It provides funders with research and analysis on the fiscal sponsor ecosystem in their focus area(s), policy and procedure development for fiscal sponsorship relationships, professional development training for program, grants, and finance managers, guidance on structuring grantor-grantee relationships when using fiscal sponsors, and on-call support for any other matters relating to fiscal sponsorship.

See also: ChangeElemental, Peoples Action, Southern Power Fund

### **Field support organizations (regional): Public charities, constituents are generally nonprofits, practitioners, specific geographic area**

#### *Propel Nonprofits*

[www.Propelnonprofits.org](http://www.Propelnonprofits.org)

**Based in Minnesota, Propel Nonprofits is three kinds of intermediary rolled into one: loan fund/federally certified community development financial institution, capacity builder, and fiscal sponsor.** Across every role, Propel builds in a wide range of capacity-building services—including accounting, financial management, board and leadership development, and strategic planning—that helps nonprofits link strategy, governance, and finance to support them through their organizational life cycles.

Propel receives capital from several funder collaboratives and foundations for its work, but before it accepts any funding, there are two conditions that have to be met: (1) funders’ values align with Propel’s commitment to social, racial, and economic justice, and (2) funders cede control over the grantmaking programs’ design and implementation (as well as the kinds of technical assistance grantees receive, which is based on co-assessments with grantees) to Propel. Propel also adds value through its efforts to identify and convene nonprofits with shared characteristics (e.g., BIPOC-led arts groups), so they can collaborate in addressing communities’ needs. Community members also often participate in designing the regranteeing process and, in some cases, making grant decisions.

Propel, for example, completed a program with two foundations wanting to support organizations working to increase BIPOC parents' involvement in children's education and "build up the infrastructure behind that work." As a senior staff person noted: "Once we agreed on the goals and purpose of what the grants would be for, the funders let us design and manage the application process and grant criteria, as well as select the grantees. They were thrilled because they didn't have to do any of the administrative work." In addition to providing financial management and governance assistance to grantees, Propel employed a relatively new developmental evaluation approach that uses real-time assessments, which "allows for more effective strategy adjustments."

See also: [Third Sector New England](#), [California Association of Nonprofits](#), [RVC Seattle](#)

## Philanthropy Serving Organizations: Public Charities, Constituents Are Generally Grantmaking Foundations

### *Hispanics in Philanthropy*

<https://hipfunds.org/>

Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP) strengthens Latinx leadership and equity by leveraging philanthropic resources through a strong network of partners—including individual donors, nonprofits, and institutional funders—committed to investing in Latinx communities. Since its establishment in 1983, HIP has provided more than \$70 million in grants to more than 800 nonprofits in the US and Latin America and \$60 million to support the Latinx entrepreneurial ecosystem. It has also supported more than 600 projects through its HIPGive program, a crowdfunding site for Latinx social impact projects and platform for cultivating a new generation of Latinx donors. HIP's Inicio Ventures initiative has supported over 20 Latinx founders whose startups cumulatively represent more than \$1.5 billion in potential Latinx Wealth Generation and more than 2,000 potential Latinx jobs.

As an intermediary, HIP provides a range of curated and culturally responsive services for donors, investors, and other financial intermediaries aimed at mobilizing funding for and partnership with Latinx communities. Among these are: helping donors wanting to invest in a specific initiative or community in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean; identifying and building relationships with key allies in the region and administering funds on donors' behalf; and managing donors' programs, including identifying key local actors, planning programs and budgets, making grants, building the capacity of grantees, monitoring and evaluating results, and administration.

HIP also helps funders identify the most pressing issues affecting Latino communities and create strategies to support the cutting-edge nonprofits addressing them. Past initiatives have focused on health, migrant children, labor rights, education, women's rights, and aging. It also connects different stakeholders—from national foundations to local donors to advocates and academics—to achieve shared goals by strengthening the capacity of the Latino nonprofit sector. In 2003, the Council on Foundations awarded the Robert W. Scrivner Award for Creative Grantmaking to HIP and the four leaders who founded HIP's Funders' Collaborative.

See also: [PEAK Grantmaking](#), [Amplify Fund at the Neighborhood Funders Group](#)

## Appendix A: A Tool for More Expansive Decision-Making

MY PURPOSE IS TACTICAL	I NEED INTERMEDIARY THAT CAN	I NEED AN INTERMEDIARY THAT HAS THESE ATTRIBUTES	ASK
I want to support an organization that doesn't have a 501(c)(3) designation and cannot meet our fiscal management and oversight requirements.	<p>Provide fiscal sponsorship and other financial management services</p> <p>Advise on legal and regulatory matters</p>	<p>Strong fiscal controls and administrative capacity</p> <p>Ability to work directly with funded projects, conduct due diligence, and manage grants</p>	<p>Does this potential grantee need only fiscal sponsorship or does it need additional financial and management assistance? What kind of fiscal sponsorship and other supports does it need?</p> <p>Does the organization want or need its own nonprofit status?</p> <p>Can the organization get help from an existing entity that provides fiscal sponsorship and additional services OR will two different entities be required?</p>
I want to deploy grants to a set of smaller organizations, but the administrative burden of funding so many organizations is too high.	<p>Regrant funds to many organizations efficiently</p> <p>Manage/oversee all aspects of regranting at a large scale</p>	<p>Knowledge of and experience in developing, monitoring, and administering applications and managing grants for large philanthropic organizations</p>	<p>Is this a better use of foundation financial/staff resources than doing it ourselves?</p> <p>How many grants do I need help managing?</p> <p>Do I need help with just the administrative elements of regranting/reporting, OR do I need help with ongoing oversight/management of the grants? Or both?</p>
I want to reduce the difficulty smaller groups have in trying to navigate our processes (e.g., applications, reporting, etc.), which are complex and designed for large organizations.	<p>Assist organizations in navigating these processes</p> <p>Be a liaison between applicants and foundation program staff to clarify issues and communicate concerns/information</p> <p>Assist in developing evaluation measures/systems for assessing progress, outcomes, and other information helpful to both the foundation and grantees</p> <p>Help staff clarify and convey internal administrative and evaluation processes so they are more easily understood by and transparent to external audiences</p>	<p>Knowledge of/experience with large foundations' internal programmatic functions and decision-making processes</p> <p>Willingness to be transparent with and advocate for grantees/applicants when appropriate/needed</p> <p>Problem-solving and mediation skills</p> <p>Experience developing and implementing evaluation and other assessment processes</p>	<p>Which systems are most challenging to my grantee(s) and why?</p> <p>How much outside assistance might organizations need and how much can foundation staff provide to meet that need?</p> <p>Can I work with organizations to develop evaluation/reporting measures/processes rather than using outside help?</p> <p>Am I willing to let organizations design and conduct their own evaluations, including progress/outcome metrics?</p> <p>How can our foundation improve our internal systems to be more accessible, transparent, and less burdensome for organizations?</p>
There has been an unforeseen crisis that requires getting grant funds distributed quickly.	<p>Regrant funds to many organizations efficiently and expediently</p> <p>Manage and oversee all aspects of regranting (especially to smaller organizations)</p>	<p>Experience and administrative capacity to move funds quickly, especially to smaller organizations</p> <p>Streamlined fund distribution processes</p> <p>Flexibility in responding to changing circumstances</p> <p>Proximity to/knowledge of the issue/region/constituency of interest</p>	<p>Are there potential risks to grantees that may be in crisis? If so, what can be done to ensure their safety?</p> <p>How much oversight, accountability, and risk are we asking the intermediary to assume?</p>
I want to assess my organization's risk tolerance.	<p>Absorb a layer of risk we cannot take on directly</p> <p>Assess risk as part of a due diligence process, especially for new initiatives or projects</p> <p>Provide ongoing monitoring to address red flags if/when they arise during the application process or grant period</p>	<p>Experience in (and tolerance for) complex and unpredictable circumstances</p> <p>Ability to intervene with potential solutions when problems occur</p> <p>Ability to manage the repercussions of "risky" grantmaking decisions and their effect in the field</p> <p>Legal experience or knowledge of potential legal issues</p>	<p>What kind of risk am I looking at?</p> <p>Am I focusing on risk assessment/ mitigation because I want to protect the grantees, the foundation, or both?</p> <p>Am I willing to have difficult conversations with grantees if/when there are red flags?</p> <p>Is there a process for brokering disagreements between grantees and staff if they occur?</p> <p>Is our legal staff able to step in if there are situations that require this kind of assistance?</p>

## Appendix A: A Tool for More Expansive Decision-Making

MY PURPOSE IS STRATEGIC	I NEED INTERMEDIARY THAT CAN	I NEED AN INTERMEDIARY THAT HAS THESE ATTRIBUTES	ASK
<p>To meet our programmatic goals, we need to get resources to smaller groups we are unable to fund directly but don't know how to identify or reach them.</p>	<p>Research, identify, and conduct due diligence on these kinds of potential grantees</p> <p>Incubate potential projects</p>	<p>Deep knowledge of and experience in a particular issue/region/constituency that is relevant to our strategy/goals</p> <p>Ability to build, facilitate, and manage communication and relationships with diverse organizations and networks</p>	<p>Are smaller, local groups important to our strategy? To advancing the issue or field overall? Why and how?</p> <p>How can I avoid disrupting the field, causing unnecessary competition or distrust?</p> <p>How clear is our funding strategy to our intermediaries and/or potential grantees? Are we willing to revisit that strategy if organizations recommend changes?</p> <p>What type of relationship do I want to have with an intermediary that is working with these organizations? With subgrantees?</p>
<p>I want to ensure that the campaigns and initiatives we support rely on well-resourced, engaged, and mobilized local affiliates.</p>	<p>Build, nurture and coordinate strategic partnerships with organizations of all kinds that are essential to advancing issues and/or strategies the foundation is focused on</p>	<p>Has deep, trusted, and strategic relationships with constituent-led local groups</p> <p>Experience and capacity to lead effective campaigns</p>	<p>What collaborative relationships exist among groups already doing this work?</p> <p>What is the potential/desire to build collaboration? If so, what kind of collaboration and with which organizations as members?</p>
<p>Rather than creating something new to meet our strategic goals, I want to support and strengthen existing infrastructure.</p>	<p>Provide a funding mechanism that moves resources to infrastructure organizations supporting broader fields, issue areas, and/or sectors</p> <p>Leverage our support through collaboration with other funders that invest in infrastructure</p> <p>Help us develop a system for allocating a percentage of our grant budgets to infrastructure strengthening</p>	<p>Deep understanding of and experience with infrastructure building for various sectors, fields, and/or issues</p> <p>Experience with and trusted by other philanthropic institutions that have engaged in this process</p>	<p>Where is there donor interest on this issue/region/constituency? What other funders are active in this space? What groups are they funding?</p> <p>Is there a funder collaborative that supports issues, fields, and/or localities (and their infrastructure) that already exists that we could join?</p>
<p>We want to practice equity by allocating more resources to BIPOC-led organizations and those that center racial justice.</p>	<p>Help us clarify these values and operationalize them across the foundation</p> <p>Help use our power and influence to engage funders in shifting their practices toward greater equity</p> <p>Share financial risk when funds may not come through by providing "floating funds" or cash advances</p> <p>Build capacity-building support into grants</p>	<p>Ability to help organizations embed racial equity values and practices more seamlessly in every aspect of their work</p> <p>Experience in working with larger philanthropic institutions to embed these values more deeply across the entire organization</p>	<p>Which organizations that have this kind of experience are most trusted in the field/region of interest?</p> <p>Are we clear about what we mean by "equity?" How are we operationalizing that in our systems and practices, including grantmaking?</p> <p>To what degree will we use equity as the criteria on which we base decisions about which intermediaries we will use?</p>

# Appendix A: A Tool for More Expansive Decision-Making

MY PURPOSE IS RELATIONAL	I NEED INTERMEDIARY THAT CAN	I NEED AN INTERMEDIARY THAT HAS THESE ATTRIBUTES	ASK YOURSELF
<p>I want to build a trust-based culture and practice at my foundation.</p>	<p>Work with foundation staff to examine internal systems and practices that may be burdensome to intermediary and community partners</p> <p>Design relational approaches into the foundation’s overall culture, grantmaking and policies</p>	<p>Familiarity with philanthropic systems and practices Experience with change management in large philanthropic organizations</p> <p>Willingness to be transparent and candid</p>	<p>Are some processes we assume to be standard self-imposed rather than necessary legal and financial guardrails?</p> <p>How can we reduce these to simplify application and reporting processes?</p>
<p>I want to mitigate the power differentials between large national funders and smaller, local groups while meeting my obligation to ensure that funds are used appropriately legally, and responsibly.</p>	<p>Work with foundation staff and leadership to explore power-sharing issues</p> <p>Work with foundation staff and grantees to cocreate clear parameters for grant oversight and accountability</p> <p>Create opportunities for grantees and others to partner with us in developing and making decisions about strategies, grant funding criteria, issue priorities, evaluations, and other grantmaking processes</p>	<p>Experience in participatory, equitable, and liberatory philanthropic practices</p>	<p>What level of power am I willing to shift/share with people outside the foundation in the various components of grantmaking processes? Are we willing to make decisions together?</p> <p>Can we deploy resources in ways that do not disrupt the power dynamics that may exist among groups working on/in/with similar issues/regions/constituencies?</p> <p>Do we have a process for responding if such a disruption occurs?</p>
<p>We want to engage with and learn from organizations proximate to directly affected communities.</p>	<p>Facilitate communication among philanthropic and community partners</p> <p>Share expertise about the issue/region/constituency</p> <p>Offer services that are available in multiple languages, allow full accessibility for those who are differently-abled, and acknowledge that access evolves and requires ongoing communication and learning</p> <p>Prioritize ongoing learning in alternative, non-normative organizational structures, leadership styles, and work practices</p> <p>Use staff members who are trusted, directly representing, or in active allyship with constituents</p>	<p>Staff are directly representing and/or in active allyship with community partners, their issues, and their constituents</p> <p>Skilled facilitators with strong equity values and practice</p> <p>Trusted partner and convenor</p>	<p>Are foundation staff open and willing to devote time and attention to learning from community partners?</p> <p>Is there a commitment to ensuring that the lessons learned are incorporated into the foundation’s overall strategy?</p> <p>What are we doing to ensure that we are not gathering knowledge in ways that are disingenuous, extractive, or onerous for intermediary and community partners?</p>
<p>To realize our equity values, we want to change our internal culture and practice.</p>	<p>Support movement and relationship building, leadership development, and coaching</p> <p>Share equity-rooted human resource practices</p> <p>Provide legal resources that include support for members of constituent-led groups undertaking high-risk action such as political disobedience or being attacked by groups that seek to discredit or harm their work</p>	<p>Demonstrated deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by people of color, youth, women, immigrants, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and other disenfranchised groups</p> <p>Experience in equitable grantmaking processes</p>	<p>Why do we think allocating more resources to BIPOC-led organizations is important? What is our definition of “BIPOC-led?”</p> <p>How important is it that the intermediary’s staff have lived experience with the issues/region/constituency we seek to affect?</p>
<p>We want to ensure that the campaigns and initiatives we support rely on well-resourced, engaged, and mobilized local affiliates.</p>	<p>Build, nurture, and coordinate strategic partnerships with organizations of all kinds that are essential to advancing issues and/or strategies the foundation is focused on</p>	<p>Has deep, trusted, and strategic relationships with constituent-led local groups</p> <p>Experience and capacity to lead effective campaigns</p>	<p>What collaborative relationships already exist among groups doing this work?</p> <p>What is the potential and/or desire to build collaboration and, if so, what kind of collaboration and with which organizations as members?</p>

## Appendix B: Interviewees

Jennifer Aronson, Senior Associate Vice President for Programs  
Leigh Handschuh, Senior Program Officer, Programs Learning and Engagement  
[Boston Foundation](#)

Kate Barr, President, and CEO  
[Propel Nonprofits](#)

Eileen Briggs, Grantmaking Director  
[Bush Foundation](#)

Chris Cardona, Senior Program Officer/BUILD  
[Ford Foundation](#)

Jennifer Ching, Executive Director  
[North Star Fund](#)

Lisa Pilar Cowan, Vice President  
[Robert Sterling Clark Foundation](#)

Adriana Craciun, Senior Adviser for Capacity Building and Organizational Development  
Media Haeri, Program Officer, Issues Affecting Women  
[Oak Foundation](#)

Jane Erickson, Director of Learning and Impact  
[Rippel Foundation](#)

Deborah Linnell, Principal  
Linnell Associates

Michele Lord, President  
Magui Rubalcava, Vice President of Strategic Partnerships  
[NEO Philanthropy](#)

Allistair Mallilin, Director of Strategy and Asset Building  
[Native Voices Rising/Common Counsel](#)

Geri Mannion, Managing Director, Strengthening US Democracy and Special Opportunities Fund  
[Carnegie Corporation of New York](#)

Jan Masaoka, CEO  
[California Association of Nonprofits](#)

Caroline Merenda, Chief of Staff  
[CFLeads](#)

Xavier Morales, Executive Director  
[The Praxis Project](#)

Amoretta Morris, President

[Borealis Philanthropy](#)

Melissa Rudnick, Director of Program and Grantmaking

[Headwaters Foundation for Justice](#)

Julia Ryan, Board Member

Michael Tang Sr. Vice President for Resource Development and Communications

[Local Initiatives Support Coalition](#) (LISC)

Thaddeus Squire, Chief Commons Steward

[Social Impact Commons](#)

Sondra Youdelman, Campaign Director

[People's Action Institute](#)