2019
Birth Justice
Fund Docket
Birth justice is at the heart of reproductive justice. As a leading funder of the U.S. reproductive justice movement, Groundswell Fund created the Birth Justice Fund (BJF) to support organizations and projects that challenge the huge disparities in pregnancy and birth outcomes experienced by women of color, low-income women, young women, and transgender people. The Birth Justice Fund increases access to empowering and culturally relevant birthing options; uplifts the leadership of midwives, doulas, and other birth workers of color; and supports real changes in policy and practices.

Through the Birth Justice Fund, Groundswell supports community-based efforts that promote dignity for parents, families, and communities by reclaiming the sacredness of the birth process and the power of choice around how, when, and where birth will happen.
Stark Realities in the U.S.

Today, the United States spends more than any other industrialized nation on childbirth, yet has the worst outcomes — higher rates of death for birthing parents and babies, along with higher likelihood of health disparities, such as low birth weight. In addition, as maternal mortality rates drop globally, in the United States maternal mortality rates are on the rise.

Women of color in the United States, especially Black women, are far more likely than white women to die or experience childbirth-related complications. Black women in the United States are four times more likely than white women to die of childbirth-related complications, a gap that has remained constant for more than 60 years. Indigenous women are twice as likely as white women to die of childbirth-related complications.

According to a 2016 study published in the *Journal of Midwifery and Women’s Health*, the infant mortality rate (IMR) in the United States for Black babies is twice the overall IMR, and Black infants die before one year of life at more than twice the rate of white infants. The IMR for Indigenous babies is 1.5 times higher than it is for white babies. Babies of color are more likely to be born prematurely or with low birth weight than are white babies because of a lack of access to adequate prenatal care and systemic racism and poverty. As the 2016 study authors explain, women of color in the United States experience far higher levels of exposure to “chronic stressors” than do white women, meaning the cumulative effect of racism directly affects the health of mothers or birthing parents, babies, families, and communities.

Resourcing Transformative Models of Care

The manifestations of racism in the U.S. healthcare system are systemic and widespread, but midwifery and doula care can change these outcomes for women of color, especially when care is provided by women of color. Midwifery and doula care supports women and their families physically as well as emotionally, and provides low-cost, high-quality care where it might not otherwise exist. This care reduces the rate of hospital interventions, such as cesarean births, and lowers infant and maternal mortality rates among communities of color. In fact, a 2014 World Health Organization report found that around the world, 82% of maternal deaths, newborn deaths, and stillbirths could be averted with full-spectrum midwifery care. The report also noted that midwifery care should be considered a “core part” of universal care, and that there are no adverse effects, only significant positive ones, of patient-centered midwifery care.

The Birth Justice Fund partners with individuals and organizations advancing and expanding midwifery and doula care as part of a broader vision of justice, autonomy, and empowerment for parents, children, families, and communities. Birth Justice Fund grantees provide services, training, and support that significantly reduce maternal and infant mortality and increase the numbers of birth workers of color, while at the same time advancing policies and programs that expand access to empowering care for all pregnant people and their families. Birth Justice Fund grantees are creating a new, community-centered vision of maternal, child, and family wellness.

Groundswell’s 2019 Birth Justice Fund grantees are the vanguard of birth workers of color practitioners, organizers, and leaders advancing birth justice in the United States.

2019 Birth Justice Fund Grantees

Ancient Song Doula Services

$35,000
Brooklyn, NY
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2015
www.ancientsongdoulaservices.com

Founded in 2008, Ancient Song Doula Services focuses on communities in New York City and northern New Jersey with the highest levels of infant and maternal mortality, serving primarily low-income women of color, immigrants, parenting teens, and currently and formerly incarcerated people. According to a recent New York City Department of Health report, Black women are 12 times more likely to die from complications of childbirth than white women in New York City. Ancient Song trains full-spectrum doulas to provide free or low-cost perinatal care, including support for abortion, miscarriage, and adoption. Its doulas advocate for clients in hospitals and other healthcare settings where racism and classism impact the quality of care. In the last year, Ancient Song served 402 clients in total, 85 of whom were abortion clients. Ancient Song has been a leading voice for the equitable implementation of recently passed Medicaid reimbursement and licensure legislation that will impact doulas of color in New York state. In 2018, Ancient Song and its partners coauthored Advancing Birth Justice: Community-Based Doula Models as a Standard of Care for Ending Racial Disparities, a report that outlines policy recommendations and guidelines for New York and the 15 other states with pending doula Medicaid reimbursement bills. Ancient Song will continue organizing communities of color and meet with elected officials in support of the equitable implementation of the doula reimbursement bill. During the grant period, Ancient Song will also expand abortion doula services to 100–120 clients and sustain its Rikers Island prison doula program for incarcerated pregnant people and returning families.

The Birth Place Lab:
“Giving Voice to Mothers”
“Giving Voice to Queer Families”

$15,000
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2017
www.birthplacelab.org

The Birth Place Lab facilitates multi-disciplinary research, community-based participatory research, and knowledge translation around access to high quality maternity


health care across birth settings. Led by midwife and researcher Saraswathi Vedam, The Birth Place Lab coordinates projects that prioritize the advancement of evidence-based policy related to birthplace and equity in maternity care. The Birth Place Lab is continuing its work with birthworkers of color to support equitable and community-led knowledge translation of its “Giving Voice to Mothers” participatory research process on racial disparities in the U.S. maternal healthcare system.

During the grant period, The Birth Place Lab will work with Birth Justice Fund grantees and community members to co-develop public information materials about respectful, high quality perinatal care in the U.S. In partnership with LGBTQ birthworkers and community-based organizations, The Birth Place Lab’s "Giving Voice to Queer Families" participatory research will examine the impact of homophobia, transphobia, and provider bias on LGBTQ people's birth outcomes. People who self-identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Two Spirit experience multiple, significant reproductive health disparities, including higher rates of miscarriage, stillbirth, low birthweight infants, and preterm birth than heterosexual women. The "Giving Voice to Queer Families" research will explore how LGBTQ families’ different experiences in the preconception, pregnancy, birth, and postpartum periods affect birth outcomes, such as preterm birth, low birthweight, prenatal anxiety, postpartum depression, perinatal trauma, breastfeeding success, and maternal and neonatal mortality.

**Birthmark Doula Collective**

$30,000  
New Orleans, LA  
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2016  
[www.birthmarkdoulas.com](http://www.birthmarkdoulas.com)

Birthmark Doula Collective is a worker cooperative of community-based doulas who support low-income families, families of color, and LGBTQ families in New Orleans as they transition into parenthood. The *Louisiana Maternal Mortality Review Report, 2011-2016* by the Louisiana Department of Health found that Black women are four times more likely to experience a maternal death compared to white women in the state. Louisiana has the second highest maternal mortality rate in the United States — three times the national rate and rising. Astoundingly, 62.5% of maternal deaths in Louisiana were found to be preventable. In the grant period, Birthmark will engage in statewide policy advocacy to increase access to midwifery and doula care within a reproductive justice frame. This includes collaborating with the Louisiana Department of Health’s Medicaid Innovation Officer to create a pilot program for Medicaid reimbursement for doulas and perinatal community health workers. In response to increased attacks on abortion, Birthmark will support organizing efforts by partners, such as Groundswell grantee Women with a Vision, to educate lawmakers about the harm caused by legislation that imposes criminal charges for miscarriage, stillbirth, and perceived drug use during pregnancy. During the grant period, Birthmark will provide free doula care, lactation support, postpartum care, and childbirth education at least 150 pregnant people, with a focus on improving access for Spanish-speaking or undocumented clients. As a member of the Louisiana Perinatal Quality Commission, Birthmark will use its Birth Violence Toolkit to conduct at least eight birth justice and equity trainings for providers and community members. Birthmark will continue to support LGBTQ parents by focusing on family building and support to connect with queer-friendly midwifery care through its Queer Parenting and Pregnancy Project. It will cohost weekly Café au Lait meetings with Groundswell Rapid Response Fund grantee New Orleans Breastfeeding Center to offer lactation support to people of color. In a state with one of the highest incarceration rates in the nation, Birthmark will formally launch a Prison Doula Project to serve pregnant and recently postpartum people who wish to have a doula in the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women.

**Black Mamas Matter Alliance**

$30,000  
National  
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2018  
[www.blackmamasmatter.org](http://www.blackmamasmatter.org)

The Black Mamas Matter Alliance (BMMA) is a national, Black women-led, cross-sectoral alliance that seeks to build power, influence policy, and shift culture to advance Black maternal health, rights, and justice. In a nation where Black women are four to five times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women, BMMA aims to improve Black maternal health outcomes. In the last two years, BMMA hosted two congressional briefings, launched the popular annual Black Maternal Health Week, and inspired the creation of a Black Maternal Health congressional caucus. BMMA's policy recommendations
helped to influence over twenty federal bills that were introduced to improve maternal health. BMMA member organizations advanced state-level policies to improve maternal health in eight states. BMMA published two Black Papers; one is about the creation of a standard for holistic care and the other is a policy agenda for Black maternal health. In 2018, BMMA’s first Black Maternal Health Conference and Training Institute created space for over 400 Black birthworkers, and birth and reproductive justice organizations to connect, gain support, and receive training. The rich connections made at the conference led to the birth of many new collaborative efforts including the National Black Midwives Alliance and a community-based doula report. During the grant period, BMMA plans to host the second Black Maternal Health Conference with the hopes of attracting 600 people. It will also host a specific convening for Black birthworkers to increase access to holistic midwifery care for Black women.

Breath of My Heart Birthplace

$55,000
Española, NM
Birth Justice Fund Grantee since 2011
www.breathofmyheart.org

Breath of My Heart (BOMH) Birthplace provides low-cost, high-quality midwifery care to reduce perinatal health disparities for low-income women and families of color in New Mexico’s Española Valley. It supports the reclamation of culturally relevant birthing practices for Tewa-speaking Pueblo Indigenous women. In rural Española, NM, Birth of My Heart Birthplace sees a 4% cesarean section rate compared to the statewide rate of 18% and a national rate of 32%. It has a 1% preterm birth rate. Thanks to its dedicated community-led and young parent-focused programming, it sees a breastfeeding initiation rate of 99% and continuation rate of 97% for six to eight weeks postpartum. BOMH provides birth center services, pregnancy testing and counseling, prenatal and postpartum exams, integrated childbirth education, well-woman services and STI screening, breastfeeding counseling and support, education on birth options and parental bonding, consultation on nontraditional forms of conception focused on single parents by choice and LGBTQ families, and service referral to other agencies through its walk-in clinic. In partnership with Groundswell grantee Young Women United, BOMH won an important policy victory in 2018, ensuring that Licensed Midwives (LMs) can now legally obtain the previously inaccessible limited pharmaceuticals that they are required to carry by the state. To ensure successful implementation of the new law, BOMH will work closely with Young Women United to engage in the rulemaking process for the NM Board of Pharmacy and NM Department of Health. BOMH and
Young Women United will also advocate for changes to Medicaid reimbursement rates, denials, and underpayment of midwives through the NM Medicaid program that covers out-of-hospital births, and work with Congresswoman Deb Haaland to shape federal legislation for Medicaid coverage of midwifery and doula care. With Groundswell funding, BOMH plans to complete renovations on its birth center, continue its free one-day walk-in clinic, and extend postpartum care for young parents of color and low-income families by piloting a Perinatal Community Health Worker position to provide clinical and nonclinical support, breastfeeding support, and trauma support rooted in the reclamation of traditional ways of knowing.

Changing Woman Initiative

$35,000
Santa Fe, NM
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2016
www.changingwomaninitiative.com

Founded in 2016, Changing Woman Initiative (CWI) gives Indigenous women access to culturally congruent prenatal, delivery, and postpartum birth services provided by Indigenous midwives. Led by Indigenous Certified Nurse Midwife Nicolle Gonzalez, CWI provides free services in its clinic and in-home prenatal support to Indigenous women in Santa Fe, NM, and within the pueblos of northern New Mexico. In 2019, CWI participated in the first congressional briefing on Native American Maternal Health held by the Center for Reproductive Rights, the U.S. Human Rights Network, and Representative Deb Haaland. The briefing was focused on missing and murdered Indigenous women, reproductive rights, and barriers to accessing healthcare. CWI spoke about the importance of informed consent, barriers to care for Indigenous families, the complexities of Indian Health Services, and health policy recommendations for Indian country. In winter 2020, CWI and Birth Justice Fund grantee Tewa Women United will lead two trainings with a total of 40 Indigenous people. The first training will be a 10-day Indigenous doula training to increase the community’s cultural competency through knowledge of plant medicine and storytelling. The second training will be a five-day Indigenous breastfeeding training for NM’s Northwestern Indigenous communities, specifically the Zuni Pueblo, Acoma Pueblo, Hopi, and Navajo reservations. In an effort to decolonize knowledge and support the growing need for Indigenous birthworkers who can provide services to rural and tribal-based women, students of the trainings will continue to provide breastfeeding and doula support in Indian country. During the grant period, CWI plans to nurture and grow the new National Indigenous Midwifery Alliance.

CHOICES: Memphis Center for Reproductive Health

$20,000
Memphis, TN
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2018
www.memphischoices.org

Founded in 1974 as a women’s health clinic that provides abortions, CHOICES is radically transforming the provision of reproductive healthcare as it newly integrates midwifery services into its services. CHOICES is one of the only facilities in the United States offering full-spectrum holistic reproductive healthcare regardless of family choice, economic status, gender identity, or sexual orientation. CHOICES’ midwifery practice implements a Southern granny midwifery tradition that reconnects abortion care with the birth and maternity care that anti-abortion political forces seek to separate. CHOICES centers midwives of color in order to remediate the racist history that led to a decline of the Black granny midwife tradition. Its midwifery model of care serves low-income women from Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas on their own terms, including when, where, how, and whether they give birth — and seeks to improve the lifetime reproductive health outcomes of its clients. In 2018, CHOICES provided midwifery care to 54 patients — 63% were Black and 54% were insured by TennCare (Medicaid). During the grant period, CHOICES will host education sessions about midwifery care at local churches, community centers, a Memphis LGBTQ organization, and education fairs for pregnant people. CHOICES will continue to build a relationship with the Labor and Delivery program at Memphis’ Regional One public hospital, where many clients schedule hospital births, while educating providers about the improved health outcomes of the midwifery model of care. CHOICES hopes to complete construction of its new birthing center and comprehensive reproductive health facility in December 2019.
**Commonsense Childbirth, Inc.**

$85,000  
Winter Garden, FL  
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2011  
www.commonsensechildbirth.org

Commonsense Childbirth (CSCB) ensures access to timely maternal healthcare, particularly for women of color; low-income women; and uninsured, underinsured, and undocumented women in Central Florida, by providing low-cost and free prenatal care and birth services. Using a nationally recognized midwifery care model, the JJ Way, developed by midwife and executive director Jennie Joseph, CSCB improves birth outcomes for its clients and significantly reduces rates of infant mortality. CSCB has reduced its preterm birth rate for Black women to 0%, compared to an overall premature birth rate of 14.2% in Florida. Using an empowering model, Commonsense Childbirth's Easy Access Clinics serve one of Orlando's highest-need zip codes by providing outreach, prenatal care, and postpartum support services with a focus on early and consistent midwifery care to more than 1,000 at-risk pregnant and postpartum women annually. In addition, CSCB supports dozens of out-of-hospital births through its freestanding birth center. Its birth center and clinics are Perinatal Safe Spots serving Central Florida's Black and immigrant communities through prenatal care, gynecological and family planning visits, postpartum support, lactation support, and Spanish and Portuguese language clinics. The organization will also host the JJ Way Institute/Commonsense Childbirth School of Midwifery, a state-licensed midwifery and peer doula training program focused on women of color, and offer free doula support for hospital-delivery patients from the Easy Access Clinic. It recently launched the Commonsense Childbirth Institute to begin online training, certifications, and mentorship for independent perinatal professionals of Perinatal Safe Spots as they develop.

**Elephant Circle**

$25,000  
Denver, CO  
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2013  
www.elephantcircle.net

Elephant Circle (EC) provides sliding scale legal services to Colorado families fighting for reproductive justice; develops and disseminates accessible reproductive justice educational curricula; and engages with national organizations in the birth justice movement to become
more intersectional around issues of race, class, and gender identity. Inspired by elephants, who give birth within a circle of support, Elephant Circle envisions a world where all people have a circle of support for the entire perinatal period. Through its successful partnership with New Legacy High School in Aurora, CO, Elephant Circle will train staff and students to become legal doulas to support pregnant and parenting teens’ resilience and self-sufficiency. During the grant period, EC will collaborate on a special Midwifery Matters edition focused on equity and antiracism. As part of its effort to increase its national profile in addressing racism within midwifery spaces, EC will spearhead the Birth Summit IV feedback team and provide racial equity training for national midwifery and research organizations. Through the Colorado Access to Reproductive Health Equity (CARE) coalition, EC will advocate for state-level policies around midwifery regulation, Medicaid reimbursement for midwives and doulas, and substance abuse treatment for pregnant people. EC will continue to incubate emerging birth justice organizations in Colorado and around the country, including the Birth Rights Bar Association, Queer and Transgender Midwives Association, Project X (a group focused on equity work within birthing care), and Expecting Changes (a two-year postpartum doula program serving pregnant and parenting people who use substances).

In partnership with National Black Midwives Alliance and Birth Justice Fund grantee National Association to Advance Black Birth, EC will begin a plan to assess the feasibility of leading a national convening for birthworkers of color.

**Elephant Circle, National Association to Advance Black Birth, and National Black Midwives Alliance**

$60,000 (two year grant)
National
New project grant

Birth Justice Fund grantees Elephant Circle, National Association to Advance Black Birth (NAABB), and the National Black Midwives Alliance (a project of Southern Birth Justice Network) will partner to assess the feasibility of hosting a national convening to coordinate birthworkers of color across the U.S. and explore plans to engage with the larger multi-racial midwifery and birth field. Over the past several years, many mainstream midwifery organizations and conferences have been sites of harm for midwives, doulas, and birthworkers of color. Midwives of color have had to intervene, stopping agendas and
demanding better representation and more reflective programming. In response to this harm, these three organizations, led by recognized leaders of color within the birth justice movement, are strategizing ways to create a truly equitable convening that centers the needs of communities of color. This planning grant will support the partners to develop a survey that asks a wide range of birthworkers of color what they need from a professional midwifery space. The partners will work with a strategic planning consultant to develop a report based on the survey results that will inform the convening planning process.

Healing Clinic Collective

$30,000
Oakland, CA
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2014
www.healingcliniccollective.net

The Healing Clinic Collective (HCC) provides low-income people and women, with holistic health and healing services through daylong healing and resilience clinics and networks. Structural racism and classism mean that communities of color and low-income communities in the Bay Area lack access to holistic healthcare and providers, including reproductive healthcare and the midwifery model of care. HCC maintains a database of 120 practitioners (mostly of color) offering 20 different traditional and holistic healing modalities, including midwifery and doula care. In the next year, HCC’s recently launched midwives council will offer monthly skill share sessions and midwifery services “from womb to tomb” by six midwives rooted in traditional values of prayer, ceremony, and ancestor-guided midwifery practices. Topics of its skill shares will include Afro-Colombiana midwifery techniques, matriz sagrada (the sacred womb), postpartum healing, body autonomy and birth, herbs and techniques to promote fertility, and Mayan abdominal massage. The council will also host a monthly temazcal for healing to its broader network of birthworkers and midwives of color. As part of an intentional move to center trans justice, HCC will postpone its healing clinics from June 2019 to June 2020 to engage in an intensive effort to build relationships with Two Spirit, trans, and gender nonconforming practitioners and healing justice activists with the hopes of expanding its practitioner network to better serve transgender communities. This effort will be led by trans people of color, who will provide gender justice trainings and Fireside Forums to engage transgender communities.
InTune Mother Society

$25,000  
Oklahoma City, OK  
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2017  
www.timcenter.org

The InTune Mother Society provides perinatal support to Black communities in Oklahoma City through intensive case management and referrals to midwifery care, doula services, and breastfeeding support. Black women in Oklahoma are three to four times more likely than other populations to face perinatal disparities, regardless of socioeconomic status. The InTune Mother Society uses a holistic approach to provide pregnant women with preconception, pregnancy, and postpartum support, including wellness education on nutrition, relaxation, and exercise. During the grant period, the InTune Mother Society will offer 100 Black and Indigenous mothers and families perinatal services and education focused on pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, postpartum, and early childhood development. The InTune Mother Society will also launch the Oklahoma Black Birth Workers Collective to advance equity, racial justice, and birth justice across the state. The InTune Mother Project will continue its Sustainable Motherhood Support program that provides health education through the postpartum period and its new Sustainable Fatherhood Support program to support the physical, emotional, and psychological health of Black fathers. The InTune Mother Society plans to train 30 people through online and in-person Perinatal Health Worker trainings and certification courses.

Mama Sana Vibrant Woman

$35,000  
Austin, TX  
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2015  
www.msvwatx.org

Based in Austin, TX, Mama Sana Vibrant Woman (MSVW) is a collaboration between Mamas of Color Rising (a collective of working-class and poor mothers of color based Austin), local midwives, and volunteer physicians that supports the individual and collective empowerment of low-income mothers of color, while improving pregnancy and birth outcomes for communities of color in Austin. Launched in 2012, the MSVW wellness clinic provides birth support services based on its Maternal Justice Care Model to low-income families of color. MSVW runs 16-week Pregnancy and Birth Circles throughout the year to offer prenatal support to 150 low-income Black and Latina women. These holistic circles include free exercise classes, nutrition support, access to doulas and birth companions, midwifery care, wellness clinics, and culturally specific monthly support groups. In the last year, 97% of program participants delivered healthy weight babies, 100% initiated breastfeeding, and 70% maintained breastfeeding up to three months. Birth Justice Fund support will allow MSVW to provide doula care to 72 women, lead a Birth Justice Training Series to train 20 new birthworkers of color, and provide 10 continuing education events for birthworkers of color in Austin. MSVW plans to increase its postpartum support offerings using a model that combines home visits by birth companions with peer-led postpartum education, exercise, and support groups. As gentrification displaces Black communities in Austin, MSVW will undertake intensive outreach in the Black community, move services to predominantly Black neighborhoods, partner with 10 Black organizations and small businesses through a Community Alliance Program, and host events for Black Breastfeeding Week and Maternal Mental Health Week. In an anti-immigrant climate, MSVW forged a relationship with Casa Marianella, one of the main shelters for pregnant recent immigrants and refugees in the United States. In response to significant increases of pregnant asylum seekers and migrants from Central and South America and Africa who face the additional trauma of family separation at the U.S.–Mexico border, MSVW will provide trauma-informed prenatal services in Spanish, English, and French.

Mamatoto Village

$35,000  
Washington, DC  
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2016  
www.mamatotovillage.org

Mamatoto Village is devoted to training the next generation of Perinatal Community Health Workers and empowering women with the tools necessary for making informed decisions about their maternity care, parenting, and lives. Launched in 2012, Mamatoto Village has two intertwined goals: providing free and low-cost maternity services to women of color and their families in Washington, DC, through the first year of their child’s life and increasing the number of women of color in the maternal health field. During the grant period, Mamatoto Village plans to
serve 300–500 women, maintain its Mothers Rising Home Visitation Program, and expand its service area through a pilot grant to serve 100 women in Prince George’s (PG) County, MD, where Perinatal Community Health Worker services are currently not covered by existing Medicaid contracts. Mamatoto Village will lead a Perinatal Health Workers Training Program at a new offsite facility to train women of color. In recent years, Mamatoto has received many requests from women of color-led and community-based organizations to replicate its model. During the next grant period, Mamatoto Village will continue plans to replicate its model elsewhere by developing a replication toolkit and holding a webinar on the best practices for building sustainable models for perinatal care delivery.

**National Association to Advance Black Birth**

$30,000

National Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2011

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

The National Association to Advance Black Birth (NAABB) combats the effects of structural racism within maternal and infant health to improve Black birth outcomes through supporting advocacy, activism, research, educational programming, and policy change. Formerly the International Center for Traditional Childbearing, NAABB underwent a profound transition period over the last four years: rebranding itself, moving its headquarters from Portland, OR, to Washington, DC, and launching a new website under the guidance of a working board. In the next grant period, NAABB seeks to strengthen its internal infrastructure, hire staff, define its direction, and develop its program offerings. In partnership with the National Black Midwives Alliance and Birth Justice Fund grantee Elephant Circle, NAABB will begin a plan to assess the feasibility of leading a national convening for birthworkers of color.

**National Indigenous Midwives Alliance**

$20,000 (18 month grant)

National New Birth Justice Fund grantee

The National Indigenous Midwives Alliance (NIMA) is a newly launched network of renowned Indigenous midwives working to uplift and nurture the well-being of Indigenous childbearing families and safeguard future generations. NIMA achieves its mission by supporting the leadership development of Indigenous midwives, promoting cultural teachings, and reclaiming birth sovereignty and culturally-matched midwifery care to improve maternal and infant health outcomes in Indian country. Indigenous communities face significant disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes, and Indigenous midwives make up only 1% of all practicing midwives in the U.S. Of the Indigenous midwives that exist, less than 1% can afford to serve communities outside of federally-run health programs, like Indian Health Services. With Birth Justice Fund planning support, NIMA will formally launch as an organization, complete its first two-year strategic plan and budget, develop its internal infrastructure, and attain 501(c)(3) status. NIMA will also create an Indigenous Midwife Elder Advisory Council and host a convening to allow seasoned midwives to share their vision and guidance for supporting Indigenous midwives across the U.S. Building off of the foundation laid by the Indigenous Birth Keepers Gathering hosted in 2015 by Birth Justice Fund grantee Changing Woman Initiative, NIMA will continue to gather Indigenous midwives for working sessions and strategic planning, including hosting a traditional medicine and ceremonial retreat to ground NIMA’s core members in Indigenous values. The alliance will also lead an Indigenous Midwifery Mapping project to document where Indigenous midwives live and work currently, and the barriers Indigenous people face when seeking to become or practice as a midwife. NIMA will use this mapping to help identify specific policy recommendations that midwifery schools can adopt to better support Indigenous student midwives.
National Perinatal Task Force

$30,000
National Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2012
www.perinataltaskforce.com

Founded by Birth Justice Fund grantees Commonsense Childbirth and Mama Sana Vibrant Woman, the National Perinatal Task Force (NPTF) is a network that offers strategic training, tools, and technical assistance to over 36 organizations based in what it calls “Materno-toxic Areas” for maternal health outcomes across the United States, helping each site to become a “Perinatal Safe Spot.” NPTF employs a Maternal Justice Model to deliver political education and build the capacity of Perinatal Safe Spots to take political action and create systemic change. In 2019, NPTF entered a movement building phase and hosted the first national Perinatal Safe Spot convening that grounded participants in the history of racialization and reproductive health in the United States that began with colonization and slavery as root causes of today’s maternal and infant health crises. Under the leadership of Organizing Director and Midwife Paula X. Rojas, NPTF will create a pilot program to develop the organizing skills of three to five Perinatal Safe Spots to devise local social justice campaigns to address the social determinants of health that put the health of mothers and babies at risk. It will strengthen its existing Perinatal Safe Spots’ internal and program capacity through ongoing training and technical assistance. In the coming year, NPTF will also revamp its national webinars, website, and media engagement to better support its movement building and capacity building work.

Native Youth Sexual Health Network

$25,000
North America Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2016
www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com

The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) addresses issues of sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice for Indigenous youth throughout Turtle Island. Using a holistic approach to reproductive justice in Indigenous communities, NYSHN’s trainings include an environmental justice analysis that addresses violence against Indigenous women and young people. In 2018, NYSHN held a three-day meeting for its network focused on reproductive justice issues impacting Indigenous communities, including the creation of youth-led comprehensive sex ed initiatives and the need to address the legacy of population control and decolonize full-spectrum doula work by decentralizing the mainstream singular focus on abortion. NYSHN plays a leadership role in Indigenous birthworker communities by supporting Indigenous birthworkers to reclaim their traditional birth practices and by expanding the definitions of full-spectrum doula care to include menstruation, sexual health, miscarriage, loss, abortion, and birth and postpartum care. In an effort to formalize an intergenerational Indigenous doula network, NYSHN maintains the Indigenous Full-Spectrum Doulas Facebook group. The group has become a hub for Indigenous birthworkers and full-spectrum doulas across Turtle Island and beyond, and remains a helpful starting place for new and prospective Indigenous birthworkers who face many barriers to entry into the midwifery and doula professions. NYSHN partners with Groundswell grantees Tewa Women United, Changing Woman Initiative, and SisterSong in its efforts to build support for Indigenous birthworkers. As part of its commitment to youth leadership and intergenerational work, NYSHN will move its older members into “Auntie” supportive roles and mentor younger staff to take more leadership and decision-making roles.

Queer and Trans Midwives Association

$15,000 (18 month grant)
National New Birth Justice Fund grantee
www.elephantcircle.net/qtma

Founded in 2018, Queer and Trans Midwives Association (QTMA) is a new network dedicated to supporting and representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Two Spirit, queer, and intersex midwives and student midwives as they train and grow as providers and people. To that end, QTMA provides educational opportunities, advocacy, community building, and tools that center an intersectional framework. QTMA is run by a majority people of color volunteer advisory committee who made a Facebook page to create a safe space for queer and trans midwives to discuss their concerns and the unique needs of LGBTQ families and clients. Within a few months, it quickly ballooned...
to 500 Facebook followers and 170 active private group participants. With a Birth Justice Fund grant, QTMA will continue to host national bimonthly Midwifery Queer Peer Review calls, each with a different clinical focus, like insemination or shoulder dystocia. The calls offer a vital space for queer and trans midwives and students to build relationships with each other and to learn how to better serve LGBTQ birthing families. QTMA plays a critical role supporting LGBTQ midwives and students who seek to serve a growing client base of queer and trans pregnant and birthing people. Many LGBTQ midwives and students live in hostile locations, and are pushed into unsafe closeting practices, particularly in religious midwifery education programs and states where it is still legal to fire someone for gender identity or sexual orientation. During the grant period, QTMA will build its organizational and fundraising capacity, develop a strategic plan, and beta test program offerings beginning with a focus on Intrauterine Insemination (IUI) workshops. QTMA will also survey members to map their work backgrounds, their needs, and the barriers they face to providing midwifery care or gaining midwifery education due to race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, educational access, and other intersecting identities.

Sista Midwife Productions

$20,000
New Orleans, LA
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2017
www.sistamidwife.com

Sista Midwife Productions addresses disparities in perinatal outcomes experienced by communities of color in Louisiana. Led by Certified Nurse Midwife Nicole Deggins, Sista Midwife provides doula training to increase the numbers of Black birthworkers working with vulnerable women. Louisiana ranks 47th in the nation for maternal mortality, 44th for infant mortality, and 49th for preterm birth and low birth weight. Louisianaans face a maternal mortality rate that is growing faster than the national rate, with Black women being four times more likely to die from childbirth complications than white women. Last year, Sista Midwife Productions trained 43 Black doulas in four cities; hosted three meet-ups for Black women in Memphis, Atlanta, and Houston; and assisted in the creation of the New Orleans Maternal Child Health Coalition. Sista Midwife Productions is completing a comparative analysis report of perinatal outcomes in Louisiana. The report will serve as a foundation for statewide community education and advocacy for the development of a Louisiana community-based doula and Perinatal Health Educator pilot initiative. Sista Midwife Productions will leverage preliminary conversations with Louisiana Medicaid and Medicaid
Managed Care to advocate for reimbursements for doulas and community health workers. In the next year, Sista Midwife Productions plans to lead six doula trainings and create a Train the Trainer model to increase the number of Black doulas in the state. Through its Birth Story Project, Sista Midwife Productions will host monthly listening circles and launch a survey to elicit stories from patients who have experienced trauma and poor treatment while seeking hospital-based maternity care. It hopes to identify two to three organizational partners to launch an Ethical Birth Coalition.

**Surge Reproductive Justice**

$20,000  
Seattle, WA  
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2017  
www.surgereprojustice.org

Surge Reproductive Justice fights for racial and reproductive justice through community engagement, education, and policy advocacy in order to stand with Northwest communities who have been subject to state control. Run primarily by women of color and queer and trans people, Surge seeks to launch a prison doula program in Washington state. The program would make doula care accessible to incarcerated people and provide free training opportunities for doulas interested in working in prisons, with the hope of launching a doula training program for incarcerated individuals in the future. In 2018, Surge helped lead the successful campaign to pass HB2016, a bill that makes midwifery and doula care more accessible to incarcerated people in Washington. Since then, Surge developed relationships with the hospital where incarcerated people from Washington Corrections Center for Women give birth, secured an agreement with Open Arms Perinatal Services to contract doulas, and began making inroads to the Department of Corrections (DOC) to provide doula services. However, DOC abruptly delayed plans to advance the prison doula program. Surge will now deploy an organizing strategy to hold DOC accountable to providing reasonable accommodations to pregnant people seeking doula care, as outlined by state law. During the grant period, Surge will build alliances with service providers who serve the women’s prison, collaborate with the Black Prisoner Caucus and partner organization Village of Hope on community education for incarcerated pregnant people, and work with a new coalition that endeavors to improve conditions for incarcerated women and LGBTQ people. In 2019, Surge and partners formed the Women’s Justice Institute, a roundtable that fights for better healthcare, legal services, and conditions in Department of Corrections facilities. In the coming year, Surge will use its connections to build entry points to prisons while organizing communities on the outside to ensure DOC compliance with laws that affect incarcerated pregnant people.

**Southern Birth Justice Network**

$30,000  
Miami, FL  
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2017  
www.southernbirthjustice.org

Southern Birth Justice Network (SBJN) seeks to expand birth justice by using storytelling, popular education, and community organizing to improve access to midwifery care. SBJN’s goal is to improve health outcomes and bring the art of midwifery back into communities of color by increasing pregnant and parenting peoples’ knowledge of their rights and their access to midwives. SBJN runs a 12-week Circle of Mamas workshop series that reached 80 young pregnant people and babies in a Miami-Dade high school and provided holistic doula support to 14 students during the prior grant period. The workshops include “know-your-rights” training, sharing of information about birth options, midwifery care, breastfeeding support, story sharing circles, and mobilizing to change the policies that affect the lives of young parents and their children. In partnership with Groundswell grantee Power U, Circle of Mamas continues to mobilize young parents around comprehensive sex education in Miami-Dade Public Schools. Young women of color in SBJN’s Young Mamas Leadership Institute organize pregnant and parenting young people to participate in actions to address health disparities and power inequities in their own communities. In the next year, SBJN will participate in a doula Medicaid reimbursement campaign, collecting 200 pledge cards, traveling to the state capitol with Floridians for Reproductive Freedom to talk to legislators about the importance of doula care, and receiving amplification support from Groundswell grantee Forward Together. As a part of Black Mamas Matter Alliance, SBJN will also advocate Congress and the United Nations for coverage of doula services. In order to increase the numbers of Black, Brown, and LGBTQ birthworkers, SBJN will launch a Birth Assistant and Community Medic training to train
community members as first responders to pregnant people, emergencies, wounds, and trauma and create a community-based alternative to EMTs and paramedics within marginalized communities. During the grant period, SBJN will launch a new program called Birth: By Us For Us to develop a website, videos, app, quarterly podcast, and other education materials focused on pregnancy, birth, and lactation for people of color and queer, trans, and disabled people. Its incubated project, the National Black Midwives Alliance, will work to increase the number of Black midwives in the United States; support legislative efforts led by Black midwives in various states; and advocate for the development of educational pathways for Black student midwives, including raising scholarship funds. The National Black Midwives Alliance is sponsored by the SBJN. In partnership with Birth Justice Fund grantees Elephant Circle and the National Association to Advance Black Birth, the National Black Midwives Alliance will begin a plan to assess the feasibility of leading a national convening for birthworkers of color.

Tewa Women United

$30,000
Santa Cruz, NM
Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2012
www.tewawomenunited.org

Tewa Women United (TWU) is a collective, intertribal voice in the Tewa homelands of northern New Mexico that supports Indigenous women to become forces for transformation within their families and communities. Reproductive justice and birth justice are central to TWU’s mission, and the organization provides resources for support, choice, and connection, as well as access to information and resources about childbearing, breastfeeding, and parenting for women facing cultural and socioeconomic barriers to reproductive health and wellbeing. Through its Yiya Vi Kagingdi (YVK) Community Doula Program, TWU provided full circle doula assistance to 25 people; increased stipends to YVK doulas; and reached 153 people via monthly birth circles, parenting groups, and childbirth education classes in 2018. Last year, TWU launched a pilot full-spectrum Community Doula Certification program that trained 15 students. Student doulas have begun to serve Indigenous families under the mentorship of YVK “Big Sister” doulas. During the grant period, TWU will provide perinatal doula assistance to at least 40 clients, train an additional 15 doulas in the second year of its Level 1 doula training, and develop a Level 2 training to offer advanced instruction for prior graduates and other doulas seeking continuing education in New Mexico. TWU will host the second Northern New Mexico Birth Summit, a gathering of birthworkers from across the state that will meet to discuss key issues and best practices in maternity care. Along with Birth Justice Fund grantee Young Women United, TWU will shape the recently launched New Mexico Doula Association that seeks to make doula care more accessible for rural, tribal, and other underserved communities; increase the racial

Uzazi Village
and geographic diversity of trained doulas; and engage doulas as change agents and advocates in New Mexico.

In the coming year, Tewa Women United will work closely with Birth Justice Fund grantee Changing Woman Initiative to offer Indigenous Breastfeeding Counselor Training for Indigenous women to become lactation consultants in the six Tewa-speaking Pueblos.

**Uzazi Village**

**$30,000**  
**Kansas City, MO**  
**Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2017**  
www.uzazivillage.org

Uzazi Village is dedicated to reducing maternal health disparities and Black infant mortality in Kansas City, MO, where Black infants die at over twice the rate of white infants. In contrast to Kansas City healthcare systems that focus on increasing cultural sensitivity, Uzazi Village’s Sister Doula certification program is led by Black women and seeks to increase the number of Perinatal Community Health Workers (PCHWs) of color from Kansas City neighborhoods most impacted by maternal and infant health disparities. Next year, Uzazi Village will pair 60 low-income women of color with PCHWs. Uzazi Village will fully open its Ida Mae Patterson Clinic to continue to provide approximately 500 women with prenatal care, education and resources about labor and birth, health and wellness classes, midwifery services, postnatal exams, and advocacy, in addition to continuing home visits. During the grant period, Uzazi Village will complete a strategic plan and continue to strengthen its fundraising capacity in anticipation of the last managed care organization ending Medicaid reimbursements for doula services. During the coming grant period, Uzazi Village is committed to providing doula care for 30–40 clients for up to three months postpartum. Research shows that Black women are largely abandoned during this critical time, left without support, resources, education, or assistance. Uzazi Village’s postpartum care will focus on breastfeeding support; creating a contraceptive plan; meal prep; cleaning; errands; Afro-centric birth practices and rituals including belly binding, baby wearing, and massage; and referrals to chiropractic care.

**Young Women United**

**$30,000**  
**Albuquerque, NM**  
**Birth Justice Fund grantee since 2012**  
www.youngwomenunited.org

Young Women United (YWU) supports young women of color and their allies in New Mexico to take action to reduce violence, improve health, and build power in their communities. In partnership with Birth Justice Fund grantee Breath of My Heart Birthplace, YWU won a policy victory in 2018 that ensures that Licensed Midwives (LMs) can carry the required limited pharmaceuticals that LMs had no legal way to access before. With support from the Birth Justice Fund, YWU will engage in administrative advocacy and the rulemaking process of the NM Board of Pharmacy and the NM Department of Health to ensure successful implementation of the law. YWU and Breath of My Heart Birthplace will also advocate for changes to Medicaid reimbursement rates, denials, and underpayment of midwives through the NM Medicaid program that covers out-of-hospital births, and work with Congresswoman Deb Haaland to shape draft federal legislation for Medicaid coverage for midwifery and doula care. In 2019, YWU cofounded the New Mexico Doula Association to increase access to high-quality doula care in New Mexico and connect doulas across the state, such as those working with Birth Justice Fund grantee Tewa Women United. YWU will serve on the New Mexico Doula Association steering committee and help to plan its first statewide doula convening. In the grant period, YWU will support the development of a Birth Companions Program at the University of New Mexico to provide doula training focused on supporting pregnant people with a history of substance use. Through a collaborative pilot study, YWU will begin data analysis on the impact of doula services on the maternal and infant health outcomes of pregnant woman who have substance use disorders. YWU will formalize a doula curriculum to begin training doulas in the community outside of its current partnerships with the University of New Mexico and Milagro program. During the grant period, YWU will raise the visibility of birth justice issues by completing postproduction of its Hollywood feature film that explores the complexities of generational cycles of substance use, trauma, pregnancy, and parenting.
To learn more about Groundswell’s Birth Justice Fund, please contact Program Officer Naa Hammond at nhammond@groundswellfund.org
2019 BIRTH JUSTICE FUND GRANTEES

CALIFORNIA
Healing Clinic Collective

COLORADO
Elephant Circle

FLORIDA
Commonsense Childbirth, Inc.
Southern Birth Justice Network

LOUISIANA
Birthmark Doula Collective
Sista Midwife Productions

MISSOURI
Uzazi Village

NEW JERSEY
Ancient Song Doula Services

NEW MEXICO
Breath of My Heart Birthplace
Changing Woman Initiative
Tewa Women United
Young Women United

NEW YORK
Ancient Song Doula Services

OKLAHOMA
InTune Mother Society

TENNESSEE
CHOICES: Memphis Center for Reproductive Health

TEXAS
Mama Sana Vibrant Woman

WASHINGTON
Surge Reproductive Justice

WASHINGTON, D.C.
Mamatoto Village

NATIONAL
Black Mamas Matter Alliance
Elephant Circle, National Association to Advance Black Birth, and National Black Midwives Alliance
National Association to Advance Black Birth
National Indigenous Midwives Alliance
National Perinatal Task Force
Queer and Trans Midwives Association

NORTH AMERICA
The Birth Place Lab:
“Giving Voice to Mothers”
“Giving Voice to Queer Families”
Native Youth Sexual Health Network

Local or state grantees
Regional or national grantees

September 2019
Groundswell Fund strengthens U.S. movements for reproductive and social justice by resourcing intersectional grassroots organizing and centering the leadership of women of color—particularly those who are Black, Indigenous, and Transgender.