



GROUNDSWELL  
FUND



GROUNDSWELL FUND  
**RAPID RESPONSE  
FUND**  
2016–2020

**An Innovative Model  
for Resourcing the  
Front Lines**

# INTRODUCTION

Groundswell Fund launched the **Rapid Response Fund (RRF)** in late 2015 to expedite grants to grassroots organizations led by women of color; transgender, gender-nonconforming, and nonbinary (TGNCNB) / queer people of color; and low-income women in critical, but unexpected, fights to protect and advance reproductive and social justice. **Groundswell designed the RRF on a firm foundation of trust-based philanthropy and the belief that people living at the sharpest crosshairs of race, class, and gender injustice often have the clearest insight into systemic oppression and the best solutions for dismantling it for all people.** One of the first rapid funding initiatives designed solely for reproductive justice organizations, the RRF soon

expanded in response to urgent requests from other people of color, women of color- and TGNCNB-led organizations fighting against multiple, intersectional threats to social and racial justice. With low barriers to grants—a phone call, instead of a lengthy proposal—and quick disbursements, RRF supports key voter turnout efforts, major public attacks on reproductive justice, and climate and environmental disasters, among other urgent and strategic actions.

Between 2016 and 2020, the Rapid Response Fund distributed close to \$2.17 million to 220 grantees, with 18 grantees receiving funding for new urgent actions in more than one year.



MARIA FUND

After Hurricane Maria, the **Center for Popular Democracy** requested a Groundswell Fund Rapid Response Fund grant as seed money for what would become the **María Fund (PUERTO RICO, 2017–\$20,000)**. The first philanthropy of its kind, the María Fund relies exclusively on Puerto Rican leadership for funding decisions. It supports local relief and recovery, base building and organizational capacity

building for social change, and strategies to confront the impacts of climate and environmental disasters on vulnerable communities. In its first five years, it regranted over \$6.8 million to support a powerful, aligned network of social justice leaders, organizations, and initiatives to build collective community power and advance structural change.



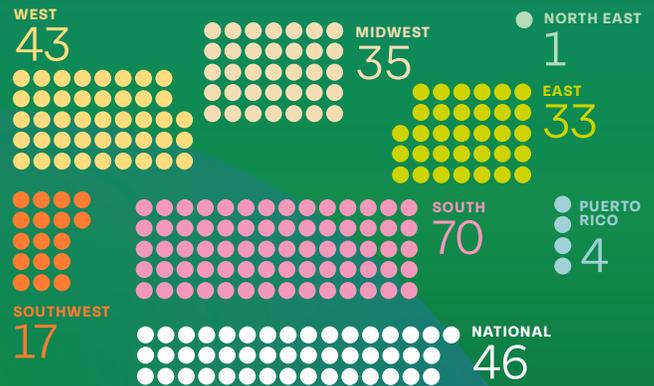
**CHANGING WOMAN INITIATIVE**

When Indigenous women began the Standing Rock resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline through their lands, Groundswell Fund’s RRF staff visited to learn what leaders on the ground needed in their fight for environmental justice and land sovereignty. **Changing Woman Initiative/Mni Wiconi Clinic (NORTH AND SOUTH DAKOTA, 2016–\$10,000)** set up a midwifery clinic providing comprehensive birthing care at Standing Rock and continues to fight for an injunction to shut down the pipeline. Changing Woman Initiative is part of a resurgent Indigenous-led health justice movement and a Groundswell Birth Justice Fund grantee, offering culturally-affirming midwifery services to Indigenous families in rural New Mexico.

\$2,167,450 in RRF grants went to 220 unique grantees (through a total of 248 grants) between 2016 and 2020.



The largest numbers of Rapid Response Fund grantees organize in the South, West, and/or nationally.



Out of the 5 top populations, the largest numbers of grantees organized in Black, POC, and/or TGNCNB communities.



# LEARNING FROM THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

**An evaluation of the RRF's first five years shows that after awarding \$2.17 million to 220 grantees:**

- ⦿ **Groundswell Fund has led with trust and learned from the Rapid Response Fund.** Responding quickly to political developments and relying on knowledge of the field and referrals from women and TGNCNB leaders of color, Groundswell cast a wide net and required minimal hurdles to access RRF grants. Groundswell applied insights from the RRF across all its initiatives—about what to fund and how to break down white- and mainstream-oriented philanthropic systems that undervalue or disregard work led by women and TGNCNB people of color.
- ⦿ **Small grants can catalyze outsized effects. RRF grants, typically ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000, provided critical early support for organizations and movements.** They were important and sometimes key to the success

of nascent organizing and advocacy campaigns, some of which went on to gain powerful momentum and impact over time. They amplified community voices and strengthened movements, providing the support that innovative organizations needed in order to take community-generated strategies to scale.

- ⦿ **Rapid, responsive, low-burden funding can build strength within and solidarity across movements to scale up the power of an engaged base of leaders.** To reduce funding barriers, Groundswell conducted intake calls with applicants, instead of requiring burdensome applications. The RRF grants they awarded played important roles in urgent fights for reproductive, environmental, economic, immigrant, gender, LGBTQ/TGNCNB, and racial justice, sometimes linking leaders, organizations, and movements that had not joined forces before.

In 2021, Groundswell commissioned a retrospective analysis of the impacts of RRF funding on grantees; on their allies and larger movements; and on the success of their efforts to bring about systems and societal change. The evaluation drew on grant reports, materials related to grants awarded in 2016 – 2020, and an interview and communications with Groundswell staff.

## This report focuses on the following five prominent themes:

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### CRITICAL EARLY SUPPORT

Championed innovative, bold strategies and organizing led by WOC/TGN CNB local grassroots community leaders, often as a “first-in” funder.

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### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Invested in an intentional base-building strategy to cultivate knowledge and skills among grassroots leaders who can engage others to maintain effective justice movements.

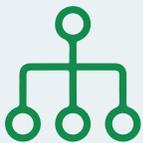
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### TRANSFORMATIVE ORGANIZING

Supported organizing that integrates healing justice, mutual aid, and other strategies that upend prevalent cultures of transactional organizing.

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### ENSURING SOLID ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Bolstered organizations’ internal capacity to create and carry out effective social justice campaigns.

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### CONNECTIVITY ACROSS MOVEMENTS

Fostered intersectional work between organizations in movements that do not traditionally work together.

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The examples and longer case studies throughout this report illustrate how **the RRF upends the traditional experience of women of color- and TGN CB of color-led organizations that regularly find it difficult to access the kind of philanthropic support** that larger, well-

resourced, mainstream, and white- led organizations do. They provide evidence of RRF’s impact, with particular focus on the communities, issues, and regions prioritized in Groundswell Fund’s 2020 – 2025 Blueprint.



# CASE STUDY

## MOVE San Antonio

MOVE San Antonio—now the **MOVE Texas Civic Fund** (TEXAS, 2017–\$10,000)—established in 2013 by Texas students, builds civic education, leadership capacity, and issue advocacy

focused on Texas’ young people. In 2015, MOVE organizers supported organizing and civic action led by students of color after the federal government had rescinded DACA protections that fall. **A RRF grant enabled MOVE San Antonio to launch a grassroots, youth-led movement to protect immigrant youth.** MOVE invested in a young woman of color organizer directly impacted by DACA. MOVE engaged immigrant youth organizing on college campuses and school districts, and collaborated with local immigrant rights organizations to deliver Know Your Rights workshops and educational tools to thousands of young immigrants and their families. MOVE connected youth with resources and pro bono legal help to renew their DACA status; held planning meetings for a Campus Police Toolkit on the treatment of immigrant youth, and fought for and won a dedicated space and webpage to help DREAMers and immigrant youth at the University of Texas at San Antonio who face discriminatory laws. MOVE Texas now advocates for cite and release policies, which keep Texans out of the deportation pipeline.

**Impacts from RRF support included access to decision makers, systems change, leveraged funding, and an arc of growth in movement building and organizational strength. Specific impacts and examples of continuing momentum include:**

- ⦿ **Strengthened relationships with local and statewide organizations and government entities**, while recruiting more volunteer social justice and civic engagement organizers than in any previous semester.
- ⦿ **MOVE San Antonio leveraged its RRF grant to get a \$50,000 grant and expand to four more cities in 2018.** By 2021, it had become the MOVE Texas Civic Fund, encompassing 10 cities and powering a statewide, youth-led civic engagement movement.
- ⦿ By November 2017, San Antonio’s ICE director had privately announced that ICE would no longer perform neighborhood raids because **educational initiatives like MOVE’s had resulted in a community where no one would open their door to ICE agents.**
- ⦿ In an institutional policy milestone, the **University of Texas at San Antonio now actively protects and supports its immigrant students** through the DREAMers center.



## CASE STUDY

# Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition

**Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition (MEJC)** (MICHIGAN, 2019–\$20,000), women of color and established in 2011 with the goal of implementing a statewide environmental justice plan, was organizing a community response to the collapse of contaminated land into the Detroit River, which put the health of millions of residents who rely on the river for drinking water at risk. MEJC hired a new staff member to work with a broad coalition of community and environmental justice groups developing the Detroit River Protection Ordinance to submit for adoption by the Detroit City Council. The ordinance (still under consideration at the time of publication) will regulate commercial property owners and storage facilities along the waterfront and mandate biennial inspections and other safety measures. MEJC’s statewide coordinator highlights the importance of the RRF grant: “If it were not for our voice present, the ordinance 100% would not have included an emergency response or drinking water protections for residents.” Over the last two years, MEJC has worked with groups to help craft the Detroit River Protection Ordinance. This legislation will now require owners and operators of riverfront property to notify local authorities if another major structural failure occurs. The city council voted unanimously to pass this ordinance on September 28th.

**Impacts from RRF support included systems change, access to decision makers and thought leaders to shape new policy, increased visibility and influence, and deepening strategic partnerships. Specific impacts and examples of continuing momentum include:**

- ⦿ **Public city government response and increased regulatory action** against violators of existing water safety policies.
- ⦿ **Articles in at least seven local media outlets** (print, online, television, and radio) highlighting MEJC’s demands and the proposed ordinance.
- ⦿ **Increased and strengthened collaborative partnerships** at the intersection of racial and environmental justice.
- ⦿ **Sustained public, media, and policy maker interest in addressing MEJC’s demands** and improving water safety for Detroit’s residents.



## CASE STUDY

# Cihuapactli Collective

Established by Indigenous women in 2015, **Cihuapactli Collective** (ARIZONA, 2020–\$20,000) works towards cultural revitalization and education, food justice and restoration,

advocacy and consultation, comprehensive reproductive justice, and birth equity that includes traditional ways of terminating pregnancy. Faced with the closure of the Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC), which left local Indigenous families without a labor and delivery ward, Cihuapactli Collective moved quickly to meet pregnant and newly parenting community members' needs through mutual aid and access to culturally-matched care, participation in a community-led process to reinstate a community-based birth and postpartum center, and a successful advocacy campaign to defeat a restrictive and racist statewide Doula Certification Bill.

**Impacts from RRF support included strategic partnerships, access to decision makers, increased visibility and influence, leveraged funding, and an arc of growth in organizational strength and reach. Specific impacts and examples of continuing momentum include:**

- ⦿ **Establishment and growth of a Collective Birth Fund, which distributed \$40,300 in funds in its first year to support Indigenous families** displaced by PIMC's closure by paying for: mutual aid to 13 urban Indigenous and/or undocumented and single-parent families (including diapers, and lactation supplies, and scholarships to pay for anything from groceries to culturally-matched birthing services); support for 10 birth workers and doulas of color, who had been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; and a stipended community resource advocate position.
- ⦿ **Invited to sit on the state DHS Maternal Mental Health Task Force** and to present at two large health convenings.
- ⦿ **New partnerships with the local NAACP chapter** and others to block the Doula Certification Bill.
- ⦿ Over **\$20,000 in additional grants** and new donor support.
- ⦿ **Capacity growth**, leading to inclusion in Groundswell's cohort of 2021 Birth Justice Fund grantees.



## AREA OF FOCUS

# Supporting Justice for TGNCNB People

**Groundswell Fund has long been intentional about supporting justice movement work that centers and is led by and with TGNCNB people of color.**

In late 2016, RRF supported **Fund for Trans Generations at Borealis Philanthropy (NATIONAL/MINNESOTA, 2016–\$20,000)**, which had created a temporary, pooled Trans Identity Document Rapid Response Fund (the “ID Fund”). The ID Fund raised \$120,000 and supported 12 organizations that provided direct fee assistance to 100 individuals seeking name and/or gender marker changes. It also provided over 500 people with legal information and resources in 13 states, including those in Groundswell’s priority regions of the South, Southwest, and Midwest. Grant recipients reported shifting conversations from personal marker changes to safety for TGNCNB communities; learning more about barriers faced by those in the TGNCNB community who are undocumented, formerly incarcerated, or nonbinary; engaging those receiving assistance in programmatic and organizing work;

strengthening relationships with agencies involved in marker change work; and leveraging other funding.

In 2020, RRF collaborated with the Black Trans Fund, the first national fund in the U.S. dedicated to uplifting and resourcing Black TGNCNB social justice leaders. Incubated and housed at Groundswell Fund, the Black Trans Fund provided 30 rapid response grants in partnership with the RRF in 2020. One of these was to **Black Transmen Inc. (BTMI) (TEXAS, 2020–\$7,500)**, the first national nonprofit social advocacy organization—with chapters in KS, GA, CA, and D.C.—organizing Black trans men to address injustice at the intersections of racial, sexual orientation, and gender identities. The grant helped BTMI to build staff capacity to enhance and increase services and provide support and mentoring for an influx of program participants. It also hosted three community summits focusing on the lack of public attention to carceral violence against Black trans-masculine people, catalyzed by the police killing of Tony McDade.

“*The Rapid Response Fund collaboration provided Black Trans Fund with a direct funding mechanism to resource Black trans and gender-expansive organizations during the pandemic. RRF grantees taught us that funding Black trans communities at scale take equal investment in service and organizing activities.* — **BRÉ RIVERA**, PROGRAM OFFICER, BLACK TRANS FUND



## AREA OF FOCUS

# Building Voter Engagement in Georgia

### The following four grantees

**illustrate how crucial grassroots organizing led by women and people of color in, with, and for their own communities is to achieving short-term victories and building long-term civic engagement and electoral power.**

In the face of the 2020 general election and later Georgia runoff elections, **Asian Americans Advancing Justice—Atlanta** (GEORGIA, 2020—\$20,000) focused on ensuring that all POC voters would be able to exercise their right to vote. To address community trauma from anti-Asian and anti-Black racism and build solidarity across movements, AAAJ-ATL organizers led workshops on racial justice history and community dialogues with local queer and Black organizers. It fought for language equity, advocating for and securing Korean and Spanish-language voting materials in DeKalb County before the general election—a win that inspired Cobb County to follow suit for the 2021

run-off. It sent multilingual mailers in eight languages as part of a mail, text, phone, and in-person canvassing GOTV campaign. Ultimately, Advancing Justice-Atlanta reached out to AAPI voters in Georgia and helped to increase Asian American voter general election turnout by 141% over 2016.

The only national organization focused on building the power of AAPI women and girls, **National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF)** (NATIONAL/GEORGIA, 2020—\$5,000)—also a Groundswell Catalyst Fund and Integrated Voter Engagement program grantee—played a critical role in reaching and mobilizing voters in the 2020 general election and the 2021 runoff election. Canvassers spent over 800 hours reaching out to voters in 18 languages through direct phone calls, text messages, postcards, and door-to-door work across 107 counties in Georgia, with an intensive focus on DeKalb County. According to ProGeorgia, 66.41% of voters contacted



*We are only just beginning to come into our power. We will continue to show up and vote up and down the ballot for our issues, our rights, and our communities.* — **STEPHANIE CHO**, ASIAN AMERICANS ADVANCING JUSTICE-ATLANTA



WOMEN ENGAGED



GLAHR

by NAPAUF about the runoff election turned out to vote, compared with 43.95% of AAPI voters statewide.

**Women Engaged (GEORGIA, 2020–\$20,000)**—also a Groundswell Integrated Voter Engagement participant, Catalyst Fund grantee, and 2016 RRF grantee—mobilized Black voters in the 2020 presidential and runoff elections and obtained 1,600 pledges to complete the U.S. Census. With roots in majority-Black communities in Atlanta and a multigenerational team of activists statewide, Women Engaged adapted its WE Vote. WE Rise! integrated voter engagement plan to the demands of 2020. It integrated COVID-19 mutual aid, the U.S. Census, and the Movement for Black Lives into canvassing and digital campaigns; connected community members with resources for housing, utilities, food, transportation to polls, and childcare; and developed innovative campaigns to engage Gen Z young Black women and femme voters.

**Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights (GEORGIA, 2020–\$20,000)** supported the Latinx community in the Georgia GOTV efforts, drawing on 14 years of trust-building and engagement to conduct outreach through a bilingual voter information hotline, diverse social media and online communications strategies, and the safe distribution of COVID-19 safety guidelines materials and information on voting rights. As a member of the national Election Defender Program, the organization’s community members and volunteers were trained to defend the right to vote through poll monitoring, bystander training, de-escalation tactics, and providing support to new voters at the polls. As a result of their and other grassroots leaders’ efforts, nearly two-thirds of eligible Latinx voters turned out for the runoff election, more than five times the 8% turnout in 2018.



*We believe that Georgia set an example for why grassroots community organizing is worthy of investment.*

— GEORGIA LATINO ALLIANCE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



## AREA OF FOCUS

# Abortion Access

**RRF grants have contributed to several important campaigns to block or rescind anti-abortion policies, enact proactive ones, and reshape national and local conversations for long-term culture change around this issue. The urgency of this support is clearer than ever in the wake of recent state-level attacks on abortion access with the first the ban on abortion access going into effect in Texas in September in 2021.**

As part of its mission to promote Black women's health, wellness, economic security, education, and empowerment, **Alabama Black Women's Roundtable** (ALABAMA, 2018–\$20,000 + 2019/2020 GROUNDSWELL CATALYST GRANTEE) partnered with local LGBTQ, civic, and social organizations; Black sororities; Yellowhammer Fund (RRF 2019 and 2020 grantee); and The P.O.W.E.R. House/Montgomery Reproductive Justice Coalition, to mutually expand their grassroots outreach and educate voters about the impact that the fetal personhood Amendment 2 would have on Black women's lives. Although the law passed, the new strategic intersectional partnerships are now core to the grantee's continued work.

Launched in 2013 with the ambitious goal of restoring insurance coverage for abortion and ending the Hyde Amendment, **All\* Above All** (NATIONAL 2018–\$20,000; 2019–\$2,000) combines a practice of seizing unexpected opportunities and strategizing for the marathon of changing hearts, minds, and policies at all levels of government. With its 2018 grant, the campaign partnered with **URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity** (RRF 2019/2020 GRANTEE AND CATALYST GRANTEE SINCE 2004) and others to convene, train, and support individuals and organizations to lead public protests and visit their senators in Washington, D.C. as part of the #StopKavanaugh Reproductive Justice Day of Action. In 2019, All\* joined URGE in developing a short documentary that highlights the work of young people organizing for reproductive justice in the South and Midwest. In 2021, after years of this and other policy and culture change work, **All\* Above All saw the first Presidential budget proposal in 30 years that did not include the Hyde Amendment ban on Medicaid funding for abortion, and spending bills passed by the House of Representatives without federal bans on funding abortion for the first time since 1976.**



# INNOVATIONS FOR IMPACT: THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

Though its experience with the RRF, Groundswell has learned that making strategic small grants, leveraging trust in the field, and lowering the burden during crisis moments can make tremendous impact. Innovations that contributed to the RRF’s impact during its five years included:

- ⦿ **Being responsive and nimble to needs and opportunities in social justice movements.**
- ⦿ **Reducing barriers and increasing accessibility to funds,** including through weekly grantmaking cycles during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ⦿ **Using trust-based philanthropy,** including collaborating with aligned grant makers during RRF’s planning phase. Furthermore, relying on community leaders’ recommendations about nascent and cutting-edge groups and an advisory panel of community leaders.
- ⦿ **Leaning into Groundswell staff members’ lived experience as organizers** to make grants that were more instrumental in developing leadership, shoring up organizations’ infrastructure, and resourcing transformative organizing models than anticipated.

With funding disbursed through strategies that combined deep knowledge, trust, and relationships, and data, grant recipients of the first five years of the RRF were able to build their capacity and resilience; deepen their communities’ skills and leadership; forge strategic partnerships for greater strength and reach; and act nimbly in response to social justice threats and opportunities. These approaches and innovations will be important to continue RRF’s track record of outsized impact in the face of ongoing threats and opportunities in the coming years.



# FROM THE MOVEMENT, FOR THE MOVEMENT

**FOR 15 YEARS** Groundswell Fund has been a major irrigation system for movements, a channel into which donors and foundations can pour resources to reach vital work at the grassroots.

Groundswell is a foundation led by women of color and and transgender and gender-nonconforming people of color who come out of grassroots organizing. We center work that is led by women of color, particularly those who are Black, Indigenous and transgender. Our giving strategy is shaped by many of the most prominent women of color movement leaders of our time.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Groundswell Fund thanks the Rapid Response Fund Advisory Committee and all the funders who helped shape and support the first five years of the Rapid Response Fund.

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*Advancing Social Justice Solutions*

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