



## AFF Kitchen Cabinet Convening June 2019

AFF funds organizations that support vulnerable youth impacted by the juvenile justice, child welfare systems, at the intersections of other potentially disruptive systems like education, immigration and others. Grantee partners have focused on trauma informed interventions and alternatives, legal advocacy and community lawyering, and child welfare and juvenile justice systems reform and transformation. Since 2015, AFF has had 79 grantee partners and granted over \$14,129,800.

In June of 2019, AFF invited over 20 of its grantee partners to explore the current state of the youth justice and child welfare fields, identify current gaps, opportunities and key lessons learned from their work.

### State of the Field As Reported by Grantee Partners

#### TRAUMA INFORMED INTERVENTIONS & ALTERNATIVES

##### **What's new?**

There has been a shift to “trauma-conscious/healing justice” instead of ‘trauma-informed.’ Trauma and the need for healing manifests multi-dimensionally in policy and systems as well as in people and within our own organizations. Organizers are facing burnout and a need for deeper individual care; holistic change is needed across all fronts. This need can be met by having healers at convenings of community leaders (activists, organizers, lawyers, teachers, service providers and others), challenging the “give all you can” mentality in the field, and addressing how activists suffer in real and life-threatening ways. Additional solutions include creating youth-led healing justice approaches that incorporate art and culture, including spoken word, or other healing modalities. This is the work and not a distraction from it.

##### **What's most exciting:**

Healing justice approaches that involve more self and community care models and providing a “web” of resources that account for culture, art, and healing in organizing. To engage young people in healing justice/trauma conscious work requires adults to claim the right to be well and model what care looks like. There is a need to honor ancestral wisdom and alternatives to white supremacy culture and define how to embody that. To fully embrace trauma-consciousness we must address the multi-faceted impact of trauma on body/brain/nervous system/spirit, inherited trauma – the trauma of oppression, as well as direct trauma. A shift is needed to include health and mental health at the “root” in schools.

##### **What are the major gaps?**

Top gaps include policy and structural systems that reflect trauma consciousness; accounting for the needs of communities and the interweaving systems of change needed; and not to practicing oppression while trying to undo oppression and the possibility of designing an alternative system. It is a challenge to successfully communicate about this work with philanthropy, especially through grants proposals with word limits.

## LEGAL ADVOCACY/COMMUNITY LAWYERING

### **What's new?**

Not necessarily new, but still present are poverty, segregation, experimentation in school systems, and different models of prosecution and outcomes. District Attorneys are key in defining the dominant narrative about the community and crime. Promising trends include more organizing and understanding of accountability, restorative justice, then defense; work with participatory defense clubs (there is initial training but no continuation); and mapping of the prison industrial complex.

### **What's most exciting?**

There are some new exciting strategies in the field. Pod Mapping is an intentional process to navigate systems for youth that helps them find the best lawyers and judges to work with. There are new efforts to create and facilitate space for young people to connect with recently released juvenile lifers, there are more male mentors and facilitators, and greater intentionality about creating laws that shift money (though not power.) There is increased radical visioning from the community based on an analysis of the prison industrial complex and how it affects young people and more restorative justice opportunities.

### **What are the major gaps?**

There is a need to define what it means to have a progressive prosecutor, and to clearly understand if progressive models are at odds with traditional legal advocacy models. Coalitions and collectives are not always effective—this requires further exploration about how to identify and address needs. Funders can drive disconnected movements and focus too much on intermediaries. Intermediaries and technical assistance providers can be problematic and this requires more dialogue about best modes of collaboration. More intentional coalition building is needed among groups working on immigrant rights, policing, and child welfare.

### **What are you most worried about?**

Top concerns include the existing narrative around juvenile crime and the lack of a systemic focus, the bail system, and the lack of accountability for police misconduct. Additionally, the infrastructure of community-based organizations is fragile and needs more support. Philanthropy is not as willing to fund organizing or organizations led by people with lived experience because they may lack formal degrees, there is a lack of trust in people with role of intermediaries and there are too many funder driven initiatives.

## CHILD WELFARE

### **What's new?**

There are some promising trends in the child welfare field. There has been a paradigm shift to prioritize youth voice. Family First legislation has a requirement for youth to be on local and state boards, possibly setting the stage for new ways to strengthen foster youth power. Foster Youth in Action curriculums show youth organizing at every level. The community has an opportunity to plug into implementation and planning processes. Insurance coverage is now available for long-term mentoring; it needs to be at least a year but it is getting closer.

**What's most exciting?**

Organizations are employing new angles to meet participant needs (therapeutic to preventive services) and there is more heart on the frontline. The community is at the table more and youth advisory boards are available for resource connections and response to data. There is also a shift to gathering more research and an excitement about thinking more broadly about how to build more knowledge around foster youth.

**What are you most worried about?**

Child welfare will continue with business as usual and change won't result from discussions.

**What are the major gaps?**

State preoccupation with compliance doesn't allow them to get strategic work done. States don't have the space or time to think about what's next because it's a constant move from crisis to crisis. There is no clear vehicle to raise awareness about how bad the child welfare systems are doing and the need for systemic behavioral change, for an intersectional approach to the issues impacting youth in care and for evaluations about the impact of foster care to be done at every level.

## JUVENILE JUSTICE

**What's new?**

Disturbing new trends in the juvenile justice reform space include broad based data sharing on impacted young people and the use of algorithms without an open and clear process to inform their development and ensure their validity. Risk and threat assessments of young people in schools are being added to federal and state legislation with mandatory reporting requirements for educators. A positive shift in the field is the presence of new voices at the federal level offering the opportunity to think actively about economic justice (JOB, PELL, higher education grants) and criminal justice reform.

**What's exciting?**

There is a growing desire among directly impacted individuals to lead in this work and new, radical visioning from the community is surfacing. Deeper Black/Brown alliance building is occurring based on transformative relationships and clarity about a shared struggle beyond single issues. New conversations about racial justice with white people are taking place. There is collaborative work underway to translate national models that work to local communities, and there is growing intentionality about creating laws that shift money, but not power.

**What are you most worried about?**

Top concerns in the field include the need to engage young people; increasing the minimum wage so all young people have an incentive to work; the fragile infrastructure of community-based organizations; the lack of trust by people with the role of intermediaries; the need for more intentional coalition building among immigrant rights, policing and child welfare.

**What are the major gaps?**

Leaders with lived experience in this field are not at the table from beginning to end. Implementation of policy excludes organizers. Street workers are not recognized as field agents of change in policy and public systems and community people are not hired as the workforce to

provide support to impacted young people. Philanthropy is not as willing to fund organizations led by lived experience leaders. There is a need to change the narrative to push for new policies based on true equity, not false choices. The lack of money for education is not justice.

## CHALLENGES and OPPORTUNITIES

### ***Youth & Community***

Youth are intentionally stepping out of systems due to fear and cash strapped counties are going to ICE to raise money. Movement building and holistic approaches are needed for disinvested communities. We need to create community-based pipelines to jobs that don't require formal degrees. We need to organize resources so that young people do not have to be a part of extractive and harmful jobs/endeavors and to organize people to show up for each other's movements on a larger scale.

### ***Education***

Serious reform in the education system could prevent many other problems. Education is key. Counselors in school have law enforcement powers, why is there not training on both sides?

### ***Justice System/Political Structures:***

The question of reform vs. transformation needs to be addressed. Privatization is the end game of bipartisan criminal justice reform. Youth prisons are closed but are not being repurposed for community benefit. There are layers of privatization and gentrification, but the only jobs that are substantive are military or in the criminal justice system. With each step forward - such as the youth mobilization after Parkland - there is a backlash and polarization.

Policy after policy change is not making a real change, not transformation, not really resulting in doing things differently. The opportunity exists to develop strategies and leverage political capital to make large transformative change. Opportunities exist in the space of a global recession; what are radical tactics that we can be training people in and be ready for Occupy 2.0? We need tactical approaches to fight 'racial capitalism.' There is international opportunity to discuss racial capitalism; we need to create the space to do that although it is difficult to implement because we are apart from one another.

Other important opportunities noted include:

- Wins in prosecutor races in Florida and Louisiana have led directly to new organizing work; results in these races matter.
- The growing cannabis industry might be a path to justice and offer career paths in a green economy.
- Youth involvement in intergenerational work can contribute to end the cycle of incarceration.
- There are allies for not separating families (Family First legislation) and new approaches for working with young adults in the juvenile justice system (e.g., juvenile jails to juvenile centers for education and restoration.) More could be done if juvenile and criminal justice advocates came together.

Challenges getting in the way of progress include the lack of government funding for communities absent a clear public demand, and the lack of resources for people directly affected by these systems. Donors are funding legal advocacy rather than community organizations led by

people directly affected. Where are these resources going? As an example, lawyers and policy advocates in correctional facilities are not reaching out for community input.

### ***Partners & Funders***

Funders focus on outcomes rather than the structure and sustainability of organizations. Crisis moments - immigration for example - take away from the ability to stay on track with work requiring long term focus; it is hard to balance both. Instead, there is a need to focus on building and resourcing sustainable leadership, and increasing funds to build an equity analysis specifically for organizing work.

Targeted conversations are needed around intersectional equity at the core of our work. There has been a wave of consultants and trainers who are using the language but not aiding advancement. Is this language around liberation justice and equity and restorative justice? The language may take away from the movement. The right is doing a lot of community organizing and co-opting the language. We need to reclaim organizing for intersectional work and move against negative terminology such as community policing.

There is no space or time to practice democracy. Funders and coalitions move on market time vs. democratic time. The reality is that getting consensus-based community decision-making takes longer, and the result is groups stop getting requests to collaborate with funders or are forced to rush their work, which makes it difficult for young people to come to the table.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

***What capabilities do we need to build to sustain our work? How do we stay focused on a long-term transformative vision of youth justice while making progress on short-term wins and responding to crisis moments?***

A key point of discussion at the session was that the people being impacted by oppressive systems and policies should be the ones who ask and answer the questions of what needs transformation, how change should be achieved and what resources are needed to realize those goals.

### ***Invest in the Movement***

The problems that need to be addressed are a web and solutions are interconnected. We need to acknowledge that we are all allies and work to bring more allies into this movement. As such we all need to be accountable to a larger movement and vision and imagine a radical agenda outside current political structures and policies. Participants noted that the survival of the black community displays resilience, and radical centering of black humanity despite all structures/policies/experiences saying otherwise. Sustainability needs to include everyone in the movement; everyone needs resources not just large organizations. Funding often goes to build the capacity of large organizations for experimentation but it is needed to build up capacity for people on the ground.

### ***Reframe Capacity Building***

There are tensions when asked about capacity. How honest should an organization be about their needs? Should they raise an immediate need to pay a bill, or present as stable and able to

receive dollars? Is there such a thing as being too honest? When asked about capacity by a funder, a white ED admitted that he couldn't do a part of his job, and that is possible because of his having privilege. Being asked about capacity needs as a person of color or a woman feels like a trick question.

Capacity needs vary among organizations in the movement and funders and organizations may define capacity differently. Some of the changes needed in capacity building include helping smaller organizations better understand funder structures, simplifying grant writing and reporting requirements as current approaches -even among allied philanthropists- require great resources from nonprofits and pose capacity issues to even be able to apply for grants. Additionally, funders need to go beyond measuring projects by narrow parameters and provide the freedom for organizations to make mistakes.

### *The Leadership Pipeline*

Leadership development needs vary between and within organizations and support for the leadership pipeline is lacking in this movement. When a leader in this work moves into a different sector there is a vacuum. This drain speaks to capacity and the lack of a leadership pipeline. Effective leadership development needs to create pathways into leadership for the most impacted people and do so in a way that it is not just tokenization. Some current movement leaders were organizers first and are now trying to support their organizing colleagues to take up leadership roles. Funding is currently not directed to the most impacted leaders, and does not provide the comprehensive support they need. As a result, funders do not understand that it takes more than a year to make changes and develop leaders. We need to look at new ways to resource this critical work and include supports for long-term preparation for leadership transitions.

## RESOURCES

### *How do we act collectively to get funders to make more investments in this work?*

Building community partner knowledge about different funding systems and how they work together and investing in relationship building between community partners and funders to see each other as partners in the work emerged as important themes in this discussion.

### *Centering Community*

To engage in resource development work in healthy and effective ways community partners must ground themselves in the history of philanthropy's capitalist origins and take time to do personal and collective decolonizing work. This will allow partners to articulate a clear and shared vision and narrative for the work that will facilitate fundraising. Partners need smart, experienced advice to better understand how resources are raised and how to be effective collaborators with funders. For example, securing support from many of the new funders in philanthropy will require presenting data on the impact of the work. Other helpful strategies to build community partner capacity and get more resources on the ground include adding a dedicated role in community organizations focused on introducing the work to new, unlikely funding partners; supporting flexible capacity building; having coalitions serve as fiscal sponsors to new community groups; and sustaining the leadership development pipeline.

### *Philanthropy*

It is critical for partners to have an understanding of the complex and changing philanthropic landscape. Some examples of changes important to understand and leverage include the role of intermediaries, changes in the tax code, the use of mission related investments (MRIs) and Program Related Investments (PRIs) investment vehicles, and a trend for big foundations to pull out of juvenile justice issue focus. Some areas of opportunity for additional philanthropic support for the field include new wealth, individual donors and donor advised funds, tech money and their new foundations and mission-aligned business fundraising. Funders also underscored the benefits of fundraising as a collective coalition that submits a joint proposal for funding with cross movement data and underscored the importance of pooled vs. coordinated resources; the jointly funded project rule; 501c3 vs. 501c4 funding.

### *Government Funds*

Partners noted that State level money is moving to the right areas and pursuing state funding should be a focus for the field. The interplay of philanthropy and government offers opportunities such as leveraging foundation resources to access larger government funds, raising money from government for programs and private dollars for more radical work and understanding that philanthropy sees its role as filling gaps not addressed by government. For example, the NYC Fair Futures project included \$10 million from the City government to support foster youth paired with philanthropic grants that together generated a new program model. Support was also available for a PR firm to message the program to the public. Partners noted that training advocates to enter government positions where they have decision-making power over budgets/funding to support the work is also an important strategy.

### *Relationship Building*

Building trust between partners and funders is essential to growing resources for the work, and trust building takes time and proximity. It is not realistic or community partners to immediately be their authentic selves. Participants discussed the importance of taking the time to find common ground and common goals and not assume agreement up front. Convening partners and funders to boldly and fearlessly explore questions together – such as honest dialogue about risk capital and what happens when organizations meet some goals, but fail in others – is needed. Creating space and time to develop organic, true relationships between investors and organizations in a way that isn't contentious is essential. Breaking bread together, especially in crisis moments, was also noted as an important way to build trusting relationships. Ideally funders would grow to trust the people on the ground doing the work to have the vision and power needed to achieve specific outcomes, and require minimal materials for groups to get funding.

## CLOSING QUESTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

- **Oppressive systems are mutating** and creating new systems of incarceration. As oppression mutates we need to create specific opportunities to control and fight against it. **We need space and support to design the most effective course of action for the long-term.**
- **Can we limit or eliminate institutionalization of young people eventually and shift those resources to communities?** For example, how do we shift from juvenile justice to education reform?
- **How do we create real alternatives? We must change to become different people, and be trained in holistic work** to effectively support communities and individuals. Positive youth development must respond to the immediate and basic needs of youth and be built on aspects of black men in the community. Realignment of government funds must be from government to communities.
- **Organizations must be member-based** to ensure long-term sustainability. Mobilization of new members is possible during real time crises by connecting those in crisis to form a community and explaining how the system causes problems for individuals and community.
- **There must be increased transparency, vetting processes and accountability structures** for organizations and funders. It is rare to hear the internal strategic visioning of foundations. We must all be together – movement building organizations, 501 c3s, funders - and create a collaborative vision; this already exists on right but not the left due to dealing with survival strategies and trauma.