



# Executive Summary: Evaluation of the Advancing Reproductive and Gender Justice Strategy

Spring 2021

Prepared for:



FORDFOUNDATION

Prepared by:



---

*This evaluation was commissioned by the Ford Foundation; however, its contents do not necessarily represent the views of the Foundation. As permitted by law, the Foundation made general operating grants to organizations that were not earmarked for lobbying but that could be used for lawful advocacy purposes as determined by the organization. Also, Foundation funds may have been appropriately used for other policy-related educational purposes as permitted under the grant agreement.*

# Executive Summary

## Acknowledgements

Grassroots Solutions deeply appreciates the opportunity to prepare this summary. It has been a privilege working with the Ford Foundation to evaluate the Advancing Reproductive and Gender Justice program. The team is led by Christina Kuo, Anne Johnson, Suzanne Del Rosario, and Grace Bouwer from Grassroots Solutions, working in collaboration with Nicole Robinson and Squakr.

We are grateful to the Advancing Reproductive and Gender Justice and Office of Strategy and Learning teams for their time and involvement to help ensure that the report and this summary best facilitates the Foundation's learning as it thinks about the program's strategy for the next five years.

Finally, we thank the Foundation's grantee partners working to ensure that all women—particularly women of color, low-income women, gender non-conforming/non-binary, and rural women—have the ability to choose whether to have a child and when, to give birth safely, and to raise children in a healthy, thriving environment. They have shared their stories and insights—including through their grant reports, survey, and interviews—which are reflected in the findings and conclusions.

## Introduction and Evaluation Overview

In spring of 2020, Grassroots Solutions, in collaboration with Nicole Robinson and Squakr, partnered with the Ford Foundation to evaluate its Advancing Reproductive and Gender Justice strategy. Our goal was to assess the program's strategy and provide information to facilitate learning and decision-making about the future of the strategy. The evaluation project began in May 2020 and concluded in December 2020. Data collection (interviews with grantees and other field funders, grantee self-reported data, and narrative analysis) happened between August and October. The purpose of this evaluation was to test the Ford Foundation's theory of change, document what happened and the Foundation's contribution, and discern observations about how change happens. The findings are based on an analysis of the three main data sources mentioned above, as well as desk research to verify and clarify information. The information from the evaluation is expected to inform the internal strategy refresh that will occur in 2021.

This evaluation took place in the midst of extraordinary circumstances – the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent social distancing measures, mass unemployment, racial justice uprisings, the Supreme Court nomination of Amy Coney Barrett, and a presidential election. With these circumstances in mind, we tried to balance providing opportunities for grantees to contribute substantively to data collection while not being overly burdensome.

In this executive summary, we communicate high-level learnings about progress toward the Foundation's desired outcomes, contribution of the Foundation's strategy, and lessons about how change occurred.

# Background

The Advancing Reproductive and Gender Justice strategy was developed and approved in Spring 2017 in response to decades of growing and persistent threats to access to reproductive healthcare and gender rights. At the time the strategy was developed, the U.S. was seeing an increase in laws criminalizing abortion, efforts to defund abortion providers, and ongoing debates over the Affordable Care Act and Title X, all of which disproportionately impact women of color.<sup>1</sup>

At the outset, the Foundation decided to utilize a reproductive justice analysis and center women of color, low-income, rural women, LGBTQ+, and gender non-conforming/non-binary people as the agents of change to guarantee the physical, mental, spiritual, political, economic, and social well-being of women and girls. A reproductive justice lens was adopted to address the intersectional needs of the people and communities most impacted by reproductive and gender injustice and tackle the perception that “traditional progressive issues divide and isolate advocacy for abortion from other justice issues relevant to the lives of every woman in the U.S.”<sup>2</sup>

## Theory of Change

Prior to collecting data to assess the Foundation’s strategy, we worked with the program staff to document the operating theory of change, articulated the assumptions underpinning it, the change agents, the resources the Ford Foundation contributes, and the grantee approaches to achieve Foundation’s desired outcomes. The Ford Foundation’s Advancing Reproductive and Gender Justice program seeks to guarantee that all women—particularly women of color, low-income women, gender non-conforming/non-binary, and rural women—have the ability to choose whether to have a child and when, to give birth safely, and to raise children in a healthy, thriving environment. To achieve this long-term impact, the Foundation has supported primarily field-building and advocacy activities aimed at realizing a variety of near term (1–3 years) and intermediate term (3–5 years) outcomes, shown in Figure 1 below. The Foundation’s approaches to implementing its strategy are to provide multi-year, general operating grants to reproductive rights and justice and gender justice organizations; fund regional and state-level organizations that center reproductive justice; provide communications research and other data to reproductive justice organizations and their allies; and convene key sexual and reproductive rights, health, and justice funders with other social justice funders. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the Ford Foundation’s documented theory of change.



**Figure 1:** *Working Theory of Change*

(Hover over to expand)

## Assumptions Underpinning the Theory of Change

Grassroots Solutions worked with program staff to clarify assumptions that underpin the program’s theory of change which were then tested through an analysis of the data collected. The following table (Figure 2) summarizes each assumption, the testing status, and whether or not the assumption was affirmed.

-----  
<sup>1</sup> Family Planning Funding Restrictions. (2018, February 15). <https://www.guttmacher.org/evidence-you-can-use/family-planning-funding-restrictions>

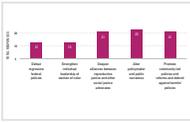
<sup>2</sup> Ross, L. J. (n.d.). The Color of Choice: White Supremacy and Reproductive Justice. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/The-Color-of-Choice----Public-Version-with-footnotes-1.pdf>

**Figure 2: Status and Assessment of Assumptions**

(Hover over to expand)

## What We Learned

Since the strategy’s approval in 2017, the Ford Foundation sought to support and promote the leadership of women of color and resource models of organizing that centered reproductive justice, particularly in historically under-resourced regions of the country like the U.S. South. To date, the Foundation has awarded 123 grants to 66 organizations totaling approximately \$59 million. Grants were given to organizations engaged in five overarching activities to achieve the Foundation’s desired outcomes and impacts. In a survey, grantees were asked to select up to two approaches that best describe the activities their organization is undertaking with support from the Ford Foundation. Figure 3 below shows how grantees’ self-reported the approaches they are undertaking to advance reproductive and gender justice.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 3: Five Approaches Grantees are Undertaking**

Source: *Grantee Survey*

(Hover over to expand)

Consistent with the Foundation’s goal to fund national and hub/networked state-based organizations, nearly 75% of the grantees reported working at the national level, 37% at the regional level, 61% at the state level, and 29% at the local level. The majority of organizations that the Foundation invested in are national organizations that have a presence in multiple states or are regional organizations with a “hub and spoke model,” as opposed to state-specific organizations, with the exception of Louisiana and Georgia, where there was a concerted effort to fund groups directly.

Seven findings emerged from our analysis of the data collected that speak to the progress towards the Foundation’s desired intermediate (3-5 year) outcomes. The first four findings are grouped together as field and base-building findings. The last three findings examine expressions of the field related to policy work, alliances, and narrative change.

No formal baselines were established when the strategy was adopted to measure progress towards the Foundation’s desired outcomes. To mitigate this challenge, we tried to use other information about context to assess progress. We characterized progress toward the Foundation’s desired outcomes in three ways: substantial, mixed, and minimal. In addition, our assessment of progress took into consideration the relatively short time—two and a half years—that grantmaking was happening under the strategy. The key on the following page describes what each descriptor means.

<sup>3</sup> Grantees were asked to select up to three outcomes that best aligned with their work.



### **SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS**

- Notable changes won
- In a noticeable improved position compared to 2017



### **MIXED PROGRESS**

- No notable changes won and no significant setbacks
- In a modestly improved position compared to 2017



### **MINIMAL PROGRESS**

- Little change made and setbacks
- In the same or very similar position compared to 2017



### **Desired Intermediate Outcome**

Leadership of reproductive and gender justice issues became more representative at the national level of women of color, low-income women, and gender non-conforming people

## **FINDING 1**

**A considerable number of women of color occupy leadership roles among organizations in the reproductive, health, rights, and justice field. The Ford Foundation’s long-term, general operating grants played an important role in further elevating women of color leaders and nurturing their continued professional development. The Foundation’s support for trainings, convenings, and retreats also helped cultivate the individual leadership of women of color. That said, although significant progress was made toward the Foundation’s desired outcome, women of color leaders require more support to ensure adequate representation at the national level and better alignment of resources with the expectation’s funders have historically had of them.**

### **What Happened and the Contribution of the Ford Foundation’s Strategy**

Since 2017, the leadership of women of color among organizations advancing reproductive and gender justice has increased considerably. The Ford Foundation’s multi-year, general operating grants to reproductive justice organizations with explicit encouragement to use funds for leadership development was widely credited by grantees and other funders for contributing to increased prominence of women of color leaders nationally.<sup>4</sup> The flexible nature of the Foundation’s long-term, general operating grants, with explicit encouragement to use the funding for leadership development, contributed to women of color taking advantage of opportunities to add human resources or train staff in ways previously unavailable to them or their organizations. Grantees shared that the Foundation’s long-term grants paid for women of color to participate in professional development programs to enhance their knowledge about how to lead and run an organization, build networks, and develop a vision for themselves as leaders.

<sup>4</sup> Despite the inclusion of low-income women and gender non-conforming people in the articulation of this outcome in the theory of change, it was not the Foundation’s primary focus. We therefore assessed progress based on the increased leadership of women of color. There were no established baselines or data from the field to measure whether or not the number of women of color leaders had increased or decreased over the last three years, however, anecdotal information from interviewees and visible leadership changes at key field organizations pointed to a likely increase in the number of women of color leaders among organizations in the reproductive, health, rights, and justice field.



## Lessons About How Change Happened

Understanding the unique needs and challenges of women of color leaders is critical to further increasing their representation nationally to advance reproductive and gender justice agendas. Grantees interviewed regularly mentioned that funders have unrealistic expectations of women of color in leadership positions compared to white women. They observed that they are held to a higher standard and judged according to metrics such as the ability to fundraise or provide national thought leadership, which are often unrealistic given that women of color do not always have the same access to extensive networks, funders and decision-makers, or resources as their white peers. Lastly, they commonly mentioned that it is unreasonable for funders to push for women of color leaders without resources and tools to support their success. It was emphasized that the problem is even more urgent and necessary as more women of color assume leadership positions within historically white-led reproductive rights organizations.



### Desired Intermediate Outcome

Increased influence and leadership of women of color-led organizations to set the agenda for the reproductive and gender, rights, health, and justice field

## FINDING 2

**Since 2017, women of color-led organizations have increased their influence and leadership over the agenda of the reproductive and gender justice field. The Ford Foundation supported this increase by positioning its grantees as leaders among other funders and organizations. While progress has been substantial, systemic racism within the field has remained a barrier for women of color-led organizations to advance their priorities. Despite additional funding and other support, the historic gap between resources for white-led organizations and women of color-led organizations has not been closed.**

### What Happened and the Contribution of the Ford Foundation's Strategy

With support from the Ford Foundation, women of color-led grantee organizations now have more influence over the agenda of the reproductive rights, health, and justice field and with other social justice organizations. They are better positioned to draw policymakers' and elected officials' attention to issues that disproportionately impact women of color and low-income women. These changes were especially evident among reproductive justice groups, as they have historically wielded less power and influence over the agendas and policy priorities advanced by the broader field.

Following the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, one grantee interviewed shared that there were discussions with funders and other groups about abandoning the original plans to focus on voter education and concentrate on the Supreme Court nomination. The Foundation's reproductive justice grantees pushed back on this idea, suggesting that a rapid change in priorities played into the right-wing's strategy of "creating so many crises all at once so that people can get whiplash." Furthermore, an abrupt decision to change course following Justice Ginsburg's death would draw voters' attention away from issues that impact the lives of women of color. Additionally, one grantee's singular focus on repealing the Hyde Amendment has produced significant political results. In addition to influencing the field's policy positions, women of color-led organizations have influenced the field's work to elevate public discourse about issues that disproportionately affect women and communities of color, including disparities in infant and maternal mortality for Black women compared to other groups of women.

## Lessons About How Change Happened

Despite increased influence and leadership of women of color-led organizations, uneven funding remains a barrier to ensuring that agendas for the reproductive and gender, rights, health, and justice field are determined by women of color. Organizations led by women of color are still catching up to national reproductive rights organizations, which inhibits their ability to set agendas for the reproductive and gender, rights, health, and justice field. Additionally, the mismatch between resources and funder expectations was often cited as perpetuating distrust and imbalances between the reproductive justice and the reproductive rights organizations.



### Desired Intermediate Outcome

Supported the development of durable reproductive and gender justice organizations to withstand seismic events

## FINDING 3

**The ability of reproductive and gender justice organizations to take advantage of emergent opportunities and withstand substantial challenges improved significantly between 2017 and 2020. The Ford Foundation’s long-term general operating grants and rapport Foundation staff built with grantees helped reproductive and gender justice organizations adapt and navigate challenges. Several seismic events in 2020 put these organizations’ resiliency and ability to respond to the test.**

### What Happened and the Contribution of the Ford Foundation’s Strategy

Since the Foundation adopted its current strategy, there is considerable evidence to suggest reproductive and gender justice organizations are more durable than before. General operating grants, especially the Ford Foundation’s BUILD grants, were broadly credited with helping organizations withstand or navigate seismic events. The Foundation’s multi-year, general operating grants helped reproductive and gender justice organizations to hire more staff, expand the geographic reach of their programming, and invest in technology infrastructure like new accounting software or computers. In addition, the flexibility of general operating grants helped ensure that the reproductive and gender justice organizations could manage growth and leadership transitions at the staff and board of director levels without destabilizing the organization.

## Lessons About How Change Happened

A variety of major events in 2020, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, racial justice uprisings, and the presidential election put reproductive and gender justice organizations adaptability and resiliency to the test. While it is impossible to establish a counterfactual, long-term, flexible grants were widely cited by grantees as key to ensuring their organizations are able to adapt or stay the course.



**Desired Intermediate Outcome**

More aligned philanthropic sector that funds broader and more interconnected social, racial, and reproductive and gender justice efforts.



**Desired Intermediate Outcome**

Key funders and organizations are organized, prepared, and aligned to proactively act on the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* and limiting of access to contraception.

**FINDING 4**

**Since 2017, strides have been made to organize and align key funders and organizations to defend legal abortion pending a potential repeal of *Roe v. Wade*. A cornerstone of the progress made to date is a collaborative effort of nonprofits and funders organized by the Ford Foundation, which got underway toward the end of 2018. However, progress to align sexual and reproductive rights and justice funders has been slower in 2020 because of staff transitions at the Foundation and the pandemic put an end to in person meetings for the participants. And minimal progress has been made to align philanthropic funding for interconnected social, racial, and gender justice efforts.**

**What Happened and the Contribution of the Ford Foundation’s Strategy**

One of the main ways the Ford Foundation supported the desired outcome of bringing key reproductive health, rights, and justice funders and organizations to proactively act was by convening funders. A collaborative effort launched in 2018 with leadership by the Foundation program staff, brought funders and a subset of nonprofits in the reproductive health, rights, and justice field together in an unprecedented way. Participants in the collaborative began to wrestle with the segmented nature of the field and its singular focus on protecting *Roe v. Wade* and the negative impact that has had on women of color, women in rural communities, low-income women, and gender non-conforming/non-binary people.

**Lessons About How Change Happened**

The COVID-19 pandemic and historical dominance of white-led organizations within the reproductive rights field have stymied progress to organize and align key funders and fund broader and more interconnected justice efforts. Grantees and funders interviewed were unanimous in their opinion that the collaborative effort benefited from participants being in the same physical space to plan and candidly grapple with difficult subjects. Tensions around decision-making power and influence within the field continued to affect progress, which makes it harder to align funding for more interconnected social, racial, and gender justice efforts.



**Desired Intermediate Outcome**

Demonstrated that reproductive and gender justice are winnable issues to broader social, racial, and economic justice fields

**FINDING 5**

**Since 2017, substantial progress has been made to demonstrate the “winnability” of reproductive and gender justice issues at the state and local levels. The Ford Foundation’s support for regional and state-based organizations that**



**work at the intersection of issues through a reproductive justice point of view, promote community-led policies, and defend against regressive policies was successful. At the same time, progress to enact favorable state policies happened against a backdrop of backsliding on abortion rights and contraception access nationally. Decades of investment by the opposition to consolidate congressional and executive governing power created especially unfavorable conditions to prevent rights-related losses.**

## What Happened and the Contribution of the Ford Foundation’s Strategy

Despite the steady stream of regressive policies and regulatory actions introduced and enacted at the state level to restrict abortion rights, from 2017 through 2020, many broader reproductive and gender justice policy gains were made at the subnational level and advanced with the Ford Foundation’s support. The Foundation’s funding of reproductive justice organizations with a state-level presence contributed to at least 90 favorable policies introduced and at least 60 known policy “wins.” A conservative estimate of the state and local policies that grantees supported or were engaged in promoting between 2017 and 2020 are shown in Figure 4 below. From 2017 to 2020, grantees in Oregon engaged in activities to change the state’s paid family and medical leave law and pass a reproductive health equity bill. In 2019, Oregon became the first state to require that low-income workers be paid 100% of their wages while on leave. Grantees were also involved in education and community engagement activities to support the successful Reproductive Health Equity Act (2017). The Act expands coverage for Oregonians to access free reproductive health services. In 2019, the Foundation’s support for organizations with a state-level presence contributed to policy wins in Illinois, Maine, Maryland, New York, and Vermont. The laws expanded and codified access to abortion care. In addition, there were other significant subnational wins that demonstrated the viability of reproductive and gender justice issues that included but were not limited to abortion rights or access to contraception. Several grantees promoted community-led policies or defend against harmful policies worked together to advance intersectional agendas that addressed workers’ rights and income inequality through a gender frame. In California, a 2017 amendment to the state’s Freedom of Choice in Family Planning Act expanded family planning provider choice for Medi-Cal enrollees. Ford’s grantees also promoted the Dignity in Pregnancy and Childbirth Act (2019), which sought to address racial bias in prenatal care. Grantees educated community members, organized, and provided strategic communications to support these two efforts.

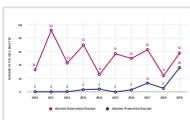
Policy Area	Number of Policies Supported
Reproductive Health Equity	15
Paid Family and Medical Leave	12
Abortion Access	10
Contraception Access	8
Other	45
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>

**Figure 4: State Level Policies Supported by Ford Foundation Grantees**

Source: Grant reports and desk research

(Hover over to expand)

At the same time, from 2017 to 2020, there were 145 abortion restrictions and 54 abortion protections enacted, as shown in Figure 5 below. State legislatures and governors of the Southern, Midwestern, and Plains states were aggressive in their pursuit of regressive state policies; however, the total number of state abortion restrictions enacted between 2017 and present does not represent a high-water mark for the decade, which was in 2011, when a total of 92 regressive policies were enacted.



**Figure 5: Enacted Abortion Restrictions and Protections (2010–2019)**

Source: The Guttmacher Institute

(Hover over to expand)

Designed to prevent further backsliding of reproductive rights, more than to demonstrate “winnability,” the Foundation’s approach to grantmaking and activities at the federal level were marginally successful. Legal action was the most important tactic supported to help prevent further backsliding amidst an onslaught of policies and regulations promoted by the Trump Administration. The Foundation’s strategy contributed to at least 12 proactive efforts to enact favorable policies or regulatory actions at the federal level and six to prevent backsliding. Only two of these efforts were successful. Figure 6 provides a conservative estimate of the federal policy or regulatory efforts that grantees supported or were engaged in promoting between 2017 and 2020.

**Figure 6: Federal Policies and Regulatory Action Supported by Ford Foundation Grantees**

Source: Grant reports and desk research

(Hover over to expand)

In addition, the Foundation supported seven organizations that filed lawsuits on behalf of individuals and reproductive health care providers. Based on documents reviewed, of the 31 legal actions grantees were involved in, 19 were successful and four failed. The remainder were unresolved, or the outcome was unclear at the time of writing.

## Lessons About How Change Happened

The anti-abortion opposition has amassed substantial governing and judicial power, particularly at the federal level, making it a steeper uphill battle to demonstrate reproductive and gender justice wins to the broader social, racial, and economic justice fields. At the state level, the significant increase in the number of reproductive health protection policies enacted in 2019 correlated with large numbers of women, especially women of color, elected to state legislatures in the fall of 2018 and took office in 2019.



### Desired Intermediate Outcome

Created alliances in critical and model states that advanced innovative laws and policies to address reproductive and gender inequities



### Desired Intermediate Outcome

Incorporated gender and reproductive justice priorities into the agendas of social justice organizations

## FINDING 6

**Steps to create alliances in critical and model states were successful, and alliances helped advance laws and policies supported by the Ford Foundation’s grantees. The Foundation fostered intra-field collaboration through information sharing and creating spaces for grantees to build community. While alliances were strengthened among traditional gender and reproductive justice organizations, there was less progress made to establish cross-issue alliances and incorporate gender and reproductive justice issues into the agendas of social justice organizations.**



## What Happened and the Contribution of the Ford Foundation’s Strategy

Since the adoption of the strategy in 2017, the Ford Foundation’s approach to grantmaking facilitated the creation of alliances and collaborations within the gender and reproductive justice field. Many of the policy successes highlighted in Finding 5, especially at the state and local levels, were partially attributed to collaborations among grantees. Grantees developed strategies, shared non-financial resources, leaned on each other’s unique expertise, activated their bases on behalf of other partner organizations, and aligned their messaging.

While the Foundation’s strategy aimed to incorporate gender and reproductive justice priorities into the agendas of social justice organizations, progress toward this desired outcome was more limited than progress to foster collaboration among grantees in the reproductive and gender justice movement. The Foundation’s support of grantee activities to protect gains and defeat regressive federal policies led to some alliances outside of the reproductive health, rights, and justice field. These cross-issue collaborations and partnerships were born from moments that necessitated working in partnership, for example, the nomination of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, which threatened the agendas of numerous progressive groups. Culture and narrative change activities undertaken with support from the Foundation also show promising signs of progress to establish broader alliances, which is further explored in Finding 7.

## Lessons About How Change Happened

Racism, the history of deprioritizing “women’s issues,” and the negative past experiences of organizations within the field working with groups from other social movements hindered progress to incorporate gender and reproductive justice priorities into the agendas of social justice organizations. Grantees reported that working with non-traditional allies was not always a priority for them. They cited not being seen or treated like a full partner in these alliances, let alone feeling empowered to take on a leadership role in these cohorts. As well as, working in cross-issue relationships with progressive groups was often describe as one-sided and extractive as reasons that these alliances were not a priority.



### Desired Intermediate Outcome

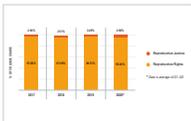
Language shifted from reproductive rights to reproductive justice in policymaker and public narratives and uptake of broader reproductive justice issues increased

## FINDING 7

**From 2017 and 2020, progress to shift language in the public discourse from a conversation about reproductive rights to reproductive justice was mixed. The prominence of a reproductive justice narrative grew; however, overall public discussion of reproductive justice remains very low. Similarly, the footprint of the Foundation’s grantees and the contribution of their work to alter narratives in the public discourse was positive, albeit limited. Conversation among Democratic policymakers was more aligned with a reproductive justice narrative than conversation among Republicans, but there are reproductive justice-related themes that resonate across the ideological spectrum and suggest opportunities to further shift policymaker and public discourse going forward.**

## What Happened and the Contribution of the Ford Foundation’s Strategy

Favorable, albeit limited, changes in the public discourse correlated with support from the Ford Foundation for activities to alter public narratives about reproductive justice in a way that challenges conventional wisdom about who supports these issues and what the policy priorities are. Also of note were efforts focused on centering women of color, especially Black women’s stories, to garner media coverage and deepen the base of support for issues that disproportionately affect women of color. Figure 7 below highlights the change in volume in reproductive rights and reproductive justice narratives in the public discourse from 2017 to through Q3 2020. The share of conversation about reproductive justice grew from 2.94% in 2017 to 4.96% in 2020 – a nearly 60% increase.



**Figure 7: Public Discourse - Reproductive Justice and Rights Volume (2017–2020)**

Source: Squakr

(Hover over to expand)

Discourse among the public about reproductive justice reflected themes ranging from pregnancy and parenting, to immigration, to sexual health and HIV, and disability justice. Until 2020, the most prominent theme was pregnancy and parenting; however, data analyzed show a recent uptick in other themes such as racial justice, workplace equity, gender, and economic justice.

A small subset of the Foundation’s portfolio (approximately ten organizations) used significant grant funds to undertake activities with the explicit aim of altering public discourse about reproductive justice as well as influencing public perception of women of color, especially Black women. Although this type of narrative-focused work was relatively limited in scope, evidence suggests it had an outsized positive impact, and we see the themes associated with a reproductive justice narrative feature prominently among the grantees’ work compared to other organizations.

## Lessons About How Change Happened

A broader look at public discourse between 2017 and 2020 suggested that being able to capitalize on important events to drive language shifts matters and secondly, that Democratic policymakers are advancing a reproductive justice narrative more often than their Republican counterparts, yet there are themes that resonate across the ideological and political spectrum.

## Conclusion

Based on the data collected and analyzed for this evaluation, our interpretation is that the overall progress of the Foundation’s strategy since 2017 was mixed. Substantial progress was made toward three of the Foundation’s nine desired intermediate outcomes, whereas varied progress was made towards four, and minimal made towards two.

## BRIGHT SPOTS

Since 2017, the most progress was made toward the Foundation’s desired “field-building” outcomes. This is significant because these outcomes are foundation-setting for the field so that it can effectively tackle reproductive and gender injustice.

Building stronger organizations within the field, especially historically under-resourced reproductive justice groups that represent communities disproportionately affected by reproductive and gender injustice received more time, money, and other support, such as convenings and thought partnership, from the Ford Foundation. Centering women of color, low-income, women in rural communities, LGBTQ+ women, and gender non-conforming/non-binary people contributed to the following results:

- More women of color leading durable organizations
- More women of color-led and justice-focused organizations leading the field and movement
- More opportunities to leverage alliances, particularly at the state and local level, which is key to the movement working as one on proactive policies
- More state and local policy wins
- Reproductive justice gaining traction in the public discourse

Less or mixed progress was made toward outcomes that represent expressions of the field wielding political power, and the Foundation's contribution was less evident. Broader changes in context such as election outcomes, the opposition, and other factors hindered the Foundation and its grantee partners from making bigger strides to incorporate gender and reproductive justice priorities into the agendas of social justice organizations, demonstrate that reproductive and gender justice are winnable issues, shift from reproductive rights to reproductive justice in policymaker and public narratives, and other desired outcomes. In some cases, the level of progress was a function of time or resourcing. For some grantees, support from the Foundation only covered less than a year. Another example of mixed progress is the uptake of reproductive justice issues within the public and policymaker discourse. The Foundation did not dedicate as many resources to efforts related to this outcome, which correlated with mixed progress.

## OTHER BRIGHT SPOTS

Based on the data collected and analyzed, the Foundation selected the appropriate mix of grantees to support activities aimed at both offensive and defensive work. The portfolio was comprised of organizations led by reproductive justice and women of color-led organizations who engaged their communities and policymakers on proactive policies, while reproductive rights grantees worked to prevent regressive policies from being enacted. This signaled the following to other funders and organizations within the reproductive health, rights, and justice field:

- Reproductive rights should not overshadow reproductive justice
- The value of testing a policy strategy as *Roe* is continually chipped away at and creating opportunities for the field to put up wins by applying an intersectional lens, not just playing defense
- The importance of allyship within the field by bringing together leaders from reproductive rights and justice organizations and positioning women of color, especially those with a reproductive justice orientation, as the current and future leadership of the field, and to help address the harmful effects of white feminism on the field

## CHALLENGES

Our findings also highlighted three major challenges that the reproductive health, rights, and justice field continues to face: racism and legacy of white feminism, consolidation of governing power by the anti-abortion movement, and overall public discussion of reproductive justice remains very low.

As mentioned above, the field-building that occurred since the approval of the strategy in Spring 2017 is significant. However, as explored in Findings 1 and 2, reproductive justice organizations, especially those historically led by and for women of color, are still experiencing the harms of white, heterosexual feminism's dominance on the field. They are playing catch-up in terms of accessing resources and relationships. Also, they often experience unfair expectations by funders, compared to the historically white women-led reproductive rights organizations, which further compounds the challenges they already face. Without more concerted efforts by funders and organizations to wrestle with historic racism, the field will be limited in its growth and progress to advance reproductive health, rights, and justice.

Another challenge is the consolidation of governing power by the anti-abortion, anti-woman opposition. Although the evaluation did not examine the opposition in depth, data collected through interviews, document review, and desk research highlighted the headwinds grantees faced promoting policies and reforms at the federal and the state levels. Without more allies and champions in governing positions, policy gains will continue to be difficult, especially at the federal level and in the South, where the opposition are extremely influential.

Lastly, a challenge highlighted in Finding 7 is that public discussion of reproductive justice remains low. Fewer resources have been invested in building narrative power. In contrast, the opposition has spent decades building and entrenching an anti-abortion, anti-woman narrative that will be difficult to counter without dedicated resources and coordination amongst the field.

## STRATEGIC QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Evaluation data support adjustments rather than wholesale changes to the Foundation's strategy. For the most part, the Foundation's theory of change remains relevant; however, as the Foundation moves forward, we have identified some important strategic questions to consider:

- 1 |** The findings point to sequencing and relationality questions. Achieving some of the Foundation's desired outcomes are necessary to make further progress toward others. For example, durable reproductive rights and justice organizations that are led by the communities most impacted by reproductive and gender injustice may be a prerequisite for achieving more significant progress to shift narratives and enact sustainable policies. With that in mind, how can the Foundation build in this understanding of the sequencing of how change happens as it considers adjustments to its strategy? And how might that affect what the Foundation wants to achieve sooner rather than later?
- 2 |** What is the Foundation's appetite for risk? And related, what is the Foundation's level of interest in continuing to fund in areas where there is lots of potential, but less progress was made, as opposed to turbo-charging activities that were more successful?
- 3 |** How can the Foundation further use its positional power to address the legacy of white feminism in the field, the consequences of historic underfunding of reproductive justice organizations, and the unequal expectations of women of color leaders? How can the Foundation deepen ongoing support for women of color leadership and women of color-led organizations? What lessons can it share with peer funders?

As the Foundation works through these and other strategic questions and considerations, we highly recommend that it does so with its grantees. They are the agents of change in your theory of change, engaging them in the strategy refresh process

will ensure that the Foundation's strategy centers the solutions that will have the most impact for the communities you strive to support. Also, we strongly encourage the Foundation to share the learnings from this evaluation and any future ones with its grantees and peer funders. Fostering joint learning with grantees and other funders will help inform more coordination and alignment. Both groups were engaged in the evaluation process and during interviews expressed interest in hearing about what was learned. Consider hosting learning sessions for grantees and peer funders in 2021. We are hopeful that these findings and strategic considerations will contribute to a successful and meaningful strategy refresh.