

RESPONSIVE PHILANTHROPY

Winter 2012-13



Member Spotlight: Bauman Foundation

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An interview with the Bauman Foundation President Patricia Bauman and Executive Director Gary Bass.

NCRP: *How has the Bauman Foundation's mission evolved since its inception?*

PB & GB: Our guiding mission since 1987, regardless of the issues, remains support of advocacy for systemic progressive social change. In the early years, we focused on the intersection of health and environment. Starting in the 2000s, we added a focus on civic engagement through support for nonpartisan voter registration, issue education, nonpartisan turnout of historically underrepresented populations and election protection. More recently, we have engaged in efforts to bring fairness to federal tax and budget policies, regulatory protections and other policies that promote economic and social justice. As this evolution occurred, we held firm in our beliefs that:

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There is a need to redress disparities in wealth and power.

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Government has an affirmative role to assure equity, fairness and public protections, which may also serve as a counterforce to corporate power.

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Transparency of government and corporations can be a tool to achieve greater accountability and alter imbalances of power.

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Strengthening participatory democracy is essential.

NCRP: *The Bauman Foundation focuses its grants on advocacy for long-term systematic changes. Why is the foundation's support of these strategies so important?*

PB & GB: A robust civil society requires an active citizenry. Unfortunately, there are structural barriers to this ideal. The loudest megaphones usually belong to those with money and special access. While state and federal laws and policies can help, they also can exacerbate the problems, as voter suppression tactics and Citizens United demonstrate. We believe private foundations must help reduce these distortions – even when the system is wildly rigged – by funding advocacy and civic engagement. Strikingly, NCRP's empirical research verifies that such support also produces high returns on investment. We believe that supporting advocacy is a win–win with lasting results.

NCRP: *What did the Bauman Foundation learn from its grantmaking leading up to the 2012 elections, and how might the election results impact the foundation's grantmaking going forward?*

PB & GB: One example was the enormously successful effort to integrate technology and field

mobilization. Field groups used tools for registering voters and measuring what actually moves them to vote. We were among the pioneers several cycles ago and we will continue to support such efforts as the technologies change and improve. We hope these nonpartisan strategies will be supported more broadly by funders to allow groups to build upon their recent success. Furthermore, there needs to be experimentation with using micro-targeting tools developed for elections to modernize grassroots issue and policy advocacy. Funder collaboration, especially when it results in strategic funding in amounts greater than what any one funder alone can do, is an important way forward.

The election results also demonstrated the importance of several other long-term major policy changes. First, we need to fix the electoral problems that were evident in 2012. Examples include the role of big money and the weaknesses in the electoral system (i.e., registration systems, accessibility to voting equipment, timing of elections and de facto voter suppression laws). To this end, we want to expand support for an enhanced virtuous circle that connects fair elections advocates to those working on progressive policy issues, in an effort to counter the vicious circle of income equality and special interest capture of government. Second, we need to build support for policies that generate greater government revenue at both the federal and state levels. By increasing taxes for the wealthiest individuals and corporations, we can pursue prosperity, rather than austerity, policies and invest in America's future. The alternative is gridlock that harms all our grantees and their issue campaigns.

The election results reinforced our belief in the "long game": long-term support over years or even decades for citizen engagement and advocacy. Yo-yoing from election to election – increasing funding in election years only to withdraw it in off-years – harms our grantees and weakens our effectiveness as funders. We must continue providing ongoing general operating support.



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