

A message from the President and CEO

Dear Reader,

It seems like every news story brings a new reason to catastrophize about our democracy. The stakes have never been higher, some lawmakers are blocking every piece of legislation that would help build a stronger society, and once revered institutions are losing public trust.

Times like these feel discouraging until we look to movement groups on the ground. This summer's Power Issue highlights movement groups building their community's political power and challenges funders to wield their power well. At a time when American society seems to transform every week, movements remind us that change comes at the speed of trust.

Karundi Williams and Kavita Khandekar of re:power (whose Board of Directors I serve on) powerfully describe this, saying that "civic engagement work can move beyond being transactional, to being transformational."

Nonoko Sato from the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits writes that frontline groups doing civic engagement are hampered when funders don't audaciously support the work.

Dakota Hall from the Alliance 4 Youth Organizing agrees, challenging funders to boldly support 501(c)(4) organizations. Addressing foundations who fear being viewed as partisan, he says, "This isn't about political parties. It's about moving the political process closer to the people. It's about investing in a more accurate and engaged electorate by allowing the groups on the ground to have the full, robust conversations our communities deserve."

In Puerto Rico, the directors of Mentas Puertorriqueñas en Acción describe their own ladder of civic engagement from volunteering to leadership, and map how marginalized young adults can become activist leaders when they are centered. They ask, who are we building power for?

Asserting that a community-focused political process involves meeting needs, Tim Wallace pushes back against funders' arbitrary categorization of direct service and advocacy organizations, arguing that the nonprofits advocating most effectively can do so because of deep relationships to communities *through* their direct service.

Laleh Ispahani from Open Society Foundations shares evolution in thinking that has occurred at the foundation in recent years. They no longer fund civic engagement around particular issues in siloes. Instead, she writes, they have learned "that the best way to advance reforms is by ensuring that impacted communities have enough power to shape the policies that shape their lives." She shares about OSF's "10-year strategy to build a pro-democracy, multi-racial majority in the U.S., an open society alliance fully committed to inclusive democracy, with enough political, economic, and cultural power to govern."

From youth engagement to voting rights to reproductive justice, frontline groups have been building communities and building lasting power in a hostile climate for years. These nonprofit groups show that the challenges the U.S. face are far from unprecedented – and that they can be overcome. More than that, they give philanthropy the unique opportunity to do more than just keep current systems from crumbling, showing that if we are bold, we can all be part of transforming our society for the better.



Be Bold,
Aaron Dorfman
NCRP PRESIDENT AND CEO