



# BUILDING

# POWER

2018 – 2021

STRATEGIC PLAN

UPDATED AUGUST 2019

# ADVANCING

# DEMOCRACY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Gender and Racial Equity is Now More Important Than Ever

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## The promise of equity for all genders in our society remains unrealized

despite more than a century of advocacy and resistance to social and systemic inequities. Women, particularly women and girls of color, continue to navigate decades-old, complex systems of oppression and a daily onslaught of threats to their autonomy, safety, and well-being.

**The long legacy of oppression against women and girls continues to manifest itself today in a myriad of ways.**

### Violence and Criminalization

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- Criminalization and mass incarceration of Black women<sup>1</sup>
- Rapid increase in violence against women and the trans community<sup>2</sup>

### Lack of Access to Healthcare

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- Systematic dismantling of basic access to healthcare at the state and federal levels, particularly reproductive health services, magnified for women of color and other minority groups
- Ever-increasing restrictions to abortion
- Growing rates of maternal mortality in communities of color<sup>4</sup>

### Targeting Low-Income Individuals

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- The punitive child care subsidy system that low-income women must navigate
- Narratives that have gutted the most basic services and support for low-income people<sup>3</sup>

### Workplace Inequality

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- Women paid far less than their male counterparts
- Little or no access for women to the training or education resources needed to advance from low-paying jobs
- Women forced to choose between their jobs and families due to denied or substandard paid family leave, which triggers a spiral of poverty and economic insecurity that impacts generations to come

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.politicalresearch.org/2016/02/02/35-years-of-demonization-the-criminalization-of-black-women/#sthash.Q6vrgvFN.dpbs>

<sup>2</sup> [http://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2015\\_ncavp\\_lgbtqipreport.pdf](http://avp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2015_ncavp_lgbtqipreport.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://law.shu.edu/Students/academics/journals/law-review/Issues/archives/upload/Michaels.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.newsweek.com/2016/07/15/pregnant-womens-care-affected-race-477087.html>



The set of conditions our constituency faces in this country are deeply rooted and intertwined in the patriarchal systems of oppression and control that work to reinforce each other.

Misogyny, racism, homophobia, and xenophobia operate and flourish under a system where high profit margins are dependent on the exploitation of people, disenfranchised communities, and our nation's natural resources.

The government, corporations, and other private actors sustain systematic oppression through a web of harmful or unresponsive legislation, administrative policies, law enforcement action/inaction, and corruption. The inconsistency with democratic principles endangers the public's well-being.

Moreover, the number of women in political office, particularly women of color, remains woefully inadequate.

These circumstances make it even more difficult to change the policies that perpetuate these inequities.

Even in the absence of proportionate formal political power, women (especially women of color) have led and served as the backbone of nearly every impactful grassroots movement in the United States, including labor movements and the civil rights movement.

At the Ms. Foundation for Women, we recognize and honor these women and strive to support them and future leaders in their efforts.



# The Ms. Foundation for Women Rises to the Challenge

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Our founders created the Ms. Foundation for Women in the 1970s in response to forces of oppression at a pivotal time in U.S. history for women and people of color.

Now, we are living in unprecedented times. The United States is witnessing a period where the growth and consolidating power of conservative forces are rapidly dismantling hard-fought gains that have taken decades to achieve, and the backlash poses an extraordinary threat to gender equity. Our next steps towards the protection of women and girls require a new vision, fierce activism, creativity, and a heightened level of strategic tenacity. We are ready to rise to the challenge.

Through the implementation of our strategic plan and with your help, we will amplify our voice as a national leader in the fight for gender equity under the central theme of **building power, advancing democracy**! Our approach will be bold, unapologetic, innovative, and inclusive. Our Ms. Foundation for Women team will take concerted action to bring together those most impacted by our current society and their allies.

*"We are not supposed to be silent, we are not supposed to sit back and watch it happen, we are supposed to actively take part in changing the course."*

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**Deon Haywood**

Executive Director,  
Women With a Vision



# A More Just and Equitable Future Begins with a Powerful Vision

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## OUR MISSION

We build women's collective power in the U.S. to advance equity and justice for all. We achieve our mission by investing in and strengthening the capacity of women-led movements to advance meaningful social, cultural, and economic change in women's lives.

*"We don't advance unless we all advance together."*

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**Cristina Aguilar**  
Executive Director,  
COLOR

## OUR VISION

We believe in a just and safe world where power and possibility are not limited by gender, race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or age. We believe that equity and inclusion are the cornerstones of a true democracy in which the worth and dignity of every person are valued.

## OUR CORE VALUES

### Integrity

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We believe in holding ourselves responsible and accountable for all that we say in order to build an aligned, principled, and powerful movement for gender equity.

### Trust and Respect

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We believe in the truth that comes from those we work with and those most impacted by the issues affecting their communities. We believe in honoring their voices and supporting their leadership.

### Interconnectedness

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We believe that by achieving equity for women of color, we achieve equity for all. Given the complexity of the issues we face, we are committed to addressing all issues holistically across multiple movements and sectors.

### Social Justice

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We believe that structural changes are needed in order to increase opportunities for those who are most oppressed politically, socially, and economically.

# A New Strategic Framework to Help Us Win

Our Ms. Foundation for Women team has designed a strategic, integrated six-prong approach to achieve maximum social impact.

## OUR CORE STRATEGIES

### 1 Grantmaking and Capacity Building

Scaling Up Our Grantmaking and Capacity Building to Support Movement Leaders and Social Justice Infrastructure

### 2 Philanthropic Advocacy

Building Up Philanthropic Advocacy to Increase Resources to Organizations Led by Women and Girls of Color or at the Intersection of Gender and Racial Equity

### 3 Policy and Advocacy

Ramping Up Our Policy and Advocacy Strategies to Win

### 4 Strategic Communications

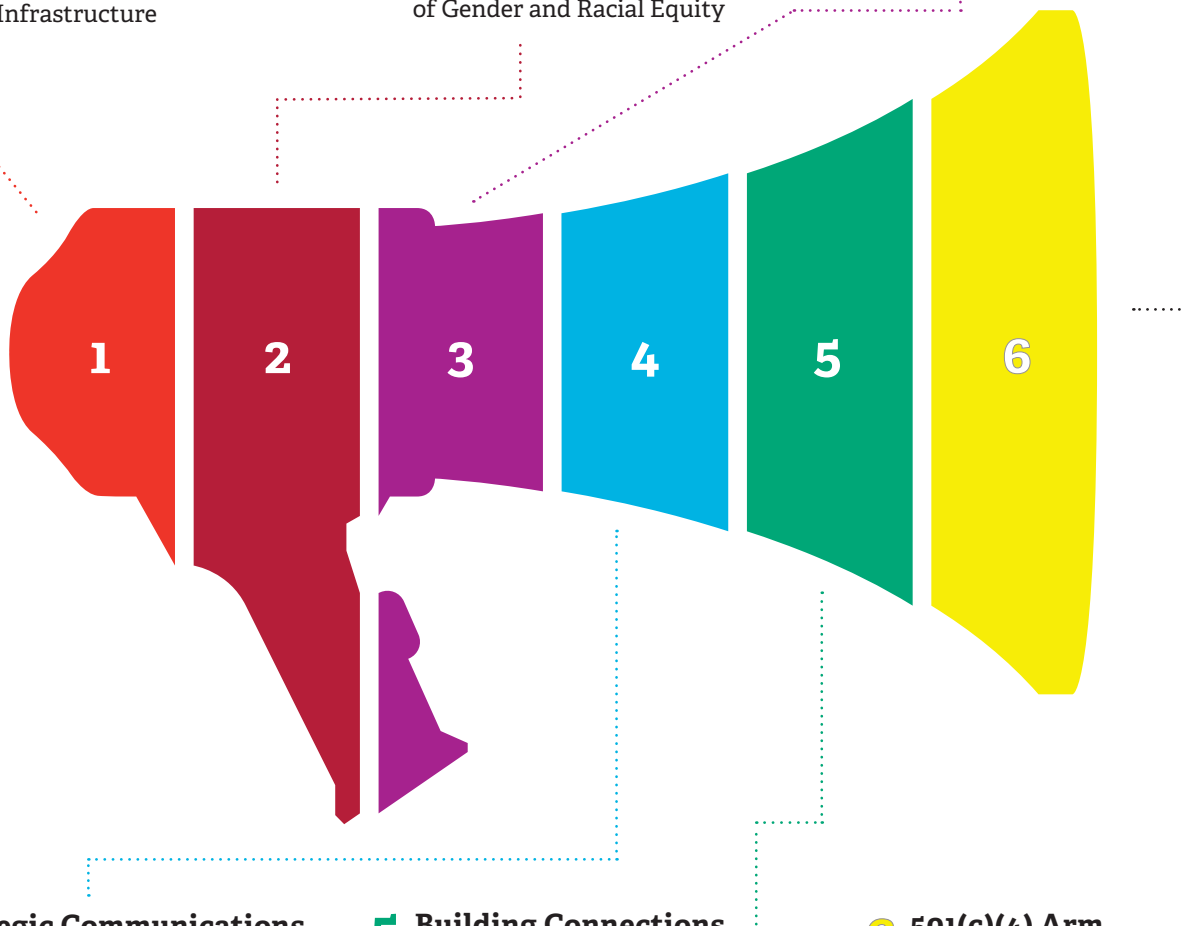
Enhancing Strategic Communications to Sharpen and Amplify Our Message

### 5 Building Connections Initiative

Supporting the Building Connections Initiative for Greater Collective Impact

### 6 501(c)(4) Arm

Building Political Power by forming the Ms. Action Fund



# Core Strategies for Achieving Gender and Racial Equity

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## CORE STRATEGY 1

### Scaling Up Our Grantmaking and Capacity Building to Support Movement Leaders and Social Justice Infrastructure

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There is an urgent need to support resilient leaders and organizations led by women of color that can fortify the social justice infrastructure at both the state and local levels. This is support to our grantee partners on the front lines creating change. The Ms. Foundation for Women's new strategic framework will continue to support our partners and help them to address the major capacity building challenges they encounter.

#### Expanding Impact

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Our team will increase grantmaking and capacity to expand the number, reach, and impact of our grantee partners.

#### Leadership Development

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We will invest in leadership development for executive directors and senior leadership teams to help position them as experts in policymaking spaces and campaigns.

#### Funding

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We will provide multi-year, flexible funding to grantee partners in the areas of safety, health, and economic justice.

#### Infrastructure Building

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We will invest in building replicable organizing infrastructures, especially in the South, which is an area that has served as fertile testing ground for regressive policies that hurt women.

#### Support Leadership Transition

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In order to help organizations effectively onboard new personnel, we will help them with leadership transitions, (e.g., succession planning, recruitment and onboarding, new executive director leadership training, etc.).

## CORE STRATEGY 2

### Build Up Philanthropic Advocacy to Increase Resources to Women and Girls of Color

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The Ms. Foundation for Women strives to build on the collective power of women and will develop a multi-pronged strategy that will educate and move the philanthropic field towards increasing funding and resources for organizations led by women and girls of color or at the intersection of gender and racial equity.

#### Expand Thought-Leadership

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By conducting our own original research and supporting research generated by our funding and grantee partners, we will leverage the information to promote thought leadership and educate the field.

#### Increased Resources

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By partnering with our funder colleagues, we can significantly increase resources.

#### Leveraging Relationships

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We will create strategic partnership and align with funder affinity groups to influence and increase funding to the movement field.



## Ramping Up Our Policy and Advocacy Strategies to Win

At the Ms. Foundation for Women, we work to shape public discourse and policy change. With policy top of mind, we have identified three priority areas that impact women and communities of color most directly.

### A Safety Net for Women

We will focus on protecting and expanding the safety net for women, including protecting access to healthcare, insurance coverage for contraceptives, and abortion services.

### Protecting Our Rights

Our team will fight voter suppression tactics and gerrymandering, protect First Amendment rights, and combat anti-immigrant and anti-LGBTQ initiatives in order to advance civic engagement and democracy.

### Ending State-Sanctioned Violence

We will work toward ending state-sanctioned violence such as the school-to-prison pipeline, the criminalization of abortion, police violence, and the indefensible treatment of incarcerated women.







#### CORE STRATEGY 4

## Enhancing Strategic Communications to Sharpen and Amplify Our Message

To create a narrative shift that centers inclusive gender and racial equity in the public discourse, at the Ms. Foundation for Women we will develop a powerful messaging strategy using the following items.

### Public Education

We will generate public education campaigns around our signature policy and issue areas.

### Digital Media

We plan to implement a proactive digital media plan that counters powerful conservative backlash.

### Messaging

We are going to invest in polling and message framing that can influence public opinion and create a shift in the narrative.

### Activism

The communications and engagement strategy that we build will fully involve our activist network.

### Technological Advances

Our team will create rapid response systems and optimize our technology to communicate and mobilize our networks more effectively.

### Thought Leadership

To amplify our message, we will increase the number of op-eds written by staff, grantees, and allies. We will also share case studies and impact stories about our work and our grantee partners.



## Supporting the Building Connections Initiative for Greater Collective Impact

As the oldest women's fund in the country, and with a network of thousands of current and former grantees, donors, and allies, we can play a critical role in incubating innovation across diverse social movements in support of gender and racial equity.

In response to the fragmented state of the women's movement and promising new practices that are evolving, our Ms. Foundation for Women team will pilot cross-movement, cross-sector, and cross-generational strategies that can amass a much larger base of supporters and hold diverse social movements accountable for advancing a gender and racial equity agenda.

### Innovation Grants

We will provide innovation grants that support effective ways to build connections wide and deep and break down silos.

### Support Learning

Our team will support Learning Circles and Communities of Practice.

### Funding

We will engage with other funders to support and move resources to connection-building strategies.

## Building Connections Initiative

A powerful multiplier effect happens when leaders from different movements agree to advance a common set of values and policy goals as part of a strategic, synergistic approach to achieving greater collective impact.

The Building Connections Initiative is the process of bringing together the leaders and anchor organizations of different social movements, sectors, and issues to build and advance a long-term social change platform for greater collective impact.

In order for transformational change to occur, we need the issues impacting women, especially women of color, to be front and center in all social justice movements from climate change and immigrant rights to economic and racial justice.



## Building Political Power by Forming a 501(c)(4) Arm

With the shift in political climate and increasing restrictions on “political activity” comes the requirement to consider a more active approach to creating political change.

*"Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world."*

**Dolores Huerta**  
Activist

For the Ms. Foundation for Women to fully realize our mission and create a more favorable terrain for advancing gender and racial equity, it is necessary to develop political strategies that amplify the voices of women and women-led organizations while setting a path to propel more women—particularly women of color—into elected and appointed positions.

*As such, we believe that there is a need to expand our work beyond the restrictions created by our 501(c)(3) status.*

Our primary aim is to support grassroots efforts to influence key local and state legislative priorities and elections while connecting networks of grassroots advocates that are working to shift policy on a national scale. We have identified six key factors in building political power and expect to be successful and most impactful in bringing them into fruition.

### Women of Color in Office

We will develop a long-term strategy to increase the number of women of color running for office.

### Winning Elections

We will fund polling and research, messaging development, and the creation of candidate report cards that lead to winning critical state and local elections.

### Campaign Strategies

We will create sophisticated power-mapping and campaign strategies to advance meaningful legislation and policy reforms (including administrative reforms) focused on our signature issues, primarily through funding of issue-based lobbying.

### Education and Training

We plan to conduct policy education and training on our signature issues for elected and appointed officials.

### Strength in Numbers

We will activate, engage, and leverage the power of our Ms. Foundation for Women supporters throughout the political process.

### Awareness of Impact

We will help raise awareness of the state and local issues that impact women's lives, especially women and girls of color that tend to be disproportionately impacted by harmful policies.





# Strengthening Our Infrastructure

**Our Ms. Foundation for Women team is committed to investing in our staff and infrastructure, focusing on:**

- Building an even stronger learning organization.
- Recruiting new talent in the areas of grantmaking, policy advocacy, strategic communications, and capacity building.
- Supporting ongoing staff leadership development.
- Making investments in new technologies.
- Expanding our revenue diversification and long-term sustainability.
- Growing our donor base to \$6.5 million per year.
- Expanding our planned giving and corporate fundraising programs.

**We can only accomplish our goals with your support!**

**Connect with us at [forwomen.org](https://forwomen.org) to join the Ms. Foundation for Women in this bold, new journey for gender and racial equity.**

## **Our thanks to the community of supporters that shared their ideas and insights with us.**

Special thanks to Elsa A. Ríos, Principal and Marquita James, Senior Associate of Strategies for Social Change, LLC, who facilitated and guided our strategic planning process.

Thanks to the thought leaders that shared their insights with us through our Praxis Panel Learning Series. And to the many stakeholders who agreed to be interviewed and generously shared their ideas, thank you:

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