



Ms. FOUNDATION
FOR WOMEN

Activist Collaboration Fund Request for Nominations

The Ms. Foundation is launching the Activist Collaboration Fund to strengthen collaboration in and across social justice movements for women and girls of color, trans women and girls of color, and indigenous women and girls.

Its creation comes at a time when movements for justice and equality face increased political challenges. As multi-pronged attacks on women and girls of color, immigrants, LGBTQ, indigenous, and low-income communities continue, social justice activists and organizations across diverse movements are organically coming together to build stronger relationships and collaborations to defend against threats and proactively strategize toward a future of justice and shared liberation. Collectively, they are asking for greater funding and resources to support collaboration in meaningful and non-prescriptive ways. This fund seeks to respond to this call.

I. Fund Purpose & Focus Areas

The Activist Collaboration Fund seeks to deepen collaboration across movement building organizations, learn with movement leaders, and increase investment in social justice movements across the country. It will primarily invest in women and girls of color led groups focused on one or more of the following areas:

- 1. Relationship Building:** Deepening relationships and building trust across organizations, including proactively preventing conflicts by building shared understanding, repairing relationships, and working through challenges that can stall cross-movement collaboration
- 2. Shared Analysis:** Increasing shared analysis, messaging, and mobilization of constituencies across intersecting social justice movements
- 3. Strategy and Planning:** Co-creating strategy, plans, and managing the logistics of projects, campaigns, and initiatives across multiple organizations
- 4. Healing Justice Support:** Creating policies; providing support, training, or spaces for healing, resiliency, wellness, and restoration for staff working on collaboration and organizations' sustainability

II. Pilot Phase Priorities (2020)

The first year of the Fund's grantmaking in 2020 will be considered a pilot phase. Ms. has allocated \$250,000 to be granted in Spring of 2020. Average grant amounts will range from \$15,000-\$25,000. After the pilot year, Ms. plans to reflect on feedback, learnings and refine the process before re-launching a new round of funding.

With these initial limited resources, the Fund will focus specifically on relationship building, as described above. Ms. heard from movement leaders and activists a desire for there to be more awareness of, and financial support for, the work that goes into building and repairing relationships. These efforts often go unsupported.

Ms. believes that groups with an honest and deep understanding of one another can build more effective and enduring partnerships, and have a greater impact on intersectional social justice issues. At the same time, the Fund is open to providing support for its other focus areas, including shared analysis, strategy and planning, and healing justice support, so long as strengthening and repairing relationships is a critical focus for these efforts.

The Fund aims to both provide long-term, comprehensive support to deepen collaboration, and to learn how groups can improve the effectiveness of collaborative relationships and joint efforts. To garner the full resources necessary to meet the needs of the field, Ms. will seek donor partners interested in supporting collaboration in and across social justice movements.

III. Grantmaking Process

Ms. seeks to create an application process that balances respect and mindfulness of state and local organizations' time and effort, the limited funds available, and the foundation's own capacity. As such, Ms. is requesting nominations to identify potential applicants.

Ms. staff will vet suggested applicants against the Fund's eligibility criteria and then invite selected groups to apply. Ms. will make efforts to offer accommodations for language and accessibility during the process, if needed. Please reach out to RLouis@msfoundation.org to request accommodations.

The following provides an overview of the process:

Phase 1. Nomination & Vetting Process

Ms. requests thoughtful nominations from our peer funders who are primarily invested in social justice movement organizations. Organizations also have the opportunity to self-nominate.

[Funders making nominations](#) or organizations [self-nominating](#) are asked to complete a brief form to share basic information, such as why the group is being nominated, and to validate that groups meet the eligibility criteria below:

Eligibility criteria

1. Led by and for women and girls of color, trans women and girls of color, and/or indigenous women and girls
2. Has a strong track record of successful collaboration
3. Experience in base building, social justice movement work, and/or leading campaigns that center women and girls of color, trans women and girls of color, and indigenous women and girls
4. Has an annual budget less than \$1M
5. Is operating in the U.S. or US territories, with a focus on state or local movements and campaigns
6. Is an established 501(c)(3) or is fiscally sponsored. (At this time, Ms. cannot fund 501(c)(4) organizations through this fund).

Those making nominations are also asked to note if groups meet additional special consideration, including:

- a. Groups are focused on trans justice and indigenous justice
- b. Groups are located in and serving the South, Midwest, and/or U.S. territories
- c. Groups that have not previously received funding from Ms., though current grantees are welcomed to self-nominate

Groups that have been nominated will be notified and asked to identify at least 1-2 additional organizations that may be part of the relationship building work supported through this grant. Groups will also be extended the opportunity to submit additional materials that highlight any initiatives, partnerships, or events that give insight into the kind of collaboration in which a group is engaged.

Ms. staff will vet the full list of nominated groups using the information provided by nominating partners or groups themselves, or that is available online. A short-list of groups will be invited to interview. These groups will not only meet the criteria above, but

also collectively represent geographic and issue area diversity.

Phase 2. Interview & Application Process

Ms. will notify groups it would like to interview to confirm their interest. Groups are encouraged to meet with their partners to align on a vision for the relationship building project and discuss how the budget will be spent and equitably distributed across groups. Ms. will schedule a group interview (via phone or Zoom) to discuss these matters and others, per the draft interview questions below. Groups may also choose to submit responses to these questions in writing in lieu of an interview, if they prefer.

1. What history do the groups have working together?
2. How would you like to use this grant opportunity to build or strengthen relationships?
3. How do you hope this relationship building work will help advance your respective movements, campaigns, and base-building efforts?
4. What are you hoping to learn through this relationship building work? How would you like to share insights and participate in light-touch learning conversations so that Ms., funded collaborations, and other partners can learn together on what makes for effective and high-impact collaboration and common challenges to expect?
5. How do you plan to divide dollars across organizations? Do you have an initial sense of what you may choose to spend dollars on? Note: you will not need to submit a project budget for this grant.

We will not ask groups to disclose to us the details of their relationships, especially for those seeking funds to support conflict management or relationship repairs. We are simply seeking high-level information to gain understanding of how groups are strengthening the relationship and what groups are building toward.

Ms. staff will write up notes from the interviews conducted, which will form the basis of group's written applications. Ms. staff will send this back to groups to review for accuracy and refinement, as desired. All groups will be asked to submit these written applications, along with the organization's financial information: 501(c)(3) tax exemption letter, most recent 990 (if required to file by state), most recent audited financial reports (if required to file by state), and an organization budget.

Phase 3. Receiving Funds & Reporting Ms. staff will select approximately 10-15 collaborations to receive funding. Funded groups will be asked to participate in phone conversations at the mid- and end-points of the grant to share back information related to the

learning questions below. These conversations are intended to be in lieu of written reporting, though organizations can opt for written reporting if that is preferred. A simple financial report template will be available for groups to submit at the end of the grant period.

During calls, groups will be asked questions about lessons learned from their collaboration experience, such as:

1. How has this collaboration helped improve impact towards your mission?
2. What factors facilitate deeper inter and intra movement collaboration and what are the barriers that hinder?
 - a. What best practices have you learned about proactively working together and strengthening relationships?
 - b. How do challenges with trust-building, conflict management, and repairing relationships affect collaboration?
 - c. How can groups work through these challenges?
3. What can funders do as partners to support deeper relationship building and collaboration across movements? What level of investment is needed?
4. Overall, how have funders helped your collaboration to blossom and grow, and how have funders hindered or undermined your collaboration?

Ms. may also ask additional questions related to supporting specific groups and regions that have historically been underinvested in. Ms. respects the privacy of organizations working to strengthen collaborations; groups will not be asked to share personal details from conversations that have been happening across organizations participating in the relationship building work.

Ms. hopes to gather insights and share key themes with its staff, funded groups, funders, and the broader social justice field. It will do so in a way that protects confidentiality and demonstrates respect for funded collaborations' work and appreciation for their knowledge sharing.

IV. Grantmaking Timeline

Nomination period opens Thursday, January 30, 2020

Nomination period closes Thursday, February 20, 2020

Notifications of Invitation to Interview, Week of March 16, 2020

Interview period, Friday, April 3 – Friday, April 10, 2020

All applications due, Friday, April 17, 2020

Notification of grant awards, Week of April 27, 2020

Activist Collaboration Fund Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. How many grants does Ms. Foundation anticipate making, and what size will grants typically be?

Ms. has currently allocated \$250,000 to be granted in Spring 2020. Ms. anticipates making grants to approximately 10-15 groups of collaborating organizations. Grants will typically be \$15,000-25,000, though Ms. may consider more than \$25,000 in some instances. Grants will be made for a 12-month period with flexibility to extend the grant period, if needed.

2. What kind of collaboration work is this fund prioritizing?

We are prioritizing support for collaborating groups who have an existing relationship and share a commitment to deepening it and/or working through conflict. Groups who have experienced barriers in partnership, including ruptures that have resulted in not working together recently, can apply to repair and reestablish their relationship. At the same time, the Fund is open to providing support for its other focus areas, including shared analysis, strategy and planning, and healing justice support, so long as strengthening and repairing relationships is a critical focus for these efforts.

3. What can funds be used towards?

Funding will be flexible, and organizations will be able to determine over time how they would like to spend the resources as work and relationship building unfolds. Here are some examples of ways organizations may choose to spend dollars to build and repair relationships and advance collaboration:

- General operating support that deepens capacity for collaborative engagement
- Planning activities and meetings (including food, translation, childcare, etc.)
- Convenings to build community, relationships, trust, and shared experience
- Trainings and travel for information gathering
- Outside facilitation, consulting services, or short-term contracted staffing
- Healing justice support for healing, wellness, resiliency, and restoration
- Dedicated part-time staff for managing collaboration across organizations, or increasing organizing staff capacity in or across movements.

4. Can organizations receive more than one year of funding?

Recipients will receive funding for one year during the pilot phase in 2020. After the pilot, and if

more funding becomes available, Ms. will seek to offer multi-year, longer-term support, and organizations from the pilot will be encouraged to apply for those extended funding opportunities. Note that Ms. plans to reflect on feedback, learnings and refine the process before re-launching a new round of funding, most likely in 2021.

5. Are national organizations eligible to apply?

This funding opportunity is specific to local and state organizations. While organizations may have

a national profile or national influence, the vast majority of work of the organization should focus on local or state advocacy and campaigns. Local or state affiliates of national organizations should meet the eligibility requirements in order to apply. Organizations receiving funds can choose to partner with a national organization, but funding should go to local or state groups.

6. Who can grantees build relationships with using these funds?

Fund recipients can use their funding toward building or mending relationships with any organizations of their choosing. Any organizations receiving funds should be led by and for women and girls of color, and meet all other funding eligibility requirements, but other organizations may be engaged through convenings and relationship building efforts. Local or state groups can choose to partner with a national organization, but funding should go to the local or state group only. Local or state affiliates of national organizations that meet other eligibility requirements are welcome to apply.

7. How should resources be distributed among the groups engaged in relationship building work?

We intend for resources to be distributed equitably (not necessarily equally) across organizations applying together, which may mean that groups with smaller budgets receive a higher proportion of the dollars to support their ability to participate. Groups should choose one organization to be the fund recipient, who can pay for any expenses associated with the project and re-grant to other organizations, as needed. The organization receiving the funds from Ms. will submit the final written application, along with the organization's financial information: 501(c)3 tax exemption letter, most recent 990 (if required to file by state), most recent audited financial reports (if required to file by state), and an organization budget.

8. Are there particular issue areas within social justice movements that groups must be working on to apply?

All social justice groups will be considered, regardless of specific issue areas – in other words, the Fund will be open to applications from groups focused on reproductive justice, economic justice, gender justice, immigrant justice, LGBTQ justice, racial justice, climate justice, disability justice, criminal justice reform, gender based violence, etc. and any other issues across the social justice spectrum that affect women and girls of color. Special consideration will be given to collaborations that center trans women and girls of color and indigenous women and girls.

9. What selection criteria will Ms. use to decide which applicants will receive funding?

Through the vetting and interview process Ms. staff will assess applicants and the strength of proposed projects against the following criteria:

- A. Demonstration of prior history with successful movement building work**, including:
 - a. Evidence that organizations each have a base of constituents and experience organizing their base(s)
 - b. Examples of work organizations have done in collaboration with others
 - c. Examples of how organizations are creating change in their communities

- B. A clear vision** for how this collaboration will advance the missions of groups involved, and a clear and compelling articulation of both why the groups want to deepen and/or repair relationships and how they see the relationship evolving over time
 - a. Evidence that organizations have an authentic interest in working together long-term
 - b. Explanation of how the proposed collaborative project can advance the respective missions of all participating organizations
 - c. Clear commitment to working through the challenges of collaboration

- C. The extent to which applicants center priority communities**, with special consideration for projects that will offer expanded support for trans women and girls of color, and indigenous women and girls.

- D. The geography served by collaborating groups**, with special consideration for projects focused on the South, Midwest, and in the U.S. territories

10. Can applicants submit additional documents for consideration during the nomination Vetting process?

Organizations will be allowed to submit 1-2 additional documents or links that highlight any initiatives, partnerships, or events that give insight into the kind of collaboration in which a group is engaged. These documents can be emailed to ActivistCollaborationFund@ms.foundation.org. We do not expect nominees to create new content to be considered.

11. Who can participate in interviews? Are they required? What happens after the interview to complete the application?

We would like the interview to be with a group composed of representatives from all the organizations that will be most closely engaged in the collaborative work being funded by this opportunity. Interviews will be conducted either via zoom or by phone. Organizations can have multiple staff people from each organization join if they wish. Interview questions are included in the RFN above, and will be shared again with groups when they are invited to interview so groups can discuss and prepare in advance.

If groups prefer to submit written responses to the interview questions, they are welcome to do so in lieu of an interview. For those that opt for the interview, Ms. staff will take notes on the responses to interview questions during the call and share that written document back with organizations for their final review. (This will serve as a group's written application). One organization, designated to be the fund recipient for the group, will submit the final application.