

# Equitable Intermediaries Resource Directory

## July 2023

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### Relevant articles including other organizations engaged in this discourse:

- [Philanthropy NY's](#) panel insights "Risk, Reward, and the Reality: What Don't We Know About Intermediaries?" discusses the kind of relationships that foundations must begin to have with intermediaries and the challenges that intermediaries face.
- As a "just getting started" step, [PolicyLink / Bridgespan](#) encourages funders to invest in re-granting intermediaries and work to learn from their model
- Learnings from [Oak Foundation's](#) collaboration with intermediaries
- This [National Council of Nonprofits](#) report highlights the importance of networks for solving complex problems and dispersing innovative approaches, but also for building internal organizational capacity.
- The California Endowment describes the importance of an [ecosystem](#) approach to build power
- How [MacArthur Foundation](#) uses intermediaries to foster collaboration, re-granting, utilize place based expertise, and info gathering
- [Panel](#) hosted by Grantmakers for Education - "Intermediaries & Philanthropy: Seeding Community Work at the Grassroots"

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- How [CLIMA Fund](#) views intermediaries as key to supporting grassroots organizations
- REO Collaborative's theory of change behind "[grassroots-centric intermediaries](#)" initiative
- Peak Grantmaking - [benefits](#) of nimbleness, ability to reach grassroots organizations and iterate faster for donors
- Momentum Nonprofit Partners' [reasons](#) to support BIPOC-led funding intermediaries
- Bridgespan - [Ability](#) to use and support intermediaries for individual major donors to maximize equitable outcomes
- Reasons with the [Libra Foundation](#) sees intermediaries as key to social change
- Memphis Music Initiative - [Importance](#) of intermediaries and their attempt to "tip toe away from the Request for Proposal model"

#### Other:

- From Jocelyn Ban:
  - This [recent resource](#) produced by CIVICUS lists progressive donors, many of which are intermediaries. It has a global focus given CIVICUS' orientation, however, the limited information on US intermediaries stood out in stark comparison to the other regions.
  - [National Network of Fiscal Sponsors](#) and Social Impact Commons are doing a [big field scan](#) of intermediaries to better quantify and understand fiscal sponsorship and intermediaries contributions to the field.
- [Database](#) of philanthropic collaborations hosted by Bridgespan

#### **\*\*Terminology note\*\***

"Intermediaries" and "philanthropic intermediaries" or "PIs" are used interchangeably here. "Organizations" is referring to those entities who are receiving funding, sponsorship, and capacity-building services. Some reports have defined such organizations explicitly as grassroots and people of color-led, with variation in the identified stages of these.

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### Reports

#### 1. [Aspen Institute](#) - *Evaluation of the Hewlett Foundation's Sub-Strategy to Support Local Family Planning and Reproductive Health Advocacy in Sub-Saharan Africa (2022)*

This report reviewed Hewlett's strategy, involving use of international NGO intermediaries, for advancing reproductive health advocacy in Sub-Saharan Africa. It identified key values of intermediaries, including access to funding, facilitating peer to peer learning, and taking on advocacy roles. It offers other recommendations for steps that funders and capacity-builders can take.

##### Key findings:

- Although discourse around new funding practices and questioning power structures has led to more empowerment of organizations to challenge traditional treatment, many practices remain the same and a lack of sufficient resources leads to competition/power imbalances between organizations and intermediaries. Findings supported power-sharing practices such as general operating support, longer term grants, etc.
- Implementing mutual accountability between organizations and intermediaries is very difficult. It suggested decoupling capacity building and regranting functions and ensuring that capacity building is "demand driven" as well as using locally based intermediaries.

#### 2. [Arabella Advisors, JPB Foundation, and Windward Fund](#) - *Frontline-serving intermediaries: An underutilized tool for philanthropy (2023)*

It emphasizes the importance of frontline organizations and the small proportion of funding going to grassroots organizations from major funders. It offers profiles of impactful intermediaries in climate and environment work.

##### Key findings:

- Portrays intermediaries as a way to provide place-based, culturally-integrated organizations with the ability to regrant and provide multi-year flexible funding to grassroots organizations.
- It also explains that intermediaries can help take on administrative, reporting, and application duties; build connections and relationships, share information in both directions, and generate strong returns.

#### 3. [Borealis](#) - *Intermediary Project Insights*

This was a result of social justice intermediaries' internal value proposition assessment.

##### Key findings:

It highlights two main assets social justice intermediaries bring, including 1) Grantmaking for underfunded work/groups. They can fill a gap of what traditional funders don't have, such as issue area expertise, networks, relationships, and flexible practices. 2) Capacity building for grantees + institutional donors. Staff are often knowledgeable about the

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movement ecosystem and can provide honest conversations and feedback to organizations and funders.

There is a need for:

- Community building amongst intermediaries. They need to increase learning, sharing, identify where each sees itself and build shared agendas.
- A possibility for Philanthropic influencing after community building. It highlights importance of building trust and having clarity about intentions to influence

#### 4. [Bridgespan](#) - *Releasing the Potential of Philanthropic Collaborations (2021)*

This resulted from a survey of 97 funder collaboratives and interviews of 100 donors and fund leaders. It notes that collaborations are appealing to wealthy individuals and families, and they help reduce risk for funders.

Key findings:

- ¼ of the collaboratives surveyed were involved with field and movement building work, and almost half were led by POC.
- It identified three necessary funder mindset shifts for increased philanthropic collaborations - funders: 1) can have both solo and collaborative giving models 2) can and must support movement building which tends to be harder to measure, and 3) must build comfort with shifting decision-making and support to grassroots leaders

#### 5. *The CA Endowment - Philanthropic Intermediaries in this Moment of National Reckoning (2020)*

This report was based on 68 interviews with TCE staff, funders, and intermediaries. It emphasizes building intermediaries' power at the state and regional levels, predicated on the idea that a new generation of leaders, particularly leaders of color, are finding new ways of working/challenging traditional organizational structures. It presents examples of PI-funder relationships that support movement building, and outlines 4 base functions: fiscal sponsorship, regranteeing, collaborative funds, program design and management. It highlights emerging hybrid forms of intermediaries including different organizational/legal structures, economic power building, network building, and/or R+D platforms. It also raises the issue of names for "intermediaries" and implications of the nomenclature.

Key findings:

- Intermediaries help carry out strategy; increase organization effectiveness and capacity of funders; promote mutual accountability; create a platform for collaboration and collective action; add valuable, difficult to transfer skills; make use of extended networks; connect to local context and depoliticize grant distribution; and check power of foundation staff by modulating power dynamics and providing an avenue for more genuine conversations/coaching.

It presents the following challenges or considerations:

- Third parties can complicate relationships and can be seen as extractive, keeping an unfair share of funding, and maintaining distance between funders-fundees, particularly with the perception (and/or reality) that they are white-led orgs without an equity mindset, cultural fluency, or longer term investment in communities.

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- Funders must avoid “foundation-sponsored capacity building” through intermediaries that lack an appropriate racial justice analysis and need to examine their reasoning and principles for intermediary work. When identifying partners, funders should assess PI’s “stance” on managing power dynamics, movement building, and its role in working with groups. Challenges arise also when there is disconnect and lack of clarity on roles and who intermediaries are accountable to; lack of regrants infrastructure; and mistrusted intermediaries.
- Intermediaries also tend to need more funding than foundations expect. Because the right kind of intermediaries are not available everywhere, foundations must invest in growing their capacity.

## 6. [Candid Learning / Ariadne](#) - *Centering equity and justice in climate philanthropy; Section 4: The critical role of intermediaries (2022)*

This is a guide created from 30 interviews of funders, intermediaries, and grassroots organizations, which discusses the role of intermediaries in climate justice.

### Key findings:

- It describes how intermediaries can be leveraged for the depth of their relationships, place-based knowledge, and ability to support movement-building, as well as for larger foundations to reach less accessible grassroots organizations. They can provide support and connections for under-resourced organizations.
- Foundations shouldn’t “reinvent the wheel” but rather take advantage of this work. It discusses how intermediaries are positioned to foster mutual accountability, especially with impacted communities through participatory processes.

## 7. [Change Elemental / Ford Foundation](#) - *Strengthening Emerging Social Justice Groups (2018)*

This was produced through surveys and interviews of organizations and intermediaries, and it frames intermediaries as incubators - as grantmakers/fiscal sponsors for new organizations.

### Key findings:

It identified services that emerging social justice organizations need, including: strategic planning and implementation; access to funders; race, power, privilege-aware leadership development; legal and financial risk sharing; access to safe spaces, anti-oppressive staff policies; support in exploring non-traditional structures; basic back of office services.

Challenges intermediaries currently pose or face:

- They are not equity-centered and lack this kind of expertise. Their business models limit exploration and creativity around organizational structures for sponsees.
- They don’t have enough capacity for greater support and/or to subsidize services for under-resourced groups, while there is a growing demand for capacity, as well as pressure to meet many needs at once, rather than specializing.

Some ways that funders can support include:

- Resourcing and lifting up equity-centered intermediaries, particularly those who are led by non-dominant groups, increasing intermediary capacity, support

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experimentation towards financial sustainability, supporting network building between intermediaries, helping organizations select intermediaries.

#### **8. [Change Elemental / Ford Foundation](#) - *Centering Equity in Intermediary Relationships (2020)***

This report was based on interviews across relevant stakeholders and a 10 month “Intermediary Learning Lab” which convened 8 intermediaries.

##### Key findings:

It introduces a tension between capacity of serving organizations, depth of equity-aligned practices to support constituent-led groups, and ability to move larger sums of funds.

It outlines recommendations for funders, including:

- Supporting equity transformation for intermediaries; Matching needs of grantees with services of intermediaries. It raises a need to be able to categorize where intermediaries fall - one framework they propose is based on a PI's function, stance, and equity-aligned services.
- It also recommends funding field-strengthening work like communities of practice that aren't covered by fees for service, and advocating internally for equity-centered practices and decision making. Including actions such as increasing clarity and selection criteria around equity-aligned practices, evaluating current relationships, and creating feedback processes.

#### **9. [Fidelity Charitable](#) - *Philanthropic Advisors (2022)***

This is a resource for wealthy individual donors to learn about Philanthropic Advisors, which outlines why and when they might be useful and things to consider and look for in an advisor. It lists directories of philanthropic advisors and grantmaking consultants. These are able to provide some analogous benefits to typical intermediaries, plus some others, including: helping design giving strategy, coordinating with other aligned funders, evaluating impact, facilitating difficult family discussions, and coordinating with other financial strategists.

#### **10. [\(Bill and Melinda\) Gates Foundation](#) - *The Central Role of Intermediaries in Building Equitable Pathways From Education to Work (2023)***

This report is based on the results of Gates Foundation and Jobs for the Future's Building Equitable Pathways Community of Practice of intermediaries.

##### Key findings:

It identified four main contributions of intermediaries, which were: “equity-oriented data collection and use, partnership building, pathways design and delivery support,” which points to programmatic supports that help address ecosystem gaps in creating pathways to economic opportunities, and “policy and funding advocacy.” It highlights the preconditions for successful intermediaries that funders and others can support.

#### **11. [GEO](#) - *Smarter Relationships, Better Results: making the most of grantmakers' work with intermediaries (2013)***

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This is an older report which is not equity focused but provides some framing. It presents a Gates Foundation example of finding an able intermediary partner who was positioned to be a change agent, and they invested substantially in building their capacity so that they could meet the foundation's demands.

#### Key findings:

It focuses on benefits of using regranting intermediaries, presents strategies for working with intermediaries, and the challenge of intermediaries being limited by the structures/demands of funders.

- They present three different relationship models: 1) Outsourcing - more transactional, time-limited; funder is more directive 2) Autonomous - allows intermediary to exercise their own model/capacity which the funder may be incapable of; while providing some support 3) Partnership - co-creation of a longer term portfolio or project.

#### **12. [Kresge Foundation / Community Wealth Partners](#) - *Strengthening the Ecosystem of Capacity-Building Service Providers: A Case for Why It Matters* (2019)**

This report reviews and presents findings from the Kresge Foundation's FUEL program, invests in talent and leadership development with a racial equity lens. It presents an issue they tried to address: nonprofits don't have time/resources to properly vet capacity building services, and may not have access to as many; this is particularly difficult when trying to build racial equity capacity.

#### Key findings:

Kresge Foundation's FUEL program created and vetted a menu of aligned providers; helped provide funding to capacity builders; and convened them for shared learning. The report discussed a number of program learnings, including that capacity-builders should be engaged in program design and that the foundation must be aware of its own role in the power dynamics of convening structures.

#### *Other Kresge resources:*

- [Q&A: Hive Fund shares how an equity-focus intermediary is working to advance climate justice in the South](#) - describes some of the things that climate justice intermediaries offer specifically
- [Grantcraft - Advancing Racial Equity Through Capacity Building: The Kresge Foundation's Talent and Leadership Development Efforts](#) - provides more specific learnings from Kresge's FUEL program

#### **13. [New Venture Fund](#) - *Leveraging Fiscal Sponsorship for Racial Equity* (2021)**

NVF created this report based on communications with 14 grassroots organizations, 5 "deep equity" organizations and 3 larger "technical support" fiscal sponsors. It is geared towards recommendations for "large, technical support fiscal sponsors" and provides clear definitions for the different stakeholders and their different types.

#### Key findings:

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It presents the following challenges: there is commonly mistrust towards often white-led, larger intermediaries; funders don't always understand the field of fiscal sponsors well enough and thus create barriers.

It provides recommendations and next steps:

- Larger fiscal sponsors can help resource field building efforts and must work to build trust and relationships when working with grassroots organizations. They can help provide fundraising support to their grassroots sponsees. "Deep equity" sponsors and larger ones collaborate and share communities of practice.
- Three key field building interventions: filling gaps, such as a fiscal sponsor directory and providing funding for shared mediation/conflict resolution services; supporting deep equity sponsors; and educating and advocating for funder change.
- Three areas for further work: research around how to enact some of these recommendations; conduct individual and field wide asset mapping; and assessing how organizations and sponsors led by people of color may receive different responses/treatment

#### **14. [Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity](#) - *Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens: A Practical Guide (pg 23-29) (2006)***

This is part of the larger guide, and it poses key questions for when a PI should be involved, including 1) Where is the impetus for having an intermediary coming from? 2) If from the funder, is the PI serving purposes that cannot be by the foundation, or is the PI serving this purpose just to avoid additional burden on the funder? 3) How are intermediaries accountable to the field and not just their funders?

##### Key findings:

- It acknowledges the costs associated with creating intermediary infrastructure and how this could divert from the goal. It raised concerns that intermediaries can encourage gatekeeping and less relationship building between organizations and funders, and emphasized the need to ensure that funding is not being diverted from direct support of organizations in going towards intermediary organizations.
- However, the report also notes that intermediaries can often have specific knowledge/know-how when they are closer to the ground and often invest in "riskier" organizations than larger funders.

#### **15. [TSNE](#) - *Capacity Building Needs, Challenges, and Best Practices for Movements, Coalitions, and Other Nonprofit Groups: A Field Scan (2020)***

The Learning Lab, established in 2018 as a "a strategic multi-year initiative focused on understanding the capacity building needs of under resourced movements, coalitions, and other nonprofits groups supporting marginalized communities" conducted a field scan, based on fiscal sponsors and capacity-building organizations.

##### Key findings:

- Orgs experimenting with alternative leadership models require capacity building and fiscal compliance support; particularly including fund and leadership development skill-building. Alternatively-structured organizations need support for sustained equity building capacities. Overall, there is a need for tailored services



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and for value-alignment in service delivery by intermediaries and governance bodies (i.e. boards), particularly for those that are movement builders.

- Recommendations included: 1) Clarifying and implementing criteria for partnerships between funders and intermediaries. 2) Customizing services and aligning these with equity centered values. 3) Building more financially sustainable business models. 4) Cultivating “network capacity” by creating opportunities for collectively engaging in peer-to-peer learning and capacity building for both organizations and intermediaries. 5) Building governance structures to support ecosystem building.

#### **16. [TSNE](#) - *Reimagining Fiscal Sponsorship in Service of Equity* (2021)**

70 grassroots organizations were interviewed for this report, which identified 6 emerging practices from fiscal sponsors who were rethinking risk, management, and capacity building.

##### Key findings:

- It highlighted issues with fiscal sponsor access, and also the potential for mistrust of formal fiscal sponsors by grassroots, BIPOC-led organizations who may be more likely to try to lean on community support instead of institutional when the impacts of their work are not appreciated/understood.
- 6 emerging practices included: 1) Fiscal sponsors should provide a variety of different services to meet the needs of these organizations. 2) Sponsors should center relationship-building, mutual learning, and dialogue as part of aligning with the values and work of grassroots organizations. 3) They should employ an integrated, cross-functional team in which each sponsee has a program manager to ensure their needs are met. 4) Fiscal sponsors should make use of partnerships to fill gaps. 5) They should experiment with different revenue models for financial sustainability. 6) They can set up risk assessment and management practices that allow for continued sustainability and reduced risks