

IF WE WANT A MULTIRACIAL DEMOCRACY, WE HAVE TO FUND IT

The Urgent Case for Strengthening
Community Organizing Across New York

No one in philanthropy gets a pass in this moment. (and this includes us)

Regardless of focus or strategy, we are called to consider how our funding choices contribute to — or limit — the conditions needed for a strong, multiracial democracy.

For us, this reckoning has been unfolding over time.

In August 2019, a group of funders gathered at the New York Foundation to better understand the state of community organizing across New York. As the meeting came to a close, a question surfaced that shifted the conversation: Were others seeing a rise in white nationalism in their communities?

The answer, across regions, was a resounding yes. What we saw emerging then has not receded; it has grown.

What followed was a shared recognition that organizations across New York State — from New York City to Long Island to upstate communities — were confronting coordinated threats without the infrastructure or resources to meet them at scale. That moment sparked a deeper partnership between the Daphne Foundation and Engage New York, grounded in a shared commitment to support organizing that could both counter these threats and build the collective power required for a multiracial, inclusive democracy.

ACROSS
NEW YORK,
OUR COMMUNITIES
ARE CONNECTED
BY SHARED
WATERS AND
A SHARED
FUTURE.

And like water systems, the organizing infrastructure needed to sustain a thriving, multiracial democracy must be deliberately built, consistently maintained, and equitably distributed. You cannot turn on a tap in communities that were never connected to the system.

The same is true of **civic power.**

Since our initial partnership in 2019, this work has grown in both scope and depth.

Engage New York is a statewide network of funders committed to learning together and taking collective action. Today, its members and partners span regions across New York, working to align resources with the needs of community organizing efforts in urban, suburban, and rural communities alike. This growth reflects a shared recognition that building power at the scale this moment requires cannot happen in isolation.

In this same spirit, the Daphne Foundation is preparing to spend down, driven by the belief that this moment calls for urgent, intentional investment in the conditions that make long-term change possible.

With this letter, we are sharing two complementary research efforts: one examining organizing infrastructure across New York State, and another offering a deeper analysis of New York City.¹

Each report was developed with a distinct scope. The Daphne Foundation's work is rooted in the five boroughs, while Engage New York's research reflects a broader statewide perspective. Together, they offer something neither could alone:

A more complete picture of organizing infrastructure across New York — where it is strong, where it is strained, and what it will take to build it for the future.

Across both reports, the findings are strikingly consistent. Organizing is happening in every region of New York. Communities are building power, developing leaders, and advancing solutions rooted in lived experience.

A consistent through-line emerges: **communities closest to the challenges are also closest to the solutions.**

But the infrastructure that sustains that work is under-resourced. Both reports highlight the following:

- Funding does not consistently reach base-building organizations most rooted in communities
- Leadership development pipelines are under-resourced
- Regional disparities limit the ability to build statewide power
- Short-term funding cycles undermine long-term organizing capacity

The research also affirms what is possible: New York offers powerful examples of what sustained organizing can achieve, where decades of base-building have translated into policy wins and leadership capable of shaping the future of the state. When organizing is fully resourced over time, it delivers tangible policy wins, strengthens civic participation, and builds the conditions for lasting change. It also builds the capacity to sustain power, implement policy, and respond to rapidly shifting conditions. **Community organizing is not one strategy among many. It IS the infrastructure that makes democracy possible.**

Communities closest to the challenges are also closest to the solutions.

¹To receive the full reports by Engage New York and The Daphne Foundation, [click here](#).





If we were fully resourcing organizing infrastructure, many of the challenges named in this research wouldn't persist in the ways they do today. That's not a critique of intent, it's a reflection of how our systems of funding are currently structured. And it's something within our control to change.

a **We are still funding activity and calling it infrastructure.**

Short-term, project-based grants remain the norm, even as the work requires sustained investment to build leadership, grow the base, and stay connected over time. The reality is: if we had consistently funded organizing and civic participation as core infrastructure, we would not be facing this level of fragility in our democracy today. We are now asking organizations to hold the line, rebuild trust, and respond to coordinated threats without having made the long-term investments that would have positioned them, and all of us, differently in this moment.

b **We say “statewide,” but our funding doesn't consistently reach the full state.**

Too much funding remains concentrated, leaving entire regions — especially outside major metros — without the support needed to build and sustain organizing capacity. The result is uneven power across the state at a moment when cohesion matters most.

c **We expect strategic coordination, but rarely resource it.**

Alignment, collaboration, and shared strategy take time, staffing, and infrastructure. Without investing in that connective tissue, we should not expect it to happen at scale — especially in a moment that demands it.

d **We fund urgency, but not always durability.**

(sometimes)
Organizations are navigating real and immediate threats. But without parallel investment in long-term power building, we risk staying in a constant cycle of response rather than shaping what comes next.

AND HERE'S THE OPPORTUNITY.

We—collectively—have the ability to:

New York has strong organizations, experienced leaders, and growing momentum across regions.

① Fund for the long term, not just the immediate

② Resource the full geography of the state

③ Support the coordination that makes statewide power possible

④ Align our efforts so that organizations are not left to navigate this moment alone

For those who haven't traditionally funded organizing, this is a moment to step in, because organizing is not one issue among many, it's what makes progress on every issue possible. There is a meaningful role to play in investing in organizing and civic participation, strengthening the conditions that all of our shared priorities depend on.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Leaders are telling us what needs to be funded¹:

This letter accompanies two complementary research efforts. While these reports were developed independently, they point to a shared set of priorities. What follows reflects a synthesis of recommendations for philanthropy, drawn from both.

Vision & Strategy

1. Community leaders and organizers need spaces and support where they can build alignment on a vision for the state and the long-term strategy to achieve it. Strengthen field strategies by supporting nascent regional coalition-building efforts, new experiments in organizing, and coordinating civic engagement work across the state.

Statewide Coalitions & Alignment

2. Invest in building and sustaining statewide coalitions that connect organizing efforts across urban, suburban, and rural communities. Fund the relationships, infrastructure, and convening needed to move from isolated efforts to collective statewide power.

Training & Talent Pipelines

3. Resource ongoing year-round training at all levels, resource organizing schools and training hubs, create a Statewide Training Fund and coordinate Capacity Builders.

Organizational Models, Structure & Roles

4. Support research on the evolution of organizational models, structures, roles and ecosystems. Resource centralized hubs for operational infrastructure and resource safety and security capacity.

Narrative & Culture Change Strategies

5. Invest in developing narrative strategies and training organizers to effectively leverage social media and online spaces to counter growing opposition and disinformation.

Funders Need to Invest Differently

6. More Multi-Year Funding (7 – 10 years); resource Black-led, youth, faith-based, migrant & rural organizing across the state; improve funder coordination and collaboration.

This is a moment that calls for philanthropy to be both more coordinated and more courageous. Not because the field is lacking, but because the field is ready!

¹To receive the full reports by Engage New York and The Daphne Foundation, [click here](#).



AN INVITATION TO ACT **TOGETHER**

What this moment requires is not incremental adjustment, but alignment and sustained investment.

New York has the opportunity to demonstrate what is possible when communities lead and institutions respond.

That future depends on whether we invest in the leadership, relationships, and systems that allow communities to build collective power, sustain it over time, and translate it into lasting change.

And it depends on whether philanthropy is willing to act — not in isolation, but in coordination — to resource the conditions under which that power can grow.

The stakes extend beyond New York.

What is built here can help shape what is possible nationally, offering a model for how organizing, when deeply resourced and aligned across regions, can strengthen democracy in the face of rising authoritarianism.

We invite you to be part of that work.

In partnership,

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