



INVESTING IN BLACK LEADERS

IN THE IMMIGRANT AND RACIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

Black-led immigrant, refugee and asylum seeker organizations have been critical leaders in the immigrant and racial justice movements challenging systems of detention and criminalization, opposing the asylum and Muslim bans, advancing an abolition framework, working intersectionally across criminal justice and LGBTQ+ movements, and gaining federal policy advances and wins.

While Black-led immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeker organizations have always confronted extraordinary challenges with limited resources, this year has pushed Black immigrant groups and leaders to their limits. A global pandemic has further exposed and exacerbated longstanding racial, economic, health and environmental inequities. In being called upon to meet the needs of their communities as well as serve in multiple movement roles and spaces, Black immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeker leaders and organizations have been pulled in many directions and are experiencing extreme exhaustion, pain, and duress.

These demands are coupled with a historic and systemic lack of investment, tokenism, and anti-Blackness both from the philanthropic sector and in the larger immigrant or racial justice fields. The progress towards a national reckoning on race presents both a tremendous challenge and an opportunity to funders to invest in and strengthen the capacity, presence, and power of the Black-led immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeker organizing ecosystem. Given how indispensable these leaders and organizations have been to broader justice movement movements, the recommendations highlighted here provide multiple ways for funders to increase investments strategically and broadly.

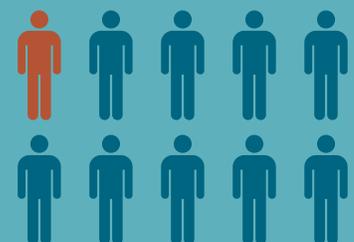
“BLACK-LED IMMIGRANT, REFUGEE, AND ASYLUM SEEKER ORGANIZATIONS HAVE PLAYED AN OUTSIZE ROLE IN PUSHING THE IMMIGRANT JUSTICE MOVEMENT TO CENTER RACIAL JUSTICE AND ARE VISIONARIES PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES FOR A MORE JUST AND EQUITABLE FUTURE.”

DIVERSE COMMUNITY DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED BY OVERLAPPING SYSTEMS OF CRIMINALIZATION AND INCARCERATION

The diverse and vibrant Black immigrant community is made up of approximately 4.2 million foreign-born Black individuals in the United States, of which roughly 600,000 are undocumented.

BLACK IMMIGRANTS ARE THE FASTEST GROWING SEGMENT OF THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES. IN 1970, ONE IN 100 BLACK AMERICANS WAS AN IMMIGRANT;

CURRENTLY, ONE IN TEN BLACK AMERICANS IS AN IMMIGRANT.



Yet it is also critical to not lump all Black immigrant communities together, as there are significant differences across language, culture, communication practices, religions, and the experience of colonization, amongst many other factors. New York state is home to the largest number of Black immigrants (roughly a quarter), followed by Florida, New Jersey, Texas, Maryland, Massachusetts, California, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Minnesota.

Systems of over-policing, Islamophobia, immigration enforcement, criminalization and incarceration have a disproportionate, disparate, and layered impact on Black immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers and their families. As noted in the ground-breaking report, The State of Black Immigrants, anti-Black racism is ingrained in the history and systems of immigration enforcement, detention, and deportation, and this is amplified by the immigration systems' dependence on our criminal justice system to funnel immigrants into deportation. Because Black immigrants face racial profiling and inequities in our policing and criminal justice systems, they have been disproportionately impacted.

While seven percent of non-citizens in the U.S. are Black, they make up 20% of those facing deportation on criminal grounds. A sharp increase in Black immigrants and asylum seekers at the U.S. Southern border in the past several years means a growing percentage of migrants languish inside immigration prisons facing a higher risk of solitary confinement, higher bonds to secure their release, prolonged detention, and higher rates of deportation.

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DYNAMIC AND GROWING

ECOSYSTEM OF ORGANIZATIONS

Black immigrant and refugee-led organizations challenging intersecting systems of oppression have historically been marginalized, underfunded, and underrepresented, in both the immigrant justice and racial justice movements. As communities experiencing the harshest impacts – and thus closest to the solutions – Black immigrants and refugees have often not been part of strategy discussions and decision-making processes. Yet, black immigrant and refugee groups are growing in their power-building work and like their communities, are remarkably diverse in terms of language and countries of origin served, programming/models, and stages of organizational development.

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There are multiple Black immigrant, refugee and asylum seeker groups leading critical work on both the local (e.g., CA, FL, GA, MI, OH, MN, PA, TX, NY) and national level. They are engaging communities with diverse strategies around survival needs through mutual aid (e.g., housing, food security, health care); advocacy around federal immigration reform, Temporary Protected Status, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, naturalization, and asylum; detention and abolition; police accountability; worker rights; mental health and healing; civic engagement (census, GOTV, redistricting); economic justice (e.g., housing, wages, COVID-relief, economic empowerment for the black immigrant business community); gender justice (FGM, domestic violence); and education justice. And with the devastation of COVID-19 and its broader social and economic impacts, Black immigrant organizations have demonstrated how mutual aid and provision of services can effectively link to their organizing and systemic change work.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PHILANTHROPY

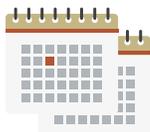
Funders can support Black immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeker-focused and led organizations in building their own **power** towards self-determination and equity through strengthening the **capacity** of Black immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeker organizations, leaders, and communities. The strategies that organizations are deploying to build power range from organizing, base-building, advocacy, leadership development and civic engagement. Capacity building must support holistic investment in the people leading and working for these organizations, as well as in sustaining organizations. The following recommendations are based upon interviews with sixteen organizations in the growing ecosystem.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH BLACK IMMIGRANT ORGANIZATIONS.



The barriers for Black immigrant organizations in philanthropy are formidable. Funders can be proactive in building relationships of trust and partnership with Black immigrant organizations to better understand how they work in the diverse and growing ecosystem.

MOVE BEYOND RAPID RESPONSE TO MULTIYEAR GENERAL OPERATING SUPPORT.



Black immigrant organizations have received rapid response and project specific funding, which is critical to organize impactfully in the short-term; however, organizations are in urgent need of multi-year general operating support to ensure stability to plan for power building and long-term systemic change. This should be based on fundamental trust and a sustained commitment to the Black immigrant community.

INVEST IN PEOPLE POWER, NOT ISSUES.



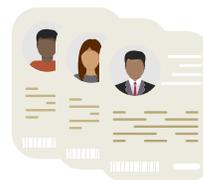
Funders should invest in the core capacity of organizations to build people power, leadership and organizing skills-building that are transferable across issues as opposed to investing in issue-based organizing or defining specific policy outcomes. This reflects how Black immigrant organizations are working with community members to surface issues and lead the policy fights that directly impact their lives.

PROVIDE SUFFICIENT RESOURCES FOR BASE-BUILDING.



Black immigrant, refugee and asylum seeker organizations are striving to build power by engaging members on a consistent basis and providing members with training to regain and claim their voice in community. There is a vast network of Black immigrant and refugee-led groups at the local level that other Black-led organizations want to deepen relationships with, but they need the resources to build trust across this diverse community. Funders should support this base-building work that is resource-intensive, requiring full-time staffing teams to sustainably engage community.

SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS IN SHIFTING FROM VOLUNTEER TO SUSTAINABLY STAFFED ORGANIZATIONS.



Black immigrant organizations are under-resourced relying on small or volunteer directly-impacted staff. Unable to staff up or pay livable salaries, volunteer staff work full-time jobs while trying to meet organizational needs. The small paid staff, each of whom carry out multiple critical functions, are working under extreme duress, affecting staff mental health, recruitment, and retention. With more attention being paid to anti-Black racism and issues of equity, Black immigrant groups are increasingly invited to participate in collaborative immigrant justice, racial justice, and other social justice spaces and coalitions, without additional funding or capacity. Given how indispensable these Black immigrant and refugee organizations have been to larger movements, an increase in investment is critical for the overall health of the field.

INVEST IN ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.



An investment in organizational development would be transformative to elevate the creativity and courage of Black immigrant leadership. This investment should be based on trust and flexibility, and organizations must have agency in identifying their key capacity building goals rather than having a one-size-fits-all approach. Among the aspects of organizational development and technical assistance that leaders have highlighted are fundraising, development, and grant writing; communications, storytelling, and narrative shift; digital organizing and communications capacity; and collaboration and convening.

SUPPORT BOTH ESTABLISHED AND NASCENT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE ECOSYSTEM.



It is critical to support the growing and strengthening of the entire Black immigrant and refugee ecosystem, to provide resources to build collective power that can shift the immigrant justice movement to center racial justice, and to ensure that both relatively well-established (yet still under-resourced) Black immigrant and refugee groups, as well as lesser-known, emergent, and local groups are supported.

To learn more about how you can invest in the Black immigrant community, please contact Anita Khashu, Director, Four Freedoms Fund, at akhashu@neophilanthropy.org.