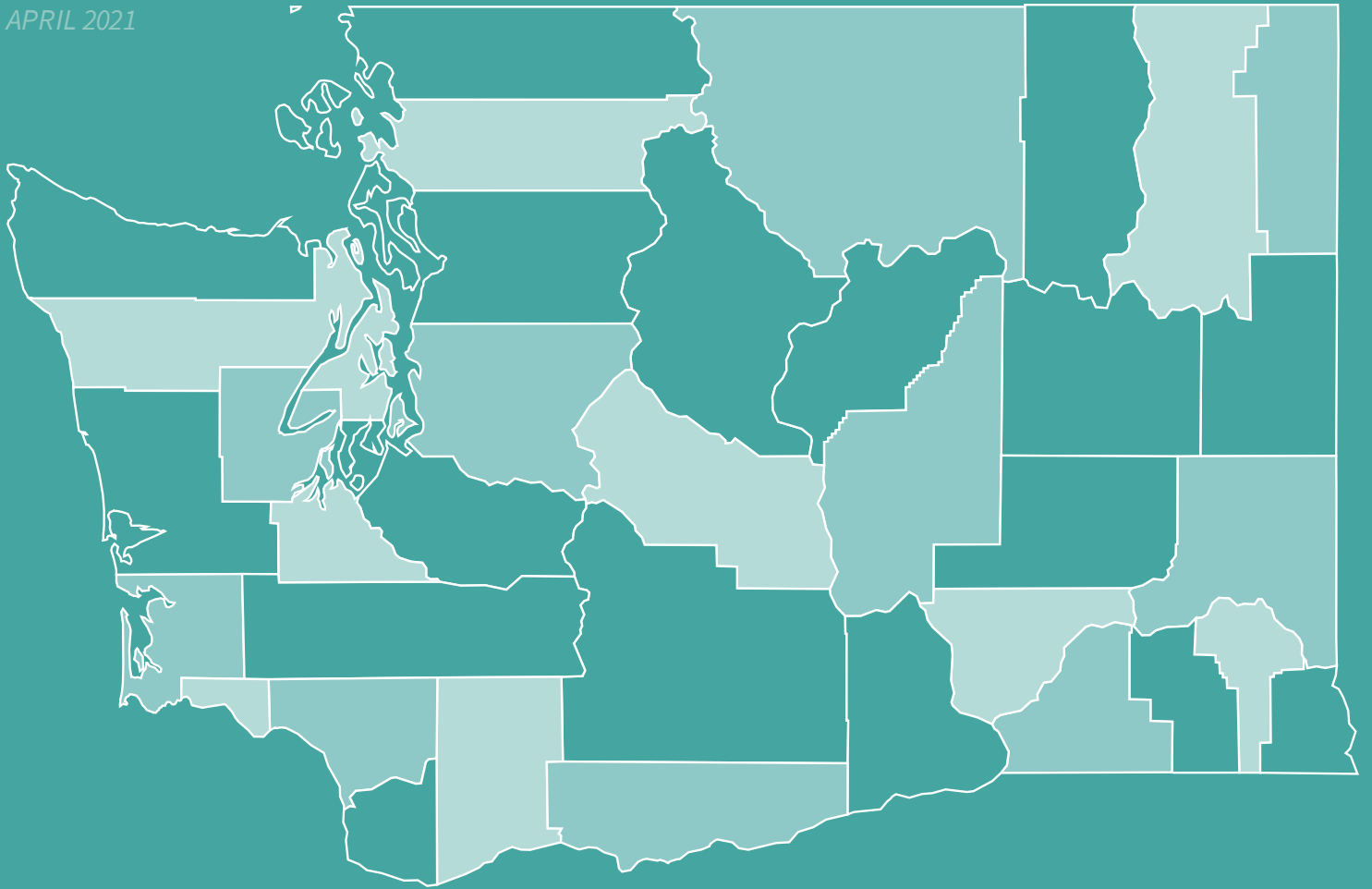


APRIL 2021



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# POWERFUL COMMUNITIES:

*What we learned in our  
first year of grantmaking*

**GROUP HEALTH  
FOUNDATION**



Community to Community Development (C2C) in Whatcom and Skagit counties is a grassroots, women of color-led organization dedicated to food sovereignty and farmworker and immigrant rights. Learn how they are nurturing a solidarity economy on page 26.



Mariposa House in Clallam County provides shelter, advocacy-based counseling, and other services for people who have experienced domestic violence and sexual assault. Learn how they are redefining systems change on page 31.



Since 2009, UTOPIA has worked with Queer Transgender Pacific Islander leaders in the state to create a safe, welcoming, supportive space for community members and to advocate for social justice. Read how they are leading and caring during the pandemic on page 19.



The Tacoma Urban League has been an anchor of the African-American community in Pierce County for more than 50 years. Read how they are advancing a Black agenda on page 13.



Wa Na Wari, a Black-led organization in Seattle's Central District, creates space for Black ownership, possibility, and belonging through art, historic preservation, and connection. Understand how they are strengthening community connection through culture on page 25.

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# Thank you for reading



As a newer foundation, we are solidifying a tradition of reflection. We hope to transparently offer what we learn to hold ourselves accountable to the organizations and communities we support and for the benefit of our

peers. As our elders and first teachers have taught us, making time to listen, learn, and absorb is vital to the longevity of our collective work and our ability to stay focused on achieving health equity for Washington and beyond.

*Powerful Communities: What we learned in our first year of grantmaking* is one way we are practicing our tradition of reflection. In these first few pages, you will see early data on our first 14 months of funding. Even as we are working to build and refine our systems and processes, we are committed to holding ourselves accountable by having a deep understanding of where and who we are funding.

Of course, the numbers within the more than 500 grants we made during that period do not share the complexity and beauty that live within the stories, experiences, and incredible work each organization across the state is undertaking. As part of our commitment to ongoing discovering and sharing knowledge, most of these pages offer community perspectives through the people and organizations we support.

We also want to be clear that Group Health Foundation is one of many funders and supporters. Communities and the organizations who serve them have long held visions for a more equitable future. Our role is to amplify their voice, elevate their leadership, and ensure they get the resources that they deserve. Many of the leaders you will hear from in this report have been doing the work long before we arrived, and they will continue to do so with or without philanthropy's support.

Like many of you in 2020, Group Health Foundation had to adapt again and again. The COVID-19 pandemic, global uprisings against police brutality

and anti-Black racism, the devastating wildfires in our state, and the November elections were catalysts to accelerate strategies and move money out the door more quickly to organizations that are leading transformative work.

When I look back at our first year of grantmaking with organizations, two thoughts come to mind. First, I am proud that we met with so many diverse people doing amazing work in every corner of our state. There is no excuse or justification for not getting dollars directly to the people who have the deepest expertise in their communities. We can now let go of any false notions of what makes an expert or leader because we know firsthand there are incredible organizations and advocates for health equity in each of Washington's 39 counties.

The second thought I am grappling with is this: What Group Health Foundation has done is not enough. When I think about the centuries of racial and social inequities, including how our state's public and private dollars have been distributed, I know our first grants are only a drop in the bucket. Our work is just getting started, and our drive for justice and freedom is what is fueling us for what is ahead.

Group Health Foundation will continue to be deeply grounded in our values and our belief that communities most impacted know what they need. We will continue to take risks and make mistakes. We continue to believe that change can happen and our strategy will be shaped by every relationship we build.

The year 2020 has brought pain on more levels than many of us can describe, but it has also given us the gift of deep clarity about who we are and what we can achieve together. While we are not underestimating how challenging the years ahead will be, we are humbled to be moving forward with you.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, sweeping initial 'N' followed by a series of fluid, connected strokes that end in a long horizontal tail.

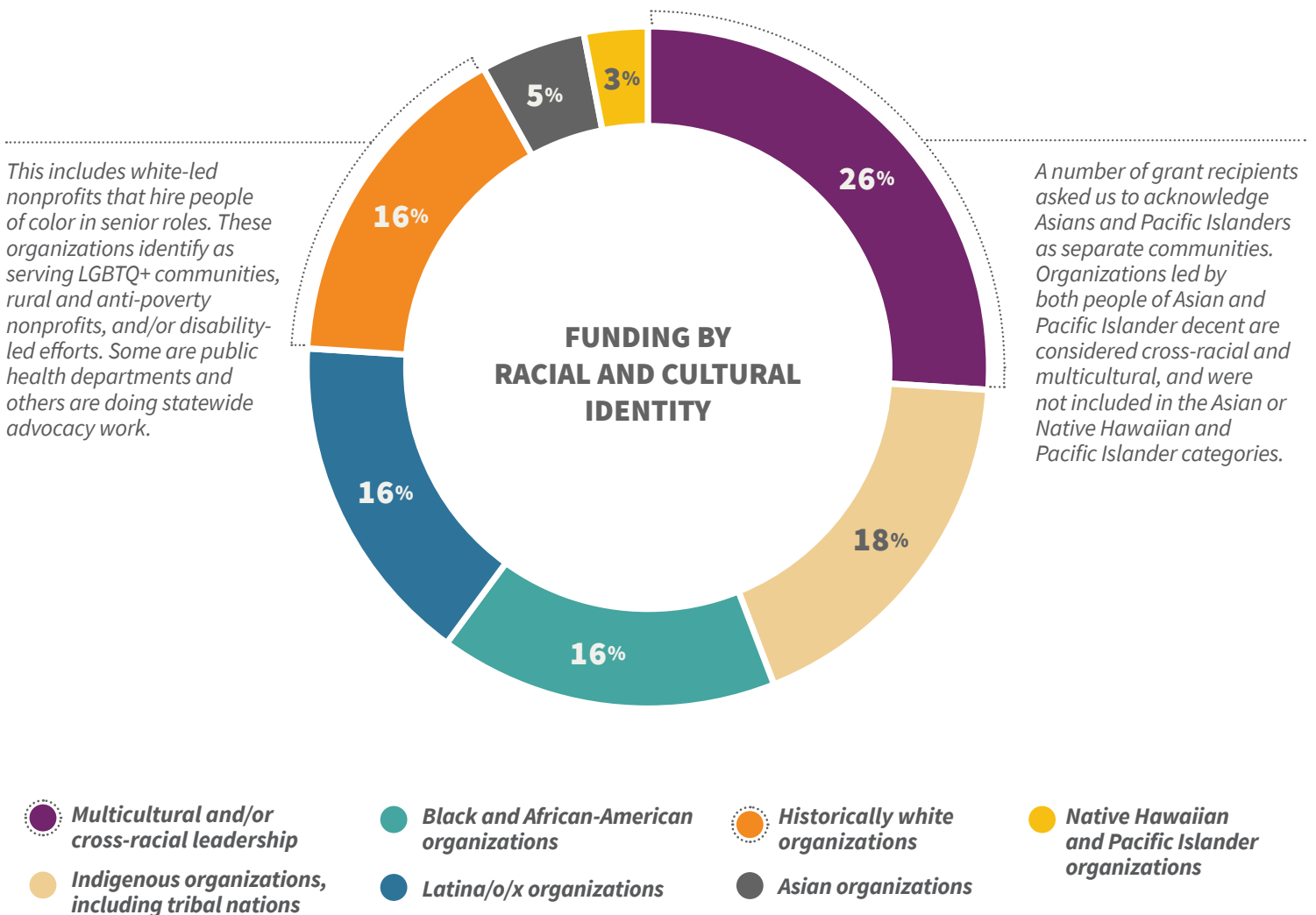
**Nichole June Maher**  
President and CEO  
Group Health Foundation

# Grantmaking overview

Group Health Foundation committed \$74 million to more than 500 organizations in our first 14 months of significant grantmaking from November 2019 through December 2020. We began collecting data on where and who we are funding to ensure we are equitably distributing dollars throughout the state. There are some instances where our information is incomplete and imperfect. This is partially because we are building our grants management system as we are making direct grants. Our team is working to refine our data collection processes to more closely reflect how communities define themselves.

## Funding by racial and cultural identity

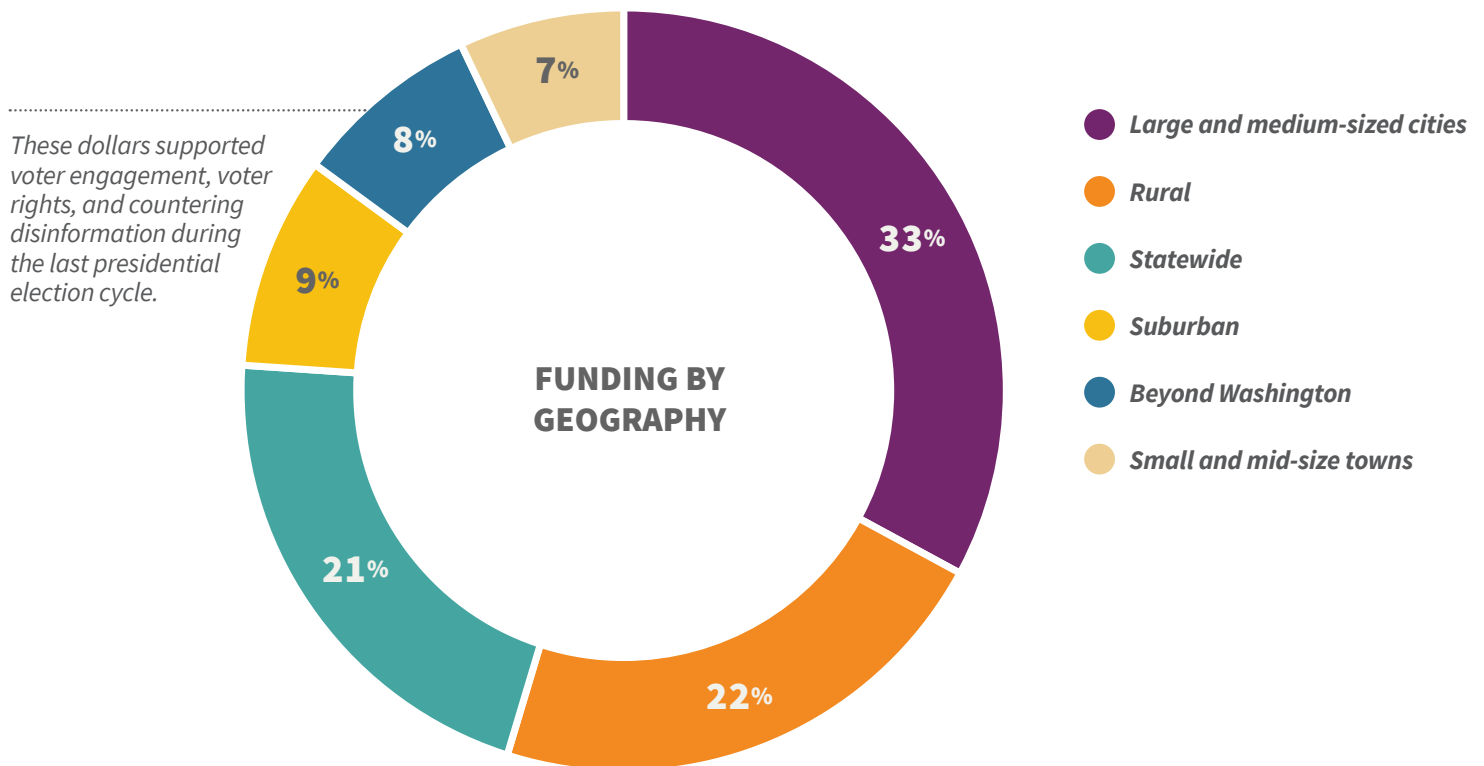
About 80 percent of our grants went to culturally specific, cross-racial, multicultural organizations and coalitions and to Indigenous nonprofits and tribal governments. These organizations work with their communities on a wide range of efforts, including justice for transgender and gender-diverse people, urban farming and food sovereignty, universal health care and community-centered healing, educational equity, cultural reclamation, environmental and economic justice, and so much more.



## Funding by geography

Geography and proximity to resources serve as important markers for our work. In learning what it means for us to be more equitable when it comes to *where* we direct funding, grant recipients have shared repeatedly that only tracking geography by whether the organization is urban or rural invisibilizes large and important parts of our state. This data is our attempt to honor how grant recipients define themselves.

There are two ways we look at statewide organizations, one is if an organization's advocacy, systems, and narrative change work has an impact across or throughout many regions of the state, even if the organization is primarily based in one region. We also look at where operations, staff, and leaders are located.



## Our grants

All Group Health Foundation funding prioritizes Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC); transgender and gender non-conforming people, and other members of the LGBTQ+ community; persons with disabilities; immigrants and refugees; people living with low incomes; and the many who hold several of these identities. We also seek to support work by organizations who reflect these communities in places that have seen little to no philanthropic support, including rural communities, tribal lands, unincorporated areas, and smaller municipalities.

We are deeply committed to resourcing organizations whose staff and board leadership reflect the people they serve. Nearly all our grants are for general operating support, to be used how an organization or fiscally sponsored project sees fit.

The following is not an exhaustive list of grant funds. We are developing additional grantmaking portfolios, and look forward to sharing more details with you later this year. For more information about our grants and the types of organizations we support, visit [www.grouphealthfoundation.org](http://www.grouphealthfoundation.org).

## Systems, Power, and Action

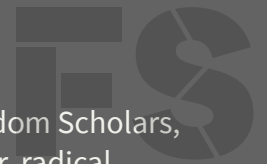
Among our largest multiyear commitments, the Systems, Power, and Action grants invest in organizations that are working to ensure public policy, public institutions, and public funding are accountable to communities throughout Washington. In 2020, we committed \$700,000 (to be paid over three years) to each of the first 25 recipients in recognition of their advocacy and systems change work.

## Community Learning Grants

Community Learning Grants help us better understand what health equity means for communities throughout the state and the approaches they are taking to advance it. Through this fund, we are resourcing “newer” and “smaller” organizations that have yet to receive flexible and multiyear funding. We also support more established BIPOC organizations, such as tribal nations and civil rights groups because they have been historically underfunded by philanthropy. More than 140 organizations received Community Learning Grants in 2019 and 2020. Grants are three-year, core-support commitments, each totaling up to \$225,000 (up to \$75,000 annually for three years).

## Freedom Scholars

In 2020, we joined Marguerite Casey Foundation in welcoming the first cohort of Freedom Scholars, an initiative supporting academics who are leading abolitionist, Black, feminist, queer, radical, and anti-colonialist studies—critical fields of research that are often underfunded or ignored. The first 12 scholars have pushed our learning and forced us to expand our imagination for what transformative change means. Each person is receiving \$250,000 over two years. Meet the scholars by visiting [www.caseygrants.org/freedomscholars](http://www.caseygrants.org/freedomscholars).



## Sponsorships

This fund honors the immeasurable value of connection making and community building in advancing the work for equity and justice. To date, we have granted more than \$1.5 million to 167 organizations to support community events, culturally specific gatherings, meetings, conferences, and fundraisers. Sponsorships start at \$1,000, though most organizations receive \$5,000 for an event. In exceptional cases, we have contributed \$25,000.

## Equitable Response and Recovery Fund

We started this fund early in the COVID-19 pandemic to rapidly deploy emergency funding to community-based organizations throughout Washington. As 2020 wore on, and as we saw the breadth of the pandemic’s impact, experienced a record-breaking wildfire season, and the movement against anti-Black racism gained greater momentum, the Foundation committed a total of \$23 million to these community-led efforts.

*Introduction:*

## **Health equity requires community power**



*Amitie, Mady, and Michelle Sandoval founded the Foundation for Youth Resiliency and Engagement (FYRE) to serve Okanogan County and designed their programming based on their experiences growing up there. Pictured is their youth advisory council, also known as the youth board of directors, with co-facilitators Mady and Keith Matt. (Photo courtesy of FYRE)*

The COVID-19 pandemic and uprisings for racial justice have put into sharp focus the reality that communities harmed by structural inequities have known all along: that health and well-being are directly tied to who gets to shape and inform decisions that affect our daily lives.

Health equity requires community power. Community power means that Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, the LGBTQ+ community, people living on low incomes—and especially those who hold several of these identities—are the ones leading the systems change necessary to transform our society. We are grateful to continue to learn from leaders and organizations who are contesting and shifting power to create an inclusive democracy for liberation over oppression.

This report builds on our previous one, *A Year on the Road: Guidance from community leaders and organizations across Washington*. In early 2019, we

were just starting to meet organizations and tribal nations throughout Washington. We had the honor of breaking bread with people who shared their aspirations and priorities and who offered guidance on how Group Health Foundation could be a respectful funder with Washington's communities.

While we did not get to meet in person with many people in 2020, we spent time hearing from and learning from leaders through video and phone calls and through our first virtual convening for grantee organizations. Over the last year, these organizations have shown up as they always have. They showed up to care for our communities and demanded more from every level of government. And, through their actions, they put forth a vision for a more vibrant and healthy future in Washington.

“

***Health and well-being are directly tied to who gets to shape and inform decisions that affect our daily lives.***



In this report, we focus on four themes that emerged from the work of the organizations we are funding and from conversations and growing relationships with leaders and organizations across the state. They are:

***Ending anti-Black racism and state-sanctioned violence***

***Caring and leading during a pandemic***

***Building collective wealth***

***Reclaiming what systems change means***

We explore these themes through the perspective of organizations that are putting their values into practice for the well-being of Washington's communities. Health equity continues to be about addressing the root causes, dismantling the systems that harm, and creating conditions for communities to self-determine and make decisions about the policies and systems that impact their daily lives.

We are grateful to be learning from hundreds of organizations and the many people who are leading in their communities, caring for their communities, and contending with and challenging systemic inequities. The culmination of this work and the leadership of communities are putting Washington on a path of transformation.



*Our team took this photo during a visit to Pomeroy in summer 2019.*



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# ENDING ANTI-BLACK RACISM AND STATE SANCTIONED VIOLENCE

*(Photo courtesy of Sandra Williams / The Black Lens)*

# Ending anti-Black racism and state-sanctioned violence

What happened to George Floyd in Minneapolis has also happened throughout Washington. And, NAACP Snohomish County President Dr. Janice Greene was quick to remind us of this fact days after his death: “Snohomish County is not immune and has a long and troubled relationship with the African-American community,” she wrote in a statement. “Recently, a sheriff’s deputy violently threw a Black nurse practitioner to the ground and jailed her for jaywalking. ... We argue that when it comes to the community, there is certainly a ‘safety and education component’ that the sheriff’s office must abide by, as well.”

Black communities have long been demanding an end to state-sanctioned violence that is rooted in this country’s historic policies of devaluing Black life as human life, and 2020 marked another groundswell of protests and demonstrations against police violence and anti-Black racism.

“If you look at it historically, institutions in the U.S. were created based on domination,” said Surge Reproductive Justice Executive Director Jackie Vaughn. “We know when the U.S. first started and brought over chattel slavery and people from the African continent, that part of that oppression was the control of reproduction. We know that when slavery ended, the prison industrial complex was just a carryover of slavery.”

Black Lives Matter protesters in Spokane following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. (Photo courtesy of Sandra Williams / The Black Lens)





*(Photo courtesy of Tacoma Urban League)*

Across the state, communities of different sizes organized marches of solidarity, protest, and advocacy to address systemic violence against Black communities. Leaders in Omak, Spokane, Aberdeen, Tacoma, Kennewick, Seattle, Everett, Forks, Pasco, Yakima, Shelton, and Vancouver coordinated actions and amplified calls that organizers had long been making: for the redistribution of police funding into community-led solutions to public safety, for police accountability and independent oversight, for reinvesting dollars in community care, for underutilized public lands and property to be invested in Black wealth building, and for an investment in democratized public processes that center the Black community.

Over the last year, new groups emerged, leaders stepped up, and relationships formed across generations. Vanessa Moore of the African-American Community, Cultural and Educational Society (AACCES) in Pasco said there were many young people and new groups that were created who sought counsel from AACCES. Dr. Janice Greene of NAACP Snohomish County shared that their youth council is organizing to end police officers in their schools. “They don’t think that they’re treated respectfully, and the data plays it out. A lot of young people of color are disproportionately disciplined.”

Black-led organizations and Black leaders in Washington are at the forefront of reimagining systems and advocating for policies that center the value of Black lives, lead with humanity, and ensure community care. We highlight a few organizations in this report, and there are many more from whom we are thankful to be learning. This organizing, rooted in accountable relationships and collective healing, provides a framework and vision to move us towards collective justice and freedom.

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*The convergence of these tragic events—a pandemic disproportionately killing Black people, the failure of the state to protect Black people, and the preying on Black people by the police—has confirmed what most of us already know: if we and those who stand with us do not mobilize in our own defense, then no official entity ever will.”*

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*Freedom Scholar Dr. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor in “Of Course There Are Protests. The State Is Failing Black People. The collapse of politics and governance leaves no other option.” (The New York Times, 2020)*

## Tacoma Urban League: Advancing a Black agenda



The Tacoma Urban League has been an anchor of the African-American community in Pierce County for more than 50 years. They have centered their policy advocacy efforts in support of the well-being of families and community—from their work for a complete census count to campaigning for Initiative 1000, a legislative effort to support affirmative action and the ability for government to ensure racial equity in public education, public employment, and public contracting. As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded and following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, the organization continued to ground its advocacy in the needs of the community.

“After George Floyd died, we had calls coming in from electeds. We didn’t rush and make policy points. We needed time to grieve,” said Tacoma Urban League CEO T’wina Nobles. “Everything is what we have been asking for 400 years. Nothing is new. At the same time, we had folks saying for the first time that they felt ready to speak up. They wanted to know what we should say, together.”

The death of Manuel Ellis by Tacoma police officers marked another moment of loss for the community, as well as calls for accountability to end systemic racism and police violence. “When Manuel Ellis died, we knew we had a role to play. We are accountable to the community,” she said.

Over the summer, the Tacoma Urban League worked with the A. Philip Randolph Institute Tacoma, Tacoma Pierce County Black Collective, Tacoma NAACP, Black Parents Alliance, Six Feet in the Street, Ministerial Alliance, and other partners to pull together a “Black Agenda.”

*(Photo courtesy of Tacoma Urban League)*



“We worked closely with organizations in King County, but we needed to support a policy agenda rooted in our lives in Pierce County,” Nobles said. The coalition developed the demands to which communities could connect to specific bills or efforts. “The Black Agenda focuses on police reform, economic racism, and educational reform. We worked to get community consensus.”

The Tacoma Urban League also began building new relationships with Black leaders in other parts of the state, including the NAACP Bremerton and NAACP Spokane. “What has happened this year has pushed us to get out of a silo. We could have put out our own Tacoma Urban League Black Agenda and it would have been respected, but we wanted to build it with buy-in, we wanted to build it with the community.”

*Note: In fall 2020, Nobles was elected as the first Black senator in Washington’s legislature in over a decade. Nobles is working closely with the Tacoma Urban League to find a new CEO and transitioning the leadership of the organization.*

## Surge Reproductive Justice: Centering reproductive justice in the work for abolition



Surge is a reproductive justice organization for Black women, women of color, and queer and transgender people of color. The King County-based organization focuses on three areas of work: birth justice, community-directed policymaking, and bodily autonomy.



(Photo courtesy of Surge Reproductive Justice)

Surge identifies as an abolitionist organization. “A lot of times people ask us: What is the connection between reproductive justice and abolition?” said Executive Director Jackie Vaughn, who shared that the organization uses an analysis from scholar and abolitionist Angela Davis. “She starts with the prison industrial complex and talks about the violence and racism that is fundamental to that institution, but how it has also permeated all the institutions in the U.S. We also try to bring in the lens of gender-based violence. It’s gender-based violence compounded with racism that we see working in these institutions.”

Vaughn continued, “There is a level of gender-based violence and racism in the prison industrial complex that we see for birthing people. It is often something people don’t think about, that there are pregnant people in prison. We also don’t think about the same gender-based violence and racism that we know is happening in the prisons is also happening to pregnant people. We do a lot of work at Surge through education and in our coalitions to expand the idea of abolition beyond the prison industrial complex. We bring in education around the medical industrial complex and what that is doing to our communities, to our Black birthing people, our families, and their babies.”

Vaughn stressed the power of communities creating a new way forward. “For us, abolition is not just about the tearing down, it’s about the building up. Our work around Medicaid reimbursement for doulas—we see that as the building up of our own institutions. As much of the birthing process that we can take out of the medical industrial complex, we want to invest in that and make sure there is funding and support for BIPOC doulas from their communities to serve their communities.”

“

***For us, abolition is not just about the tearing down, it’s about the building up.”***

*Jackie Vaughn  
Surge Reproductive Justice*

Through technical assistance and staff capacity, Surge supports the Decriminalize Seattle Coalition, which has been successful at changing the narrative of what public safety means and the need for government to invest in community and divest from policing. Surge and those organizing with Decriminalize Seattle are following the guidance of Aaron Dixon, a long-time leader in Seattle’s African-American community who was the co-founder and captain of Seattle’s Black Panther chapter and who grew up in the city’s Central District.

## Surge Reproductive Justice *(continued)*



“It’s what [Dixon] calls the 75-25 rule,” explained Vaughn. “Seventy-five percent of the time we need to be working to build the world that we are trying to live in, and 25 percent of the time taking down systems that are inherently racist. When I think about the 75-25 rule in the work of abolition, the 75 is the work we are doing to end dependence on systems, and that we have what we need as community. How do we work to reclaim the money that belongs to us and use it for what we know our communities know how to do best? It is about peer-support, peer-led programs. It is about programs that are run by those in the community that they serve. There is a lot of emphasis on investing in community-led work as ultimately a path to abolition. The more we invest in community-run, peer-led work, then the less we are going to depend on these systems. We can spend all our time trying to take down these systems or reinvest the money to do what we know best.”

Last fall, Surge launched a community-directed policy initiative called “Our Words Build Power.” The campaign is rooted in a community-led research process. “Community-directed policy challenges power dynamics. We are focusing more on the process and not just the outcomes. We are working to show our community that at the end of the day, they are the ones who should be driving and directing policy. We want to break down this notion that you need a lobbyist, you need a policy director, you need somebody to do it for you. We are facilitators, and we mean that in the most absolute way. We are here to support and facilitate the leadership that already exists.”

*(Photo courtesy of Surge Reproductive Justice)*





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# CARING AND LEADING DURING A PANDEMIC

*(Photo courtesy of Mel Ponder Photography / UTOPIA)*



# Caring and leading during a pandemic

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare a reality that Black, Indigenous, and other people of color have known and experience daily: Institutional racism is killing our communities. Throughout the pandemic, organizations have been powerful advocates, even as they respond to urgent needs. Communities who were already experiencing the brunt of systems failures and inequities in employment, housing, incarceration, and isolation, experienced these impacts at a much deeper level.

The number of roles community organizations take on—as service providers, connectors, information brokers, policy designers, and so much more—is both a testament to their power and further evidence of a system that overburdens our communities. A strong civil society is important to health equity, but generations of racism, underinvestment, and privatization have left communities to fend for themselves and be at the mercy of trickle-down philanthropy. As a result, organizations have been stretching their resources to provide public aid that should have otherwise come from local, state, or federal government.

In the wake of this reality, community members supporting each other are critical lifelines. The Washington COVID-19 Immigrant Relief Fund, led by young Latinx organizers who are or were undocumented, exemplified the leadership and power of community—especially when systems fall short. These volunteer organizers, who are part of the Washington Dream Coalition (WDC), knew that they could not rely on the government to support undocumented people and families.

WDC quickly partnered with the Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network (WAISN), Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, Scholarship Junkies, and others to raise more than \$6 million dollars in relief money by individual donors. They then harnessed that power to pressure state government to set up a



***This is not charity work, this is mutual aid.”***

*Alejandra Pérez*  
*Washington Dream Coalition*

\$300 million fund for undocumented families of all races. “This is not charity work, this is mutual aid,” one of the coalition members, Alejandra Pérez, told the *South Seattle Emerald* in July 2020.

The compounding impacts of racism could also be seen in the numerous ways that communities are living through the pandemic. “With COVID originating in China, it led to increased cases nationally of hate crimes committed against Asian Americans,” said Brian Lock, co-chair of Asian Pacific Islander Coalition of South Puget Sound (APIC-SPS) based in Thurston County. “The already volatile racial tension was also exacerbated by the killing of George Floyd in May, as well as other high-profile, police-involved shootings of Black Americans. The API community was still facing some issues of intense racial tension involving law enforcement after the Tommy Le shooting and other shootings involving Pacific Islander teens.”

In addition to hosting their first “Dialogue on Race” event in September, APIC-SPS provided critical advocacy for emergency grants for families in need, resources for undocumented residents, and small business support for those who may not be familiar of how to access emergency loans or grants.

Across the state, community organizations have been essential centers of both racial justice and COVID-19-related advocacy, while developing networks of mutual aid to support community members. Networks of care have also been vitally important by organizing funding for basic needs, providing legal support, implementing communications campaigns, and mobilizing the government to act.

# Pacific County Immigrant Support:

*Serving the undocumented community*



**Many of the families that we support were unemployed and could not receive stimulus payments or unemployment compensation. We received a large number of calls for assistance.**

*Kendra Williams-Reyes  
Pacific County Immigrant Support*

Pacific County Immigrant Support (PCIS) works with families in Southwest Washington. The organization mobilizes support for basic needs and legal defense required by undocumented immigrant families threatened by arrest, detention, and deportation by ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement).

Pacific County is a major shellfish production and processing center on the Washington coast, and host to a thriving commercial fisheries industry. PCIS supports families affected by ICE raids by raising funds to help with basic needs, attending hearings at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, providing deportation defense, and accompanying community members to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services appointments and court hearings.

PCIS shared the direct impacts of federal policies on the local community before the pandemic hit. Nine people were arrested by ICE in January and February 2020. PCIS' legal defense fund provided for payment of legal services. "We were able to connect detainees with proven, effective attorneys and pay most of the attorney fees for all of them, and we paid all or part of bonds for six people. We also helped many other people who had been arrested in prior years to make their final attorney payments and pay for application fees for work permits and cancellation of removal," said PCIS President Ann Reeves.

The impact of the pandemic was felt deeply by undocumented families, with the need for direct services as the canneries and other places of employment closed. PCIS Secretary Kendra Williams-Reyes shared, "Many of the families that we support were unemployed and could not receive stimulus payments or unemployment compensation. We received a large number of calls for assistance. We began an online fundraising campaign and successfully received over \$30,000 in donations."

In addition to providing direct outreach through WAISN for the Washington COVID-19 Immigrant Relief Fund, PCIS brought on a new volunteer to lead coalition building with the faith community, business community, and allied organizations. They also subcontracted with five Spanish-speaking promotoras to connect with immigrant community members to share information on rent relief, resulting in more than 100 families submitting applications for rental assistance. This direct connection to community allowed for the organization to meaningfully respond to evolving needs.



*(Image courtesy of Pacific County Immigrant Support)*

# UTOPIA:

## Securing safety for queer and transgender Pacific Islander communities



The United Territories of Pacific Islanders Alliance (UTOPIA) is an organization led and founded by women of color identifying as transgender and/or Fa’afafine, a cultural gender identity native to Samoa that means “in the manner of a woman.” Since 2009, UTOPIA has worked with Queer Transgender Pacific Islander (QTPI) leaders to create a safe, welcoming, supportive space for community members to address basic needs and advocate for social justice, education, and overall wellness among members of the Pacific Islander LGBTQ+ community in Washington.

Systemic racism, heterosexism, and transphobia have exacerbated the impacts of COVID-19 on communities of color. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities are experiencing some of the highest rates of COVID-19 across the state, yet have had the least access to resources and vaccines. In many cases, the entire population has been left out of COVID-19 plans and strategies, despite having the highest infection rates.



(Photo courtesy of Mel Ponder Photography / UTOPIA)

UTOPIA works with Pacific Islanders in the sex industry by providing testing kits, HIV prevention and screening, contraceptives, and other healthcare resources. Executive Director Taffy Johnson shared, “Before COVID, sex workers were impacted by social isolation, criminalization, intimate-partner sexual violence, and lack of access to healthcare and mental health support. These conditions have been exacerbated by the global pandemic.”

To address immediate needs, UTOPIA distributed over \$100,000 in emergency financial assistance through a QTPI Relief Fund and 600 boxes of food curbside from their office. The fund allows for people to pay for rent, utilities, food, medical supplies, and other essential needs. “The fund broadly accepts applications from LGBTQ+ Pacific Islanders and other people of color, with a focus on providing stability for sex workers and those most impacted by violence and health disparities,” said Johnson.

Through street-level outreach, UTOPIA served more than 300 QTPI and other queer and transgender people of color with essential health and safety resources. The organization also recognized the need for mental health support and held five Talanoa Dialogues on issues impacting community members, such as QTPI mental health and safety during COVID-19. Talanoa means “open,” “inclusive,” or “transparent.”

At the outset of 2020, UTOPIA had a goal of growing their Trans Leadership Cohort, a program supporting the leadership and organizing skills of 32 QTPI leaders. As UTOPIA grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on their community, they saw a clear connection between the cohort and the ability to address the community’s immediate needs.

“All of UTOPIA’s emergency response work has integrated with and built off our regular programming,” said Johnson. “The Trans Leadership Cohort has had a role reaching out to impacted QTPI, assessing the areas of need, and planning campaign strategy. Our cohort is deeply grateful for the opportunity to be in community with one another working towards a collective purpose.”

# People First of Washington:

## Ensuring people with disabilities stay connected



People First of Washington is a statewide self-advocacy organization led by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities working for self-determination, self-advocacy, and inclusion. The organization has more than 30 chapters across Washington with an elected state board of directors that oversees a small group of paid staff.



The year 2020 brought tremendous growth for People First of Washington, from one to four full-time staff in a matter of a year. This growth happened alongside the pandemic, which restricted the ability of people to gather safely. “Increasing access to the community and limiting isolation are issues of concern for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities that have been amplified by the pandemic,” said Program Administrator Krista Milhofer.

Deep relationships and trust with members positioned the organization to quickly adjust and meet the community’s needs. Over a six-month period, People First of Washington was able to provide more than \$50,000 in personal technology to self-advocates across Washington, helping members stay connected with family, friends, and one another. The online coordinator was hired to support people to learn how to use the technology and create their own virtual community. The organization also moved their annual conference to a virtual platform, celebrating 42 years of gathering.



People First of Washington members focus on issues that impact their daily lives. The ability of many to connect with one another online across the state ensured continued engagement and movement on several legislative efforts. They include taking on the implementation processes of bills for caregiver protection, client rights, and the ability for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to choose to live in small community settings or with their families.

They are also at work on potential legislation, titled “Nothing About Us Without Us,” which would require people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are at the table when decisions impacting them are being made. People First of Washington has begun to partner more closely with other disability-led organizations. They have joint legislative agendas and strengthened their relationships through shared resources and support.

*People First of Washington lost two board members in 2020, Shannon Benjamin of Yakima (top) and Tony Hall of Shoreline (bottom). Shannon was a passionate supporter of gay rights, employment, and inclusion. Tony was a passionate advocate for criminal justice reform, self-determination, and inclusion. We honor their lives and their work and are grateful for the legacy of their organizing. (Photos courtesy of People First of Washington)*

# Lake Roosevelt Community Health Centers:

## *Creating a community hub*



The Lake Roosevelt Community Health Centers are located on the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation in the town of Inchelium, a rural community along the shores of Lake Roosevelt and in the nearby town Keller. The Inchelium Community Health Center and the San Poil Valley Community Health Center clinics are owned and operated by the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. Tribal health clinics provide care for Native and non-Native community members in Ferry and surrounding counties. In many places tribal health clinics serve as the primary health care provider and as a central hub for the community.

Over the last year, tribal health clinics faced enormous financial strain while working overtime to respond to the needs of the community. The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation experienced both the impacts of the pandemic and the impact of the wildfires in their communities. In September 2020, the Cold Springs Fire and Inchelium Complex Fires destroyed over 200,000 acres, 80 homes, hundreds of miles of fence and electric lines, and thousands of acres of timber.

Facing the impacts of the wildfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, staff of the Lake Roosevelt Community Health Centers came together and worked overtime and on weekends to provide essential medical and behavioral care. Staff shared their concerns about the threat of COVID-19 to the community and the need to focus attention on protecting the elders. As of December, the Tribe had conducted nearly 1,500 COVID-19 tests in the Inchelium Clinic, which serves 2,700 unique patients a year and more than 200 tests at the San Poil Valley clinic.

In December, Joseph Pakootas, CEO of the Lake Roosevelt Community Health Centers, shared that there were 51 positive cases in their community. They had recently conducted nearly 100 tests in one day. “We’re working to do our best to respond quickly to what we’re learning about the virus,” he said. The leadership that the Tribe showed in its testing has continued in vaccine response. The Lake Roosevelt Community Health Centers received its vaccines directly from Indian Health Service at the end of December. Since then, the Tribe has led in its vaccine distribution efforts with some of the highest vaccination rates in the state.

“We will continue to fight this virus and protect our community and do our part to stop this pandemic,” said Pakootas.

*(Photo courtesy of Lake Roosevelt Community Health Centers)*



## NAACP Snohomish County: Caring by filling in service gaps



The NAACP Snohomish County is a Black-led organization working to ensure equitable outcomes and the protection of civil rights for people of African descent and other people of color communities. Serving Snohomish County, the organization provides volunteer-driven programs that are focused on education, advocacy, economic development, health, legal redress, political action, and youth development.

In 2020, the organization leased space at the Everett Labor Temple for a family and community support center designed for the community to have a place to gather, hold meetings, and work on their priorities. While the organization couldn't gather inside the building because of the pandemic, they were able to use the space to anchor their work through the last year, including holding voter registration drives in the parking lot.



President and CEO Dr. Janice Greene shared the importance of political organizing to their work. “One of the things on the top of our list is political organizing, making sure that we get people who are sympathetic to what our positions are, our lived experience, what we deal with on a day-to-day basis.” In June 2020, Greene penned an open statement outlining a set of demands for accountability by city and county law enforcement.

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**“One of the things on the top of our list is political organizing, making sure that we get people who are sympathetic to what our positions are, our lived experience, what we deal with on a day-to-day basis.”**

*Dr. Janice Greene*  
NAACP Snohomish County

It is this leadership that continues to garner trust. Community members have turned to the organization for support throughout the pandemic. Over the last year, the NAACP Snohomish County responded by providing \$50,000 in COVID Assistance Funds to households in need. “We filled in gaps. If you couldn't pay for your prescription or you couldn't pay your PUD [public utility district], then we would do it. As we got to talk to people, we got to learn a little more about what's impacting them,” she said.

Greene noted the difficulty of mass vaccination sites being a two-hour bus ride away from where most Black community members live. They are working to bring a clinic closer and more centrally located to BIPOC communities in the county. The organization is currently in conversations with local institutions about providing vaccine clinics for the communities they serve.



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# BUILDING COLLECTIVE WEALTH

*(Photo courtesy of Wa Na Wari)*

# Building collective wealth

Communities are organizing to strengthen community ownership of land and build collective wealth. These efforts build political power, change the material conditions of people's lives, and ensure the ability for communities to self-determine.

Leaders have stressed the need to move away from narratives about prosperity that uphold white wealth as the model for Black and brown people to emulate through “wealth gap closing.” The conversation, communities are saying, should include naming the impacts of policy decisions that perpetuate wealth extraction from communities of color. This includes an acknowledgement of American capitalism's violent and deadly origins—especially toward Indigenous communities and enslaved African people—and how it connects to wealth extraction today.

Organizations point to the many structural drivers that have led to the withdrawal of wealth from communities and the role systemic racism plays: from mass incarceration and a public revenue system reliant on carceral system fines and fees, to anti-trust laws and a borrowing market that preys on or denies Black and brown homeowners and entrepreneurs. Philanthropy also has a hand in these inequities by hoarding wealth that has been twice stolen: through free or underpaid labor and then again through tax shelters. Health equity requires government and philanthropy to recognize our moral responsibility to return wealth to BIPOC communities.

Organizations shared with us their values for community wealth building. Foremost is the value placed on people, specifically the lives of Black, Indigenous and other people of color. This includes values of interdependence, regeneration, agency, and collective well-being. We've been fortunate enough to learn from efforts that are telling us this paradigm shift is what's needed to truly address inequity in the United States.

Leaders have also shared how community ownership and decision making is directly tied to community self-

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*The moral devaluation of Black lives has been ingrained in the American political economy.”*

*Freedom Scholar Dr. Darrick Hamilton, during a presentation for Group Health Foundation, September 2020*

determination. “When we talk about community health, when we talk about community wealth, when we are talking about issues of ownership, all these things are interconnected,” said Wa Na Wari Co-founder Inye Wokoma. “We recognize that having the agency over the land and imagining how we need to use that land for the collective well-being are central.”

We are learning from organizations using grant funding to initiate land and property purchases or for the last mile of a capital campaign or acquisition project. Others have pursued land and title transfers from government agencies to community organizations and land trusts, which has been an increasingly successful strategy after decades-long demands.

In other cases, organizations are imagining future capital campaigns, and more are developing ideas for cooperative ownership of community centers and affordable housing to address displacement. The following organizations are two of many groups across Washington who are leading a vision around what building collective wealth means to transform the material reality for communities, build political power, and transform relationships of value.



# Wa Na Wari:

## Strengthening community connection through culture



Wa Na Wari, a Black-led organization in Seattle’s Central District, creates space for Black ownership, possibility, and belonging through art, historic preservation, and connection. Wa Na Wari is building a model of community land use to shift public policy, making it easier for Black families to keep their homes while creating new cultural spaces that rebuild community connections weakened by gentrification and displacement.

The organization opened in 2019 in a fifth-generation Black-owned home of Co-founder Inye Wokoma’s grandmother. “I began to pull on my experience in art and media and community activism to try and think of creative ways to bring in the kind of resources my grandmother would need to retain her home,” Wokoma shared. The entire house is dedicated to art, culture, and organizing work. Additionally, Wa Na Wari is working on acquiring a two-story duplex near the home.

The funds generated from the space ensured Wokoma’s grandmother could remain in her home with full-time care. She passed in September, surrounded by family in her home. Now, Wa Na Wari is working to purchase the home. It is a collaborative campaign effort to raise the funds to purchase, renovate, and activate the entire property on which the house sits.



*(Photo courtesy of Wa Na Wari)*

In the 1970s, Black people were 80 percent of Seattle’s Central District; today, they are less than 14 percent of residents. “In the wake of displacement from the Central District, Wa Na Wari emerged at a moment, when for most folks, it felt like there was no hope for Black folks to ever have community life in Seattle ever again, and a minority of folks in the Black community were doggedly working to keep that possibility alive,” said Wokoma.

Wa Na Wari also launched the Central Area Cultural EcoSystem, 21st Century (CACE 21), an organizing initiative that brings together Black Central District homeowners and Black artists to advocate for land use policies that create more cultural spaces. Partners include King County Equity Now, Africatown Community Land Trust, Rainier Beach Action Coalition, Keep Your Habitat, West Coast Poverty Center, and the University of Washington.

“These organizations are committed to solutions around anti-displacement, land and economic justice, equitable urban planning, community-led innovation hubs, and collective land ownership. That they have been willing to join our partnership network underscores the power of reimagining single-family homes as community spaces, as places of possibility where ideas can be generated for the future,” said Wokoma.

The work of Wa Na Wari addresses collective wealth building by centralizing community and culture. “We think about ownership and land in an American capitalist framework, as it relates to deeds and legal rights,” said Wokoma. “But, when we and our partners talk about collective ownership, we talk about community connections, family connections, our collective welfare, our mutual aid, our shared destiny. We talk about where we imagine ourselves going together, and how these spaces help facilitate that. It really is about that collective sense, that relational way we have in our community.”

# Community to Community Development:

## *Nurturing a solidarity economy*



Community to Community Development (C2C) is a grassroots, women of color-led organization dedicated to food sovereignty and farmworker and immigrant rights. Their work is structured in three program areas: participatory democracy, food justice, and movement building with the vision that everyone should have equitable access to the fundamental democratic processes that affect their everyday lives.

Core to their vision is work to build a solidarity economy, where farmworkers decide how to and what to produce. C2C has successfully developed farmworker-owned, cooperative farm, and food businesses, as well as the distribution of land and other capital assets to those businesses. Since 2017, Tierra y Libertad, the farmworker-owned cooperative they developed, has operated a 65-acre community farm in Whatcom County. Through this effort, the cooperative includes housing for five immigrant farmworker families of Mexican Indigenous descent, who cooperatively own and operate the farm based on the traditional ejido model of community ownership.

*(Photo courtesy of Community to Community Development)*



C2C played an important role in supporting and continuing to organize alongside Familias Unidas por la Justicia (FUJ), an independent farmworker union of Indigenous families in Burlington, representing more than 500 Triqui-, Mixteco-, and Spanish-speaking workers at Sakuma Brothers Berry Farm. FUJ is the first union led by Indigenous workers.

C2C is currently part of a statewide base-building effort to strengthen the farmworker organizing infrastructure. In spring 2020, C2C and FUJ organizers and promotoras were invited by striking workers to join them at Allan Brother's fruit processing plant in Naches. While there, strikes took off at five additional companies in the Yakima Valley. Workers demanded transparency from the companies about the spread of COVID-19 at the plants and other actions to protect them. "Our new base-building goal is to identify and support farmworker leadership in the four corners of the state," Executive Director Rosalinda Guillen shared. The pandemic hasn't dimmed the work of the group.

"As we transition to COVID-19 recovery, our efforts to provoke a just transition to a solidarity economy become all the more urgent," she said. "No matter the electoral situation in Washington, the redistribution of wealth and power to the Latinx and Indigenous, immigrant community will be provoked by themselves, because they are the only ones who can guide us to the 180-degree change in approach to policy and systematic change that will be required to achieve this. We see only two polar outcomes: either a continued stratification of wealth and power that excludes communities of color and continues to erode the social and democratic fabric of the U.S., or the new normal and the world that can be possible because our constituents have been empowered to create these changes."



# Reclaiming what systems change means

Comunidades organizes with White Salmon residents against evictions. (Photo courtesy of Ubaldo Hernández / Comunidades)



A healthy society that is centered on well-being, human connection, interdependence, and inclusive democracy requires agency and self-determination. It requires that Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, people with disabilities, immigrant and refugees, LGBTQ+ people, and people living with low incomes are a part of naming, defining, imagining, and determining our systems and public narratives. An inclusive democracy calls for decision makers to not only reflect the community, but to be the community.

We have learned how organizations led by those most impacted by inequity are building political power through building movements.

## ***Political advocacy is rooted in local experiences and local relationships.***

Those closest to an issue are closest to the solutions. Hamdi Abdulle of African Community Housing Development observed that funders have too often separated organizations that provide direct services from those that do civic engagement and political advocacy. “We couldn’t do advocacy without serving our community’s basic needs,” she said. During our 2019-20 grantmaking, we talked with BIPOC leaders of organizations providing culturally specific and cross-racial support for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault; people who are unhoused, have been displaced, or struggle as renters; LGBTQ+ young people; and other communities. We heard powerful examples of how they are working to fill gaps left by government and mobilizing for political power and systems change.

### ***Building long-term change requires healing and culture.***

Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment, an organization led by Nez Perce tribal members, works to protect treaty areas, educate tribal members and youth on current environmental issues, and develop next generation leadership on environment justice.

Julian Matthews, a board member and coordinator, shared the importance of cultural knowledge and cultural teachings to the work. Since the pandemic, the organization has worked to bring supplies to residents while continuing their political and cultural education work virtually. “We have been doing Zoom meetings on the canoe project, dam removal/breaching, water quality issues, forestry issues, and other treaty issues that have or are being impacted by the federal or state governments on the land, air, forests, and water,” said Matthews.



***We couldn't do advocacy without serving our community's basic needs.”***

**Hamdi Abdulle**

*African Community Housing Development*

### ***Support existing community leadership.***

Comunidades is a Latino/a/x-led organization working to amplify voices in Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities on environmental and social justice in White Salmon. The organization builds on the inherent leadership of community and supports people in testifying and advocating at city council meetings, where they won stronger protections for White Salmon residents living in mobile home communities. “Before the residents showed up, the only people who attended the city council meetings were developers, real estate agents, and people who owned a lot of properties,” said Ubaldo Hernández. “It’s how systemic racism persists and how discriminatory practices against low-income people and people of color happen.” Throughout the last year, Comunidades has continued their work of supporting communities in Klickitat and Skamania counties through COVID-19 relief funds. They have also begun training residents on community journalism to ensure residents are becoming a part of the local news source and sharing stories that are too frequently overlooked by mainstream news media.

### ***Bring in multiple strategies, including legal avenues.***

Groups have been working within shoestring budgets to bring in legal support to take on institutions and systems that perpetuate harm and exclusion. Others shared their hopes to address civil rights violations, but they lacked the financial resources to bring suit or identify attorneys who might help. Even as numerous state and federal cases have been brought by impact litigation organizations and attorneys helping to advance community aspirations, we do not see sufficient resources being marshalled to support all the needs.

### ***Time is required to build relationships across groups.***

Organizations noted the number of ways they are partnering with one another and the importance of being able to take the time to build trust and relationships. We continue to learn the importance of providing groups the space and time to connect with one another, create new relationships, and deepen existing ones.



***Before the residents showed up, the only people who attended the city council meetings were developers, real estate agents, and people who owned a lot of properties.”***

**Ubaldo Hernández**

*Comunidades*

# CAFÉ:

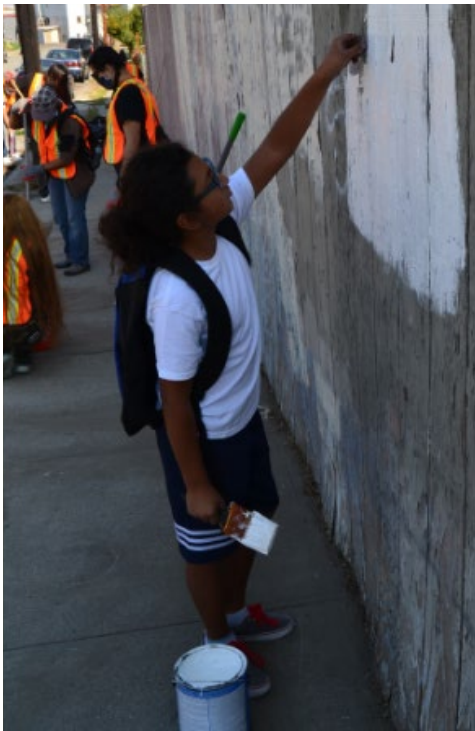
## Supporting civic leaders and fostering engagement



The Community for the Advancement of Family Education (CAFÉ) is based in Wenatchee and serves Chelan and Douglas counties. CAFÉ works with community residents on leadership development, civic and social engagement, literacy development, and academic advancement. Latinos are one-third of residents in Chelan and Douglas counties. CAFÉ advocates at the local and state levels on issues impacting the Latino community, including voting rights, education policy, and wildfire response.



The organization has carried out intentional efforts to ensure Latino representation in local government. Co-founder Alma Chacón shared, “CAFÉ has focused on getting information and communication to the Spanish-speaking Latino community to have a voice at the local level, state level, and national level. We think about how we can get people informed and engaged.”



CAFÉ has been instrumental in removing systemic barriers to reflective representation in local government. They were involved in a redistricting committee, which ultimately led to structural changes in how the community members were represented. “The City of Wenatchee moved to a five-district council, enabling our communities in the south end to have a voice where before that wasn’t possible. We were able to elect the first Latino into the city council, which is a big gain for us. That wouldn’t have happened without advocacy and civic engagement in our communities to make sure people voted and had their voice heard,” said Chacón.

In 2020, CAFÉ’s work focused on supporting families affected by COVID-19, ensuring a complete census count, and leading voter engagement and registration. “This year we really worked in getting youth involved. They turned out for phone banking and registering people to vote,” said Chacón. “We did a voter’s guide in Spanish. We had a large Latino turnout this year. We have very few Latinos in office and part of the work that we are doing is saying, how do we build that leadership.”



CAFÉ also partnered with other local Latino organizations and coalitions to support the immediate needs of residents impacted by wildfires, including farmworkers displaced by the Pearl Hill and Cold Springs fires. There are two cohorts of members who are working on fire response through the Washington Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network. “We’re working with community partners to plan and make sure emergency response information is available in languages people understand. We’re making sure people have the information, and they receive communications they need to move forward and to be prepared for emergencies.”

*(Photos courtesy of CAFÉ)*

# Mariposa House:

## Bringing community together to address interpersonal violence



Mariposa House provides shelter, advocacy-based counseling, and other services for people who have experienced domestic violence and sexual assault. The organization is home to projects and partnerships working to strengthen racial equity and community connection in west Clallam County.

For the past few years, Mariposa House has worked to build the Northwest Coast Tribal Partnership, which includes representatives from the Quileute Tribe, Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, Hoh Tribe, Makah Tribe, and Quinault Indian Nation. Northwest Coast Tribal Partnership Coordinator and Legal Advocate Beverly Lee shared that the genesis of the partnership came from Mariposa House’s mission to serve individuals facing violence. “Through our learning, we decided we need to take a broader look at systems and engage the community more than systems, to look for solutions,” Lee said.



(Photo courtesy of Mariposa House)

Through the partnership, Mariposa House works with tribal programs addressing interpersonal violence with an understanding of trauma and resilience and the importance of community in addressing these factors. Tribal programs are building shared messaging and supporting each other’s work. Over the last year, the partnership has outlined five bodies of work to carry out in 2021, including development of support groups and talking circles, a culture camp curriculum, school-based life and social skills training, advocating for low-income housing, and organizing youth councils. “We believe together we can make a larger impact,” Lee shared.

Mariposa House is also working on Community Café, a project that brings together Native American, immigrant community members, and other people of color using culture and capacity building to work on advocacy and increase people of color and younger people’s representation in city, county, and state political decision-making power. Executive Director Ann Simpson shared, “Most of this group has experienced family violence, many have experienced the deportation or detainment of loved ones, some have experienced criminalization or the criminalization of family members. These are people who know what they are looking at, believe deeply in the value of community and the importance of culture, and have the determination and fortitude to keep moving.”

Leaders shared the changes they have seen over the last year. Attention is being given to issues impacting their communities that had before been overlooked. Simpson shared one example: “Port Angeles, the county seat, has really come around on the need for housing and on issues of homelessness. They have it on the agenda to look at how the county can leverage the power they have with economic development and the parts that are under their wing.”

Relationships continue to play a critical role in Mariposa House’s work as they adapt to using technology. “You don’t realize the importance of having something until you can’t have it,” said Lee. “Just being able to gather, eat meals, just be around each other was so amazing. When we have Zoom meetings, it is so good to see each other. We share something personal or professional to still have that connection with each other about what’s in your hearts and minds.”



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# LESSONS WE'VE LEARNED AS FUNDERS



# Lessons we've learned as funders

We have shared major themes of work and ways organizations are advancing health equity. There are also lessons we are heeding as a new foundation that is working to remain true to our values and centering the leadership of those most impacted. Many of these lessons were offered to us during one-on-one meetings with Group Health Foundation staff and at our first convening that brought more than 200 people from 100 grantee organizations together to virtually connect and build relationships.

## ***Provide multiyear, unrestricted general operating dollars.***

We heard early on, and continue to hear, that even three years isn't enough to truly invest in the long-term ability of organizations.

## ***Continue funding for Black-led organizing.***

Many leaders shared that they received an influx of dollars last year because racial justice was front and center in the public's consciousness. Pointing to philanthropy's past behaviors, organizations do not expect, and are preparing for, grants to dry up in 2021. The need for racial justice organizing won't go away, but funding will if our sector's commitment wavers with the news cycle.

## ***Understand that BIPOC communities are not monolithic and holding multiple identities could mean compounding oppressions.***

This was shared through a few examples. Leaders talked about the importance of acknowledging Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders as their own community rather than making them invisible by grouping them with the broader "Asian Pacific Islander" racial category. We heard from Muslim leaders about the need to acknowledge the thriving Black Muslim community and, relatedly, how anti-Blackness and police violence impacts Muslim people. Our overall understanding must also extend beyond race alone and include other identities. For example, BIPOC queer and transgender-led organizations shared they receive very little funding due to the compounding impacts of racism and transphobia.

## ***Pay attention to and be proactive in supporting an equitable recovery from the pandemic.***

Leaders stressed funding for advocacy is critical to ensure that people and communities facing compounding inequities have what they need to not only survive, but also thrive. Additionally, organizations want to avoid being in a constant mode of crisis, and are instead asking for multiyear, sustainable funding, not just grants to fight "small fires." Such reactionary grantmaking is how philanthropy keeps the status quo in place.

*An aerial view of Downtown Pasco, where we plan to open a Tri-Cities office in 2021.*



**Recognize how leaders and organizations are working to address civil rights through legal strategies.**

Groups said their small budgets don't allow for legal support to bring complaints against entities such as school districts. Others shared they want to do more to address civil rights violations, but they lacked the financial resources to bring a lawsuit or identify legal practitioners who could help. Even as organizations have brought forward numerous state and federal cases, philanthropic funding is not keeping pace.

**Continue to learn the language and landscape of all of Washington.**

This includes understanding what it looks like to truly become a statewide organization. As a Washington funder, we are working to improve our understanding of how organizations describe and reflect a statewide approach. Our definition includes the organizations we have met who are acutely aware of the need to be accountable to a geographically reflective staff, leadership, networks, and constituencies—even when that is hard to accomplish. We have also been called to understand a different definition of “statewide” as it applies to grantees, which may include both statewide organizations and a diverse group of organizations working in localities throughout Washington who collectively represent a meaningful perspective on policies, systems, and priorities.

**Know the dialects of Washington.**

Some of the language our sector uses most —like “systems change,” “public policy advocacy,” and even “health equity”—do not have common meaning among communities throughout Washington. Conversations with grant recipients have confirmed that we cannot be the best supporters of their work unless we have a shared understanding of what we are communicating.

**Prioritize understanding intersecting identities of race, place, disability, and more.**

Our practice to be equitable by geography demands we seek out learning, relationships, and grantees of various lived identities throughout the state. Inequities are compounding. Addressing the lack of consistent resources flowing to small towns and rural places by funding only mainstream, historically white, non-disabled organizations does not address how people of color, disabled, and queer people living in rural places face tremendous health, economic, and social disparities. We must continue pushing to identify and fund organizations led by and serving people with more diverse intersecting identities in rural places. If we are not able to accomplish this across our work over the next few years, we risk contributing to these local inequities ourselves. Failing to recognize and honor this risks the accidental perpetuation of exclusion that keeps political and economic power away from those who need it most.

We remain committed to building a foundation that leads with relationships. We are thankful to all the leaders and organizations who are allowing us to learn from them and their work.

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**Foundation leaders need to allocate funds to the groups working on the ground to build new forms of safety, care, and self-determination—and they need to trust that those organizations know how to get the job done.”**

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*Freedom Scholars Dr. Megan Ming Francis and Dr. Erica Kohl-Arenas in “Philanthropy is Once Again Undermining Racial Justice Movement” (The Chronicle of Philanthropy, 2020)*

*Closing:*

## **Our strategy will be shaped by every relationship we build**



*A morning scene in Vantage taken by our colleague Peng Wang.*

Our team has started an extraordinary learning journey over our first few years. With our previous report, *A Year on the Road*, and now *Powerful Communities*, we have two comprehensive documents to guide our foundation forward.

The next few years will be critical as our state heads into pandemic recovery. With the fast-changing nature of this work, our team will share more frequently throughout the year, instead of an annual report such as this. We will also keep exploring the four themes outlined in this report because there are so many additional insights and stories to elevate and amplify.

We will also continue to listen and learn. As a foundation grounded in community wisdom, we are committed to ongoing discovery and dedicated to sharing knowledge. Publishing what we learn is one way we hold ourselves accountable because what we learn is what informs our work. We also hope that by making this information available, all of us could become better and more respectful supporters of communities and organizations throughout the state.

Thank you again for reading. And, most importantly, thank you to the organizations who have connected with us over the first few years. We continue to believe that change can happen and our strategy will be shaped by every relationship we build. Our team looks forward to continuing this journey with you.

## GROUP HEALTH FOUNDATION

### ***About Group Health Foundation***

*Group Health Foundation aims to shape and accelerate efforts to improve health equity and advance community aspirations for a vibrant, healthy future in Washington. Through relationship building, grantmaking, and advocacy, the Foundation works to foster conditions where people—especially those experiencing economic, political, or social injustice—can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. For more, visit [grouphealthfoundation.org](https://grouphealthfoundation.org).*

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