

More than just funding.

Building an inclusive movement by shifting power at the community level
& across Environmental Justice philanthropy.



GRASS 2021 STLOOR ANNUAL FUND REPORT



Fostering
Innovation
through Grants



Amplifying
Voices



Convening
Changemakers



Revolutionizing
Philanthropy

PRESENTED BY THE NEW ENGLAND GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENT FUND, INC.

Welcome!

Over this past year, we saw communities continue to step up to respond directly to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, racist violence, economic injustices, and climate chaos throughout New England. Local organizers - from those who began their community work as response to the pandemic to those who have been organizing for years - have (re)committed to intentionally shifting their projects from being grounded in charity to being grounded in mutual aid and solidarity. For the Grassroots Fund, this movement in the behaviors, attitudes, and values that are implemented through the day-to-day actions of community-based efforts, are reflected in our Guiding Practices – Rooted Innovation, Shifting Power in Decision-making, Equity in Participation, and Centering a Just Transition.

We know the work in operationalizing the Guiding Practices is not easy as there is not one approach that works in all contexts. Conditions change and that may necessitate internal shifts to be able to respond appropriately. Groups may not always align internally on best approaches and that can create tension but also opportunities for creativity and better alignment on how to carry out values. The framework of the Guiding Practices offers language and structure to better reflect as a group how values can show up and how to implement the principles behind Environmental Justice so that we can create the infrastructure and projects that lead to the change our communities need. This requires being open and flexible, and being able to respond to feedback and ideas. This is true both for the groups we support as well as for our own Grassroots Fund programs and processes.

In 2021, we expanded our participatory review process to our Seed grant program, which now invites Community Grant Readers - frontline organizers with the lived experience of addressing environmental injustices - to discuss and review grant proposals from newly formed grassroots groups. This program provided funding to 55 mostly new and mostly all-volunteer groups who are testing new project ideas and group norms. The Seed grant program continues to provide a quick turnaround for funding and with this new launch, Community Grant Readers provide grant applicants with deeper feedback on how projects align with the Guiding Practices at a time when the effort is still newly forming.

We also launched the Northeast Food System Resilience Fund and the Greater Boston based Community-Led Climate Resilience cohorts, two year-long learning cohorts that will participate in one round of a shared gifting circle in 2022. Our shared gifting circle structure will bring together a group of individuals who will collectively distribute a pool of funding. These are both pilot projects for the Grassroots Fund, and were intentionally developed from feedback we were hearing from grassroots organizers on the need for more spaces to build relationships with peer organizers and for funders to support efforts tackling systemic injustices. We're excited to share more learning from these cohorts throughout the year and invite you to read more about the cohorts and the participatory Seed process in this report.

And lastly, you may have heard that the Grassroots Fund has undergone a leadership change at the start of 2022. After seven years as executive director, Julia Dundorf has stepped back into a development strategist role, as Sarah Huang, former Director of Learning, and Bart Westdijk, former Director of Operations, have stepped into new co-director roles.

We're excited to continue to learn and grow as an organization into this new phase of a shared leadership model. In the meantime, we'll see you in the community.


REV. MARIAMA
WHITE-HAMMOND
Board President




SARAH HUANG
Co-Director




BART WESTDIJK
Co-Director



Meet the Grassroots Fund Staff and Board of Directors at:
grassrootsfund.org/about-us/our-team

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Image Courtesy of GF Grantee Peace & Justice Center of Eastern ME

Guiding Practices

The Guiding Practices serve as the grounding that underpins the work we see taking place throughout New England and that we hope to continue to support. They offer a framework for our grant applicants, Community Grant Readers, and other community partners to reflect on the values that underlie the Environmental Justice movement and for us to learn about how to continue to deepen the work of Environmental Justice. It's these values of bottom-up organizing, centering the voices of those most impacted, and shared community leadership that we believe are necessary to truly build just and resilient communities.

We hope that the Guiding Practices can create a space for ongoing reflection and learning because we know that this type of work - work that centers and empowers the voices of those most impacted by today's most pressing issues - is not easy, that there isn't just one approach, and that it's never truly done. Whether it's community organizing, responding to a state's climate action plan, developing a local food plan, or building mutual aid infrastructure, we are only going to build a better future by working together.

Throughout this annual report you'll find reflections and prompts to consider for each Grassroots Fund Guiding Practice based on the ongoing learning directly from grassroots groups who are doing it best in their own communities. We encourage you to engage with these questions in relation to any work you're undertaking and to also challenge our understanding. We, at the Grassroots Fund, are on this journey with you and strive to continue to learn alongside our network. Come engage with us, ask questions, and dig deeper.



Image Courtesy of GF Grantee Nonprofit Accountability Group

Rooted Innovation

Rooted Innovation focuses on understanding how a project is grounded in a community. This means understanding not only what the needs are in the community, but also how you aim to understand these needs and will continue to update and maintain feedback about your work.

1. *What are the needs of the folks who live in our community?*
2. *What existing partnerships and collaborations do we have?
Are there any new connections that can be made to make sure that we are working in solidarity with our community?*
3. *How can we make sure that our community can provide active feedback on this work?*

Shifting Power in Decision-Making

Shifting Power in Decision-making focuses on how decisions are made, how those with diverse lived experiences can meaningfully weigh in, and what protocols are in place to navigate tension and conflict. Some additional questions that you can ask include:

1. *Are the folks who are intended to benefit from this project also a core part of priority setting and Decision-making?*
2. *Is the group's composition diversely representative across race, ability gender, class, and other self-identifiers or demographics?*
3. *Do our Decision-making processes ensure that all voices are heard?
How are we navigating tension and conflict?*

Equity in Participation

Equity in Participation focuses on understanding the barriers to participating and creating opportunities to collectively respond to those barriers. There are many types of barriers to participating that include tangible and intangible practices. An example of a tangible barrier, might be lacking access to transportation to a meeting. An intangible barrier to participation might be a culture of unawareness or attention to equity and care. Some questions to help you think about this practice include:

1. *How do group members voice their concerns about participation? Is this an explicit process that all members are aware of and are able to engage with?*
2. *Do you understand the complexity of your community's identity? How do intersectional identities influence how members show up to each meeting?*
3. *How do you assess barriers to participation? Who was included in those assessments? When was the last time you asked these questions?*

Centering a Just Transition

We reference Climate Justice Alliance's understanding of Just Transition, which has roots within labor organizing and Environmental Justice. In order to move towards a Just Transition, the solutions and ideas of what is needed for community well-being must come from the bottom-up, thus it requires having a foundation in Rooted Innovation and Shifting Power in Decision-making. It also means creating a culture of problem-solving that trusts people's lived experiences and trusting that community members know best the complexity and the diversity of their needs. It requires asking questions like how are we working towards relationship building and connecting? This includes between people, between organizations, between food and health and housing issues.

When we're looking at Just Transition, we see grassroots groups who embody this Guiding Practice are reflecting deeply upon:

What intersections exist within our work? For example, is hunger a result of lack of food access or are there other societal issues at play?

How is our work leading towards greater systems change?

How have we assessed our community's needs? What are the gaps and opportunities in our resources (including, but not limited to lived experiences, knowledge, skills)?

Who are the non-traditional partners needed in our work?

This is one of the Guiding Practices where we often look to see how groups are addressing the other Guiding Practices - how are they rooted in community, how are they shifting power in Decision-making, and who is participating? Once these practices are in place, then our theory of change believes that groups are able to move towards a Just Transition. We see this as work that is deeply intersectional, has a systemic analysis, AND is built upon community needs, community relationships, and shifting power.

Centering a Just Transition is also at the core of how we talk about what "counts" as environmental work. Oftentimes, we hear feedback from readers that applications might not be in the scope of how the Grassroots Fund thinks about Environmental Justice or environmental work. However, a Just Transition points specifically to the need for our actions and our organizing to be intersectional and systems-based. Thus, this means that work addressing toxic dumping in local water systems is as "environmental" as work focusing on economic empowerment of community members living in poverty.

We know that through bottom-up organizing, centering the voices of those most impacted, and shared community leadership the grassroots will continue to build resiliency through their communities. That is why these insights into the Grassroots Fund Guiding Practices - Rooted Innovation, Shifting Power in Decision-making, Equity in Participation, and Centering a Just Transition - are always being adapted and updated based off of the learnings derived from the work taking place directly throughout our New England communities.

Our Participatory Processes: How they Work

Our participatory grantmaking processes are rooted in creating meaningful spaces for individuals with direct lived experience in communities and Environmental Justice across New England to make decisions around supporting grassroots organizations. It takes multiple forms across our grant programs including; open calls for readers, invited Grantmaking Committee members, three-month reader commitments, and shared gifting circle. Over the past six years of concerted exploration and testing of participatory grantmaking, we've learned a great deal from community participants and that carefully crafted processes to fit grantmaking goals is essential. In this realm, process truly matters and one-size definitely does not fit all. These lessons have also proven how critical it is to establish and hone a clear set of values based in equity and justice that can serve as a north star for design, implementation, and revisions to the processes, such as the Grassroots Fund Guiding Practices - Rooted Innovation, Shifting Power in Decision-making, Equity in Participation, and Centering a Just Transition. Our participatory processes look different across our grant programs - Seed, Grow, and Young Leaders as well as the Food System Resilience Fund and Community-Led Climate Resilience in Boston shared gifting circle cohorts - to reflect the Guiding Practices in how we're working to shift power to community members and how we're supporting grassroots organizers.

SEED GRANT READERS

Over the course of 2021, the Grassroots Fund piloted the first year of the long-standing Seed grant program shifting to a participatory review process. The Seed grant program provided a few challenges in crafting a participatory process as two key elements of the program are rolling deadlines and rapid decisions for applicants. Within those constraints we invited past, experienced Community Grant Readers from the Grow or Young Leaders grant programs to join us in this experimentation of developing a participatory process for Seed review and to help us make improvements along the way. Throughout the year, groups of about six individuals met every other week for a three month review session. Reviewers used a consent-based decision making process based on a model shared by Sociocracy for All. <https://www.sociocracyforall.org/the-difference-between-whole-group-consensus-and-dynamic-governance-sociocracy/>

GROW AND YOUNG LEADERS READERS & GRANTMAKING COMMITTEE

The Grow and Young Leaders grant programs utilize a multi-step participatory review process: We invite grant readers to apply via an open, public call. After online training, readers are assigned grants to read and score using a common rubric form based on the Guiding Practices - Rooted Innovation, Shifting Power in Decision-making, Equity in Participation, and Centering a Just Transition. Our readers are able to test and learn about the Guiding Practices, learn more about work happening in their communities, and, in turn, begin to implement Guiding Practices and Environmental Justice work in their own communities.

Following the readers' review and staff's applicant interview calls, Grow and Young Leaders facilitators are brought together before the Grantmaking Committee (GMC) retreat each spring and fall, and help Grassroots Fund staff to make the GMC more accessible, productive, and representative of New England communities as they both plan and facilitate our final decision-making process for each round. This fall, we primarily invited previous grantees who have scored high on our Guiding Practices to join the Grantmaking Committee. We heard that this shift allowed former grantees to learn more about Grassroots Fund's participatory review process, how to implement and test the Guiding Practices, and about different project ideas and strategies from other grant applicants.

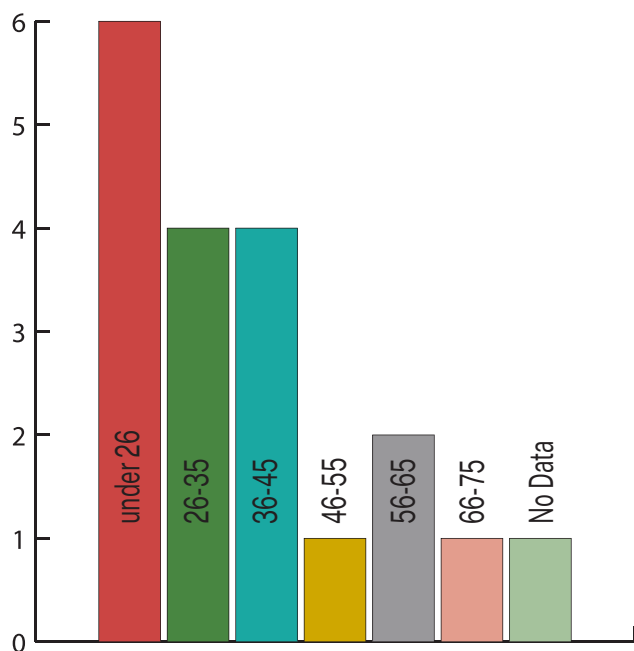
To learn more about different types of participatory grantmaking processes, we recommend this piece (Link - https://nonprofitquarterly.org/a-primer-for-participatory-grantmaking/?mc_cid=e41389bcfc&mc_cid=70e908dbff)

COHORT SHARED GIFTING CIRCLE

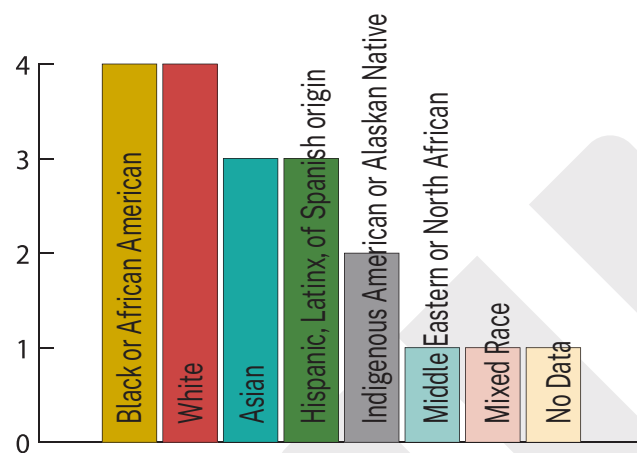
The Food System Resilience Fund and the Greater Boston based Community-Led Climate Resilience cohorts are invitation-only groups that bring together grassroots organizations which have either already been through our participatory process and scored highly on all Guiding Practices or were selected as leaders in their communities and in their work. The Grassroots Fund chose the shared gifting circle model¹ in order to build and expand upon relationships with grantees and provide organizers the funds to support other grassroots leaders across the region. This process involves building trust in order to collectively make decisions while also learning through shared experiences of the food system and mutual aid organizers. Both of these cohorts are pilot projects and we hope to share more about shared gifting circle in the next year.

We want to thank all individuals who make our participatory processes possible! A big thanks to our Community Grant Readers, Grantmaking Committee members, GMC facilitators, Ita Meno from CQ Strategies who leads bias in decision-making trainings, and our cohort members.

A SNAPSHOT OF SOME OF OUR GRANTMAKING COMMITTEE MEMBERS FROM FALL 2021



Readers by Age



Readers by Race/Ethnicity

Learn more about our participatory grantmaking processes:
<https://grassrootsfund.org/amplifying-voices/make-decisions-on-grants>

¹ Read more about this model of grantmaking here https://ssir.org/articles/entry/shared_gifting_shifting_funding_power_to_nonprofits

Fostering Innovation through Grantmaking

We're supporting changemakers who face systemic and structural barriers to traditional funding. We're investing in community groups and organizations working across a broad range of social and Environmental Justice issues that traditional funders often overlook, and encouraging them to take creative approaches to challenging existing systems.

SEED: \$500 - \$1,000 grants with rolling deadlines and review process of 4-6 weeks. Focused on groups and projects that are new and need early support to gain momentum.

GROW: \$1,000 - \$4,000 grants with deadlines in March & September and a participatory decision-making process. Focused on established projects and groups looking to broaden and/or deepen their impact.

YOUNG LEADERS: up to \$6,000 grants, offered once yearly through a participatory decision-making process. Focused on projects giving meaningful leadership roles to people under 25 years of age.

OTHER: occasionally the Grassroots Fund collaborates with partner organizations on specific partner grants or pilots new programs.

FISCAL SPONSOR: the Grassroots Fund acts as a fiscal sponsor for a limited number of grantee groups who seek additional financial support but don't (yet) have a tax exempt status.

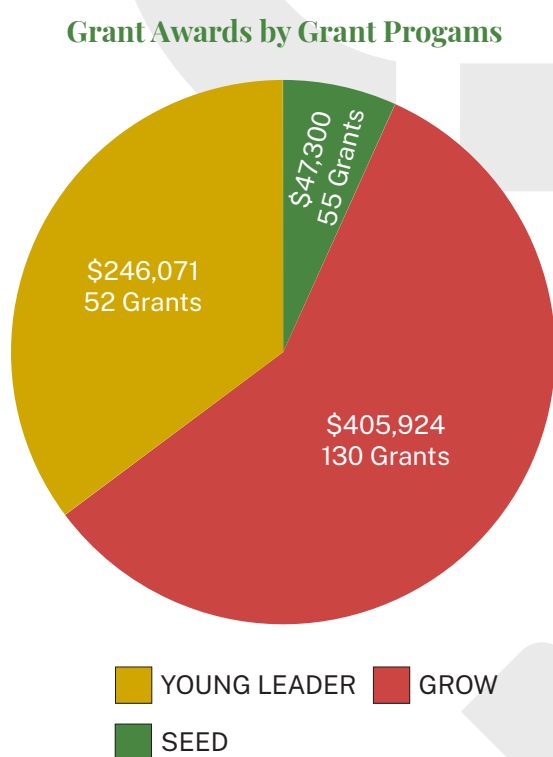
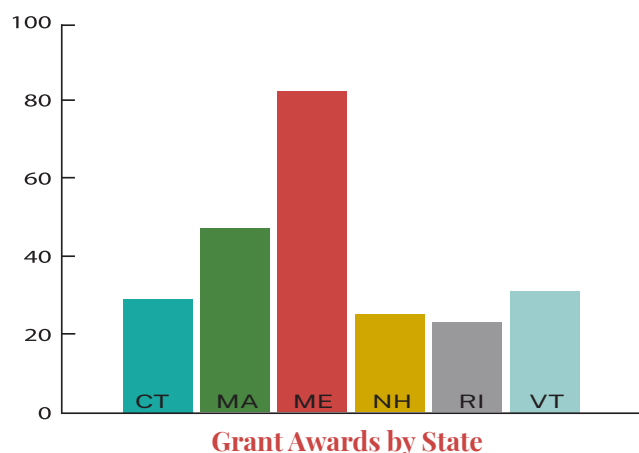
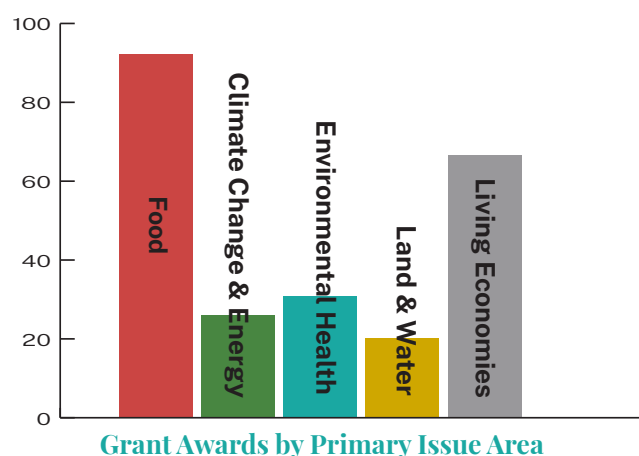
Note: *This program will cease in 2022.*

Our grant programs are focused on community-based, local initiatives.
For the Grassroot Fund that means that:

- *The group is doing local, grassroots work in CT, ME, MA, NH, RI or VT.*
- *The group is volunteer-driven or has no more than 2 full-time paid staff.*
- *The group has an annual operating budget of under \$100,000.*
- *The group does not need to have formal tax status or a fiscal sponsor."*

The Grassroots Fund distributed over \$1M in grants in 2021 to grassroots groups across New England through our regular grant programs and fiscal sponsor program, maintaining 2020's grantmaking level which was well above any previous year.

COMPETITIVE GRANTS* TOTALS AND STATISTICS:



4 Year Comparison*

	2021	2020**	2019	2018
Total # Grants	237	448	222	174
Total \$ Grants	\$699,295	\$736,465	\$513,708	\$340,671
# Core Volunteers	4,411	6,292	3,466	3,097
% that are ad hoc tax status	45.99%	53.35%	52.70%	51.72%
% w/ annual budget under \$50,000	67.51%	63.84%	68.47%	68.39%

*Doesn't include \$306,518 in special grants distributed to 9 fiscal sponsee groups

**2020 numbers higher due to rapid response COVID-19 grantmaking.

Go deeper! Dig into our grantee map at:
<https://grassrootsfund.org/about-us/grantee-map>

Meet 6 of the Grassroots Fund Grantee Groups from 2021

350NH YOUTH ORGANIZING PROGRAM

Dover, New Hampshire **Issue areas: Climate Change & Energy**

In 2019, four high school student leaders launched the 350NH Youth Organizing Program to create community and build organized power and structures for teenagers in New Hampshire to take action to stop the climate crisis. With a recognition that youth will be among the hardest hit by the climate crisis, the program is working to give youth a voice and to provide the training, community, and resources required to make meaningful change to stop the climate crisis.

Not only does their work prioritize giving a voice to youth, it ensures that there is **Youth Leadership** driving the decision making and leading the projects. Youth are compensated throughout the year for their work as well as given opportunities for professional development, organizing mentorship, and support from a 350NH adult mentor.

CRAFTSBURY NEIGHBORS TO NEIGHBORS TASK FORCE

Craftsbury, VT **Issue areas: Food, Living Economies**

Craftsbury Neighbors to Neighbors Task Force of Vermont was created as a compassionate and direct response to the needs of their community during the COVID-19 outbreak, and in doing so, laid the foundation for future responses to a variety of environmental, natural or other disasters that might affect their community in the future. They're working to take stock of the town's abundant resources, from volunteers, farms, organizations, schools, businesses and an accessible town government, and provide coordination of efforts during times of crisis or extreme need.

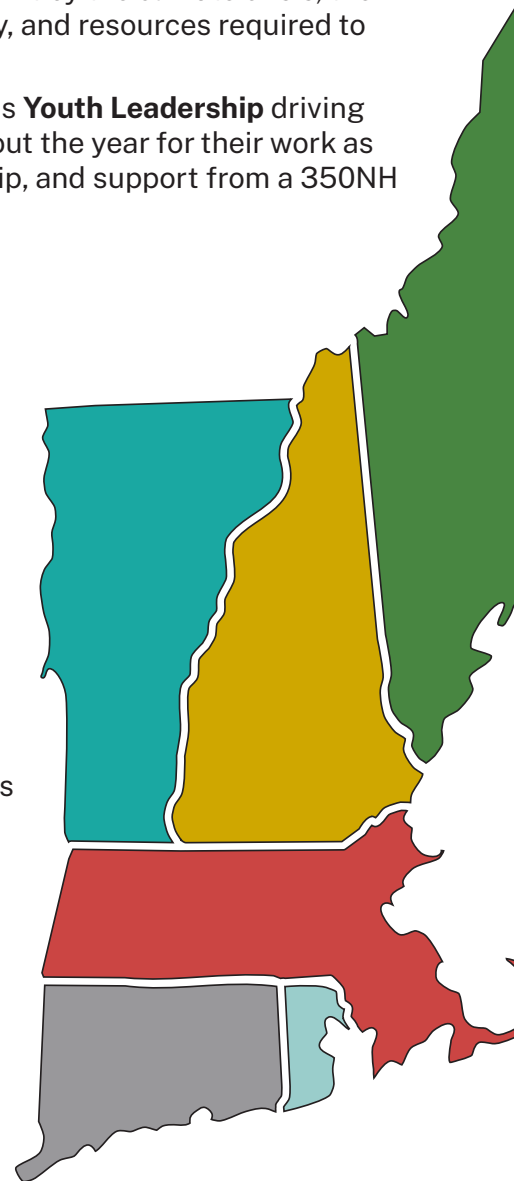
With an understanding that issues like food security live at the intersection of the strength and robustness of local agriculture, Craftsbury Neighbors to Neighbors Task Force is **Centering a Just Transition**. They are working directly with members of the community to identify the issues that they want to address and creatively meeting the needs of a wide swath of community members with their solutions. Their way forward is based in regenerative practices that hold the needs of people and the land together.

GROW WINDHAM

Willimantic, CT **Issue areas: Food, Living Economies, Land & Water, Environmental Health**

GROW Windham of Connecticut cultivates relationships and creates space for youth, community members, and food system partners to build a stronger local food system and community. They are working to build youth power through their Windham Youth CORE program and collaborations with school- and community-based youth programs, generating resources in local growing spaces, including their own Thread City Family Garden; and working to integrate the food system.

It's through their work in ensuring **Equity in Participation** that GROW Windham is able to successfully meet their community's needs. By offering bilingual communication for material and workshops, addressing cultural barriers through bias work, compensating youth, collaborating with community partners to make transportation easier, and working to dispel non-tangible barriers like a culture of perfection, they are opening up for all and actively inviting people into the process.



SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD RELIEF ORGANIZATION (SLRO)

Lewiston, Maine

Issue areas: Food, Living Economies, Environmental Health

Sustainable Livelihood Relief Organization of Lewiston, Maine formed to help immigrants, especially refugees and asylum-seekers, improve their participation rates in the American labor market and help immigrants build long-term wealth through the establishment of sustainable livelihoods. Their model aims to identify and intervene at each step of the way from promoting and supporting long term farming initiatives on their own land to coordinating “experiential learning” opportunities on local farms during the planting, harvesting, processing, and marketing and sales cycles.

Their work is **Centering a Just Transition** by working in regenerative and relationship-based ways that are intersectional in scope and practice. Their focus on disability justice, housing rights, and health access while incorporating elements of community agency and self-determination among historically marginalized groups has allowed them to forge just, place-based community solutions.

PA'LANTE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Holyoke, Massachusetts

Issue areas: Living Economies

The mission of the Pa'lante Restorative Justice at Holyoke High School in Massachusetts is to build youth power, center student voice, and organize to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline in Holyoke and beyond. Pa'lante stands out as perhaps the only school-based Restorative Justice program in the country that embodies transformative justice where they focus on both repairing interpersonal harm and conflict, and on transforming underlying social conditions including poverty, racism, and educational inequity.

Their unique program is **Shifting Power in Decision-making** in several ways. The varying levels of engagement with school staff, community leaders, and students allow for a wide range of lived experience to be part of the decision making process. From youth and adults with lived experiences with criminal injustice systems, immigration, english learners, and climate crises, the group's leadership reflects the specific communities that they are working within. .

ROOTS 2EMPOWER

Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Issue areas: Living Economies, Food, Climate Change & Energy

Root 2Empower of Pawtucket, Rhode Island is working to empower community members in the Urban Core of Rhode Island through the work of revitalizing and making viable urban farming for the benefit of the community and those working in the field. Through skill development and assisting in access to resources for budding farmers, to supporting the expansion of urban farming and working to supply fresh produce to food-insecure communities, they are working to utilize a cooperative business model to become financially self-sustaining.

Roots 2Empower has deep roots in their community with direct representation of folks in their decision making processes. This imbues their work with a unique insight into what the community needs and how best to respond to those needs in a way that is grounded in the desires of everyone involved - a perfect example of how to embrace **Rooted Innovation** in organizing work.

Learn the stories of the groups we've funded and get involved with their work at:
<https://grassrootsfund.org/guiding-practices/community-stories>

Financial Results

In 2021 the Grassroots Fund distributed the largest total grant dollars through its Grow (\$322,079 total) and Young Leaders (\$238,763) grant programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact programming with no in-person events all year. Many grantee efforts continue to respond to local needs and build out mutual aid efforts for long(er)-term support. Grantee efforts are actively exploring what it means to work from a place of solidarity rather than charity.

Over 173 Community Grant Readers were involved throughout our participatory process, with nine participant facilitators and 32 Grantmaking Committee members involved in virtual retreat with emphasis on space to discuss how to disrupt implicit bias, white supremacy culture and adultism in decision-making.

We received support from 29 foundation and donor funds as both general operating support and restricted funding. Under 'Other Income' the Fund booked federal COVID-19 support (\$85k) through the PPP program after meeting the requirement for loan forgiveness.

We continue to see growth in our individual donor support. No program fees or sponsorships were received in 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions limiting in-person gatherings.

Note: as per board policy, the Grassroots Fund directs a minimum of 2% of foundation income to a reserve fund.

2021 PRELIMINARY/UN-AUDITED FINANCIALS:

INCOME:

Foundation Grants: \$1,477,500

Contributions: \$324,660

Fiscal Sponsor Contributions: \$308,844

Other Income: \$96,088

Temporary Restricted Net Asset Transfer: (\$65,267)

TOTAL INCOME: \$2,141,826

NET INCOME: \$400,240

EXPENSES:

Grantmaking programs: \$953,535

Programs & Events: \$35,308

Fundraising & Outreach: \$1,802

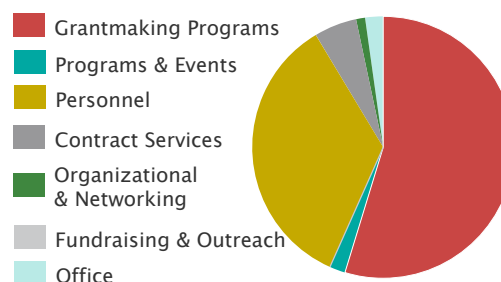
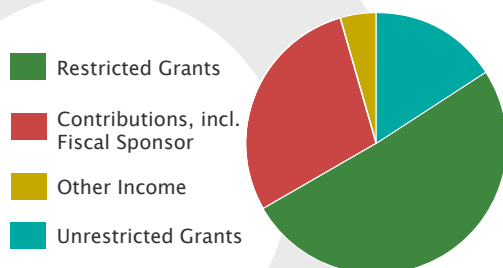
Personnel: \$601,645

Contract Services: \$91,418

Organizational & Networking: \$22,007

Office: \$35,871

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$1,741,586



Thank you to our Donors!

Grassroots Fund Donors

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To energize and nurture long-term civic engagement in local initiatives that create and maintain healthy, just, safe and environmentally sustainable communities throughout the six New England states.

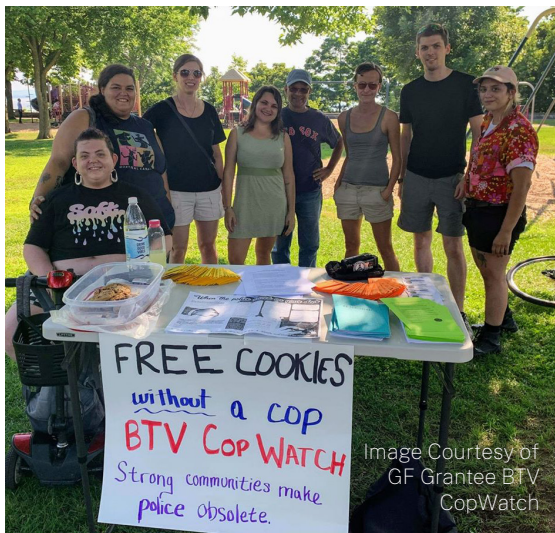


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