



# Making the Case for Greater Investment in Community-Rooted Funders

# CONTENTS

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Case Studies</b>	
<b>Building a participatory community-rooted fund in West Africa: Initiative Sankofa d’Afrique de l’Ouest</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Strengthening leadership through community-rooted funding in the U.S. South: Southern AIDS Coalition and Contigo Fund</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Centering youth voice and advocacy: Global Network of Young People Living with HIV and Advocates for Youth</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Power of participatory grantmaking with criminalized populations: Red Umbrella Fund</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Data analysis: HIV-related philanthropy for intermediary and community-rooted funders</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Data Reflections</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>The advantages and added value of community-rooted funders</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Appendix: Acknowledgements, Interviewees &amp; Endnotes</b>	<b>21</b>

# INTRODUCTION

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In the fall of 2020, members of the Funders Concerned About AIDS (FCAA) COVID-19 Learning Group,<sup>a</sup> supported by external consultants, explored the impact of COVID-19 on marginalized and criminalized communities in the U.S. and global context, and how funders, community networks and groups have responded. One of the main findings, as detailed in the resulting FCAA and Elton John AIDS Foundation “Converging Epidemics: COVID-19, HIV & Inequality” report,<sup>1</sup> was that HIV-related intermediary funders are best positioned to provide flexible, strategic support for the most critical needs of community members and community-led groups working at the intersection of HIV, human rights and racial justice.

A central recommendation from the “Converging Epidemics” report was for private and public donors to provide increased, longer-term support to these key organizations, which are committed to trust-based grantmaking<sup>b</sup> and are closer to — and oftentimes part of — grassroots community advocacy and actions.

The purpose of this follow-up briefing paper is to help make the case for greater investment in HIV-related intermediaries, particularly those that are community-rooted and community-led. It explores their role, added value and impact, and key challenges and needs. It also looks at the strategic and practical considerations that donors who currently support intermediaries take into account when developing relationships with their intermediary partners. This briefing paper is based on a series of interviews with donors and intermediary funders conducted in the summer of 2021. It was inspired and informed by a number of recent publications from the Global Philanthropy Project, Association for Women’s Rights in Development, Mama Cash and Oak Foundation<sup>2</sup> that highlighted the added value and importance of intermediary funders in resourcing intersecting movements — including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) and feminist groups — globally.

In HIV-related philanthropy, as in other philanthropic fields, there is a complex ecosystem of “intermediary funders,” including donor-advised funds; donor collaboratives; entities acting as fiscal agents or pass-throughs for grantmaking programs at the global, regional, national or local level; and grantmaking organizations that are situated in, led by and/or representative of the communities they support.

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<sup>a</sup> To deepen understanding of how best to respond to the evolving needs of vulnerable communities at the intersection of HIV/AIDS, COVID-19 and (in the U.S. context) racial justice, FCAA convened a working group (the COVID-19 Learning Group) consisting of over 30 funding and philanthropic organizations that provide financial resources to groups supporting marginalized communities — including people living with HIV/AIDS and underserved geographies — in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>b</sup> Trust-based philanthropy seeks to address inherent inequalities and power imbalances between funders and grantees. This includes donor organizations offering multi-year unrestricted funding, streamlining applications and reporting, and committing to building relationships based on transparency, dialogue, and mutual learning. (Source: <https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org>).

Although all of these types of intermediaries have important and oftentimes complementary roles to play in resourcing and amplifying the work of community-led organizations and activists, the focus of this briefing paper is on the latter category, which we hereafter refer to as community-rooted funders.

Recognizing that donors, community networks and organizations do not share a uniform definition<sup>c</sup> or understanding of “intermediary funder,” for the purposes of this paper, we applied the following definition and set of criteria for what constitutes a community-rooted funder.

## A COMMUNITY-ROOTED FUNDER IS AN ORGANIZATION THAT MEETS AT LEAST TWO OF THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

- Has a participatory grantmaking mechanism in which community members have decision-making authority on funding of community-led groups.
- Provides support for community-led groups and individuals beyond grants, including capacity strengthening, leadership development, mentoring and direct advocacy.
- Has processes in place that enable community members to provide input into strategy prioritization and decision-making.
- Has substantial representation from community members in its decision-making governance structure (management and board).

Finally, this briefing paper also offers new benchmark data to contextualize the level of HIV-related philanthropy moving to intermediary and community-rooted funding organizations.

We hope that the case studies and insights from interviews conducted and data analyzed for this paper will encourage donors — whether public or private, large or small — to invest in community-rooted funders and/or adopt some of the community-rooted practices described below. A series of recommendations for putting this into practice is included at the conclusion of this briefing paper.

The following case studies highlight community-rooted funders who are working in different geographic areas, are at different stages in their organizational development and, in some cases, focus on particular populations. However, all of them share a commitment to centering the communities they represent and serve in their efforts to create systemic change.

<sup>c</sup> A helpful general definition, however, is as follows. An intermediary funder is an institution that receives funding from one or more donors and meets at least one of the following three criteria: a) funds a grantee or grantees directly; b) performs a function so important that, absent the intermediary, the funder would have to perform itself; c) relates to grantees or a field of interest in any way that makes it act as a grantmaking advisor. Source: Meier, Johannes, *Resonance in a Stakeholder Economy: Working Effectively with Intermediaries*, Oak Foundation, 2017, page 5.

# CASE STUDY: BUILDING A PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY-ROOTED FUND IN WEST AFRICA: INITIATIVE SANKOFA D'AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST

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Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique de l'Ouest (ISDAO) is a participatory, activist-led fund dedicated to strengthening and supporting a West African movement for gender diversity and sexual rights by adopting a flexible approach to grantmaking and building a culture of philanthropy committed to equality and social justice.<sup>d</sup> ISDAO's inaugural call for proposals took place in 2018. In 2019, it hired its first staff member, Executive Director Caroline Kouassiaman. In 2020, its second year of grantmaking, ISDAO made 42 grants totaling \$429,811 through its Activist Grant-Making Panel, which supported 41 LGBTQI-led organizations and groups in eight countries. Today, ISDAO is a distributed organization, in which many staff are remote — its eight staff members are located in five countries in West Africa.

The process and path leading up to ISDAO's first few rounds of grantmaking were deliberate and deeply consultative. In 2014, a group of queer women activists came together to imagine a funding structure with a feminist perspective and a movement-building focus that would not duplicate what other funders were doing in the region; their ideas were informed in part by the structure and processes of ISDAO's sister fund, the UHAI EASHRI in East Africa. From 2014 to 2017, extensive community consultation and research was carried out, and activist steering committees set up to shape and determine the strategic framework and organizational structure of ISDAO and to identify key funding gaps and needs for West African LGBTQI organizing.<sup>3</sup> According to Kouassiaman, "When we were in building mode, it was important to have a group of funders who believed in the process and recognized that we weren't ready to do grants. They wanted to support us collectively, with multiyear funding. They understood that consultative processes take time."

ISDAO's third round of grantmaking took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The grants did not provide much additional funding for grantee partners compared with past years, but they ensured a high level of flexibility in how the funds could be used, prioritizing what communities needed the most. They also introduced "resilience grants" a mechanism to provide additional core support for its grantee-partners, understanding the emerging resource gap created by the global pandemic and the long-term impact of this on groups working at the community level. What they are now hearing, after meeting with and listening to partners over the past three months, is that the ability to reallocate ISDAO funding has opened doors to other sources of funding both for COVID-19 emergency response and generally. One partner was able to expand its organizational resources fivefold for its COVID-19 response as a result of the ISDAO grant.

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<sup>d</sup> ISDAO's mission statement can be found at <https://www.isdao.org/>.

As a “young” organization it is hard to get long-term funding, and the universe of donors who are willing to do so remains small.

What are some of the challenges that ISDAO faces as it continues to grow? Kouassiaman noted that as a “young” organization, it is hard to get long-term funding, partly because the universe of donors willing to provide long-term funding remains small. Finding donors who understand the true costs of participatory work that centers LGBTQI activists and keeps them safe in hostile contexts can also be challenging.

Finally, in its philanthropic advocacy work, ISDAO recognizes the importance of increasing resources for LGBTQI groups in the region and celebrates when groups can access funding from larger donors as a result of initial grants from ISDAO. At the same time, Kouassiaman encouraged donors to think about complementarity in their funding strategies. Direct support for individual organizations from donors outside West Africa is important and needed, but long-term, flexible support for place-based intermediaries like ISDAO is also critical. These intermediaries bring to the table a strong movement-building lens and deep understanding of context and relationships among movement actors within the region.

# CASE STUDY: STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP THROUGH COMMUNITY-ROOTED FUNDING IN THE U.S. SOUTH: SOUTHERN AIDS COALITION AND CONTIGO FUND

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Underinvestment in community-rooted funders and organizations based in the U.S. South, particularly those representing and serving communities that are disproportionately impacted by HIV, racism and other forms of structural inequality, is a well-documented but still chronically unaddressed problem. The Southern AIDS Coalition and Contigo Fund are two community-rooted funders whose grantmaking, advocacy and leadership development efforts are demonstrating the impact of community-centered, place-based work: it can build leadership among community members who traditionally are left out of decision-making processes, as well as address ongoing manifestations of white supremacy within mainstream philanthropy.<sup>e</sup>

It is critical to “always bring people to the table with you, share power and create space for conversations.”

Established in the aftermath of the 2016 Pulse nightclub tragedy, Orlando-based Contigo Fund’s mission is to fund, strengthen and empower existing and emerging agencies working to improve the lives of LGBTQI and Latinx individuals, immigrants, and people of color in Central Florida.<sup>f</sup> All of Contigo’s grantmaking, including its recently established All Black Lives Fund, is guided by community members themselves. According to Contigo Program Director Marco Antonio Quiroga, it is critical to “always bring people to the table with you, share power and create space for conversations. We consider it a key part of our role to build leadership. We have a dual focus of connecting people to a broader social justice movement and providing the critical services they need.” Supported by a group of values-aligned private donors, Contigo has become the largest LGBTQI funder in the U.S. South in the five years since its establishment — demonstrating that the “model works,” Quiroga noted.

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<sup>e</sup> The Southern AIDS Coalition and Contigo Fund are intermediary grantmakers through the Gilead COMPASS Initiative ([www.gileadcompass.com](http://www.gileadcompass.com)).

<sup>f</sup> Contigo mission statement can be found at <https://contigofund.org/>.

The Southern AIDS Coalition (SAC)<sup>g</sup> was founded 20 years ago by HIV advocates, leaders of community-based organizations and state health departments who recognized that the South was not getting an equitable share of federal resources to fight HIV/AIDS. Initially focused on policy and advocacy, SAC has expanded its work in recent years to include grantmaking to community-based organizations, as well as leadership development training and capacity building. Executive Director Dafina Ward emphasized that the Southern AIDS Coalition “is an organization that is very proud to represent communities most impacted by HIV in our staff. I’m the first black woman to lead SAC. We have many staff members who are living with HIV, who’ve had very personal experiences with HIV from black and brown and rural communities. We really want to model for other organizations what the goal should be around inclusion and leadership development and providing opportunities to people from the communities that are closest to HIV and the disparities that we’re working against in the South.”

Ward and Quiroga noted the critical role that their main donors have played in supporting their growth — providing flexible, longer-term support and the space to make decisions that reflect their community members’ needs and priorities. But they also highlighted the ongoing challenge in building a philanthropic culture that centers and supports Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC)<sup>h</sup> and LGBTQI communities in the South (as elsewhere). Quiroga reminded us, “Mainstream philanthropy was set up to preserve wealth for the wealthy, with a charity lens versus creating power. Funders need a lot of intentionality and work to unpack that, and people with lived experience to guide the process.” Ward also noted that “place matters. Having intermediary grantmakers who are in these communities and have first-hand understanding of their needs is critical. It’s more than just writing checks for programmatic support, it’s building and sustaining organizations in a region that has been historically underserved and marginalized. I encourage funders to fund intermediary grantmakers in the South.”

Having intermediary grantmakers who are in these communities and have first-hand understanding of their needs is critical.

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<sup>g</sup> The Southern AIDS Coalition mission statement can be found at [www.southernaidscoalition.org](http://www.southernaidscoalition.org).

<sup>h</sup> FCAA’s research methodology defines BIPOC communities as African Americans, Latinx, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Indigenous/American Indians and Alaska Natives.



## CASE STUDY: CENTERING YOUTH VOICE AND ADVOCACY: GLOBAL NETWORK OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV AND ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH

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The Global Network of Young People Living with HIV (Y+ Global)<sup>i</sup> and Advocates for Youth<sup>j</sup>, two organizations centering youth voice in decision-making and advocacy, highlight that certain populations, particularly young people and youth groups, oftentimes require partnership with community-rooted funders to deepen their success and impact. These are adolescents who are developing skills for life. As Debra Hauser, Advocates for Youth's Executive Director, reflected, "Our partnership with young people accompanies their advocacy and skill development over many years."

Y+ Global's Maximina Jokonya added, "Y+ Global works directly with national and regional networks of young people living with HIV, community youth-led and youth service organizations, specifically serving and working with diverse groups that are most marginalized in decision making spaces that impact their health and rights such as young people living with HIV, adolescent girls and young women, young people who use drugs, those who sell sex, young people identifying as LGBTQI+ and those located in hard-to-reach areas, as these are the groups and young people most left behind."

Given this close, long-term relationship between youth and their organizations, Hauser and Jokonya were hesitant to define Advocates for Youth and Y+ Global as "intermediary funders." While both organizations regrant funds to young individuals and youth groups and acknowledge that funding is absolutely key to building capacity of youth, it is only one small part of the accompaniment and partnership they provide.

Although many donors are currently prioritizing youth voice, not so many are translating this into adequate funding for the capacity work needed with adolescents starting out in life.

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<sup>i</sup> The Global Network of Young People Living with HIV mission statement can be found at [www.yplusglobal.org/about](http://www.yplusglobal.org/about).

<sup>j</sup> The Advocates for Youth mission statement can be found at [www.advocatesforyouth.org/](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/).

For four decades, Advocates for Youth has worked alongside thousands of young people in the U.S. and globally in their fight for sexual health, rights and justice. Advocates for Youth partners with youth leaders, adult allies and youth-serving organizations to push for policies and champion programs that recognize young people's rights to honest sexual health information; accessible, confidential and affordable sexual health services; and the resources and opportunities necessary to ensure sexual health equity for all youth. Valuing young people at Advocates for Youth means involving them in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs and policies that affect their health and well-being. Hauser noted that Advocates for Youth lives this commitment: they include youth partners in meetings with donors, building relationships while presenting, debating and assessing current strategies and actions. Centering the voice of youth has included youth involvement in HIV community planning groups, the HIV Vaccine Trials Network, the President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS and local school health advisory councils. Advocates for Youth also hosts a Youth Activist Network that has over 100,000 young members across many U.S. communities and 120 countries.

Y+ Global has over 100 partners globally working towards the improvement of health and rights of young people living with HIV in all their diversity and young key populations including adolescent girls and young women. Y+ Global's HER Voice Fund<sup>k</sup> is focused on centering adolescent girls and young women in decision-making processes. Since 2018, Y+ Global has served as the coordinator of this 13-country initiative in sub-Saharan Africa that works through youth-led national consortia to offer small grants to organizations contributing to the reduction of HIV incidence among adolescent girls and young women. The grants are to amplify the voices and priorities of adolescent girls and young women within national-level advocacy and policy processes in order to inform decisions that affect their lives. Over the last three years, Y+ Global has engaged more than 42,000 adolescent girls and young women in training sessions, workshops and meetings that focus on advocacy and policy reform. One notable example among many is the advocacy and campaigning work protesting sexual and gender-based violence carried out by the HER Voice Fund Ambassador in Namibia. She was then invited by the president of the country to discuss setting up a committee to respond to sexual and gender-based violence and femicide issues in Namibia.

Both Y+ Global and Advocates for Youth stressed that funding for capacity strengthening and staffing of organizations led by young people is absolutely essential in achieving the outcomes outlined above — but such funding is hard to identify and sustain. Although many donors are currently prioritizing youth voice, not so many are translating this into adequate funding for the capacity work needed with adolescents starting out in life. Jokonya shared that “donors may view the lack of experience among youth groups as too much of a risk.” Both Hauser and Jokonya emphasized that truly valuing and respecting youth voice means centering youth in decision-making and supporting that role with both financial and capacity-strengthening investments either directly or through community-rooted funders.

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<sup>k</sup> The HER Voice Fund is funded by ViiV Healthcare and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

## CASE STUDY: POWER OF PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING WITH CRIMINALIZED POPULATIONS: RED UMBRELLA FUND

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Criminalized populations, especially sex-worker-led organizations, have received very little funding historically. According to data discussed later in this briefing paper, HIV-related philanthropy to intermediary organizations that support sex worker populations has decreased by approximately 70% since 2017. There is often a lack of understanding of sex workers' rights issues within donor communities and a lack of trust between sex worker activists and funders. The funding landscape has reportedly become even more challenging over the last 19 months during the COVID-19 pandemic: communities most at risk, such as sex workers and other key populations, have received a smaller proportion of pandemic response funding as many donors have turned to supporting general population strategies.

The donor community is not meeting its commitment to support an intersectional response which includes sex workers and other criminalized communities.

To Paul-Gilbert Colletaz, the Coordinator of the Red Umbrella Fund (RUF)<sup>1</sup>, this demonstrates that the donor community is not meeting its commitment to support an intersectional response, which includes sex workers and other criminalized communities. He said, "In human rights funding, 1% goes to sex workers, with 20% going to women's rights and 24% going to racial justice issues. With such numbers, it is clear that the discussion around criminalized populations and human rights just isn't the same as any of these other populations. This is illustrated when, for instance, these other populations are part of the sex worker community and still receive less funding."

RUF was established over 10 years ago, as a unique collaboration between sex worker activists and social justice funders to create the first global fund guided by and for sex workers. It is a reflection of the understanding that a community-led, community-driven funding mechanism is essential in responding to the needs of sex worker rights groups that are fighting against violence, stigma and criminalization. In a document recounting RUF's creation story, Ana Luz Mamani Silva from Mujeres del Sur reflected, "In my point of view, the Red Umbrella Fund is very important. It provides direct support for our ideals, our dreams. Other funds tell you where you should go, what you should do, what activities to implement. The Red Umbrella Fund supports us in what we want because it is by sex workers, for sex workers."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Red Umbrella Fund mission statement can be found online at [www.redumbrellafund.org/about-us/mission-principles/](http://www.redumbrellafund.org/about-us/mission-principles/).

As part of the process of establishing RUF operations, Mama Cash and Open Society Foundations hosted a meeting in which sex worker groups and donors who were part of the collaborative agreed to a number of key principles: RUF would exclusively support sex-worker-led organizations so that sex workers could set their own priorities and hire experts from their own communities. Additionally, transparency would be enforced by asking both donors and sex workers to openly share agendas and expectations so that trust could be built and sustained. It was also determined that RUF would focus its advocacy efforts solely on donors, as other advocacy could and should be done directly by sex workers. RUF committed to exclusively giving core, flexible grants to ensure that sex workers, rather than donors, were driving decision-making.

During the creation of RUF, governance was also carefully thought through so that sex workers comprised a majority of the Fund's International Steering Committee and Programme Advisory Committee. Sam Avrett, an RUF consultant, noted, "The added benefit is that by doing something together, it will mobilise new money, and it will also empower sex workers to have decision-making power and control over how the money flows. And it's a community organizing effort, and that's important if you want to strengthen a global movement. Doing it as a funding mechanism not only helps with the funding, and makes the funding better, but it also helps people work together. Something tangible to do, rather than just creating a global coalition for the purpose of global coalition building."

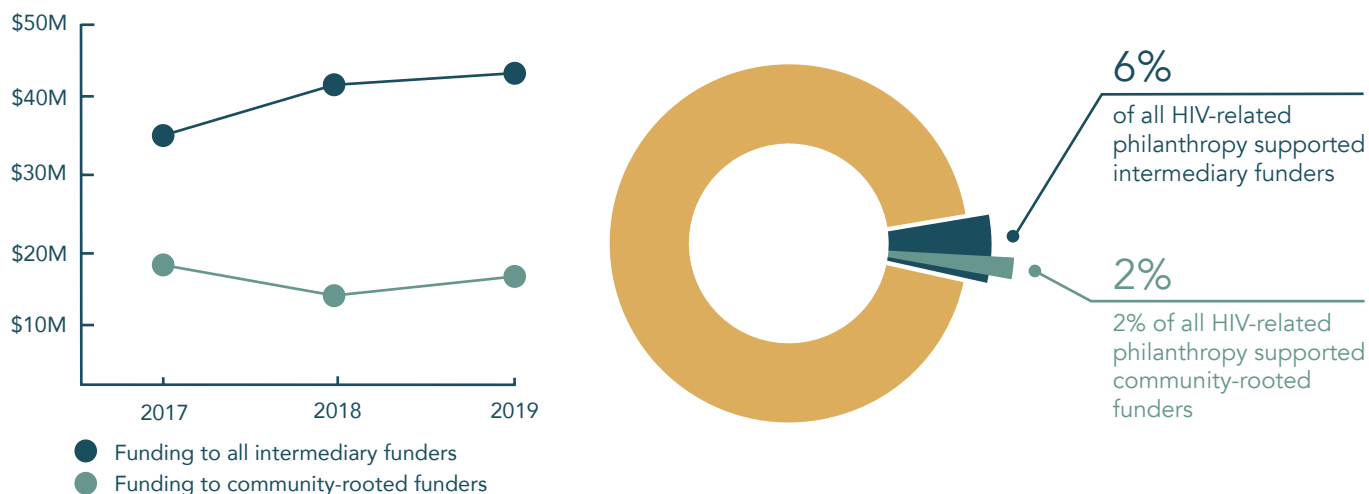
Colletaz is proud of RUF's accomplishments. From 2012 to 2020, the organization made 217 grants totaling over \$6,600,000 in over 60 countries. Colletaz noted that funders should be proud of giving to community-rooted funders and should raise this up as an accomplishment.

"Funding community-rooted funders is shifting power. If donors commit to genuinely shifting power, then they must commit to participatory grantmaking — directly and through community-rooted funders."<sup>4</sup>

# WHAT DOES HIV-RELATED PHILANTHROPY FOR INTERMEDIARY AND COMMUNITY-ROOTED FUNDERS TELL US?

In addition to conducting the interviews detailed above, FCAA analyzed the three most recent years (2017 to 2019) of its annual resource tracking report “Philanthropic Support to Address HIV/AIDS”<sup>m</sup> to identify and contextualize the current level of HIV-related philanthropy for intermediary funders, including those that are community-rooted. To do this analysis, we first reviewed the list of grantee organizations that received an HIV-related grant from 2017 to 2019 to determine if they acted as a regrantor or intermediary organization. Next, we evaluated that list against the criteria established on page 3 to identify which of those organizations could be defined as “community-rooted funders.”<sup>n</sup>

It is important to note that the data and reflections within this section refer generally to resources provided to intermediary funders (also referred to as intermediaries), with some additional insights into the smaller subset of those organizations that are defined as community-rooted. In those instances, this subset is referred to as “community-rooted funders.”



## Key Finding

HIV-related philanthropic funding for intermediaries, including those that are community-rooted, remained flat over the course of 2017 to 2019. Over the course of the three years, the average annual total for overall HIV-related philanthropy was \$670 million per year. As such, HIV-related funding to all intermediaries accounted for just 6% of total funding each year. Funding to community-rooted funders was even lower at just 2% each year.

<sup>m</sup> The data used for this analysis came from grants lists collected for FCAA’s annual resource tracking report, “Philanthropic Support to Address HIV/AIDS.” These data were sourced from grants lists submitted directly by funders, as well as grants information from funder websites, grants databases, annual reports, 990 forms and Candid’s Foundation Maps grants database. More information can be found online at <https://www.fcaaid.org/inform/philanthropic-support-to-address-hiv-aids/>.


<sup>n</sup> Data limitations: The data presented have many caveats and limitations, as listed below. While it is difficult to elicit detailed, specific learnings from the data given these limitations, big picture trends seem visible and are highlighted.

- While we tried to capture as many HIV-related intermediaries and donors in the landscape above as possible, some are undoubtedly missing.
- Figures and analysis are reflective of funding received by these intermediaries, including operational, programmatic and regranting funds. The data did not allow us to separate specific spending categories. Therefore, we can only establish the purpose of the grant to the intermediary itself, not necessarily how the intermediary will subsequently use that funding.
- We do not have a full picture of what COVID-19 responses have meant to the trends and patterns outlined above, as 2020 data are not yet available. Reporting of some 2019 data also may have been impacted by 2020 lockdowns and challenges to accessing and submitting data.

## Distribution of funding to intermediary funders

	2019	2018	2017
Dollars 	\$42,078,125	\$41,069,590	\$35,427,487
Donors 	49	162	90
Grants 	202	131	235
Grantees (Intermediary funders) 	46	43	43

## Distribution of funding to community-rooted funders

	2019	2018	2017
Dollars 	\$16,997,300	\$14,015,674	\$17,383,937
Donors 	17	18	16
Grants 	60	45	66
Grantees (Community-rooted funders) 	14	13	15

## Concentration of Funding

Within overall HIV-related philanthropy, funding is often concentrated among a small set of funders. In 2019, for example, the top 20 HIV-related funders accounted for 92% of all funding. This concentration was even more pronounced within funding for intermediary and community-rooted funders:

- Over the course of 2017 to 2019, approximately 70% to 80% of total HIV-related philanthropy, for intermediary funders came from the top five donors each year. In 2019, just two donors represented 70% of funding to community-rooted funders.
- From 2017 to 2019, an average of 69% of total HIV-related philanthropic funding went to just five organizations. Similarly, the majority of funding to community-rooted funders was received by just two organizations.
- Intermediary funders represented only between 1% and 2% of total grantee organizations that received HIV-related philanthropic grants from 2017 to 2019. We identified only roughly a third of intermediary funders, and less than 1% of overall HIV-related grantees, to be community-rooted in 2019.

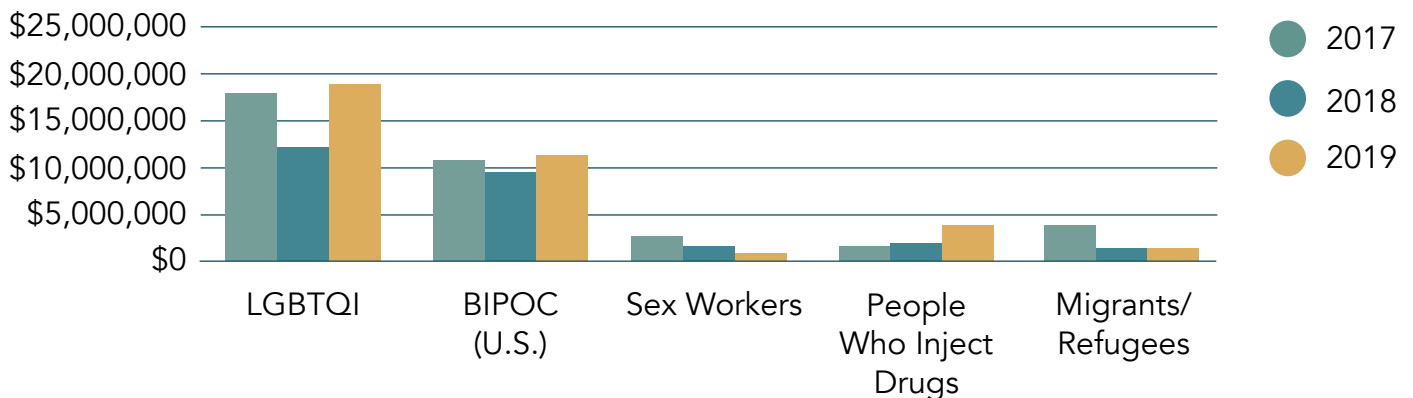
## Impact by location

Over the course of 2017 to 2019, FCAA analyzed data for 54 intermediary funders, although some grants were received by the same organization, but in different country offices. Seventeen percent of those organizations were located in the Global South, with 87% located in the U.S., Canada or Western and Central Europe. Of the intermediary funders that we identified to be community-rooted, a slightly larger percentage, 33%, was located in the Global South.

## Population Breakdown

The “Converging Epidemics”<sup>1</sup> report focused on the impact of COVID-19, HIV and inequality on marginalized populations; for this follow-up briefing paper, therefore, FCAA analyzed HIV-related philanthropy, to intermediary funders that reached key populations globally and BIPOC communities within the U.S. from 2017 to 2019. The data highlighted that although there were modest increases in HIV funding to intermediaries for most of these populations, total funding amounts still represented a small percentage of overall HIV-related philanthropy over the three years. Two exceptions were support for migrants/refugees, which saw a 65% decline, and support for sex worker populations, which saw a 70% decline, from 2017 to 2019. Both represented just 2% to 3% of total HIV-related philanthropy for intermediary funders.

### Population analysis: 2017-2019 HIV-related philanthropy to intermediary funders



# REFLECTIONS

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## **Intermediary funding is limited and not growing.**

Funding for intermediaries remained at a limited 6% of all HIV-related philanthropic funding. Only 1% to 2% of all HIV-related grants went to intermediary funders, with the number of recipient intermediaries remaining mostly unchanged over the course of 2017 to 2019. This landscape was particularly striking when compared with investment numbers from some related fields, such as LGBTQI funding, which have seen significant growth in both the number of, and also funding to intermediaries.

In interviews, it was reported that participatory grantmaking has received tremendous donor attention over the last two to three years, with one discussion group expanding to over 600 participants in 2021. While interest in forging new kinds of relationships with communities and grantees has blossomed, it has not resulted in an increase in investment in organizations with participatory community approaches.

## **Funding is highly concentrated, with not enough intermediaries in the Global South.**

Historically, philanthropic funding in all aspects of the HIV landscape is highly concentrated, with just a few donors supplying the vast majority of resources to the entire HIV field. Within the context of intermediaries, few donors gave most of the funding — and most of the funding went to only a few intermediaries. Of particular concern was that only 17% of intermediary funders were located in the Global South. More donors need to enter this field and intentionally support an ecosystem of intermediaries.

## **BIPOC- and key-population-focused funding to intermediaries is just a small portion of overall funding**

While intermediary funders prioritize and know how to support LGBTQI and BIPOC communities, funding to intermediaries for this work still represented a small percentage of overall HIV-related philanthropy.

Funding for intermediaries, that focused on criminalized populations, was relatively limited. Sex worker support fell by approximately 70% over the years analyzed. Support for groups representing and serving people who use drugs represented only 9% of total funding, and support for migrant and refugee populations represented only 3% of funding to intermediaries.

COVID-19-related data from 2020 were not yet available during our analysis. Anecdotally, however, we were told in interviews that funding to key population groups fell even further during 2020 and 2021 given an overall push by donors to fund COVID-19 responses at a general population level.

## **There is opportunity for more intermediaries to adopt trust-based, community-centered practices.**

Only about a third of all intermediaries identified in the data met the criteria we used to define community-rooted funders. As we noted at the outset of this briefing paper, we recognize that there are many different types of intermediaries playing complementary roles; there is, however, significant room for more intermediaries to intentionally put into practice community-led processes and practices.



# THE ADVANTAGES AND ADDED VALUE OF COMMUNITY-ROOTED FUNDERS

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With an understanding of how community-rooted funders operate, and the gap in funding for these organizations, we interviewed donors to highlight the reasons why they choose to support community-rooted funders. Some of the most commonly cited reasons are shared here to help support other donors as they explore strategic options and organizational choices for increasing philanthropic impact.

## **Private and public donors shared that community-rooted funders:**

- Shift power to address systemic inequalities by creating participatory grantmaking processes that center communities and populations in priority-setting, governance and decision-making.
- Strengthen the connective tissue of social movements by creating and “doing” together.
- Center “place” in responding to challenges, particularly in crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Support marginalized and criminalized population engagement and responses that are poorly resourced.
- Respond swiftly and flexibly in complex and fast-moving landscapes.
- Develop leaders.
- Provide resources without cumbersome requirements to individuals, nonregistered groups and nontraditional and/or small organizations.
- Coordinate donors to act and fund together and raise more resources.
- Facilitate learning among communities, movements and funders.
- Communicate needs, state of play and combined experience to a broader audience, including decision-makers.

## **Criteria donors use in decision-making about support for community-rooted funders**

In our donor interviews, we asked what type of criteria donors consider when deciding whether to support (and which) community-rooted funders in the U.S. and global context. Commonly expressed criteria included whether the organization has:

- A track record and existing capacity (systems and processes in place) for grantmaking, financial management and reporting.
- Knowledge about, as well as credibility and relationships with, community-led groups and movements in countries and/or regions that the donor may not have itself.
- Ability to work with individuals and nascent and/or unregistered groups that need significant mentoring and support that the donor cannot offer itself.
- Ability to make small grants and to support community-based groups more flexibly and quickly than the donor can itself.
- Ability and willingness to work in nontraditional spaces and bring new groups and individuals into programming, organizing and advocacy.
- Communication capacity to foster enhanced contact and understanding between and among small grantee groups, individuals, donors, decision-makers and the general public.

Most donors indicated that the representativeness of intermediaries' governance and management structure and grantmaking processes (i.e., the degree to which they are inclusive of the communities they represent and work with) was an important consideration. Several donors noted, however, that technical capacity sometimes had to take precedence over representativeness.

“We want to know who are the most impactful organizations in terms of movement building. I use that [criterion] in thinking through which intermediaries are most crucial to support. The Fund for Trans Generations is one key example. They fund 50 nascent groups across the country. This fund is crucial to ensuring a pipeline of trans leaders and organizations in a movement context. We want to support a sustainable trans movement in the U.S., and this helps us get there.”

– DESIREE FLORES

U.S. Social Justice Program Director, Arcus Foundation

Some of the community-rooted funders whom we interviewed — while recognizing and appreciating the institutional constraints and fiduciary responsibilities of their donors — highlighted the importance of challenging long-standing dynamics and assumptions that underpin mainstream philanthropy's processes. Chief among them is the urgent need to embed an explicit equity lens in grant decision-making, in which the representativeness of organizations (incorporating race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age and characteristics) is an essential criterion. Another area for further interrogation is how donors define “track record” and “capacity” and whether they adequately support the building of that track record and capacity. As highlighted in the case studies above, building those can take time and significant resources.

“We have to manage how we set up these intermediary relationships. It is important to be conscious of the role of power in access to information and resources. Global North-based groups still dominate. To expand the ecosystem of funders supporting community-centered work, we need to look more deeply at our own assumptions about the “capacity” of institutions. Just because something is not done the way that we want it to be done doesn't mean it isn't effective.”

– KALI LINDSEY

Portfolio Lead for LGBT and U.S. Grants, Elton John AIDS Foundation

# RECOMMENDATIONS

We hope that the case studies and insights from interviews conducted and data reviewed for this paper will encourage donors — whether public or private, large or small — to invest in community-rooted funders and/or adopt some of the community-rooted practices described below.

## Private institutional donors

- **Support participatory grantmaking** in order to shift power, address systemic inequalities and center communities in priority-setting and decision-making. Community-rooted funders strongly believe that donors must either directly introduce participatory grantmaking into their own structures and practices or give as much funding as possible to community-rooted funders for systemic change impact. A new participatory grantmaking community of practice has recently been created, and donors are encouraged to explore this community at this site: <https://www.participatorygrantmaking.org/>.
- **Support the establishment of more community-rooted funders**, especially in places and for populations that are particularly underserved. Interviews highlighted that there are few community-rooted, HIV-related funders based in the Global South. Data show that beyond East and Southern Africa, there is limited funding flowing to community-rooted funders in the rest of the Global South. It was also stressed that some populations, including people who use drugs, do not have a community-rooted funder solely focused on them and their needs. In U.S.-focused interviews, we heard that there are still relatively few community-rooted funders in the areas of the country most impacted by HIV, racial and other forms of injustice.
- Donors who are currently giving to community-rooted funders should **use their voice to actively encourage donor colleagues to adopt this practice**. We heard from interviewees that the philanthropic community plays a particularly important role in motivating public funders, including local health departments in the U.S., to give to intermediaries and community-rooted funders.
- **Recognize that core, flexible funding** is the type of support communities need most and is most appropriate for community-rooted giving.
- **Increase investment in capacity strengthening and leadership development for community-rooted funders and the groups they work with**. One community-rooted funder described this gap as an “important missing piece of the puzzle.” Donors should recognize that emerging community-rooted funders need time and resources to engage in the consultative and participatory processes that are essential to doing community-centered work effectively.
- Donors can and must do more to **collaborate and communicate intentionally with their partners**, particularly during extended crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Community-rooted funders aggregate proposals, foster joint funding opportunities, connect the dots among ongoing efforts and help donors think through path-breaking approaches. Community-rooted funders appreciate and would like to see more donors that consider them as a partner in bigger-picture strategy and learning processes.
- Donors should **build internal capacity** to better understand, support and collaborate in meaningful ways with communities.

## Public institutional donors

- **Identify opportunities to give to and through intermediary and community-rooted funders** as much and as often as possible.
- **Clearly articulate the governance and financial systems and monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks** that need to be in place for intermediaries and community-rooted funders to qualify for public grants.
- **Work supportively with intermediaries and community-rooted and community-led funders to help build these capacities** and to scale efforts.
- **During grant application and review processes, ask intermediary applicants to describe how they will use trust-based community practices** and score their responses in proposal review and grant decision-making.

## Community-rooted funders

- Community-rooted funders need to work with donors to **identify ways of communicating impact that make room for qualitative as well as quantitative approaches and acknowledge the longer-term nature of changes that are being sought**. Community-rooted funders play an important role in bridging the gap between larger public donors that have extensive reporting requirements and community groups that may not have the capacity or experience to fulfill the requirements; however, they still struggle to convey the impact of work on the ground to those who are further away from it.
- **Capture stories and use them to advocate** for increased funding to community-rooted funders, particularly those that are community-led.
- Community-rooted funders should **create more opportunities to collaborate and learn more intentionally across place- and population-based funders**. Interviewees noted a relative lack of sharing given time constraints. They also encouraged dedicated efforts to elevate and sustain regular communication, sharing and learning.
- **Strengthen capacities to effectively bridge** gaps between donors, including public institutional donors, and community groups at some scale. Interviewees noted that many community-rooted funders do not yet have expansive capability to manage large grants and support communities as needed.

## Other intermediary funders

- **Nurture capacity in emerging community-rooted funders** by sharing lessons learned, walking through organizational development issues, exploring communication approaches and co-thinking on other developmental priorities.
- **Introduce at least two community participatory elements** into ongoing governance and grantmaking practices.

## Communities

- Communities should **strategize together on the best mechanisms for community-rooted funding**. The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the importance of supporting intersectional, place-based responses to community needs in particular. Communities have been highly effective in organizing mutual aid efforts by and for themselves, and have a window of opportunity to push for greater support of community-centered funding practices going forward.
- **Advocate for funding** to community-rooted funders, **particularly from large, undertapped public sources**.

# APPENDIX: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS INTERVIEWEES, & ENDNOTES

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## Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to the many community-rooted funders, advocates, and philanthropic partners who shared their own lessons, recommendations, and resource materials, without which this report would not have been possible.

Thank you as well to the FCAA COVID-19 Learning Group for providing both the inspiration for, and valuable input into, this important project.

Finally, FCAA wants to acknowledge and thank the consulting team that led and produced this briefing paper: Roxana Bonnell and Becky Tolson.

## FCAA conducted interviews with the following individuals for this briefing paper:

Adrian Coman and Desiree Flores, Arcus Foundation

Amelia Korangy, ViiV Healthcare

Caroline Kouassiaman, Initiative Sankofa d’Afrique de l’Ouest (ISDAO)

Dafina Ward, Southern AIDS Coalition

Debra Hauser, Advocates for Youth

Kali Lindsey and Thomas Brigden, Elton John AIDS Foundation

Marco Antonio Quiroga, Contigo Fund

Maria Phelan, Robert Carr Fund

Maximina Jokonya, Global Network of Young People Living with HIV (Y+ Global)

Paul-Gilbert Colletaz, Red Umbrella Fund

## Endnotes

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