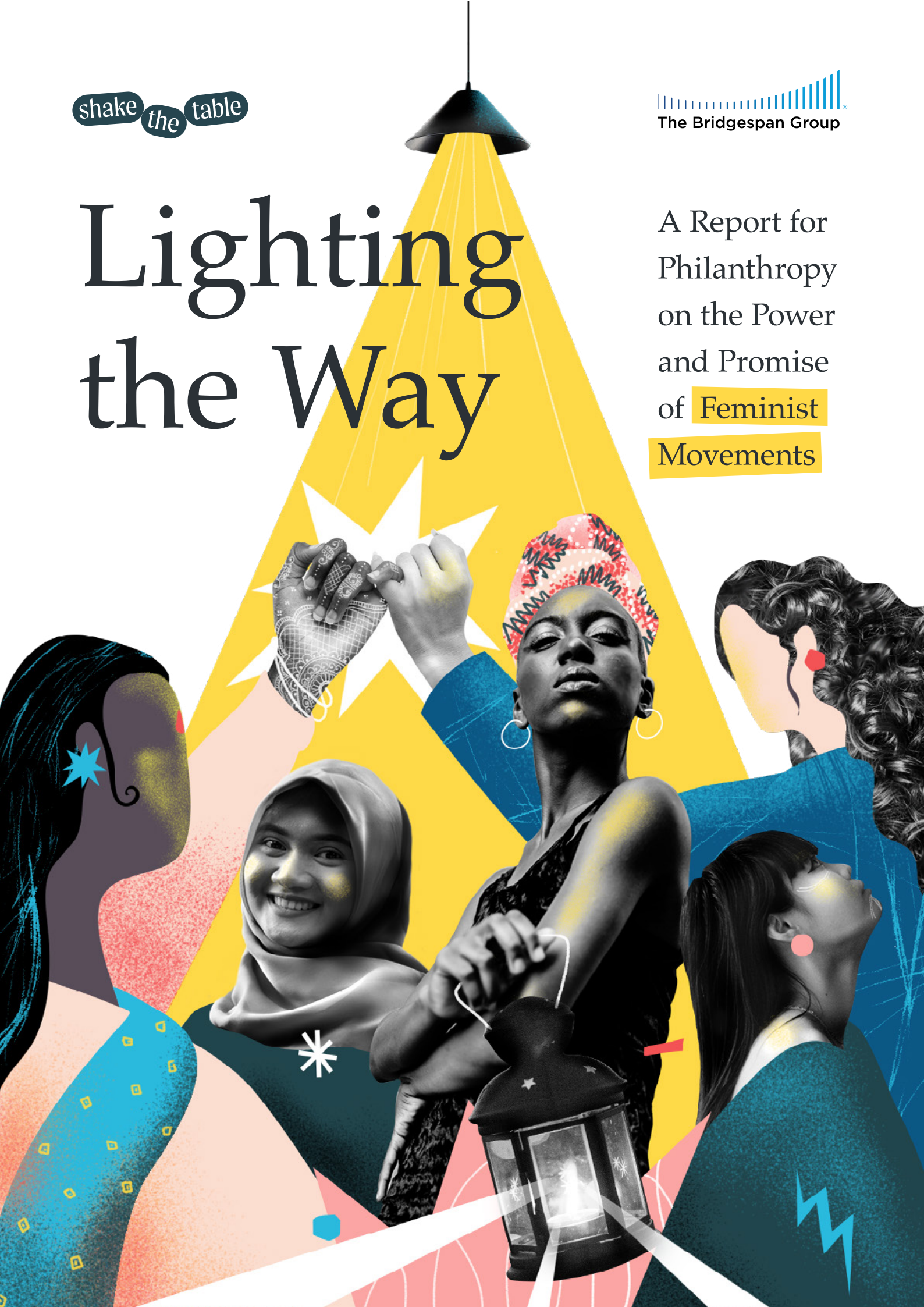


shake the table

The Bridgespan Group

Lighting the Way

A Report for
Philanthropy
on the Power
and Promise
of Feminist
Movements



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We acknowledge the many voices that informed this report, both directly and indirectly. In particular, this work has brought us into relationship with feminist leaders who are advancing strategies to fulfill a dream of greater equity, peace, and freedom for all. We are humbled to share their stories and calls to action for philanthropists here.

For an abridged version of this report, please see our [research brief](#).



Table of Contents

04	Executive Summary	29	Be Part of the “We”
05	About This Report	32	About the Authors
06	A Vision for Systemic, Lasting Change	33	Acknowledgments
10	Understanding Feminist Movements	35	Appendix A: Solidarity Statement
14	A Huge Opportunity to Accelerate Social Change	37	Appendix B: For More Information on Feminist Funds and Funder Communities
18-28	Five Things You Can Do to Support Feminist Movements	38	Appendix C: Literature Scan
	01. Understand power structures	40	Endnotes
	02. Re-examine risk		
	03. Fund feminist funds		
	04. Shift your practices		
	05. Measure what matters		

Executive Summary

Women, girls, and nonbinary people have faced systemic oppression for centuries. And too often, other forms of discrimination—racism, ableism, classism, and more—compound gender inequality. We see the impact across all issue areas, from education to disaster relief and from health to climate change.

Our research makes us excited about the power of feminist movements to address systems of oppression and realize the transformative change donors seek. **Feminist movements are organizations, leaders, and networks working together to change power structures that reinforce gender and other inequalities.**¹ Led by people with lived experience of the gender power imbalance and other injustices, feminist movements challenge the compounding factors of discrimination, taking an intersectional approach to address our most intractable problems.

And they are effective. In recent years, feminist movements in Argentina, Ireland, and Mexico realized crucial gains in reproductive rights. Farmworkers in the United States secured better wages and working conditions, including curbing sexual violence in the fields. And feminists in Nigeria organized intense protests to bring an end to an abusive special police squad.

To date, feminist movements have achieved their successes with minimal philanthropic support. **In 2017, less than 1 percent of total foundation giving, and in 2018 approximately 1 percent of gender-focused international aid, was directed to women's rights organizations, which we use as a proxy for lack of data on feminist movement funding.**^{2,3,4} Most women's rights organizations have never received unrestricted or multiyear funding.

Shake the Table and The Bridgespan Group teamed up to understand how we can better connect global philanthropy with feminist movements. We conducted 43 conversations with high-net-worth individuals, institutional funders, and leaders of feminist movements

and funds. This report offers practical ideas for all philanthropists, including those whose core focus is not gender equality. Our recommendations include:

01. Understand the power structures that shape our homes, communities, and systems.

02. Re-examine risk. Recognize the greatest risk is not investing in the feminist leaders and organizations that are actively tackling systemic injustice—and facing well-funded opposition.

03. Fund feminist funds, which are primary supporters of feminist movements.

04. Shift your practices. Expand your sourcing beyond your close-in network, and ensure your diligence practices aren't screening out feminist movements. Fund across the ecosystem and provide long-term general operating support.

05. Measure what matters to movements. The multifaceted work of movements will likely require a range of measures. Work with grantees to define success—and allow them to pivot as needed.

We urge philanthropists to invest an additional \$6 billion by 2026 (\$1.5 billion annually) in feminist movements.

Specifically, focus unrestricted, multiyear funding on feminist movements in the Global South as well as those led by women, girls, and nonbinary people from Black, Indigenous, and communities of color worldwide.

About This Report

Shake the Table and The Bridgespan Group teamed up to understand how we can better connect global philanthropy with feminist movements. The Shake the Table team collectively brings decades of experience working with and alongside movements to resource economic, gender, and racial justice work globally. The team's path-making strategies have moved more than \$1 billion to date in support of the transformative work of feminist movements led by women, girls, and nonbinary people from Black, Indigenous, and communities of color. Meanwhile, as a global nonprofit that advises nonprofits, philanthropists, and impact investors, Bridgespan takes what it learns from its client work, builds on it with original research, and engages audiences with actionable insights.

Over months of collaboration, we learned, and often unlearned, from our different approaches, and benefited from complementary networks that brought a range of diverse perspectives. As feminist movements engage race-conscious strategies to end inequality, we have worked together to deepen our race and gender consciousness and to bring an understanding of the compounding effects of overlapping forms of oppression to this work.

To pursue our research, we conducted 43 conversations, engaging with 27 high-net-worth individuals and the people who lead their giving, 10 feminist movement leaders and feminist fund leaders, and six institutional funders. We spoke with individuals in Egypt, Ghana, India, Iraq, Mexico, Senegal, Singapore, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and elsewhere. They were honest with us, sharing their stories, challenges, regrets, hopes, and wisdom in this promising space. This report captures what we heard.

We were also informed by an advisory council of 32 movement leaders, funders, and intermediaries who understand the intense barriers and immense opportunities at hand. Our work with them was guided by this [solidarity statement](#).

We are by no means the first to address the issue of resourcing feminist movements. We give credit to those who have preceded us in researching the impact of these movements, exposing the extent of their under-resourcing, and crafting theories of what it means to be a feminist funder. This report includes a [literature scan](#) of the reports and articles we've found helpful. We're grateful for *all* the building blocks that made this research possible and acknowledge the many voices that informed this report, both directly and indirectly.

For Bridgespan in particular, while we have long focused on programs that empower women and girls, our work with Shake the Table has taken us on a learning journey of our own into the brave and critical work of constituency-led feminist movements. We acknowledge that historically Bridgespan's focus on programmatic measurement, scalability, and "what works" as a predictor of future success may have led us to overlook feminist movements and their adaptive work to change the beliefs, policies, and practices that keep historically exploited and excluded groups at a perpetual disadvantage. In fact, Bridgespan's mission to build a more just and equitable world is impossible if we cannot support those who are working to challenge and change systems of discrimination moving forward. We have made a commitment to continue to do the work, learning, and self-reflection that achieving a just and equitable world requires, and invite our peers and clients to join us.

A Vision for Systemic, Lasting Change

“**Women are the changemakers.** If you’re on the ground, women are the peacemakers, women are the mediators, women are the hope. I come to this work with joy, and that joy comes from having seen women across the globe change the world for everybody.”

— Theo Sowa, Co-Chair, [Equality Fund](#), Former CEO, [Africa Women’s Development Fund](#)



To the extent people enjoy freedoms and human rights, we do so thanks to social justice movements.⁵ Led by those with lived experience of injustice, movements have long gathered people together to make changes to their societies. From overthrowing British colonialism in India to ending apartheid in South Africa and from expanding voting rights in the United States to changing laws prohibiting abortion in Argentina and more recently Mexico, time and again movements have shown the impact individuals can have when they collectively organize for their own liberation.

Indeed, throughout history, we have counted on movements to light the path forward in a complex and troubling world. Today’s world is no different. The globe is heating up. Civil liberties are under siege. A deadly virus persists. More people are forcibly displaced now than at any time in the last three decades.⁶

We know from the experience of COVID over these last two years that these emergencies don’t affect people equally. Occurring against the backdrop of multilayered and interconnected social inequalities, they are producing profoundly unequal outcomes by race, religion, nationality, class, caste, ability, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Across all these crises, and **interwoven with other forms of inequality, gender inequality is compounding the injustices.** Gender inequality is everywhere, hard-wired into our mindsets, policies, and practices, slowing our progress on every issue. While the forms of discrimination are myriad, the root cause of gender inequality—patriarchy—is the same.

Consider, for example, how rigid gender norms shape the impact of natural disasters, increasingly common given climate change. Men often transmit warning information to other men in public spaces, while women, because of public policies and social norms, tend to be in private spaces, caring for children or the elderly. In Sri Lanka, where it also is often considered inappropriate for women to swim, men outnumbered women survivors of the 2004 tsunami three to one.⁷ More broadly, women are 14 times more likely to die during natural disasters.⁸

Also, in the United States, while voter-suppression efforts make it significantly more difficult for Black and other people of color to vote,⁹ they have gendered consequences as well. Today, 17 states require photo IDs to vote.¹⁰ Such a law disadvantages those who may change their name due to marriage, divorce, or a

gender transition. Voter registration and ID laws that require the same name across all documentation increase the chances that the ballots of women and LGBTQI+ individuals will be discounted.¹¹

If we as a society want to realize transformative change in any area, it's critical to elevate the efforts of those individuals and organizations working to address systems of oppression. And so we must once again look to social justice movements—and feminist movements in particular—to illuminate the way through these troubling times. **Feminist movements are uniquely poised to address the rules, norms, and stories that reinforce gender inequality.** Importantly, feminist movements don't focus solely on gender. On the contrary, they also name and challenge the compounding factors of discrimination—race, religion, caste, class, and more—taking a multifaceted approach and working without end to address our most intractable problems.

Lasting impact: Shaping the policy response to domestic violence

Looking at 70 countries over four decades, political science professors S. Laurel Weldon and Mala Htun concluded that feminist movements—more than left-leaning political parties, participation of women in government, or economic factors—had the most lasting impact on policy responses to violence against women.¹²

Thanks to feminist movements ...

... there has been, [as Françoise Girard has written](#), a “seismic shift in how the world thinks about and prioritizes gender equality. From the creation of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1946 to the negotiations that led to the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015,¹³ ... the mass mobilization of the global women’s movement ... has pushed governments to include gender equality and women’s rights in international agreements and norms, whether in health, education, water and sanitation, or criminal justice reform.”^{14,15} Importantly, this has also extended to LGBTQI+ activism and progress.

What’s more, feminist movements have **pushed beyond direct impact on outcomes for women, girls, and nonbinary people** to realize better outcomes for all people, from more and better-distributed economic growth to more spending on public health and children’s needs. In addition, feminist movements are actively holding the line against the coordinated attack from anti-rights movements that are winding back hard-earned wins, be they in Texas in the United States, Poland, Austria, or Ghana.¹⁶

Here are a few concrete wins feminist movements and other movements that take a feminist lens have been central to realizing in recent years.

Reproductive rights

In 2021, Mexico ruled that, in the northern state of Coahuila, women cannot be prosecuted for getting an abortion.¹⁷ In 2020, Argentina decriminalized and legalized access to abortion up to 14 weeks.¹⁸ In 2018, Ireland overturned a 35-year ban on abortion.¹⁹

Sexual harassment

In 2018–2019 in the United States, following [#MeToo](#), several states banned nondisclosure agreements in sexual misconduct cases. Some states also expanded sexual harassment laws to cover independent contractors.²⁰



Intellectual property

In 2016, the Movimiento Nacional de Tejedoras brought a case against the Guatemalan government, arguing it must prevent global fashion companies from stealing Mayan textile designs. The Guatemalan Supreme Court decided in favor of the Mayan weavers, setting an international legal precedent for Indigenous Peoples' collective intellectual property.²¹

Indigenous territories

In 2012, 18-year-old Nina Gualinga of the Sarayaku Indigenous community in the Ecuadorian Amazon represented the Sarayaku before the Inter-American Court on Human Rights and won a groundbreaking case against the Ecuadorian government for violating Sarayaku rights and lands for oil drilling.²²

Farmworker rights

Since 2011, thanks to decades of organizing by the [Coalition of Immokalee Workers](#), food companies including Trader Joe's, McDonalds, Aramark, and more have signed on to the Fair Food Program, agreeing to source tomatoes and other types of produce only from farms that participate in the program. The program has raised labor standards in an industry that was notoriously exploitative. It has been particularly effective at ending sexual violence in the fields, which has improved working conditions for farmworkers of all genders.²³



Understanding Feminist Movements

Feminist movements are organizations, leaders, and networks working together to challenge and change power structures that reinforce gender inequality.²⁴ They are almost always led by people with lived experience of the gender power imbalance and often other oppressions as well.

The work of feminist activists, organizations, groups, and movements is grounded in an understanding of linked struggles, a proposition famously summed up by American civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, who said, “Nobody’s free until everybody’s free.”

Our conversations and research highlight a host of characteristics that are central to what feminist movements are, how they operate, and, ultimately, why they’re so effective in bringing about transformative change. Granted, they’re quite varied. Some feminist movements enter through climate, others through racial justice. Some are working to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.²⁵ Others are transforming education. And they use a range of strategies and structures. But they all:

- **Focus on power and rights**, working to shift power so that women, girls, and nonbinary people can make their own choices—for themselves and for their communities.
- **Use intersectional analyses**, recognizing that forms of oppression, such as racism and misogyny, compound one another.
- **Are constituency-led**, born from and guided by members of the communities in which they work.
- **Operate as a collective**, comprising any number of (often local) organizations, leaders, and networks working in collaboration.



- **Operate with care**, designing collaborative organizational structures and centering care not just in the *what*, but the *how*, such as offering childcare at their meetings.
- **Work on multiple time horizons**, addressing immediate needs as well as the underlying structural inequities that caused those needs to arise.

Feminism and intersectionality

Feminist writer Zoé Samudzi explains why taking an intersectional approach is integral to feminist work: “Intersectionality is such a vital framework for understanding systems of power, because ‘woman’ is not a catchall category that alone defines all our relationships to power.”²⁶ A Black woman with disabilities will experience racism differently from a Black man, sexism differently from a white woman, and ableism differently from a white man with disabilities. To achieve equality for all people, we must consider the experience of all people.

It's worth noting that feminist movements are most often led by women, girls, and nonbinary people living at the intersection of several forms of social discrimination, such as patriarchy and racism. Those who experience multiple forms of oppression are often best situated to upend injustice for everyone.

For example, the [Movement for Black Lives](#), a racial justice movement of Black-led organizations, includes among its priorities understanding and disrupting the violence that Black women, queer, trans, gender non-conforming, and intersex, and disabled people experience. Challenging patriarchy is an integral part of the work towards Black liberation.²⁷

Constituency-led feminist movements have arrived at the same conclusion many philanthropists have: without a broad equity lens, approaches to solving social problems, including gender inequality, will fall short and may even deepen disparities.²⁸ For example, in the United States, feminist movements are working on racial and gender inequality at once, while in India, feminists also address caste- and religious-based discrimination. While the structures of inequality vary by context, feminist movements are guided by a commitment to challenging the common roots of injustice and informed by lived experience navigating and resisting multiple forms of oppression.

“These are *leaderful* movements,” explains Hilary Pennington, executive vice president for global programs for the Ford Foundation. “They are not *leaderless* movements.” These are the Nepali groups that, following the 2014 earthquake, worked to ensure that rebuilt homes were designed for the first time with standing kitchens so fewer women would suffer from the uterine prolapse commonly caused by traditional squat kitchens. And they are the collectives of Black girls and young women in the United States who work to dismantle barriers to their education—such as harsh discipline at school, sexual harassment, and dress codes that reinforce negative stereotypes about Black girls as “hypersexual” and “disruptive”—and advocate for fair resourcing and culturally affirming instruction.



Nigerian women #EndSARS

Experienced feminist leadership played a crucial role in ending Nigeria's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a police squad that was supposed to curb theft and firearms but became notorious for rape, murder, torture, home invasions, and more. [#EndSARS](#) protests began in 2017 but had limited impact until feminists took the helm.

During a three-week period in October 2020, a group called the [Feminist Coalition](#) raised funds and quickly disbursed them to sustain protestors with food, ambulances, and legal help for those arrested. The effort, which engaged thousands of Nigerians, was the largest protest Nigeria had seen in years. “They took on a scale and size that caught most by surprise,” writes [African Arguments](#), which credits the group's success to its strong women leaders, experience with grassroots movements, and powerful collaboration.²⁹ The intensity of the protests ultimately garnered a commitment from the Nigerian government not only to dismantle SARS but also to prosecute some former SARS members for extortion, rape, and murder.³⁰



Feminist movements “open the door” to intimate spaces

Women’s rights advocate Srilatha Batliwala points out that while many social justice movements “stop at the doorstep of the household,” feminist approaches also consider how power operates in private spaces. For feminists, the body, sexuality, mindsets, and self-image are also sites of power: true social justice requires control over our bodies and expression of our sexuality. While mindsets and self-image can perpetuate oppression, they are also one way feminists resist.³¹

Defining terms

We acknowledge readers come to this report with preexisting definitions and reactions to language. Our team also grappled with some of this language. For example, the Bridgespan team didn’t begin this work with a shared comfort with the word “feminism,” given the range of narratives and stories around the term (including the “whitewashing” of earlier waves of feminism, where stories of white leaders crowded out the reality of the continued leadership of feminists who were Black, Indigenous, or people of color). Through our collaboration with Shake the Table and in dialogue with movement leaders and funders, we came to more fully understand the meaning and value of the terms below.

Given that definitions vary, here we define how we’ve used these terms throughout this report. These definitions were informed by our advisory board, interviews, and the works of feminist writers.

Constituency-led organizations

Constituency-led organizations are organizations led by members of the community in which they work. Community members often have lived experience with the challenges and systems of discrimination the organization works to address. With direct knowledge of community conditions, they are well positioned to develop strategies that will work in context.

Feminism

Feminism is the belief in full social, economic, and political equality for cis-gender and transgender women and girls and nonbinary people. To achieve meaningful gender equality, feminism seeks to shift power to those who resist exploitation or oppression based on their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, nationality, class, caste, ability, or ethnicity.³²

Feminist movements

Feminist movements are organizations, leaders, and networks working together to challenge and change power structures that reinforce gender inequality.^{33,34} They are almost always led by people with lived experience of the gender power imbalance and often other injustices as well.

Funding movements

Funding movements is the practice of investing in registered or unregistered organizations, individuals, and networks—working locally while addressing globally important issues—that collectively seek to achieve full agency and human rights for all people.

Global South

Global South doesn't refer to a geographical south but instead describes a grouping of lower-income countries. The South is a metaphor for human suffering caused by unfettered capitalism, extreme income inequality, and colonialism as well as for the resistance to overcoming such suffering.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an analytical tool for understanding how multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and classism) compound each other in the lives of individuals and groups. Kimberlé Crenshaw initially developed the theory to delineate the ways in which “race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences” and to highlight the race, class, and gender dimensions of violence against women of color.³⁵

Patriarchy

Patriarchy refers to a system of social structures, values, and practices that upholds gender inequality. Patriarchy facilitates men’s control over resources and legitimizes discrimination and violence against women, girls, and nonbinary people. It’s often interwoven with other systems of privilege and oppression.³⁶

Power

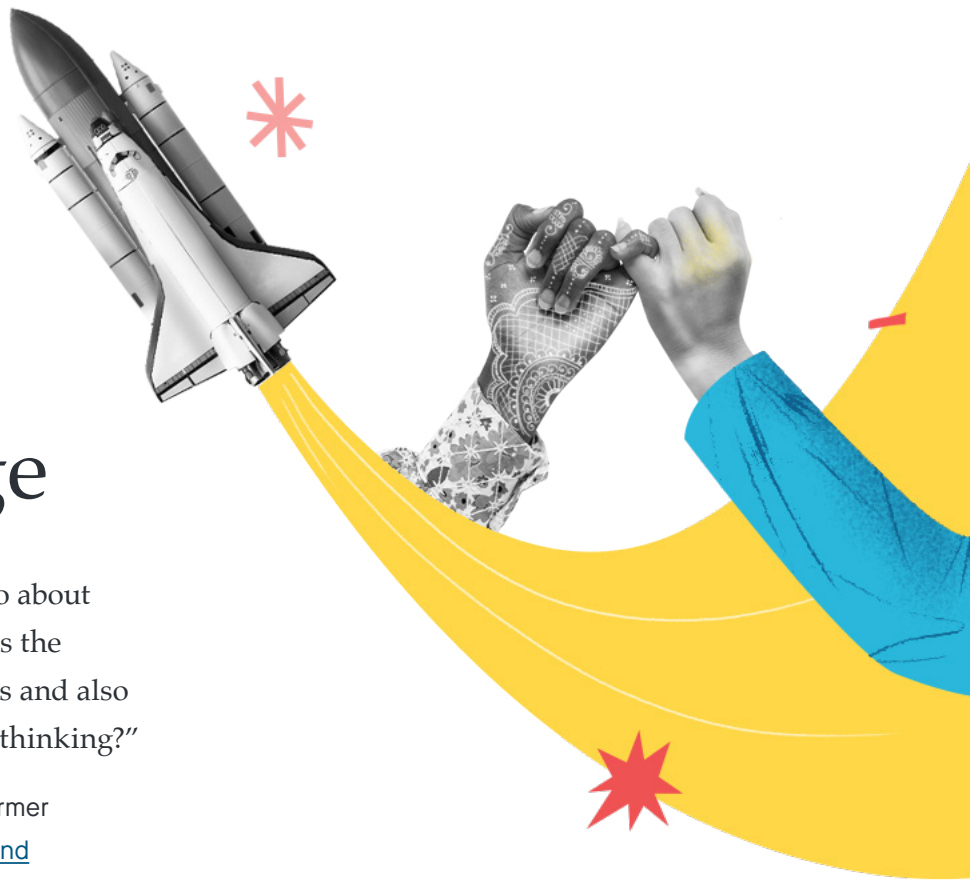
Power is the capacity to shape other peoples’ behavior and hold a disproportionate share of resources and influence. Power dynamics are not static and can shift over time.³⁷ Feminist organizations and leaders often also refer to agency—the ability to act and shape change that we all possess regardless of our access to formal power and privilege.³⁸

Women, girls, and nonbinary people

Women, girls, and nonbinary people is an inclusive category that refers to cis and transgender women and girls and people who identify as nonbinary. We focus particularly on people of color and religious and ethnic minorities, who face multiple injustices and are least likely to have their injustices fully addressed.



A Huge Opportunity to Accelerate Social Change



“ Why would we intentionally go about excluding a group that both has the greatest disparities and barriers and also some of the most cutting-edge thinking?”

— Vanessa Daniel, Founder and Former Executive Director, [Groundswell Fund](#)

While many donors are thinking about how to incorporate systems change into their giving, to date, philanthropy has largely taken a short-term approach to long-term issues, addressing symptoms of deep-seated problems, such as giving girls access to school and helping place women in jobs. Their gender-focused work is often confined to a “women and girls” programmatic silo. Meanwhile, other program areas—climate, health, livelihoods, and so on—may or may not consider how gender inequality is at play. While investment in each silo is important, it will not be enough to create the transformative change donors seek.

The good news is that feminist movements are already doing this hard, integrative work. They provide us with a vision of the transformational change that could be attained with flexible, sustained, community-driven investments, and they remind us of the immense *joy* that can come from being part of realizing a collective vision of a more just world. What’s more, as threats to humanity mount—the climate crisis, the rise of authoritarianism, a global pandemic, extreme income inequality—feminist movements present the holistic solutions such problems require. These powerhouses for social change represent a tremendous opportunity

for funders, who will be hard pressed to see marked progress on the issues they care about without them.

To date, feminist movements have achieved their successes with minimal philanthropic support. **In 2017, less than one percent of total foundation giving, and in 2018, approximately one percent of gender-focused international aid was directed to women’s rights organizations**, which we use as a proxy for lack of data collected on the funding of feminist movements.^{39,40,41} The majority of women’s rights organizations have never received core or multiyear funding. Roughly half of women’s rights organizations in the Global South operate on a median annual budget of \$30,000 or less.⁴²

Add to that an under-resourcing of Global-South-based organizations more broadly. Harvard research has found that a startling 94 percent of foundation giving goes to organizations in the United States and Europe.⁴³ What’s more, Bridgespan research in Africa reveals that the lion’s share of funding designated for Africa remains in the Global North or with Global-North-based entities, such as INGOs headquartered in Africa or UN agency field offices.⁴⁴

Supporting feminist movements is even more critical given the investments in rolling back progress on gender equality and human rights. The election of ultra-conservative, right wing, deeply patriarchal populist leaders in several countries in recent years has led to the erosion of rights and progressive policy. For example, in 2020, the United States led an alliance of ultraconservative governments, including Brazil, Poland, Hungary, Egypt, and Uganda, among others, to issue the Geneva Consensus as a joint front against abortion and diverse family structures. This alliance reflects the anti-rights forces that have prevented further advances in commitments on comprehensive sexual education, sexual rights, and LGBTQI+ rights under the banner of a war on “gender ideology.”⁴⁵

While far too little funding supports the rights of women, girls, and nonbinary people, there are some bright spots. In 2019, the government of Canada gave \$300 million to launch the [Equality Fund](#), an innovative model that combines gender investing, public funding, and philanthropic capital to build sustainable funding flows for feminist movements globally.⁴⁶ And in 2021,

[Leading from the South](#), a program of the government of the Netherlands as well as [Women’s Fund Asia](#), [African Women’s Development Fund](#), the [International Indigenous Women’s Forum](#), and [Fondo de Mujeres del Sur](#), was renewed for another five years to the tune of €80 million.⁴⁷ The program ensures funding reaches grassroots groups in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—without an intermediary in the United States or Europe.

Also in 2021, when the [Generation Equality Forum](#) launched a five-year journey to accelerate gender equity, funders committed \$40 billion to advance gender equality. And yet just \$2.9 billion of the commitments, or roughly 7.5 percent, mentioned a portion of the support would go to feminist movements and women leaders.⁴⁸ While even this smaller number might overestimate the dollars that will reach feminist movements, it remains exciting and significant.⁴⁹

Despite limited philanthropic investment, feminist movements still manage to be vital forces for social change. With bold partnership from philanthropy, their impact will be even more transformational.

“You have this survival mode that keeps us from thriving.”

Laura García, current president and CEO of [Global Greengrants Fund](#), which funds grassroots environmental causes, estimates that during the first five years of her seven-year tenure as director of [Fondo Semillas](#), a Mexican women’s fund, she devoted the majority of her time to fundraising. “The last two years were the years where I was able to push the vision of the organization and creatively think with the movements and the grantees. ‘What can we do? How can we transform this?’ But it took me five years, because it was just impossible. We had to work, work, work to at least fulfill the operative costs.”



Feminist movements in action: Spotlight on domestic workers

The global efforts of domestic workers to secure social protections and labor rights and improve their lives and livelihoods offer a compelling example of feminist movements at work. They approach the challenge from every angle, recognizing the full range of issues and employing multiple strategies—from community building to legal reform to offering alternate economic and environmental solutions—to achieve their aims.

In 2011, the International Labour Organization adopted Convention 189 (C189), establishing an international labor standard for domestic workers.⁵⁰ The convention, itself the result of intense activism by feminist funds and movements, marked a major step forward. Yet it merely suggested the rights and protections informal workers should have. For C189 to be more than that, countries must ratify it. And societies must shift to see their nannies, caregivers, and cleaners—75 percent of whom are women and

girls, many of them migrants and refugees⁵¹—as worthy of dignity and respect. The fight was on.

In Mali, those waging the fight are as young as 12 and 13 years old. Girls subject to domestic work often come from rural villages, arriving in cities with no connections, education, or money. In 2012, a group of young domestic workers founded Association pour la Défense des Droits des Aides Domestiques (ADDAD) to pursue Mali's ratification of C189, to promote the rights of domestic workers, and to improve their economic and social standing in Mali. Shake the Table's Swatee Deepak, who was director of the [With and For Girls Collective and Fund](#) at the time and one of ADDAD's early funders, was used to funding organizations led by girls and young people. But ADDAD was extraordinary. "[Labor rights] were not something we expected to see in the portfolio," says Deepak. "Once ADDAD was nominated and selected for funding, they highlighted for us that there were other groups like them, in Mali and beyond, that were also run by really young women and girls."

For domestic workers, organizing is a lifeline. Individually, they are isolated, often invisible, working behind closed doors where physical, sexual, and verbal abuse are common. **Collectively, they are a force for change.**





ADDAD is still lobbying for existing laws in Mali to include domestic workers: a legislative win is the guiding star. It has also pushed for employment contracts to protect domestic workers: to date, 700 contracts have been processed—and counting. Meanwhile, ADDAD teaches girls how to read, supports them when they face abuse or rights violations, and helps develop their leadership within ADDAD, offering alternate pathways outside of domestic work.⁵²

As ADDAD's membership has grown into the thousands and across borders, it has turned its spotlight on hard-to-see root causes. ADDAD was one of 300 organizations to participate in “The Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles” road show. ADDAD members traveled by bus through three West African countries to raise awareness about the poor management of natural resources that is driving girls from their homes in the first place, needing to seek employment and often housing as domestic workers. The Global Convergence delivered a declaration to the Economic Community of West African States' court, representing an important win for the region.⁵³

In the United States, the fight to improve the lives of domestic workers involves different players but the same tenacity. In 2011, the [National Domestic Workers Alliance \(NDWA\)](#)⁵⁴ launched the [Caring Across Generations](#) campaign, which brought together home care consumers and workers in a shared effort to improve working conditions for domestic workers as well as access and affordability for those who use long-term supports and services to live safe and dignified lives.

Trishala Deb, who worked for Caring Across Generations in its early days, highlights the audacity of and foresight in the campaign's

vision. “Not only did they predict an unlikely alliance [between consumers and workers] but saw a solution at a national scale, which led to their policy package framing the conversation 10 years later during the Build Back Better and Infrastructure policy debates,” says Deb. Notably, those debates continue, with the NDWA still there, pushing for a better future for the 2.5 million domestic workers in the United States.

In Mexico, domestic workers found their own moment when director Alfonso Cuarón made the film *Roma* to honor the Indigenous domestic worker who raised him. When the film was ready, Cuarón reached out to [Fondo Semillas](#), a Mexican feminist fund that has supported women-led groups and laid the groundwork for a domestic worker movement in Mexico for years. Cuarón also invited the [Centro de Apoyo y Capacitación para Empleadas del Hogar \(CACEH\)](#)⁵⁵ to join the film's impact campaign to support domestic worker rights. Both organizations, together with the NDWA, worked with Cuarón and film producers to help domestic workers in Mexico raise their voices—to moving effect. On the same day the film was screened for senators, Mexico's Supreme Court ordered the national government to extend social protections to domestic workers. At the time, an estimated 98 percent of Mexico's 2.4 million domestic workers were working without contracts; 90 percent had no medical insurance.⁵⁶

Mexico ratified C189 in 2020, becoming the 30th country to achieve this milestone.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the fights to ratify C189 can be heard in stereo in Burkina Faso, India, and beyond. The drum beat grows louder: the [Center for Global Women's Leadership's](#) annual [Global 16 Days Campaign](#), with more than 6,000 organizations in 185 countries, chose informal workers as its focus for 2020. The fight goes on.



Five Things You Can Do to Support Feminist Movements

While some philanthropists will be new to funding feminist movements, we recognize others may be well into this work. Wherever you are, we urge you to go further. This report offers ideas for all philanthropists, including those whose core focus is not gender equality.



01. Understand power structures

02. Re-examine risk

03. Fund feminist funds

04. Shift your practices

05. Measure what matters

01. Understand power structures

Power structures, informal and formal, show up and shape relationships, homes, communities, and every system with which we interact. To understand the work of feminist movements, which dedicate themselves to shifting power, we must recognize those structures.

Consider the experience of philanthropist Eileen Farbman, president of the Kolibri Foundation. In her former profession as a social worker, Farbman had worked with women facing tough problems: domestic violence, human trafficking, substance abuse, foster care, and prison. She carried this experience into her philanthropy, funding others doing similar work and ceding power to them to make decisions on the ground as she would have made as a clinician.

Still, what she saw worried her. “I saw all of these systems stacking up, where Black and brown and all people of color were on the bottom,” says Farbman. Wanting to do more, she shifted from programmatic funding to the gender and racial justice movements that were challenging the systems perpetuating inequalities. “It didn’t take a lot to shift,” she says.

Feminist movements dedicate themselves to shifting the power entrenched in our informal norms and consciousness. To begin recognizing power structures, you may ask yourself the same questions they do: *Who has privilege and power here? Who’s making decisions? Whose narrative is dominating? Whose voices are missing? What is the political context? What are the origins of existing power structures, and what are the consequences for women, girls, and nonbinary people? How do their overlapping identities factor in?*

As you lean in to feminist movements, here are some other steps to take to deepen your understanding of why and how to fund them.



Recognize that patriarchy cuts across every issue.

Addressing patriarchy gets relegated to a “women and girls” issue, when, actually, women, girls, and nonbinary people are disproportionately affected by every issue. Consider Afghanistan, where women’s rights have been *de jure* equal to men since the 2004 constitution, but the reality of their civil rights has been less than equal. This reality was on full display during the refugee crisis in 2021. While the crisis affected everyone, patriarchal systems limited women’s options for recourse: 94 percent of men in Afghanistan had formal identification documents compared to only 48 percent of women. As a result, many Afghan women didn’t qualify for evacuation programs and were unable to leave the country during the US withdrawal and Taliban takeover.⁵⁸

Also consider the issue of over incarceration. Today, the number of women being jailed in the United States has increased at nearly double the rate of men since 1985, with patriarchal violence being a significant underlying factor. Indeed, this system has been set up to criminalize those who experience sexual violence, creating a “sexual abuse to prison pipeline.”⁵⁹ Among women, lesbian and bisexual women are four times more likely to be arrested than straight women.⁶⁰ One in five trans folks who’ve had police contact report having been harassed by police—a number that jumps to nearly two in five for Black trans people.⁶¹

Listen to those closest to the challenges. One's own experience, limitations, and biases limit the understanding of power. Perhaps the single most important way to draw closer to movements is to listen to those with lived experience resisting oppression and discrimination.

While Farbman was clear eyed about the potential movements presented, she was nevertheless unsure she belonged in the movement space. So she began forging alliances with grassroots leaders beginning with conferences and conversations. "To me, listening, learning, and looking for where the need is is a really important way to engage," she says. Farbman, a consummate relationship builder, particularly likes

having a conversation after the grant—always in the spirit of learning more and seeing if there are other ways she can lend support. It's important to her to make grants by leading with trust.

Now, as Farbman and her son, Leo, get ready to launch a new foundation specifically focused on funding at the intersection of race and gender justice, they've deliberately gathered a team of three movement leaders to help shape their giving. "I feel grateful to have spent over a year dreaming and imagining about Kolibri with three amazing feminist movement leaders," says Farbman. "As we are about to launch, I'm incredibly excited."

02. Re-examine risk

Some types of investments, be they financial or philanthropic, are quite linear and technical, with fairly predictable outcomes (e.g., investing in an established company or in an established direct service program). Others, such as those in tech startups or power-shifting organizations, follow less predictable paths and take more time to pay off—but introduce the potential for transformational impact. “For us to be able to live in a better, more equitable world, we actually need a full-stream approach,” says Sid Efromovich, co-founder of [Generation Pledge](#), a community of inheritors pledging to do good.

Feminist movements fit squarely into the less predictable, more transformational category. Some philanthropists may view them as risky, particularly given that they’re often far from the powerful networks of Global North philanthropy. **And yet, to address systemic injustice, the real risk is not investing in these leaders and organizations.**

Indeed, key to understanding risk is recognizing the headwinds. While feminist movements go almost entirely unfunded, existing power systems continue to attract and deploy more resources. Thus, as feminist movements work to defend and advance the rights of all people, they face mounting and often coordinated and well-funded opposition to their important work. For example, there has been and continues to be an uptick in anti-gender funding. The Global Philanthropy Project estimates that, from 2008 to 2017, the aggregate revenue of organizations associated with the anti-gender movement was \$6.2 billion.⁶² This movement has been credited with significantly rolling back sexual, reproductive, and children and young people’s rights.⁶³ Feminist movements face similar headwinds in many areas, including funding that undermines the rights of migrant workers, Indigenous people, and more.

When funding finally came through, Liberian women ended the war

Leymah Gbowee, who led the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement in 2003,⁶⁴ received job offers from multiple international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) that recognized her skills—none of which would support her work organizing women to participate in Liberia’s peace movement. When she finally managed to secure that funding from the Global Fund for Women and a few other funders willing to take the “risk,” she was able to lead a movement that was ultimately credited with ending the devastating decades-long civil war.⁶⁵ Gbowee was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in 2011.





03. Fund feminist funds

If you're new to funding feminist movements or have limited time to build relationships with them, feminist funds offer an excellent way to support burgeoning movements and move money to constituency-led feminist groups. Institutional funders also invest in feminist funds as a way to ensure long-term work happens regardless of shifts in institutional priorities. Even funders deeply immersed in the work of feminist movements support feminist funds, sometimes creating new ones, to accelerate their grantmaking.

Created by, for, and with women, girls, and nonbinary people, feminist funds are primary funders of feminist movements, particularly in the Global South.

Feminist funds raise money to support feminist movements and to advocate for their further resourcing. They provide long-term, flexible support as well as emergency-response funding. These funds “read” the political landscape in which they operate and respond to feminist movements’ priorities rather than create their own grantmaking strategies. Many feminist funds have open calls for funding, allowing them to identify trends in movement priorities and support evolving needs. Aside from grantmaking, feminist funds also convene diverse feminist activists, groups, and organizations and support the movement organizations that are leading shared strategy efforts and coordinating across movement actors. Some funds may not identify as

explicitly feminist, but invest deeply in constituency-led feminist work with an intersectional approach.

Shalini Eddens, deputy executive director at the [Urgent Action Fund for Human Rights \(UAF\)](#), a feminist fund specializing in rapid response, likens her organization to the “emergency room” of philanthropy. UAF’s quick small-grant funding helps people to be safe—to get a lawyer, get out of prison, put up security systems in their offices, and so on—or allows them to act fast when opportunity strikes. Key to moving quickly are UAF’s advisors, many of whom are past or current grantees, who are either on the ground or from the countries where UAF funds. “It’s another way of thinking about participatory grantmaking,” say Eddens. “Bringing activists and movement leaders into the grantmaking process is central to the principles of feminism.”

Feminist funds view funding in a collaborative light. Anne Hess, board co-chair at [MADRE](#), a fund that supports women’s groups facing war and disaster, looks across the funding landscape to ensure that, collectively, needs are met. Hess asks her peer funds, “What are you doing? How does that complement what we are doing? How can we collaborate for stronger impact?”

Feminist funds are experts in turning over stones and overcoming barriers to fund and support feminist organizations and leaders at various stages of their development. Latanya Mapp Frett, president and CEO of [Global Fund for Women](#), which funds gender justice movements, feels a responsibility to meet movements where they are rather than make them find her. “It’s important to tap into our network around the world to advise us on not only what’s happening in their communities but how we might be able to support feminist groups that are making a powerful impact on really hard or entrenched issues,” says Frett. She recently set up a gender justice listening lab to identify and fill knowledge gaps, make more strategic decisions, and drive more and better resources where they are most needed.

Shake the Table and Bridgespan join the voices of others calling for investment in feminist funds.⁶⁶ A vibrant and diverse landscape feminist funds exists, and [weshakethetable.org](#) provides an illustrative list ready for funding. **Bridgespan research indicates that collaborative funds focused on gender equity could, on average, deploy approximately 10 times their current funding.**⁶⁷ Feminist funds represent a ready opportunity for funders to unlock tremendous impact.

On-the-ground savvy in Afghanistan

Collaboration and creativity were on full display in feminist funds’ support of women’s groups in Afghanistan during the Taliban’s 2021 takeover. At a time when other funders couldn’t get money into Afghanistan, MADRE, UAF, the [Association for Women’s Rights in Development](#), the [Equality Fund](#), [Frontline Defenders](#), [Equality Now](#), [Donor Direct Action](#), and the [Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom](#) managed to collect donations from US funders and pull together the legal information required to send funds from the United States to women-led, informal networks in Afghanistan.

Taking into consideration the largely cash-based economy, bank shutdowns, and potential Taliban surveillance of incoming funds, MADRE’s grant-making team sent its funding via Western Union and coordinated with on-the-ground partners to ensure women had safe transportation to pick up the cash. MADRE also anticipated the difficulties in moving funds to Afghan groups before the Taliban takeover and sent “disaster preparedness” funds to partners in the weeks prior, so they would be well-resourced to sustain themselves through the emergency. As of February 2022, MADRE has moved more than \$500,000 to women-led, women-focused movements in Afghanistan, with another \$400,000 scheduled to go in the coming months.



04. Shift your practices

Revisit your existing processes for selecting grantees to consider how they can be more collaborative, responsive, and inclusive. If you deepen your focus on root causes and systemic, entrenched inequalities, you'll likely increasingly turn to feminist movements to achieve your goals.

Expand your sourcing. Often, donors' sources come from close-in networks and may be limited to Global North, white-led institutions—compounding their own biases. Redefine “expertise” and prioritize sourcing channels that are closer to the work and issues. Invite grassroots feminist leaders to serve as your advisors—and pay them for their time and expertise. Consider expanding the languages in which you'll review applications.



Consider using an open call process for at least part of your funding portfolio. This approach can be powerful as an equity practice and an effective way to surface emergent groups and younger leaders.

You can also join a donor community to explore feminist funding in community with others. These communities create opportunities for broader relationship building, learning, and collaboration among you and your peers. [Weshakethetable.org](https://weshakethetable.org) provides an illustrative list of funding communities ready to support you in your funding.

During COVID, the funding community [Women Moving Millions](https://womenmovingmillions.org) found that many organizations addressing trafficking, domestic violence, sexual assault, and other issues that were especially acute at the time weren't being adequately supported.⁶⁸ In response, Women Moving Millions highlighted an organization or social change leader every Wednesday on Zoom for its members. “Every single one of them were supported—either through funds, sourcing personal protective equipment (PPE), or connecting them to valuable resources,” says Board Chair Mona Sinha. “While every single person can't fund every single issue, even four or five people who stepped in and then amplified their large networks successfully filled each need.”

For young philanthropist Kristina Johansson, who founded her family's Solberga Foundation, being part of the vibrant [Resource Generation](https://resourcegeneration.org) community of young funders is a source of strength. “When I'm around my philanthropic peers who are doing similar things, I'm always challenged to be braver in my practices, to take on more risk, and to actually challenge my own internalized, more conservative approaches to philanthropy,” says Johansson.

Use diligence tactics that elevate feminist movements rather than screen them out. Consider each aspect of your due diligence process. Do you evaluate organizations based on the caliber and content of their websites? (Feminist movements often have little time or money to spend communicating their work.) Do your diligence criteria reinforce existing power

structures, such as defining a “strong leader” in a way that favors white-dominant leadership styles or organizations from the Global North? Look for diversity and constituent leadership on the board or leadership team as a sign of organizational strength.

Do you have thresholds for size, history, impact, or even status as an organization? Such thresholds will limit who can apply, screening out some innovative and visionary actors. Feminist strategist Angelika Arutyunova explains that some feminist movements have good reason not to establish formal organizations. “In some of the regions where I work, organizing isn’t happening in an NGO model, not happening in organizations, because we’ll be killed,” she says.⁶⁹

Guided by trust for her grantee partners, Urgent Action Fund’s Eddens collects only what she absolutely needs from them. UAF’s rapid-response efforts ask three questions of applicants: What’s the urgency? What do you want to do with the money? Why do you need to do it now? After she makes a grant, Eddens is open to receiving any kind of report—be it UAF’s template or a video or report the grantee may have prepared for another funder.

Fund the ecosystem. Large-scale, long-term change has always taken an ecosystem of organizations, networks, and people working together to dismantle the forces that maintain the status quo. Picking just a few organizations can meaningfully hinder progress toward the collective goal and perpetuate the starvation cycle for those doing the hardest work. Understand the ecosystem, fund across it, and support collaboration among organizations.

“Unequal opportunities create inequality,” attests Global Greengrants’ García, who warns against choosing a “winner” or highlighting a “hero story,” because “it disrupts the collective organizing piece that is key for political life in communities.”

“If you actually get beyond just ‘how do you write a report in English ...’”

Erin Ganju, managing director of private education funder [Echidna Giving](#), finds small organizations to be among the most impressive in Echidna’s portfolio. “If in fact you get to know the work and see the presence they have ... see their ability to influence government ... see their ability to be in a community of practice and influence other organizations ... see their proximity to crises that often, in education, are as important as what’s happening in schools, what’s happening in the community ... [local organizations are] light-years ahead of the organizations that would traditionally be ‘safe bets.’ They’re much more impactful.”

For Echidna Giving’s Erin Ganju, building the ecosystem is part of the goal. “For those trying to give away millions every year, we need to debunk the notion that the best path is a smaller set of grants,” says Ganju. “It’s a lot easier to give to 25 organizations. However, if we’re trying to build the ecosystem, we need to give to 200 organizations and ensure organizations of all types and sizes have the ability to thrive.” Indeed, Echidna isn’t afraid to give small organizations the funding they need to do big things.

Strengthen the entire ecosystem by encouraging and funding collaboration among ecosystem leaders and funders. When Lynne and Peter Smitham, co-founders of The Kiawah Trust, a family trust that supports adolescent girls in India, narrowed their philanthropy in 2012 to focus holistically on gender justice in India, few organizations shared their focus.

Nearly a decade later, the field has changed dramatically. The Smithams’ close work with its philanthropic partner in India, [Dasra](#), helped draw other philanthropists to support women and girls, fund research and collaboration, and make capacity-building grants in the sector. Fifteen organizations are working together. Cross-movement collaborations are working to address Indigenous, climate, and caste issues and accelerating their combined efforts through peer

learning exchanges. And, excitingly, media coverage of issues related to women and girls has skyrocketed.

Provide long-term, general operating support. The work of feminist movements is generational and emergent; funding needs to align with that. Too often, funds are restricted to specific programs and outcomes, holding feminist movements back from precisely the adaptive work that enables them to be transformative. Feminist leaders with lived experience of the challenges they address are best positioned to determine how funds may be most effectively used. Flexible resources up front allow feminist movements to be imaginative, responsive, and planful.

Interrogate your existing portfolio with a feminist lens. Take time to understand how gender inequities, often compounded by other forms of oppression, show up in the problems on which you have chosen to focus. Further, disaggregate your data. Within every issue you fund, ask: *What percentage of your grantees are using multiple strategies, including organizing, narrative-based tactics, and other approaches, to shift power? Are you having the impact you desire in shifting norms, policies, and ultimate life outcomes for women, girls, and nonbinary people? If not, what may need to shift? What percentage of your funding is reaching organizations working with, and led by, those most affected by gender injustice? What percentage is reaching adolescent girls and young women?*

If you don't already know the answers to the above questions or otherwise feel the need to gather more information, resist the urge to add new line items to your reporting requirements. Instead, truly listen to the organizations you're funding and build trust-based relationships with them. Get to know how they're thinking about gender inequity, the data they're gathering, and the spaces they occupy.

Ask for—or offer—two more names. If you have organizations in your portfolio that are aligning well with your aspirations, ask those leaders for two more organizations you might consider funding. And promote

those rockstar grantees (the ones so clearly working to shift power) to your network.

When lifelong organizer Jackie Payne, executive director of the nonpartisan women's civic organization, [Galvanize USA](#), meets with funders, she always has two other suggestions for organizations that need funding. "I always say, 'If you don't want to fund me or even if you do, here's who else you need to fund,'" says Payne, for whom the ecosystem is front of mind. In fact, when you give to Galvanize, you get a thank you note with a request to support the Florida Rising, an organization Payne admires.

How core funding fueled feminist leadership in Sudan

Since 1995, the [Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa \(SIHA\)](#) has been working to strengthen women's rights and address the subordination of and violence against women. Working across eight countries, SIHA has built a massive informal network of women with very little funding, most of it project-specific. "Funders don't fund in conflict areas," explains Hakima Abbas, co-executive director of the Association for Women's Rights in Development.

Eventually, SIHA received its first core funding grant, giving it the flexibility to be responsive—and none too soon. When Sudan's dictatorship fell in 2019, SIHA was ready. "They had built trust," says Abbas. "They knew how to support." At a time when other actors couldn't enter the region and it was difficult to get funding through, SIHA was already in position to help feminist activists respond to the threats, especially that of mass sexual violence during the perilous early days, as well as the opportunities for impact.

"They couldn't have done that if they had project-specific funding, because it wouldn't have aligned," says Abbas. "How could they have known a revolution was about to start?"

05. Measure what matters

Similar to the challenge donors face when funding systems change work of any sort, funding feminist movements requires rethinking how we measure success. Interviews with funders currently focused in this area reveal that dialogue with grantees is an invaluable way to surface the indicators of progress that matter most.

It's worth noting that the following practices are not specific to feminist movements but to movement funding more generally. Our examples show ways in which they play out specifically in feminist contexts.

Use a range of measures. The work of feminist movements is inherently wide-ranging. For example, a single feminist organization that takes an intersectional approach may work in a variety of areas, such as securing access to services, conducting training with religious leaders to shift social norms, and advocating to local governments to change laws. Using a range of measures allows you to see a grantee's contribution to a shift in any one of these multiple arenas. You may also want to specifically inquire about collaboration as a metric of impact, given how integral it is to the work. Does the group belong to associations of aligned organizations? Are the leaders in dialogue with other organizations across the region or globally?

Work together with grantees to define success. “We designed a set of metrics, but we co-designed it with grassroots leaders so that it would be relevant,” explains Vanessa Daniel, founder and executive director of [Groundswell Fund](#), a fund that supports grassroots organizing led by women of color. “It would align with data they were already collecting for the most part and would help us to give a sense of scale and impact to funders—and also to aggregate the impact across many smaller grantees, which is what a



lot of funders need to move the needle.” Groundswell’s metrics include numbers of constituents organized, constituents in leadership roles, grantees organized around various social justice issues, and more.

Melinda French Gates, co-chair and founder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, underscored the importance of letting grantees lead on metrics in [her 2022 Giving Pledge letter](#).

“My approach to philanthropy has always been data-driven, and I think it’s important for philanthropists to set ambitious goals and measure our progress against those goals. I’ve learned, however, that it’s equally important to place trust in the people and organizations we partner with and let them define success on their own terms. **Philanthropists are generally more helpful to the world when we’re standing behind a movement rather than trying to lead our own.**”⁷⁰

As you measure, be mindful of the trade-off. While metrics may be valuable for funders and grantees alike, collecting them may take precious time away from grantees’ power-shifting work. Above all, it’s best to

use measurement as a tool to understand the work of your grantees, support their efforts to explore ways they can continue to improve on their strategies and practices, and explore your own opportunities to resource their work better.

Be ready to pivot. Once metrics are set, hold them lightly. Many feminist groups, particularly ones in communities and regions that have been shut out from institutional power and resources, are continually reassessing their priorities and pivoting to the most promising opportunities and pressing needs, especially in emergencies.

During COVID, the [Silicon Valley Community Foundation](#) funded the San Mateo-based nonprofit [Faith in Action](#) to reach out to faith-based communities to help families claim the earned income tax credit (EITC). As young Latina leader Eva Reyes went door-to-door advocating for the EITC, she came to understand that people in her community were more concerned about being evicted. Reyes changed course and built a coalition to push for an eviction moratorium in San Mateo County. “If we would have put very strict metrics on [Faith in Action] ... we would not have been successful, because they might have gotten 30 people filing for the EITC,” says Gina Dalma, executive vice president of community action, policy, and strategy for the Silicon Valley Community Foundation. “Instead, we had the most ambitious moratorium on evictions in the state.”

Listen to narrative, story, and details. Many of the philanthropists we interviewed have turned to story as a more authentic way of evaluating progress.

After years of focusing on a finite set of quantitative metrics, Amy Klement, managing partner at [Imaginable Futures](#), a global philanthropic investment firm, has shifted into hard-core listening mode. Klement gathers people throughout an ecosystem—students, parents, teachers, policymakers, entrepreneurs, philanthropists—and creates spaces where they can share empirical stories of what’s happening in the field.

Klement wants to know what the bright spots are, where the momentum is, and where they should fan the flames. Rather than look for quantitative measures, she asks qualitative questions: *What did you learn? What did you do? What was the impact? Do you think there’s more to be done here?*

Most of all, Klement wants to learn. “We never say ‘here’s what we’re going to do over the next three years.’ Even in the calendar year, what we end up doing could be very different based on what we learn,” she says. Klement’s commitment is steadfast; she is ready to shapeshift with partners based on their learnings.

Be Part of the “We”

“ It’s not about one subset. It’s about all of us, and by virtue of some of us having more power and influence and more of a platform, it’s incumbent upon us to share that power and platform with those who don’t yet have the microphone.”

— Tara Abrahams, Head of Impact, [The Meteor](#)

In Ghana today, queer people are in a fight for their lives. The anti-gender movement is making headway, and a proposed anti-gay bill threatens 10-year jail sentences for LGBTQI+ people and their advocates or sympathizers. It also proposes gender reassignment surgery for intersex folks. The bill was instigated by a meeting of the World Congress of Families held in Ghana in 2019. The World Congress, largely supported by churches, enjoys hugely flexible funding and several times the funding of LGBTQI+ movements.

Since then, LGBTQI+ people in Ghana have been on tenterhooks. “During the pandemic, those churches, those folks with that ideology were able to pin this in ways that feminist movements weren’t and provide direct services like food and other things,” says Hakima Abbas of the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID). “Imagine being queer in Ghana in a pandemic with no livelihood and having to access food resources through churches that are calling for the death penalty for homosexuality. So ... by not supporting grassroots, constituency-led feminist agendas, you’re also creating atmospheres in the country where then something like the anti-homosexuality bill comes up in Ghana.”

When Abbas talks about losing ground on the African continent, her urgency is palpable. LGBTQI+ rights organizations across Africa are working for safety,

freedom from violence, and full opportunity. With adequate funding, the nimble and resourceful organizations that make up the Ghanaian LGBTQI+ rights movements can coordinate efforts, provide legal defense services, mobilize communities, and create advocacy campaigns to change hearts and minds. But with a dearth of funding, there is no way to hold the line, let alone push for greater freedoms. This is the true risk to human life of not supporting constituency-led feminist movements.

“There’s just not enough funding for movements and organizations in the Global South,” Abbas says. “Do the funding,” she implores. “Give as much as you can to constituency-led organizations and as flexibly as you can.”

Do the funding. What exactly does this entail? In short, give as if everyone’s lives depend on it—because they do. In this interconnected world, the threats—particularly the climate crisis, rise of authoritarianism, and closing space for civil society—are truly existential. Investing in constituency-led feminist movements, even as only part of a larger portfolio, is a critical way funders can help turn the tide.

Feminist movements and funds are at the ready but are significantly underfunded. AWID research from 2019 estimates women’s funds channel \$100 million and



foundations channel \$600 million to feminist movements each year. With the vast majority of funding remaining in the Global North, we estimate feminist movements in the Global South receive only a small fraction of this funding—far less than the need.⁷¹ Yet, we are seeing momentum. In the past couple years, individual governments and bilaterals have moved additional funding to feminist movements, recognizing both their historic underfunding and tremendous power. Now, more and more individual funders and private funders are embracing this opportunity to do more.

Feminist movement leaders and funds recognize the potential of the growing funder momentum. The [Generational Equality Forum Action Coalition on Feminist Movements](#), [AWID](#), [Global Philanthropy Project](#), and [Prospera](#) all include demands for philanthropy to step up at this critical moment. Prospera, for example, demanded that 10 percent of all gender-equality funding be routed to women’s funds directly over five years (2021–26), reflecting a 10 times increase over current giving.

Inspired by their leadership, Bridgespan and Shake the Table join these leaders in calling the field to be bold and start to deliver on the existing capacity of giving and receiving for feminist movements. We urge philanthropy, individual philanthropists, and other funders to give at least an additional \$1.5 billion annually to feminist movements, or \$6 billion by 2026. Specifically, focus unrestricted, multiyear funding on feminist movements in the Global South as well as those led by women, girls, and nonbinary people from Black, Indigenous, and communities of color worldwide.

We set the very minimum of \$1.5 billion a year over and above current funding levels as a starting point, to hold ground against the anti-gender movement and gain traction toward a just future for us all. For thousands of individual feminist leaders, organizations, and their collective movements, this investment would represent a game-changing opportunity. Increasing the resources available to feminist movements by an order of magnitude could enable gains (and stave off losses) in reproductive rights around the world, fairer and more dignified wages and working conditions, and climate justice. It could advance work to reduce gender-based violence as well as push back against authoritarianism and protect democracy, countering systemic abuse in communities around the world. It would recognize the transformative, collaborative work of feminist movements across borders and generations. Such an investment will lead to outcomes we can’t yet imagine.

We urge you to lean into the fear, the exhilaration, the joy of this imperative work and to match their tremendous courage with your giving—to join in and help blow past this call to action.

In the meantime, movements aren’t waiting. They continue to pursue their work against all odds. When Pari Ibrahim, founder of the [Free Yezidi Foundation](#), a nonprofit supporting women and children caught in ISIS’ genocide of the Yezidi people, attended a meeting with religious leaders, the men in attendance literally pushed her off her chair.

So, Ibrahim picked herself up and shoved her way back into the circle.

Now is the time to fund systemic, lasting change for us all.

\$6 billion as a baseline

We believe \$1.5 billion per year is a minimum baseline to support feminist movements.

Throughout the paper we have used the term “feminist funds,” which includes a range of funders that support feminist movements, including women’s funds, along with feminist intermediary funds or networks that redistribute resources, and feminist donor collaboratives. AWID research from 2019 showed that women’s funds alone channel \$100 million to feminist movements each year. Bridgespan research in 2021 identified that collaborative funds focused on gender equity could deploy, on average, approximately 10 times their current funding.⁷² This is consistent with Prospera’s call to action to multiply funding to women’s funds by 10x. Thus, we believe women’s funds alone could channel an additional \$900 million.

Then, our collective conversations and interviews suggest organizations can readily double their investments. Considering the \$600 million currently being absorbed by feminist movements from foundation giving, we assume these leaders, networks, and organizations could absorb an additional \$600 million.

Together, these numbers illustrate the ability for feminist movements to deploy a minimum of \$1.5 billion annually.

While women’s funds are an important set of feminist movements’ funders, as noted above, their work is complemented by other feminist funding mechanisms. There are feminist intermediary funds, such as [Ms. Foundation for Women](#) in the United States, [Trag Foundation](#) in Serbia, and [Purposeful](#) in Sierra Leone. There are other feminist donor collaboratives housed at fiscal sponsors such as [Amplify Change](#), [Collective Future Fund](#), and [Grantmakers for Girls of Color](#). And there are exciting new networks emerging, including the Global Alliance for Sustainable Feminist Movements.

All of these types of feminist funds reach only a fraction of the need. For example, in 2021, [Mama Cash](#) was only able to give grants to 15 of 1,000-plus applications from new groups of activists. We heard this pattern play out across funds. Even at 10x, there will be more demand for funding than is addressed.

Our question, then, is: **given this huge, timely opportunity to collectively give and be part of investing in transformative change, how far past the baseline will the funder community go?**

About the Authors

Shake the Table bridges movements for racial, gender, and economic justice and philanthropy. We share knowledge, move resources, convene dialogue, expand networks, and create practical tools. We believe in the power of feminist movements to create more justice and joy and share insights and unlock resources to multiply their impact.

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The Bridgespan Group is a global nonprofit that collaborates with social change organizations, philanthropists, and impact investors to make the world more equitable and just. Bridgespan's services include strategy consulting and advising, sourcing and diligence, and leadership team support. We take what we learn from this work and build on it with original research, identifying best practices and innovative ideas to share with the social sector. We work from locations in Boston, Johannesburg, Mumbai, New York, and San Francisco.

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Lastly, and most importantly, we honor the bold movements that are building more just, feminist realities around the world. We hope this report contributes to your advocacy for better and more sustained resourcing of your vital and vibrant organizing.

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Appendix A: Solidarity Statement

The authors developed and committed to the solidarity statement below at the outset of their research and used these principles to guide them throughout this work.

Shake the Table and The Bridgespan Group are partnering in research that helps mobilize meaningful philanthropic resources in support of feminist movements globally. If we are to successfully upend the deep injustices and suffering caused by patriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism, and unfettered capitalism, feminist leaders and efforts must be resourced with abundance.

To lead this process effectively, we recognize that our research team must embody and integrate feminist principles throughout our process. This includes our engagement with movement leaders and with other research efforts (past, present, and those in planning) that are led by feminist leaders and funders.

Philanthropic actors have caused harm and undermined feminist leadership, particularly women of color and leaders in the Global South, under the banner of “supporting” their work. We have seen this in creating platforms for some and invisibilizing others; co-opting and de-contextualizing the work and ideas of Black, Indigenous, and Global South leaders; and by being more accountable to those with wealth than to working-class and under-resourced feminist movements.

Our hope is to lead a process that will model solidarity between movement leaders, feminist funders, and research teams working in service of strengthening feminist movements globally. For this reason, the Shake the Table team has written this solidarity statement outlining the following commitments.

In solidarity with feminist research teams and movements, Bridgespan and Shake the Table are committed to the following:

Centering and elevating movement research. We must elevate voices and give credit where credit is due. A

multitude of researchers and practitioners have spent time thinking about these issues over the past few years, although not all of them have benefited from as large a profile and presence as they deserve. An important aspect to building the field is to honor and elevate these voices through our research. In particular, we want to take special care to ensure that the ideas of women of color are elevated and not improperly claimed by others. We commit to prioritizing reciprocity in these relationships and sharing back what we learn.

Naming and leveraging our power. We will acknowledge our role and identity in the problem. As we engage philanthropists in this work, we will want to humbly acknowledge the roles we have played that have contributed to the precise issues in question. Acknowledging our past complicity is key to credibility and to truly listening and learning.

Recognizing our institutional privilege and exercising it for good. Bridgespan is privileged to have a distinctive role vis-à-vis influencing high-net-worth individuals, given its trusted relationships. Similarly, the leaders of Shake the Table are well-networked within long-standing respected institutions. Insights that are not new to those deeply in the feminist movement can still catalyze change when packaged and shared in a way that connects with a new audience; this is a distinctive role in which this team can be helpful.

Ensuring the value-add. The means are as important as the ends. Existing funders and feminist movement partners must feel like this work is additive and in service of them for it to have the desired influence and impact. Further, we have found the practice of sharing the impact imperative, and asking the right questions in interview and roundtable discussions can be an

important first step in getting funders who have not considered this issue started on a path toward changing their practice.

Transparency and reciprocity. We must commit to a culture that honors transparency of our findings, analysis, and recommendations. We recognize the privilege of access that we have to those in positions of power and becoming gatekeepers that cause harm to our movements. We commit to prioritizing reciprocity in our relationships with movement leaders and sharing back what we learn, knowing that what we produce has more value in serving movements.

Appendix B: For More Information on Feminist Funds and Funder Communities

We encourage you to apply the recommendations in this report to resource organizations and groups that align with your priorities. There's an incredible and vibrant wealth of feminist movement groups doing transformational work in every setting.

We have chosen not to include a list of recommended organizations for funding in this report. By definition, a list will inadvertently omit some deeply feminist re-granting or networking organizations guided by intersectional approaches. We recognize that by creating lists, we run the risk of replicating dynamics that determine who does and doesn't have access to philanthropic decision makers, fueling unhealthy competition in movement spaces—the same dynamics we seek to challenge in this report.

As an alternative, and in order to give some direction, which philanthropists have asked us to do, we have partnered with movement leaders to develop an illustrative list of organizations representing local, regional, national, or global re-granting organizations, constituency-led and participatory funds, and critical networks. At weshakethetable.org, you'll find groups that focus on power and rights, use an intersectional analysis, and move funding to Black, Indigenous, communities of color, and other communities resisting multiple oppressions and discrimination. This list will be open and dynamic, so organizations can be added. We acknowledge this is an imperfect solution but want our readers to be able to learn about feminist movement organizations directly. This should not be considered investment advice.

Appendix C: Literature Scan

This paper was informed by a wealth of prior writing, and we are deeply grateful for these resources and the work that informed them. We are sharing this list for readers who wish to delve deeper into any of these topics.

#	Title	Author(s) and/or Organization Publishing	Type of Work
01	All About Movements: Why Building Movements Creates Deeper Change	Srilatha Batliwala, CREA	Primer
02	Brave, Creative, Resilient: The Global State of Young Feminist Organizing	FRIDA	Report
03	Embracing Feminism Can Change Philanthropy and Create a More Equitable World	Rena Greifinger, Managing Director, Maverick Collective	Op-Ed
04	Entering the funding arena	Halima Mahomed, Graciela Hopstein, Romy Krämer, <i>Alliance</i>	Article
05	Feminist Movement Builders Dictionary	Just Associates	Resource
06	From women's individual and collective power to political change: PEKKA	Nani Zulminarni and Valerie Miller, Just Associates	Case Study
07	Gender at Work Framework	Gender at Work	Resource
08	How African feminism changed the world	Aili Mari Tripp, African Arguments	Article
09	How funders can resource feminist movements: concrete practices to Move More Money to the Drivers of Change	AWID, Mama Cash, with support from Count Me In! Consortium	Report
10	Indigenous Feminism Is Our Culture	Jihan Gearon, <i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i>	Article
11	Indigenous women's rights and activism	UN Women	Collection
12	Intersectional feminism: what it means and why it matters right now	UN Women	Article
13	Meet the Moment: A Call for Progressive Philanthropic Response to the Anti-Gender Movement	Global Philanthropy Project	Report
14	New research reveals the power of feminist movements over the past 50 years	Geoff Gilliard, Simon Fraser University	Article

15	Our Voices, Our Environment: The State of Funding for Women's Environmental Action	Global Greengrants Fund	Report
16	Philanthropy for the Women's Movement, Not Just 'Empowerment'	Françoise Girard, <i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i>	Essay
17	Pocket Change: How Women and Girls of Color Do More with Less	Erin Howe and Somjen Frazer, Ms. Foundation for Women	Report
18	Principles for Feminist Funding	Equality Fund	Statement
19	Supporting Women's Organizations and Movements: A Strategic Approach to Climate Action	Equality Fund and Nobel Women's Initiative	Report
20	Toward a feminist funding ecosystem: A framework and practical guide	AWID	Guide
21	The seeds of a movement: disabled women and their struggle to organize	Janet Price, Open Democracy	Article
22	Until Black Women Are Free, None of Us Will Be Free	Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, <i>The New Yorker</i>	Article
23	Vibrant Yet Under-Resourced: The State of Lesbian, Bisexual & Queer Movements	Mama Cash and Astrea Lesbian Foundation for Justice	Report
24	Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots: The Status of Financing for Women's Rights Organizing and Gender Equality	Angelika Arutyunova and Cindy Clark, AWID	Report
25	We are multiple bodies, connected as currents. What the Water Brings: Lessons on Funding Young Feminist Activism on Climate and Environmental Justice	FRIDA	Video
26	Weathering the Storm: Resourcing Girls and Young Activists through a Pandemic	Purposeful	Report
27	What does feminist funding really look like?	Lisa Houston, Ginger Norwood, Patrick Pierce, and Rebecca Wolsak, <i>Alliance</i>	Article
28	What is African feminism, actually?	Ms Afropolitan	Article
29	Where is the money for feminist organising? New analysis finds that the answer is alarming.	Tenzin Dolker, AWID	Report

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