

# Responsive Philanthropy

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## 2021 NCRP IMPACT AWARDS

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by Jeanné Lewis

This year's NCRP Impact Awards, held on Wednesday, Oct. 27 at the 2021 Unity Summit, was a joyous celebration of the best that philanthropy has to offer.

That our celebration occurred in the middle of our CHANGE Philanthropy's UNITY Summit is no accident. What I value the most about the CHANGE partners, and the larger community

that often attends the annual event, is that we are vigilant about reminding ourselves to be holistic in our work in the philanthropic sector.

Constantly striving for more and better ways to bring our whole hearts, minds and spirits to this work helps inspire others to lead with a passion for empowering and supporting the communities that have nurtured us and made us whole. This countercultural work is challenging, but the Unity Summit reminds us that we are not in it alone – that there is a whole community of people who share our values and walk with us, even though we may not know one another.

What we didn't know when we first

planned our 2021 Impact Awards, however, was the role that our initial location of Minneapolis would play. Not only has the city served as the epicenter of an ongoing national conversation around race and police violence, but it is also the site of the ongoing examination of some of the worst of foundation trustee behavior in the Otto Bremer Trust trial.

The stark contrast between the Otto Bremer trustees and our four Impact Award honorees couldn't be clearer. While the Otto Bremer trustees are accused of using their position to enrich themselves, our Impact Award winners are using their power to support movement and grassroots leaders that serve us all. *(continued on page 11)*



challenging grantmakers  
to strengthen communities

## In their words: Celebrating philanthropy's best models today

(continued from page 1)

In reading their speeches, we hope that you come away with a deep appreciation of the intersectional nature of all movement work and are inspired by the possibility of change that their current work models. Let's holistically act from a place of love and abundance, not fear and scarcity, so that we can redefine what health, safety and success means for generations to come.

Of course, all of this wouldn't be happening without the efforts of frontline leaders and groups. Impact Awards performer and Season 4 winner of *The Voice* Chris Blue's rendition of "Rose Petals" was an appropriate tribute that reminded us that although the last few years have been painful and full of grief, there are so many who have stood and fought for liberation. There are so many groups who have gone unheard and unrecognized until now, yet for years, they have been building relationships among our most marginalized siblings in order to be ready for this moment.

We as a human race have suffered much loss over the last few years, but frontline groups who have been working for decades to bring systemic change were ready for this time, this forced collective pause. In this space, grassroots leaders realize that THIS is the moment when great transformation can happen.

Let's build on their work and the work of all of our Impact Award winners. Their dedication and radical collaboration challenge us all to do better – for our grantees, colleagues and communities. ■

*Jeanné Lewis is NCRP's VP and Chief Engagement Officer.*



### NELLIE MAE EDUCATION FOUNDATION

"Changing Course" Impact Award for Incorporating Feedback.

*Even before organized protests in 2020 reshaped the national debate around racial justice, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation was on a journey to review and redesign its organizational strategy, culture and practices through the lens of racial equity. It built a new grantmaking strategy informed and guided by a set of community advisers – with the lived experiences and connections to the communities they were seeking to serve through grantmaking.*

Interim President & CEO, Gislaine N. Ngounou:

Thank you, Cristina, friends and colleagues, I am thrilled and honored to be accepting the NCRP Impact Award for Changing Course on behalf of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. I know I speak on behalf of all of my colleagues at Nellie Mae when saying that we feel so humbled and grateful to be celebrated alongside such amazing and inspiring funders, the California Wellness Foundation, The Four Freedoms Fund and the Third Wave Fund. Congratulations to all of you. We are inspired each and every day by the work that you do.



Over the past 4 years, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation has been on a journey to review and reset our organizational strategy, culture and practices through the lens of racial equity. It has been an enlightening and rewarding journey full of hope, joy, reflection and challenges. We began this shift when we realized that the goals we have set out for ourselves could not be actualized without zeroing in on racial equity. We also recognize that if we were truly interested in making transformational change would really have to dig deep and examine the ways in which white supremacy culture was showing up within our grantmaking practices and organizational culture. Over the course of a couple of years, the foundation built a new grantmaking strategy that sought to explicitly focus on advancing racial equity in public education and

championing community-driven efforts. But a core piece of implementing this strategy was not only about changing what we funded, but how we funded.

Like many in philanthropy, we have often shown up as funders with the answers, giving out grants and expecting folks to carry through our own desires. After spending a lot of time listening to our grantee partners and external constituencies, we recognized that truly living into our values as an organization meant thinking about and redefining our relationship to power, yes, sharing and even giving it up.

This meant shaping a strategy with the guidance and strategic council of community advisers that we still meet with regularly today, learning to spend more time listening than sharing our vision and our own needs, and trusting our grantee partners to lead the way. It also meant leaning into general operating support, multi-year funding, and challenging long-held beliefs and assumptions about how change and impact happen.

To our advisers, grantee partners, board members, and all of the young people, educators and communities that work with us: We share this award with you tonight. It is because of you that we are being honored tonight. *Ubuntu*, we are because you are.

We are far from perfect and are truly a work in progress. But we've learned a lot over these past couple of years about what it means to shift, share and wield power. We remain committed to learning, growing and listening. And we recognize that while we have the great privilege to steward these resources, it is not our money to control. Thank you so much for honoring us and celebrating with us this evening. ■



Top: NMEF Staff with Community Advisers, 2019. Bottom: NMEF is supporting Hartford Public Schools for general operating support as it responds to the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism. This photo was taken pre COVID-19. Photos courtesy of The Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

## THE CALIFORNIA WELLNESS FOUNDATION

“Get Up, Stand Up” Impact Award for Rapid-Response Grantmaking



Even before the current pandemic, California had regularly been hit with a series of natural disasters that had become all too common: fires of unprecedented magnitude, floods and mudslides, and earthquakes. In the wake of these incidents, Cal Wellness became increasingly aware of how under-resourced communities were additionally burdened with recovery challenges with groups like the undocumented community unable to access FEMA and SBA relief dollars.

As a result, the foundation chose to step up their rapid response grantmaking capacity by reaching out to community leaders, local philanthropists and others who could provide guidance and perspective.

They started making proactive, core support grants to current grantee partners, prioritizing organizations that provided



The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank was one of the many groups that received multiyear and core operating support grants to help address basic needs disparities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo credit: Los Angeles Regional Food Bank.



services and relief to communities of color, undocumented individuals, seniors and those ineligible for government relief. They removed much of the upfront work typically asked for from partners, such as filling out an application and accelerated the review process to get grants out quickly. They eased or eliminated reporting requirements. And their public policy team is continuing to look for opportunities to advance the equitable investment of public resources to meet immediate needs and prepare long-term for recovery, compensating for disinvestment in these communities going back decades.



President and CEO Judy Belk:

We thank you so much. This award means so much, and it couldn't come at a better time.



First of all, it means a lot because it comes from NCRP. NCRP has been our ally, our partner in our fight for more racial and social justice in the philanthropic community. At times, we've been pushed! We have been really inspired by the leadership of NCRP, so thank you, thank you so much.

The second reason that we accept this award, and we are inspired by this award, is that it's for the work that Cal Wellness community partners, and our board and staff have done in fighting the global pandemic.

It's a fight that we are still in today. Over 700,000 Americans lives have been lost. Who would have thought that this would have been a milestone, and even as we speak, there are more and more lives being lost.

And I want you to know that we are committed to continue the fight.

This award really inspires us. We will continue to get up and stand up every day for California, for the communities that we serve.

So, I am so, so proud to accept this award on behalf of the California Wellness staff, board and the communities that we serve throughout California. ■

Top: The California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA) is just one of the many community advocacy groups funded by the California Wellness Foundation. Photo credit: CalWellness. Bottom: CalWellness' investment in the Public Health Institutes (PHI) Together Toward Health Initiative helped fund community based COVID-19 and vaccine outreach and resource navigation run by organizations like Lideres Campesinas. Photo credit: Lideres Campesinas/Public Health Institute.

## FOUR FREEDOMS FUND

### “Mover and Shaker” Award for Bold Peer Organizing

Since its founding in 2003, Four Freedoms Fund (FFF) has infused the immigrant justice movement with over \$180 million and provided crucial technical assistance to deepen organizational capacity.

From an initial handful of grantees in 2003, FFF now supports organizations, coalitions and networks operating in approximately 30 states and Washington. Following years of sustained FFF investments in state and local immigrant justice organizations, the immigrant justice movement is undoing the damage of past years and rebuilding a better, more inclusive nation through bold policy reforms expanding protections, opportunities and equity for immigrants and their communities. Through years of ceaseless movement building, voter mobilization, and hundreds of state and local immigrant justice policy victories, the immigrant justice movement has laid the groundwork to meet this movement moment.

FFF’s long-term and responsive grantmaking and capacity-building initiatives have helped the immigrant justice movement build and win under some of the most hostile political conditions. NCRP Board member Cristina Jiménez was proud to present this award to FFF’s Senior Director Rini Chakraborty, remembering the support that Four Freedoms Fund gave as Jiménez was co-founding United We Dream, now the largest youth-led migrant justice organization in the country.

Senior Director Rini Chakraborty  
Thank you so much, Cristina. On behalf of the Four Freedoms Fund, I would like to just express how deeply honored and humbled we are to be receiving NCRP’s “Mover and Shaker” Award. I want to start by thanking the exceptionally committed and brilliant community of Four Freedoms Fund donors for their strength and their steadfast support of the immigrant justice movement. We very much share this honor with you who have always believed in the power and transformative capacity of immigrant communities.



Most of all, I want to express our deepest gratitude to our grantees, the Dreamers, the TPS holders, farmworkers, border communities, LGBT asylum seekers, Black migrants, immigrants fighting the crimmigration system, and immigrants fighting for their families, communities and our collective future. You are the true movers and shakers.

This award feels all the more poignant this year, especially after the unrelenting hate-filled attacks against immigrants and refugees under Trump, and more recently, the brutal and hor-



Top: Four Freedoms Fund grantee CASA de Maryland rallying for federal immigration reform. Bottom: FFF grantee The National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC) at a rally in Washington, DC.

rifying attacks on Haitian immigrants at the border. These incidents, unfortunately, are not aberrations. This is exactly how our immigration system has been designed to work and will continue to work unless we change it, in many ways.

This award means so much because it recognizes the resilience, power and beauty of immigrant communities, even during the bleak moments. At Four Freedoms Fund, we’ve been extremely fortunate to partner with the beloved community of funders and grantees in order to respond to the evolving needs of immigrant rights leaders on the frontlines while providing long-term, ongoing support so the immigrant justice movement can thrive. On a recent funder briefing with phenomenal Black migrant leaders, I was so deeply moved by what Guerlaine Jozef with the Haitian Bridge Alliance shared about the origins of her organization. In talking about how the bridges work started on the border, Guerlaine said “we came to support Haitians, and we stayed to help everyone.”

What she said resonated deeply with me because that’s exactly what we need to do as funders. However we come to the fight for justice, we must fight for everyone. Whether you believe in racial justice, climate, justice, economic justice or restoring the promise of our democracy, the fight for immigrant rights is inextricably tied to the broader fight for social justice. In the defining issue of our times, immigrant rights groups are moving mountains. So our task and our calling as funders is to do exactly the same. Thank you so much. ■



Top: Mobilize Power Fund grantee Dissenters at its youth leadership convening in Chicago in January 2020. Credit: Byul Yoon. Bottom: Mobilize Power Fund grantee Baltimore Safe Haven painting a Black Trans Lives Matter Street mural in the summer of 2020. Photographer unknown.

### THIRD WAVE FUND:

“Smashing Silos” Impact Award for Intersectional Grantmaking



Third Wave Fund recognizes that gender oppression is inextricably interrelated to classism, racism and ableism, and that gender justice can only truly be achieved when all forms of oppression cease to exist.

Since 1996, Third Wave Fund has resourced and supported youth-led, intersectional gender justice activism and organizing work. When the initial impact of the pandemic was felt in early 2020, Third Wave received 10 times the amount of rapid response funding requests than any previous year. It pivoted swiftly, reallocated every spare dollar and fundraised to move over a year’s worth of rapid response grants in 9 weeks. In total, Third Wave granted over \$2 million to gender justice movements across the United States and territories, nearly doubling its grantmaking budget from 2019.

As a gender justice funder with leadership that reflects the communities it serves, Third Wave’s grantmaking and donor mobilizing strives to advance the community power, well-being and self-determination of young Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) most directly impacted by and best positioned to end gender oppression.

Co-Directors Kiyomi Fujikawa and Ana Connor,

Kiyomi Fujikawa: Hi. Thank you so much to NCRP for the Smashing Silos Award.

Ana Conner: Yes, bam, bam, bam. Oh my gosh, it is such an honor to receive this award for our intersectional grant making.

Kiyomi Fujikawa: Yes, so we are the co-directors of the Third Wave Fund. My name is Kiyomi Fujikawa, I use she/her pronouns,

Ana Conner: And my name is Ana Conner, and I use they and she pronouns.

Kiyomi Fujikawa: It’s such an honor to receive this award. We know our work wouldn’t be possible without the work of youth-led intersectional gender justice organizations and movements that we resource every day at Third Wave, whether that’s sex workers who are on the forefront of the SESTA/FOSTA and decrim fights, or organizations on the border that are fighting for reproductive and migrant justice, or Black trans organizations fighting for decarceration and abolition work.

Ana Conner: That is so spot on. And right now, gender justice grassroots movements are taking really bold and courageous and unapologetic actions for justice and liberation, right. And as philanthropy, we have a choice to join them. And so we really hope that this award inspires others to commit to meeting movements where they’re at. So whether that’s with trust-based philanthropy, or de-siloed funding, or long-term resources, we have an opportunity.

Kiyomi Fujikawa: Yeah, that’s right. And we know that there have always been young, Black Indigenous women of color that have been shaping philanthropy. And as you said, right now there is a window of opportunity for all of us to come together and dismantle white supremacy and really center gender, racial, disability and economic justice and, you know, the leaders in those fields. Thank you so much for seeing the work that Third Wave does as we join a movement to reimagine philanthropy,

Ana Conner: Yes! Thank you so much NCRP, and congratulations to all the other Impact Award recipients. It is such a beautiful award. ■

