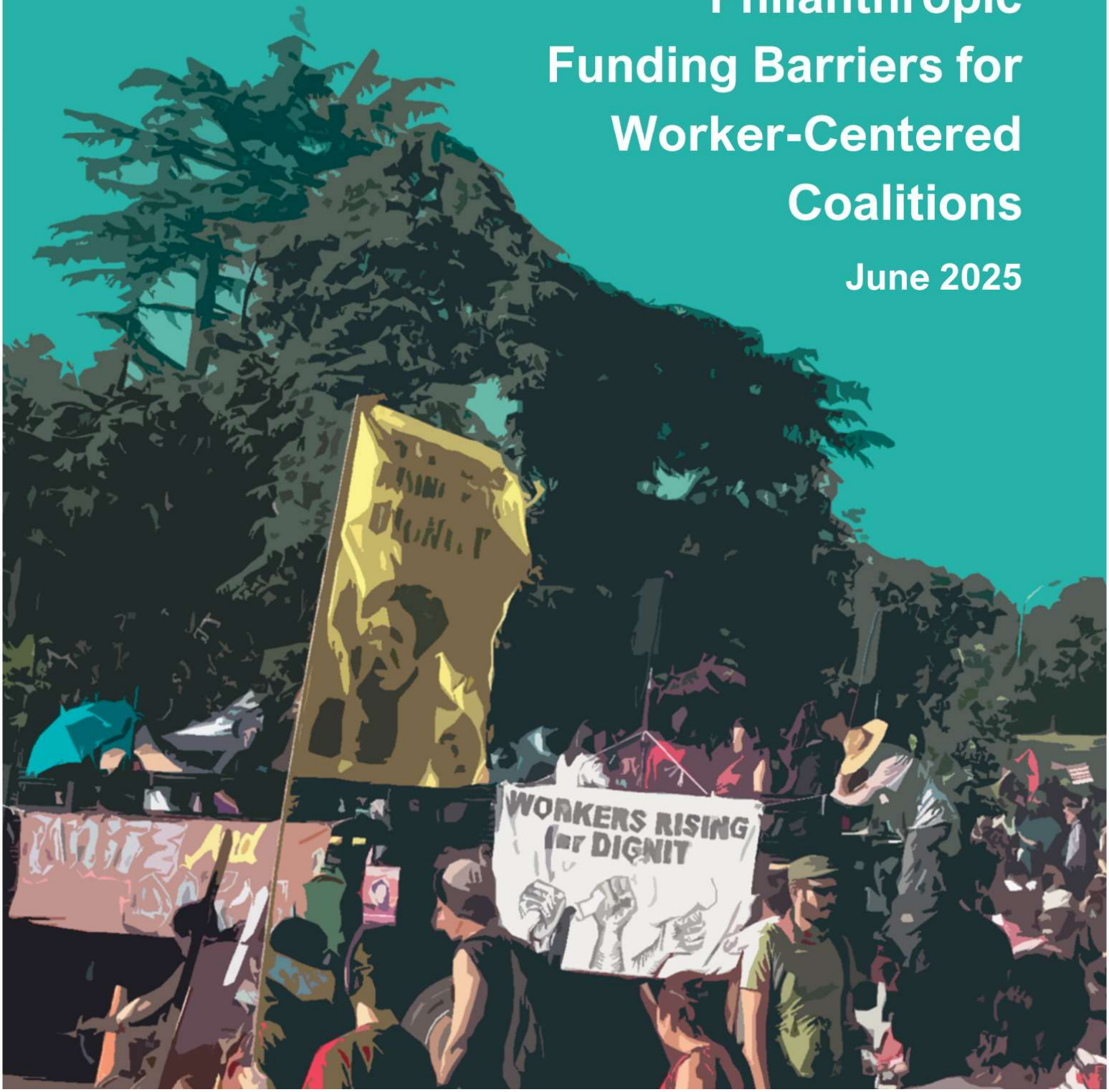
ReWork the Bay

# BRIDGING THE GAP

## Understanding Philanthropic Funding Barriers for Worker-Centered Coalitions

June 2025



## Acknowledgements

This research was completed by Aparna Stephen for ReWork the Bay as part of an effort exploring how the philanthropic sector can more effectively support worker-centered coalitions advancing economic and racial justice in California. This report would not have been possible without the generosity and insight of the many individuals who contributed their time and expertise to this project. We are especially grateful to leaders from North Bay Jobs with Justice, Jobs with Justice San Francisco, East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE), and Working Partnerships USA, who not only participated in interviews but also generously reviewed and offered feedback on the findings and recommendations. Their dual contributions were instrumental in shaping both the substance and direction of this report.

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## About ReWork the Bay

ReWork the Bay is an initiative hosted by the San Francisco Foundation that creates a liberated and equitable economic future by transforming the roles workers, employers and the philanthropic sector play in economic and workforce development. We center and amplify the expertise of those most impacted by economic inequities to design, pilot and scale multi-sector systemic solutions responsive to current needs, while activating philanthropic partners to maximize their impact through transformative, strategic relationships.

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## Executive Summary

Worker-centered coalitions in California play a vital role in advancing economic and racial justice, particularly for low-wage and marginalized workers. Despite their proven track record securing wage increases, tenant protections, and other legislative reforms, they remain underfunded and undervalued by the philanthropic sector. This report, developed as part of ReWork the Bay's broader initiative to increase infrastructure and collaboration among worker-centered coalitions, investigates how funders can better support these coalitions, drawing on literature and interviews with 11 funders and coalition leaders. In the next phase of this work, ReWork the Bay will be testing, building on and sharing these insights with input and partnership from additional funders and coalitions.

### Key Findings

Findings indicated that philanthropic support of coalitions is strongest when the coalition is aligned with a foundation's long-term systems change goals. Trust-based relationships and strategic alignment are key motivators for coalition-supporting funders, who often go beyond grantmaking to take on roles as connectors, brokers, and influencers to strengthen coalitional infrastructure.

However, findings also surfaced persistent barriers coalitions face during different stages of funder-grantee interactions: the pre-funding, grantmaking and implementation stages. Many struggle to secure early support due to funders' hesitancy to invest without proof of success, creating a "track record paradox". Additionally, coalitions working across interconnected issues, such as housing, jobs, childcare, and immigration, struggle to access aligned resources, as most funders operate within narrow programmatic silos. As a result, coalitions are forced to segment their work or cobble together fragmented funding streams that do not match their strategic goals.

At the implementation stage, limited staff capacity and high administrative burdens undermine coalition effectiveness. Coalitions often lack the dedicated infrastructure and staffing to manage multiple funder relationships and respond to traditional reporting requirements. Internally, coalitions face coordination and shared leadership challenges, especially in moments of campaign pressure or when member organizations differ in priorities or capacity. Even when funders recognize these limitations, funder pressures to produce quantifiable results often override an individual grantmaker's trust-based approaches. These dynamics threaten long-term coalition sustainability and pull attention away from organizing and movement-building.

### Key Recommendations

- *Fund core infrastructure:* Provide planning grants, support dedicated staff, and invest in coordination tools and convening capacity for new *and* mature coalitions.
- *Align funding with coalition needs:* Offer multi-year general operating support and simplify reporting requirements.
- *Support cross-sector strategies:* Coordinate investments through funders' tables and ecosystem-aligned funding.
- *Shift internal practices:* Embrace long-term thinking, get creative in measuring and communicating impact, share decision-making power with grantees, and act as connectors, brokers, and influencers.

## Introduction




Worker-centered coalitions play a critical role in advancing economic justice for low-wage workers. In California, where working poverty and labor violations remain widespread, one in three workers holds a low-wage job, and over 1.3 million working-age adults live in poverty despite working year-round[i]. Violations such as wage theft, unpaid overtime, and denied rest breaks further highlight the gap between California's strong labor laws and their enforcement (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). By uniting different groups around shared goals, coalitions have secured meaningful policy wins, including wage increases and tenant protections. Several recent examples are included in **Error! Reference source not found.**.

An early finding of this research was that the term "coalition" is used and interpreted in different ways by different groups. Interview respondents, as well as broader literature, often use the term interchangeably with concepts such as movements, alliances, and networks. This report uses coalition as defined by Mizrahi & Rosenthal (2001)[ii]:*"* an organization or organizations whose members commit to an agreed-on purpose and shared decision making to influence an external institution or target, while each member organization maintains its autonomy", aiming to provide a high-level framework to help funders better understand and support coalitional work. **Error! Reference source not found.** provides a glossary to familiarize readers with terms used in this report.

While there is no formal definition of a *worker-centered* coalition, organizing and policy research literature use the term to describe coalitions that center worker agency and rights, workers' lived experiences and operate with a grassroots, power-building orientation. Worker-centered coalitions have historically brought together labor unions, community groups, and grassroots organizations to tackle systemic issues that disproportionately affect low-wage or low-paid, immigrant, undocumented, and informal sector workers. [iii]

## Background

Despite their proven impact, coalitions remain underfunded and undervalued by the philanthropic sector and face barriers that hinder their sustainability. This study provides a starting point for a conversation exploring how philanthropy can more effectively support worker-centered coalitions advancing economic and racial justice in California. A key piece of of ReWork the Bay's broader initiative to increase infrastructure and collaboration among worker-centered coalitions, this report explores what drives or deters funders from supporting worker-centered coalitions, and the core operational challenges these coalitions face. In doing so, we begin to unravel the disconnect between funders and coalitions and identify opportunities to strengthen philanthropic support for worker-centered movements.

With intention to launch a larger ecosystem conversation, this study used a qualitative approach combining a targeted literature review with 11 in-depth interviews of funders and coalition partners. In the next phase of this work, ReWork the Bay will be convening

conversations with additional funders and coalition leaders to test, build on and share these insights[iv].

## Why (and How) do Foundations Fund Coalitions?

Interviews with funders who currently support coalitional work reveal two central insights: first, foundations are most likely to support coalitions when there is strong strategic alignment, a long-term vision for systemic change, and trust in the coalition's leadership (why they fund); and second, funders engage coalitions through a range of adaptive roles that go well beyond grantmaking (how they fund). Together, these motivations and methods shape the evolving nature of philanthropic support for worker-centered coalitions.

### Finding: Strategic Alignment, Long-Term Vision and Trust Motivate Grantmaking

Philanthropic organizations that fund worker-centered coalitions consistently cite alignment with their **organizational strategy** as a primary motivator. Interviews affirmed that funders are more likely to engage coalitions when **systemic change** and **movement building** are already embedded in their institutional goals. This aligns with research findings[v] that foundation leaders are more likely to fund workers' rights initiatives when they view such investments as core to their broader mission, particularly when their strategies prioritize long-term policy influence, equity, and support for historically marginalized communities.

Trust also emerged as a critical motivator in interviews with foundation leaders. Funders with longstanding relationships with community-based organizations were more likely to recognize the value of coalitions and to **trust coalitional actors to determine their own priorities**. Some funders view their support as a resource to sharpen coalition strategy, reflecting a desire to contribute to the direction of the work even while deferring to, and respecting the autonomy of, coalition leadership. Coalition leaders echoed this view, noting that funder involvement can be constructive when it focuses on ensuring that coalitions have the tools and capacity to develop and implement strong, responsive strategies.




At the same time, coalition partners acknowledged that this kind of trusting approach is not yet the norm across the philanthropic sector. As one coalition leader observed, "*there is a bit of a self-selection problem here*" - funders who support coalition work tend to already operate from values that center grantee relationships and shared goals. Outside this group of highly aligned funders, such relational approaches remain the exception rather than the rule.

### Finding: Funders Support Coalitions through Adaptive, Multi-Faceted Roles

*How* funders engage with coalitions can also be fluid and responsive - interviewees described a host of **roles funders take on**, from providing in-kind support (such as office space or space for in-person meetings) to fundraising and advocating on behalf of their grantees. The specific support, in addition to funding, varied based on the size, structure and strategy of the particular funder. Foundation leaders saw these roles as not discretely defined, linear or mutually exclusive; rather, they may move among the roles and take up different tasks depending on coalitional needs and external circumstances.

The role-shifting practices described by interviewees in this study align nicely with a framework shared by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations[vi] that outlines five key roles funders can play in support of movement building:

1. ***Investor: Provide flexible, general operating support and invest financially in building long-term infrastructure, leadership, and internal capacity.*** This includes multiyear grants, in-kind support (such as space or technology), full cost support, and leadership development funding. The role of investor also includes an acceptance of risk, recognizing that coalition-building work does not follow linear timelines or predictable outputs, and often requires quick-response or bridge grants to adapt to changes in external conditions.

2. ***Broker: Leverage relationships and reputational capital to attract additional resources for coalitions.*** This may involve participating in funding collaboratives, sharing grantee stories with peers, or serving as making warm introductions to other philanthropic institutions. Effective Brokers also help grantees make existing funding more efficient by aligning timelines, reducing duplication, and coordinating learning among funders.

3. ***Connector: Play a relational role, helping coalitions and ecosystem partners build trust, develop shared strategies, and deepen cross-sector relationships.*** This can include convening grantees and other funders, hosting peer learning spaces, or investing in intermediary infrastructure. Strong Connectors also help navigate power imbalances by ensuring that coalitions have meaningful space and time to shape and re-shape agendas, especially during moments of transition or volatility.

4. ***Learner: Support research and organizational learning, both internally and across the field.*** This includes funding communications research, power or network mapping, and trend identification. It also includes investing in data systems or evaluative capacity to help coalitions measure and articulate their impact over time. Learning starts with listening to the needs of coalitions, and the types and timing of capacity support that would be most effective.

5. ***Influencer: Use institutional credibility and visibility to shift the philanthropic field or broader policy environment.*** This includes advocating for coalition goals in public or policy settings, modeling movement-aligned practices to colleagues within or outside the foundation (e.g., equitable hiring, values-driven investment policies), and influencing peers to adopt more risk-tolerant and trusting approaches. Self-awareness, humility and lived and earned experience are important for Influencers, as they often encounter and engage in difficult conversations around race, power, and privilege within the philanthropic space.

## Barriers and Challenges

Interviews surfaced several barriers that deter philanthropies from funding coalitions, and the operational challenges coalitions face as a result of insufficient resources. These findings are organized by the different phases of funder-grantee interactions: the pre-funding phase, grantmaking phase and implementation phase.

### 1. Pre-Funding Phase

#### Finding: 'Fear of Being First' Hinders Early Investment

Coalitions face significant barriers during the pre-funding stage due to many funders' hesitancy to make grants to new organizations or formations unless other funders are doing

so as well. This "fear of being first"[vii] often prevents early-stage coalitions from securing the resources they need to get started. Compounding this is the "track record"[viii] paradox - funders expect coalitions to demonstrate success before making a grant, but coalitions lack the funding necessary to build a track record without initial support.

### Finding: Grants to Coalitions vs Single Organizations Mis-framed as Zero-Sum Choice

Interviews revealed that funding decisions are often shaped by a false binary between supporting coalitions or supporting individual member organizations. This framing overlooks the distinct and complementary roles each plays - coalitions enable cross-organizational alignment, shared infrastructure, and systems-level advocacy, while member organizations bring deep community trust and programmatic expertise. When only one side is funded, the coalition either lacks the participation of key members or risks overstretching those members' capacity to engage meaningfully. Coalition partners emphasized that it is not a zero-sum game, that is, successful funding efforts are not aimed at individual organizations *or* coalitions, but both.

> *"There are different organs in the body but there's things that connect them, like literal connective tissue. If you just fund the things that connect them but the different organs themselves are unhealthy, that is a problem. At the same time, if each organ is healthy but they are not connected to each other, then the body or the system doesn't work either. Coalitions are like these living systems."*
>
> - *Coalition Leader*

### Finding: Philanthropy Undervalues Movement-Building & Organizational Infrastructure

Funders often want coalitions to demonstrate strategic clarity and deliver rapid policy wins, yet hesitate to fund the slow, foundational work that makes those wins possible. As a result, coalitions are under-resourced during the critical early phases of movement-building, what D'Emilio[ix] describes as the "creeping" phase, when groups cultivate trust, align strategies, and develop leadership. This groundwork is essential to preparing for "leaping" moments, when public and political conditions allow for rapid progress.

Without flexible, upfront funding to support this slow but necessary work, coalitions are often forced to operate reactively, responding to opportunities or crises rather than advancing long-term plans. Some funders view this as a lack of strategy, but coalition leaders highlight another structural dilemma: coalitions are expected to show strategic readiness to secure funding, yet need that very funding to build the strategy in the first place.




## 2. Grant-Making and Funding Phase

### Finding: Restrictive Grant Conditions Undermine Advocacy

Funders often place restrictive conditions on grants. While 501(c)(3) organizations are legally permitted to engage in public education, nonpartisan research, and limited lobbying within legally defined thresholds, many funders prohibit even permissible advocacy activities out of caution[x]. This disconnect forces coalitions into a balancing act, where funders seek policy wins but often withhold support for the advocacy work necessary to achieve them. As a result, coalitions must piece together funding from multiple sources, even for activities that are legally permissible and essential to systemic change.

> *I think it's one thing to say you can't do lobbying. It's another thing to really want to see policy wins, but then not fund lobbying, which not every policy win is lobbying, but it's an interesting dance to be like, we didn't use your money for this. We used someone else's money for this.*
>
> - *Coalition Leader*

**Finding: Capacity Constraints Impede Coalition Funder Stewardship**

Worker-centered coalitions often lack the dedicated infrastructure to meet funder expectations around grant management, especially when coalitional work is layered on top of member organizations' existing responsibilities. Staffing was reported as a persistent constraint - coalitions rarely have the resources to hire dedicated personnel for coordination or planning, forcing organizers to stretch across multiple roles with limited support. Additionally, coalition staff often require specific skills to effectively coordinate and communicate strategies that can be different from the skills staff need to execute their responsibilities at the organizational level.

These capacity challenges are compounded by the administrative burden all nonprofit organizations face when seeking grant funding. Funders frequently require extensive application and reporting protocols that exceed administrative capacity, diverting time from core functions like organizing and relationship building. While some foundations have streamlined processes and adopted more flexible, trusting approaches since the COVID-19 pandemic, these remain exceptions.

### 3. Implementation and Sustainability Phase

**Finding: Coordination Challenges of Shared Leadership**

While coalition partners often agree on overarching goals, breakdowns in internal communication and decision-making can occur within coalitions due to the complicated nature of shared leadership. For example, one coalition partner interviewed reported a campaign win that resulted in a Community Benefits Agreement. However, member organizations within the coalition had different opinions on what should be included in this agreement. Ultimately, it required a seasoned organizer to facilitate the trade-off between individual organizational priorities and the collective's priorities and reach language they could all agree to. Without sufficient time or infrastructure to build trust, a shared language and coordinate strategy, misalignment between member priorities can derail efforts.

Funders also observed that unclear roles and imbalanced power within coalitions, such as one organization dominating the campaign, can complicate accountability and undermine the perception of a cohesive collective. These issues can be compounded when multiple coalition members apply separately to the same funder, creating confusion and signaling a (real or imagined) lack of shared leadership.

> *It's hard to know who's playing what role when one organization is kind of taking over the collective and basically leveraging that positioning to lead instead of really sharing leadership. So shared leadership is a challenge.*
>
> - *Coalition Funder*

### Finding: Coalition Structure Influences Agility and Longevity

Coalition structure is a key factor shaping both responsiveness and sustainability. Event-driven coalitions were found to be nimble and campaign-focused with more measurable short-term objectives, but more vulnerable to breakdown due to weaker internal ties. In contrast, enduring coalitions benefited from long-standing relationships and trust but faced constraints in pivoting quickly or taking strategic risks. A hybrid coalition model, where a core group maintains long-term alignment while flexible subgroups form around specific issues, emerged as a promising strategy. This approach allows coalitions to better manage internal tensions and accommodate divergent interests.

### Finding: Multiple Funder Demands and Changing Priorities Strains Coalition Capacity

Implementation and sustainability challenges are further compounded by conflicting demands of multiple funders, with diverging expectations. Because coalitions rely on support from multiple foundations, coalitions are often forced to tailor their approach or workplans to meet individual funder needs. Coalition leaders described this as a *"gentle dance"* to keep all funders satisfied.

Leadership turnover within foundations further destabilizes funding relationships, with funder priorities reportedly hinging on the personal opinions of individual foundation leaders and *"whatever is in trend"* or the *"buzzword now"*. These rapid, unpredictable and opaque strategy shifts result in non-renewals, funding cuts or coalitions being pulled in directions that are adjacent or trivial to its agenda. Since funders hold more power in their relationship than grantees, coalitions often feel forced to bend their strategy to appease the foundation and avoid funding cuts.

### Finding: Reporting Expectations Misalign with Coalition Work

Respondents also spoke to the misalignment between traditional reporting requirements and the nature of coalition organizing that surfaces during this stage. Outside of a small (but growing) set of foundations, funders still prioritize quantifiable, short-term outcomes that do not capture core coalition metrics like trust, relationship-building, base development, and cross-organizational alignment.

> *How do you measure the trust an organization has in a community and that they are going to be the person, the organization people go to when they're in trouble?*
>
> - *Coalition Funder*

Further, while some foundations have adapted to allow narrative reporting, verbal check-ins, or reuse of internal materials, these practices are not yet standard. Funders who recognize the limitations of numeric reporting acknowledged internal pressures to produce or translate results into measurable impact for board members or senior leadership.

> *Oftentimes actually quantifying for our board, the wins, it's an internal issue we're grappling with because we're trying to move away from making our orgs quantify because we know this is a multi-generational site.*
>
> - *Coalition Funder*

### Finding: Fragmented Funding Undermines Ecosystem Approaches

The current structure of philanthropic support does not support the "whole worker" [xi] approach of many coalitions. Coalition leaders reported that their work is often intersectional, bridging issues such as housing, childcare and immigrants' rights, in addition to challenges workers face in their workplace. However, most philanthropic organizations continue to fund within narrow, siloed program areas. This limits coalitions' ability to address the full range of worker and family needs, and constrains their flexibility to adapt as those needs change.

Some funders acknowledged this need and reported they were part of funders' tables that provide *"additional aligned"* investment to bring together seemingly disjointed parts and *"build power for a cross-sectoral approach"*. However, interviews also surfaced some limitations in how funders' tables currently operate with respondents noting duplicative engagement with the same funders across multiple spaces without significant coordination and significant time burden with *"limited impact"*. Coalition leaders also emphasized the need for funders to take a more active role in influencing peer institutions. Funders themselves acknowledged this dynamic as well.Beyond fundraising, some coalitions reported that funders who understand the importance of ecosystem work can influence more risk-averse funders to shift their practices towards some of the trusting, worker-centered approaches detailed throughout this report.

## 4 Key Areas of Coalition Infrastructure

### Staffing and Coordination Capacity

- **Fund dedicated staff or consultants** for coalition coordination, communications, strategic planning, funder engagement, and administrative tasks. These roles are central to coalition functionality and distinct from typical organizational campaign roles.
- **Continue supporting staff in established coalitions (not just new ones)** to maintain alignment, manage conflict, and lead collaborative strategies. These functions require specialized skills in facilitation, relationship-building, and balancing organizational and collective needs.
- **Invest in backbone infrastructure** including physical or virtual convening spaces, technology platforms, and digital tools to facilitate communication and coordination across member organizations.

### Planning and Strategy Development

- **Provide planning or seed grants to support early-stage coalitions** or new collaborative campaigns. These grants give coalitions the space to develop shared language, clarify goals, and establish governance structures before engaging in public-facing work.
- **Support strategic planning processes in mature coalitions**, enabling them to revisit priorities, adapt to evolving political landscapes, and recalibrate their approach while maintaining alignment across member organizations.

### Organizational Collaboration and Alignment

- **Support individual member organizations alongside the coalition as a whole**, compensating their time and labor involved in collective work. This ensures that coalition participation is not extractive and that organizational needs are integrated into collective strategy.
- **Invest in the leadership and relational capacity of coalition staff**, especially

## Recommendations to Funders

The following recommendations were either directly offered by respondents or were developed based on insights from the interviews. As the actors with the most power and agency in the funder-grantee relationship, these recommendations are directed at foundation leaders and grantmakers. We hope these ideas inspire changes to your organizational process and funding strategy that will lead to increased and more effective support of coalitions.

### 1. Seed and Sustain the Internal Infrastructure of Coalitions

Coalition leaders repeatedly emphasized that successful collaborations require time to build shared vision, clarify roles and develop trust before taking on campaign or coalitional work. However, this "pre-work" phase is rarely funded. Most philanthropic support is directed towards implementation or campaigns, rather than the foundational relationship building and alignment work that makes those wins possible. Interviewees also described early coalition-building or campaign-building as a high-stakes period during which misalignment on values, goals or leadership structures can derail future collaboration or the efficacy of the campaign.

Additionally, coalition formations do not often have their own dedicated staffing. Coalitions are most commonly made up of individual member organizations who provide resources, including staffing, towards the coalitional activities. The staff responsible for coordination within the coalition are often the same people responsible for organizing, strategy, and external communications, leading to burnout, turnover and reduced coalition effectiveness. Even in more established coalitions, funding often fails to account for the labor required to keep organizations aligned, navigate conflict, and drive shared strategy. Established coalitions require staff with specific skill sets, which are distinct from typical campaign roles.

In both new and established coalitions, under-investment in internal coalition infrastructure threatens short- and long-term effectiveness. Foundations can strengthen the field by working with a coalition to understand its stage of development, and providing general operating support that could seed or sustain one or more key areas of coalition infrastructure.

### 2. Invest in the Philanthropy Ecosystem Supporting Movement Building Efforts

Worker-centered coalitions often are involved in intersectional work by nature of the demographics and challenges of the population they represent. The whole-worker concept focuses not just on workers' challenges and problems at the workplace but also in their community, and bridges issues such as housing, childcare, transportation and immigrants' rights. However, philanthropic organizations have their own defined "issue" areas, often want to fund activities within those silos and do not accurately reflect the fluidity or intersectionality of the challenges workers face. While programmatic funding is essential, funding is also needed to move the needle or to shift systems, build long-term power, and change the conditions that shape workers' lives. In the current political climate, such funding is equally critical for protecting hard-won gains and sustaining the infrastructure of worker advocacy. Philanthropic organizations can meet the moment by:

- **Participate in funders' tables:** Funders who invest in different issues related to the whole worker can come together for additional, allied investments. This *additional* funding is over and above the funding to individual grantees, and helps move or protect the broader ecosystem of worker rights, worker protections and other issues that the "whole-worker" faces.

- **Engage in the "coalition of the willing":** There is a community of philanthropic organizations that are willing to go above and beyond a traditional funder-grantee relationship to sustain movement building efforts. Join them! This might include funders raising funds for their grantees, brokering connections with other funders on behalf of their grantees, or engaging consultants or dedicated staff to develop funder diversification or small donor strategies for their grantees.

> *Funders tend to trust funders more than they trust organizations. So it is the job of funders to fundraise on behalf of funders, on behalf of grantees. I think that's an important role.*
>
> - *Coalition Funder*

### 3. Trust the Leadership of Coalition Organizations

The Bay Area is home to a number of funders who understand the fundamentals of coalitional work and work with them to reduce undue administrative and procedural burden. However, the scale of the challenges workers face demands additional funding and a call for new funders to join the work. The following are some considerations for emergent funders in coalitional work, and effective funder practices that support coalition infrastructure:

- **Consider seed grants:** For funders unfamiliar with coalitional work or uncomfortable with the idea of funding a new campaign or concept, seed grants provide an opportunity to dip their toes in, while still being cautious. This also provides coalitions an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities and strategies, instill trust and lay the groundwork for bigger grants.

- **Make flexible, multi-year, general operating grants the norm:** Unsurprisingly, short-term and project-specific grants restrict coalitions' ability to engage in long-term planning and strategic movement building. Many coalition leaders reported that when they do receive multi-year, general operating support, it allows them to shift focus from fundraising to coalition organizing and leadership development.

- **Simplify reporting requirements:** Coalition leaders consistently described grant application and reporting processes as disproportionately burdensome and unevenly distributed among anchor organizations that serve as fiscal sponsors or coalition leads. Funders who adopted more relational or flexible approaches, such as allowing verbal check-ins, accepting previously submitted documents, collaborative reporting formats or even shared reporting spaces with other funders, helped alleviate the administrative load on coalition partners.

### 4. Leverage Opportunities for Internal Growth Within your Foundation

Funder interviewees for this project worked at a wide range of philanthropic organizations – from smaller family foundations to large public foundations and regional community foundations - that vary in their size, scope, internal strategy and operating structure. Across these foundations, it became clear that effectively supporting coalitions requires internal shifts, not just external grantmaking changes. Some of these internal characteristics are detailed below, and consistently emerged as critical for funders engaged in movement-building. Existing funders can view these shifts not only as philanthropic best practices but also as opportunities for internal growth and alignment with the movements they aim to

support. For newer funders entering the space, adopting these internal orientations from the outset may be critical to building meaningful partnerships with worker-centered coalitions.

- **Play to win:** Craft a funding strategy that aims to induce incremental systemic change and "play the long game". Coalitional work is a long-term investment and requires looking beyond short-term wins, targeted campaigns and over reliance on programmatic funding.

- **Engage in** Error! Reference source not found.**:** Entrust and compensate people with lived and earned experience to deploy philanthropic capital, bringing new, grounded voices into the often disconnected realm of philanthropic grantmaking.



*Photo by Joyce Xi*

- **Wear multiple hats:** Move beyond one-dimensional grantmaking to play multiple roles depending on coalition needs. These roles are summarized below and outlined in more detail in the **Error! Reference source not found.** section of this report. Again, these roles are nonlinear and not mutually exclusive--a funder's ability to be adapt and play different roles is just as important as coalitions' ability to pivot to changing conditions:
    - *Investors* provide flexible, general operating support and invest in coalition infrastructure.
    - *Brokers* leverage relationships to attract additional funding and participate in strategic co-funding collaboratives
    - *Connectors* sustain movement clusters, host convenings, and help build trust and relationships across networks.
    - *Learners* conduct and fund strategic research, engage in organizational learning, and adapt based on what movements need.
    - *Influencers* use their institutional and professional clout to advocate for movement goals, model movement-aligned practices, and shift peer funders toward stronger engagement.

## Want to Join the Conversation?

Email us at ReWorkTheBay@sff.org to learn how you can participate in and help shape our initiative to increase infrastructure and collaboration among worker-centered coalitions.

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