

SOUTHERN MOVEMENT BUILDING LANDSCAPE SCAN

Strategic Recommendations



converge



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CONTEXT

“As the South goes, so goes the nation.”

— W.E.B. DuBois

W.E.B. DuBois once said that “As the South goes, so goes the nation.” This sentiment rings as true today as it has historically. The United States of America, particularly in the Southern states, continues to extract itself from the deeply rooted impacts of centuries of intentionally oppressive and unjust laws, policies and culture.

As in the civil rights battles of the 1960s, today’s South is once again the frontline in the fight for collective freedom. Almost daily, new restrictive laws and policies are introduced in Southern legislators that aim to control one’s bodily autonomy, public educational materials and an individual’s gender and sexual identities. To achieve an inclusive and thriving nation, we must root out oppression and injustice.

This Southern Landscape Scan report was prepared as communities continue to face the combination of several crises:

(1) A global pandemic that has disproportionately harmed the health and socioeconomic circumstances of Black, indigenous people and peoples of color (BIPOC) communities

- (2) A national uprising against the equally lethal “virus” of systemic racism in response to the murders of Black people**
- (3) An economic recession resulting in food and housing insecurity among the poor and racial minorities, among other things**
- (4) Ongoing voter suppression during a historic election and post-election voting rights battles which tested the fabric of our democracy**
- (5) Climate change-related injustices negatively impact Southern BIPOC communities**

Across all thirteen Southern states, common key issues caused by systemic racism and conservative politics persist. It is still difficult for activists to make breakthroughs that contribute to system change. One example is the prevalence of the “school-to-prison” pipeline in most Southern states. The COVID-19 pandemic, economic and climate injustices only exacerbated these hardships for BIPOC communities.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SOUTHERN MOVEMENT BUILDING



The Southern Movement Building Landscape Scan research affirms an American reality that racial justice work in the South is strategically important for the following reasons:

- ❖ The South continues to drive key pieces of the nation’s public policies that affect social and economic mobility outcomes.
- ❖ As the South’s large African-American population and fast-growing Latino demographic gave rise to many “majority-minority” counties (places with the majority of people are racial minorities as defined on the national level), stark inequalities facing BIPOC communities in education, health care, transportation, the criminal justice system, and economic opportunities are taking center stage.
- ❖ In the COVID-related public health crisis and economic downturn, the South’s weak social safety net as provided by both federal and local governments failed to assist low-income and working families, particularly those in BIPOC communities. Social support sustained by regular people and in informal networks are strong and have risen to fill the gap that socio-economic structures have failed to invest.
- ❖ The South remains on the frontlines of civil rights and racial justice, yet BIPOC-led and/or BIPOC-serving organizing efforts continue to be underfunded. The philanthropic sector has ignored this, typically following Democratic investments



to win easier electoral fights. Movement organizations have been underfunded even after they have historically provided progressive wins. Funders have an important role to play in fostering a collaborative culture among local organizations



RESEARCH FINDINGS



BIPOC-led organizations that operate with limited staff and financial resources are often the same organizations experiencing overwhelming demand for services. That requires funders' support immediately.

For example, some organizations are rethinking how to best use their space in order to help communities where the digital gap remains. Resources for strategic planning and other skills to facilitate deepening and equitable engagement with local residents are also much needed.

Below is a summary of our high-level research findings of the Southern landscape:

- ❖ The history of the South shapes the region's present realities and its future projections. Racism, homophobia, and xenophobia continue to shape social life in the South and impact BIPOC communities' social and economic experiences. These have been exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- ❖ With the national reckoning on race after the trauma of multiple racialized violence incidents in 2020, people in the South, across all racial and ethnic groups, are working together to push for change. Solidarity-based networks proliferated across the region and gained momentum.
- ❖ More and more funders now have awareness of supporting BIPOC-led organizations and networks, but compared with the rising demands compounded by crises, there is still much work to do.
- ❖ Local organizing and power-building are integral to progressive change in the South and must be led by visionary leaders who are most impacted by the policies and social-economic context of the region.
- ❖ Southern leaders expect multi-generational investments in return for multi-generational divestments (or extractions) and to solve multi-generational problems.
- ❖ Movement building in the South requires a deep racial equity and racial justice analysis to achieve progress. Southern organizations are diverse in their abilities to operationalize this analysis internally and externally.

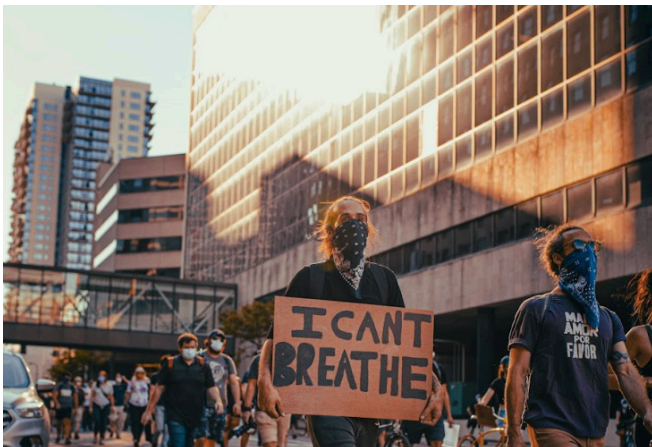
STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION #1



Based on analyzing data from thirteen states and 440 BIPOC-led and/or BIPOC-serving nonprofits in these regions, Converge developed the following strategic recommendations for funders who want to invest in southern movement building:

I. Develop Region-specific Investment Strategies

For funders who want to support racial justice organizing in the South, there are certain key strategic target regions that are particularly important in the coming years. Take **Georgia** and **Florida** for example. The politics in these two states are in flux, and progressive movements are at a critical point of making political changes. They also have relatively mature social justice infrastructure which funders can help strengthen and solidify.



Other Southern states have favorable climate for more progressive organizing also include: **North Carolina** (where a strong social

justice infrastructure in place) and **Mississippi** (where the social justice infrastructure is weak but there have been many successful multi-racial and multi-issue coalitions).

Southern states that have strong clusters or racial justice organizing work include **Alabama, Texas, Louisiana, Virginia,** and **Tennessee**. There is greater density of organizing strength in the nonprofit sectors of these states. More funding can help local movements to reach a critical mass towards system change.

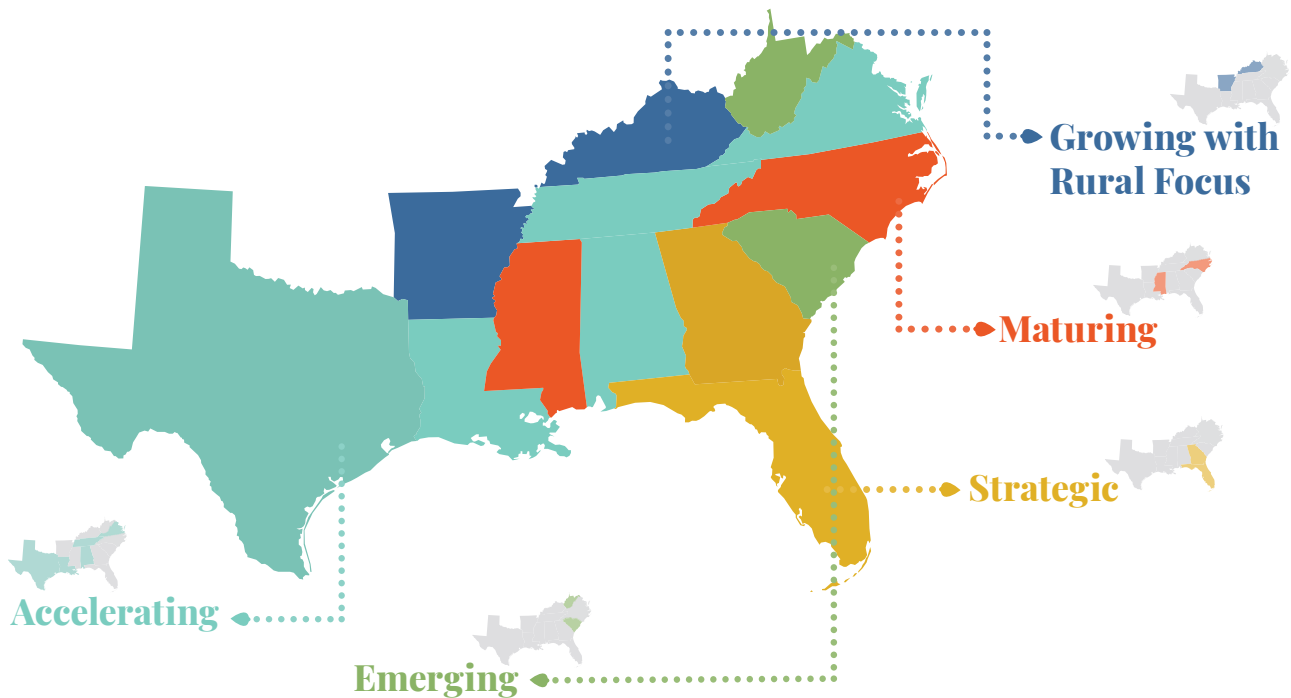
Regions where BIPOC-led organizations are emerging and growing are **South Carolina** and **West Virginia**. These two states face either entrenched political suppression or long-term geographic disadvantages. Lack of funding has not only hindered BIPOC-led nonprofits to grow, but has also fostered a toxic culture of co-optation by white-led organizations or over-competition among BIPOC leaders. Funders should focus on BIPOC leadership development and coalition-building in these two states. This high-level analysis is summarized in this table:

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION #1

Table 1. Region-Specific Investment Strategies

Local Landscape and Infrastructure	States	Investment Strategies
Emerging	South Carolina West Virginia	Capacity-building grants BIPOC leadership development
Growing with weak exosystem, rural focus	Arkansas Kentucky	BIPOC leadership development Ecosystem grants
Growing with maturing ecosystem	North Carolina Mississippi	Capacity-building grants Ecosystem grants
Strong and accelerating	Alabama, Texas Louisiana, Virginia Tennessee	Strategic partnership Acceleration grants
Strategic	Georgia Florida	Electoral Base-building Coalition-building, Civic engagement

*The sequencing of local landscape and infrastructure does not suggest ranking of importance.



STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION #2



II. Support BIPOC-led System-change Work

Although philanthropic efforts to advance racial equity and racial justice have increased since 2020, matching these funding initiatives with authentic local organizing movements has been a challenge. We have learned from our research that funders tend to have a path dependence in granting to white-led or state-wide reputational organizations. Grassroots BIPOC-led organizations that carry out the most direct work but have limited capacity rarely get noticed.

Moreover, not enough funding has gone to the full range of work that is needed to support system change. This is consistent with long-standing research showing that

systems-changing work typically gets little funding.¹ Based on this qualitative assessment of each state's nonprofit ecosystem, the density and maturity of BIPOC-led and/or BIPOC-serving nonprofits, BMP should develop long-term and varying investment strategies to match each region's needs.

As this landscape scan research shows, not all Southern states are on the same page when it comes to community organizing. Region-specific investment blueprints allow the prioritizing of urgent issues (such as climate justice and voting rights) because racial justice intersects with many other context-specific issues.



¹ Paul Engler, Sophie Lasoff, and Carlos Saavedra, [Funding Social Movements: How Mass Protest Makes an Impact](#), May 2018.



STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION #3

III. Center Southern Leaders' Own Definitions of “Progress”

It is important for funders to hear the voices of local nonprofit leaders and community activists whose work is most impacted by the flow of funds. During our research, we were highly interested in how these local leaders define “progress” in the South when it comes to economic, gender, climate and social justice. To summarize, interviewees described “progress” in the South as:

- (1) **Long-term sustained engagement with those who are directly impacted by the work towards pushing for policy changes.**
- (2) **Shifts in mainstream narratives that support repressive policies through the elevation of stories about people impacted by these policies is critical to building compassion, understanding and solidarity.**
- (3) **BIPOC-led leadership development that is based on personal transformation to advance structural change.**
- (4) **The sustaining and deepening of relationships and the ability to project a vision for the future while meeting the immediate needs of those being locally organized and mobilized.**
- (5) **Increased investment and equitable disbursement of resources, including flexible general operating support**
- (6) **Funders allow BIPOC leaders to create their own metrics for measuring progress and success in their work.**
- (7) **A culture valuing collaboration and partnership over competition for resources. Infrastructure that includes multi-issue, multiracial coalitions aligned on a shared agenda with shared values.**
- (8) **An ecosystem of infrastructure that includes base-building organizations, advocacy organizations, organizations with litigation, research, and communications capacity, C4 organizations and organized donor tables.**
- (9) **These networks allow for the sharing of information, expertise and resources and decentralize power and reflect the value of interdependency.**
- (10) **Election of progressive candidates, particularly candidates of color.**

Coming from BIPOC communities that are most impacted by racial equity and racial justice work, BIPOC leaders are in the best position to lead this work in the South. BMP can support BIPOC leadership development in each Southern state by partnering with existing networks and platforms.



DESIRABLE OUTCOMES

Converge envisions a South where BIPOC-led organizations are well-funded to push for system change. Below are a summary of desirable outcomes as a result of implementing the strategic recommendations:


- ✦ Each Southern state receives targeted support to BIPOC-led organizations so that they may produce sustainable impact according to their self-determined agenda.
- ✦ Each Southern state has an inclusive regional network of BIPOC organizations that assert more visible leadership in coordinating resources.
- ✦ Funders direct more resources to a localized coalition of BIPOC-led organizations that focus on system change.
- ✦ BIPOC leadership networks create a safe and supportive space for leaders to unapologetically tell their stories, shift narratives, thought-partner, and form deeper relationships that promote organic collaboration.

Funders can take the following actionable steps to achieve these outcomes:

- ✦ Design high-level investment blueprints for each Southern state based on (1) evaluation of the local social justice, (2) leveraging a diversified group of players

in the ecosystem, and (3) the selection of targeted areas of improvements.

- ✦ Involve area experts to review and evaluate these regional investment blueprints.
- ✦ Identify and fund existing regional networks of BIPOC organizations.
- ✦ Identify and support BIPOC organizations with good reputation and track records to form local collaboratives aiming at creating a networked and inclusive community.
- ✦ Provide collaboration grants for organizations to work together.
- ✦ Identify and fund existing regional networks of BIPOC organizations that focus on system change work.
- ✦ Provide collaboration grants for organizations to work together.
- ✦ Invest and partner with existing regional BIPOC leadership development networks and platforms so that the latter can expand their table to include emerging and young leaders from BIPOC communities to form a leadership pipeline.
- ✦ Provide communication support grants to existing regional BIPOC leadership networks to build and shift narratives.



Converge specializes in supporting funders' strategy development to promote system change. We follow a proven methodology of **Racial and Intersectional Equity**© in building and shifting power to communities of color. Through our copy-righted **Power in Place**© learning community, Converge also provides training and coaching to grantee cohorts sponsored by funders who want to empower BIPOC leaders in system change work.

If you are a funder who is interested in developing system change strategies or in sponsoring a grantee cohort to learn about movement building, please contact us at info@convergeforchange.com