



**ASTRAEA LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE**

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# Feminist Funding Principles

Founded in 1977, Astraea is one of the original women's funds in the world and the only fund dedicated to LGBTQI rights globally. Today, we sit at the nexus of more than 40 years of feminist grantmaking and movement building. These funding principles reflect our learning about what it takes to support frontline activists to make enduring social change.

## ***Feminist Funding Principles - Acknowledgments***

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Photo credits for *Astraea* Timeline, pages 10-11

2017 - **Members of Missouri GSA Network**

Credit: Missouri GSA Network

1977 - **Astraea staff and Lesbian Writers Fund recipients**

Credit: *Astraea* Archives

1990 - **Astraea marches at the NYC Pride parade in 1991**

Credit: *Astraea* Archives

2013 - **World Conference Against Racism, Satellite Conference on  
Homophobia in Durban, South Africa, 1991**

Credit: *Astraea* Archives

# Introduction

Founded in 1977, the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice is one of the first women's funds in the world and the only fund solely dedicated to LGBTQI rights globally. Through grantmaking, capacity building, philanthropic advocacy, and media and communications, we support brilliant and brave grassroots activists and artists who challenge oppression and seed social change. We are a leading funder of LGBTQI movements for gender, racial, and economic justice across the globe.

Our founders—a cross-class, multi-racial group of women activists—dreamed of a women's movement that centered the leadership of lesbians and women of color. For over four decades, Astraea has uniquely supported women's rights and LGBTQI movements working at the crossroads of gender justice, racial justice, bodily autonomy, sexual rights, and self-determination.

We ground our grantmaking in feminism—a political identity that challenges oppressive norms and power relations. We embrace an intersectional feminism as part of a wider struggle for social justice, recognizing that sexism, transphobia, homophobia, misogyny, and restrictive gender norms harm everyone. Feminism is

a powerful framework that enables us to discuss how bodies, sexuality, and gender interact with oppression based on race, class, and other axes of identity and experience. Rooting our feminism in social justice, we particularly support Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and Global South movements and leadership.

As a feminist fund, we believe the strongest approaches to achieving justice center the needs and visions of people who face multiple oppressions. We believe it is our responsibility to redistribute money as a mechanism toward redistributing power, so movement agendas are controlled by activists, organizations, and communities.

Today, Astraea sits at the nexus of more than 40 years of feminist grantmaking and movement building. **Feminist Funding Principles** is an invitation to engage in a thoughtful rigorous practice that acknowledges the power of purposeful grantmaking. These principles can be applied across different organizational strategies, geographic priorities, and theories of change. We offer them to share what we have learned over the last four decades about what it takes to support activists on the frontlines to make enduring social change.



2015 Martin Luther King Jr. Day March and Rally  
Credit: Naomi Ishisaka





# Principles

## 1. Fund those most impacted by gendered oppression

Making progress toward advancing gender equality and justice requires centering the priorities of those who face discrimination, violence, and oppression based on their gender identity, gender expression, sexuality and/or sex characteristics. To effectively address gender-based violence, for example, philanthropy must take up the distinct harms faced by LBTQI women and non-binary

people who are targeted with violence that seeks to enforce discriminatory gender norms.

We must expand traditional notions of gender, so programs targeting women reach *all* women, including trans and cis women, and those who identify as non-binary. Funding with this lens not only ensures that no one is left behind but also brings about more meaningful change: when social change efforts are led by and prioritize the experiences of those most impacted, everyone benefits.

### Grantee Highlight: Anti-Domestic Violence Organizing, East Asia

One of Astraea's lesbian-led grantee partners in East Asia worked in close partnership with women's rights organizations and feminist alliances to pass the first national anti-domestic violence law in their country (anonymized for security concerns). The grantee organized with women's rights organizations to make the proposed law as inclusive as possible. In the end, they succeeded in keeping the law gender-neutral and wide enough to include protections for unmarried couples, and maintained a broad definition of domestic violence that includes psychological abuse. Each of these provisions was vital to ensure that the law would be able to be used by LGBTQI communities to secure services and protections from family violence and intimate partner violence. Overall, their advocacy contributed to a more progressive law that provides more expansive protections to more women.



Migrants' OBR in Taipei, March 2018

Credit: Lennon Ying-Dah Wong; Obtained from Flickr



## 2. Fund at the intersection of women's rights and LGBTQI liberation movements

Donors often address women's rights and LGBTQI issues in silos, but both activists as well as opponents to the rights of women and LGBTQI people know that these issues are deeply connected. For example, "gender ideology" or "anti-gender" movements in many parts of the world seek to halt progress on women's and LGBTQI rights by targeting marriage, gender identity, abortion, and birth control, claiming to protect family values while promoting retrograde notions about gender roles.<sup>1</sup> Many

LBTQI and women's rights organizations organize across movements to combat these threats, creating powerful opportunities to build solidarity. By supporting groups that are concerned with both women's and LBTQI rights, funders can help build stronger bases of support to combat these anti-gender forces. In fact, LBTQI activists are often on the frontlines and in leadership of feminist movements, but don't receive support for this work. For example, while many trans and intersex groups around the world engage in feminist organizing, only 9% of trans groups<sup>2</sup> and 18% of intersex groups<sup>3</sup> received women's rights funding in 2014-2016.

### Grantee Highlight: Women's Initiatives Supporting Group (WISG), Georgia

WISG is a feminist LBT-led group working to ensure the full social, political, economic, and cultural participation of all women in Georgia. The organization sits at the forefront of both feminist and LGBTQI movements, advocating for a shared political agenda to combat the rise of the anti-gender movement. In close cooperation with civil society partners, WISG is driving national advocacy efforts around sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and legal gender recognition. Achieved through organizing with the Coalition for Equality alliance, one of WISG's major victories was the adoption of comprehensive national anti-discrimination legislation, which includes protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as sex, in spite of harsh opposition from the Christian Orthodox Church of Georgia and other conservative groups. The group is now monitoring implementation of the law.



- 1 Global Philanthropy Project. (2018). *Religious Conservatism on the Global Stage: Threats and Challenges for LGBTI Rights*, p. 27. Retrieved from <https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/2018/11/04/religious-conservatism-on-the-global-stage-threats-and-challenges-for-lgbti-rights/>
- 2 American Jewish World Service, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice & Global Action for Trans\* Equality. (2017). *The State of Trans Organizing (2nd Edition)*, page 27. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/astraea.production/app/asset/uploads/2017/10/Trans-REPORT-for-the-web-Updated.pdf>
- 3 American Jewish World Service, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice & Global Action for Trans\* Equality. (2017). *State of Intersex Organizing (2nd Edition)*, page 7. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/astraea.production/app/asset/uploads/2017/10/Intersex-REPORT-For-the-Web-Updated.pdf>



### 3. Apply an intersectional lens to break down funding silos

In order to effectively build power, movements cannot operate in isolation. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to lift up the specific oppression that Black women face, is the concept that people have multiple, layered identities, including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability.<sup>4</sup> Oppression, then, is exponentially compounded for those living at those intersections.

It is imperative to fund at the very junctions that abnegate power, freedom, and rights—and limit the voracity of movements—if we are to bring about meaningful, lasting

change. For example, the fight for racial justice is deeply connected to a number of other issues, from sexual and reproductive rights to migrant justice to sex worker rights, because People of Color are disproportionately affected by health, immigration, labor, and criminal justice policies. Similarly, LGBTQI people are often the first to experience the effects of economic injustice, and the poorest communities are most negatively impacted by the fallouts of climate change. To resource movements intersectionally is to address the greatest systemic issues of injustice. It also enables communities to build power together. Funders who are willing to break down traditional identity or issue-based funding silos in order to fund across movements and communities create opportunity for the most impactful change.



Scene from an alQaws educational video

Credit: alQaws

#### **Grantee Partner Highlight: alQaws for Sexual & Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society, Palestine**

Astraea has supported alQaws for over a decade because of its powerful intersectional politics that centers LGBTQ issues in wider struggles for social justice. Born out of grassroots organizing and rooted in anti-colonial and queer feminist values, alQaws works to build a vibrant and just Palestinian society that celebrates diverse sexualities and genders. In addition to community-building, leadership development, and counseling support, alQaws leads large-scale cultural change efforts to transform Palestinian social norms. Their work is cross-issue and intersectional at its core, interweaving sexual and gender diversity issues with the broader context of occupation and colonialism. To this end, alQaws works to build shared analysis and strategy across civil society sectors and social justice movements, including by training human rights, feminist, and health organizations on gender and sexual diversity; sparking intellectual debate in public and academic spaces; and engaging in cultural and media production. For example, their monthly “Hawamesh Discussion Series” takes issues traditionally seen as belonging to the margins, such as LGBTQ issues, and connects them to broader political and social conversations. Through their work, Palestinian civil society and media have become much more inclusive of LGBTQ issues.

<sup>4</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberlé. (1989). *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Retrieved from <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>



#### 4. Provide flexible and sustained core funding to activists

Astraea believes that those who are closest to the problems that need addressing are best positioned to set their own priorities and determine where resources go. We provide flexible core funding because it enables grantee partners to self-determine their agendas, respond to changes in contexts, seize unanticipated opportunities, cover their operating costs, and invest funds where they are most needed. In 2018, 70% of our grants provided general operating support to organizations; in comparison, only 20% of funding from the largest 1,000 U.S. foundations was general support.<sup>5</sup> Further, more than 80% of our grants are renewals. We partner with organizations over the long-term, often five to 10 years, because social change does not happen in a 12-month grant period. Donors invested in making meaningful change must commit for the long haul.



<sup>5</sup> Schlegel, Ryan. (2019). *The gig economy continues to hold back the nonprofit sector*. National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncrp.org/2019/01/the-gig-economy-continues-to-hold-back-the-nonprofit-sector.html>





## 5. Fund efforts to make social and cultural change, alongside and as part of legal and policy change

Social change is complex; it has many dimensions, and progress is needed in all of them. Strong, autonomous feminist movements are *the* drivers of policy change for women's rights, given their abilities to articulate needs, shift public opinion, and demand institutional change that reflects those needs.<sup>6</sup> Legal and policy changes are necessary, yet alone they are insufficient to affect people's lives; social norms must evolve alongside them in order for laws and policies to be implemented and to make a meaningful difference.

Funding cultural change work, from arts activism to strategic communications, is essential to change hearts and minds, implement and protect policy gains, and transform oppressive practices. A recent evaluation of Astraea's policy-focused grants found that a critical outcome was supporting grantee partners to shift dominant narratives about gender and sexuality, expanding public understanding of LGBTQI issues in their national contexts.<sup>7</sup> As community leadership plays a critical role in making change real, base-building and grassroots organizing are also necessary components of an effective policy change funding strategy.



### Grantee Partner Highlight: Colectivo No Tengo Miedo, Peru

LGBTQI communities in Peru have few legal protections and face high levels of violence and discrimination. Colectivo No Tengo Miedo (NTM) is a LGBTQI collective composed of youth artists, activists, and academics that has made strategic use of cultural activism, digital organizing, and grassroots mobilization to shift public narratives about LGBTQI communities, enabling the organization to make significant inroads toward legal and policy change. Their multimedia campaign #YOTRANSformo encouraged trans and gender non-conforming people across the country to share their personal stories through powerful videos, many of which went viral; the group launched the online campaign, "Visibles Somos Mas Fuertes," to raise community visibility. NTM also published a report on violence against LGBTQI communities, the first-ever data set and research on this topic, leading Peru's National Institute of Statistics and Information to develop the first survey on LGBTQI communities in Peru, for which NTM provided key technical assistance. Each of these campaigns had a major impact on media representations of and public discourse about LGBTQI people. NTM has parlayed this work into political commitments, such as getting all Lima mayoral candidates in 2017 to sign onto a LGBTQI rights platform.

6 Weldon, S. Laurel & Mala Htun. (2013). *Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women*. Gender & Development, volume 21, no. 2, page 231-247. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13552074.2013.802158>

7 Fried, Susana & Leila Hessini. (2017). *Social Change and Opportunity Fund (SCOF) Evaluation*, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, page 5.



# Four Decades of Feminist Funding



2017

Begins LBQ funding initiative, in collaboration with peer women's fund Mama Cash



1990s

2016  
Supports grantee partners to participate in key global movement spaces, including the AWID Feminist Forum in Brazil and the ILGA World Conference in Thailand

2015  
Launches the first Intersex Human Rights Fund in the world

2014  
Launches CommsLabs, becoming the first funder to make a major investment in media, communications, and technology for LGBTQI movements globally

1996

Launches first international fund for LGBTQI rights

1995

Sends a contingent to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing

1994

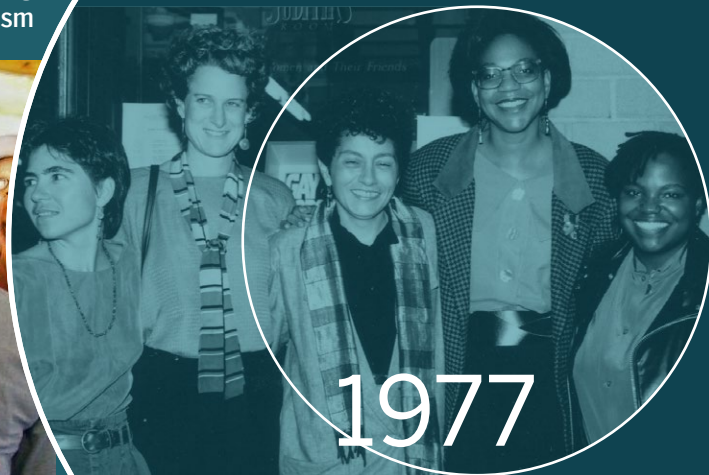
Begins grantmaking support for trans activism

1980

Awards first set of grants, including to a lesbian choir, advocacy for lesbian mothers, and support for incarcerated women

1977

Founded by a cross-class, multi-racial group of women activists to fund feminist organizing centering the leadership of lesbians and women of color



2000

Supports feminist movement-building spaces in the U.S., including INCITE's first Color of Violence conference and the national Arab Women Organization conference

2001

Raises visibility of sexuality issues at the World Conference Against Racism in South Africa



1990

Comes out as a lesbian organization

1991

Supports arts activism, launching the Lesbian Writers Fund, followed by the Visual Arts Fund, which later became the Global Arts Fund

2008

Begins a multi-year funding commitment to queer and trans People of Color-led (QTPOC) movements in the U.S.

2009

Co-founds the Global Philanthropy Project to expand global philanthropic support to advance the human rights of LGBTI people in the Global South and East

2010

Partners with Latin American women's funds to increase funding for LBQ & trans activism in Latin America & the Caribbean

2013

Starts the LGBTQ Racial Justice Fund, affirming our long-standing commitment to racial and economic justice; Supports the first Caribbean Women and Sexual Diversity Conference, the first space for Caribbean LBT women to come together on their own terms



## 6. Support cross-issue and cross-regional movement building

With the rise of authoritarian governments and anti-rights movements around the world, we face threats to human rights on every front. Feminist and LGBTQI groups need spaces that bridge issues and borders to build relationships, share information, and develop strategies for leadership, research, advocacy, and collective action. Providing funding for convenings, especially when they are led by or co-designed with activists, is an effective strategy to spark collaborations and deepen partnerships. Donors can support these kinds of peer

exchanges and learning opportunities by drawing connections across country and regional programs, and engaging with grantee partners about what they most need.

Concurrently, donors can strengthen cross-issue analysis within their portfolios. For example, when considering strategies to address climate change, there are rich opportunities to learn from climate justice movements rooted in feminist framings that integrate gender, racial, economic, and migrant justice and promote community-owned infrastructure and assets.

### **Movement Building Highlight: Digital Solidarity Convening, Central Asia & Eastern Europe**

In 2018, Astraea collaborated with peer funder Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights and grantee partner Labrys, based in Kyrgyzstan, to host the Digital Solidarity Convening for feminist and LGBTQ activists from Post-Soviet countries in Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The convening created space for groups from across the region to explore the ways digital strategies can strengthen queer, trans, and feminist activism, while considering the implications for security and sustainability. It was a rare opportunity for activists from all over the Post-Soviet space, a deeply underfunded region, to come together. Activists discussed the political, social, and cultural challenges to organizing in the region, and strategized about the future of joint regional initiatives. The facilitators and participants noted that this kind of transnational convening was extremely critical for building trust among activists from across LGBTQI and feminist organizations, as well as for collectively responding to the violence, backlash, and oppression they face.



Astraea, Urgent Action Fund, and Labrys Digital Solidarity Convening in Kyrgyzstan, 2018.

Credit: Labrys Kyrgyzstan



## 7. Go beyond grantmaking: accompany activists with capacity building and leadership support

Organizations, especially those led by under-resourced and most impacted communities, require more than money to be sustainable. Astraea believes that it's our responsibility as funders to work to ensure that grantee partners have what they need to heal, survive, thrive, and build power. Accompanying—or walking alongside—groups includes providing moral and emotional support, political solidarity through moments of crisis and struggle, hands-on advice, assistance with legal and fiscal needs, and resources to support learning, growth, and sustainability.

How this happens matters a lot. Learning and capacity building needs must be defined by activists and the movements they are part of, and the most effective and sustainable capacity building is led by peers and movement actors themselves.

As a feminist funder, we give particular attention to leadership models. Movements with intergenerational and collective leadership are far more sustainable. We encourage funders to support this practice, as well as to resource grantees' efforts to train the next generation of activist leaders through political practice and education. It is also critical to support organizations who are nurturing leadership from most-impacted communities, across gender, racial, economic, ability, and other barriers.



**BYP100 National Convening in Raleigh, North Carolina, 2016.**

Credit: BYP100

### **Capacity Building Highlight: BYP100, United States**

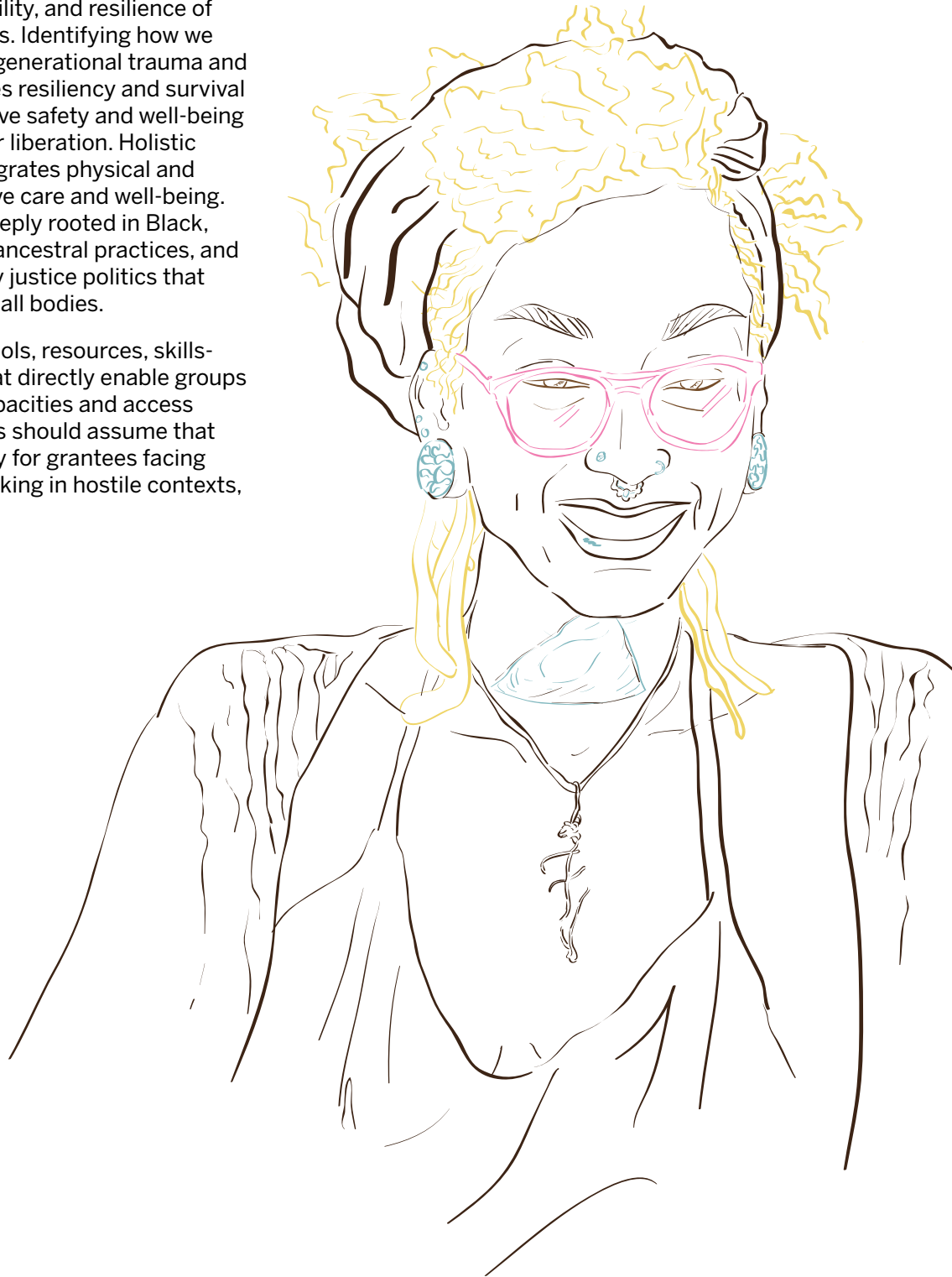
National U.S. organization the Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100) was at a critical juncture in its organizational history in 2018, as its first national director prepared to step down. Astraea provided BYP100 with a grant from our Fertile Ground Fund to strengthen its sustainability and continue building power during this time of transition. The grant supported BYP100 with space and time to release a new strategic plan, identify leaders within their membership, and further develop a hiring and onboarding process. Asking what our movements are planting now and what they need to harvest for the long haul, Astraea's Fertile Ground Fund compliments our core funding by supporting grantee partners to seize movement building opportunities and strengthen organizational sustainability and resilience.



## 8. Invest in holistic security and healing justice

Feminist activists on the frontlines face safety and security threats, both online and off, due to their activism that confronts power structures. Marginalization and oppression make some groups more vulnerable than others to burnout and violence, so this is particularly important when reaching LGBTQ groups. Healing justice and holistic security are two strategies that can bolster the well-being, sustainability, and resilience of organizers and their communities. Identifying how we can respond to and intervene in generational trauma and violence, healing justice promotes resiliency and survival practices that center the collective safety and well-being of communities as integral to our liberation. Holistic security is an approach that integrates physical and digital security with self/collective care and well-being. Both of these frameworks are deeply rooted in Black, People of Color, and Indigenous ancestral practices, and also speak to a feminist disability justice politics that values the safety and security of all bodies.

Funders can provide access to tools, resources, skills-building, and strategy spaces that directly enable groups to build their holistic security capacities and access healing justice practices. Funders should assume that this support is needed, especially for grantees facing multiple oppressions and/or working in hostile contexts, and make it available.



## 9. Support work at the crossroads of feminist activism, digital rights, and internet freedom

Astraea recognizes the Internet as a critical terrain where rights are being contested. Feminist and social justice activism cannot thrive without an open Internet and secure access to digital tools. Technology gives grassroots organizers a revolutionary edge: activists are equipped to build communities, craft effective messages, amplify their voices, and reach their audiences. However, the same methodologies and tools that open up new

social change possibilities also expose activists to surveillance, abuse, and harm. The Internet/digital terrain has the ability to reify oppression in ways that are not always immediately visible or obvious. Marginalized constituencies are particularly vulnerable because Internet governance policies do not prioritize their needs. It is critical to equip LBTQI and feminist activists with the skills, tools, networks, and technologies they need to harness the power of digital organizing while protecting their safety and wellbeing. There are huge opportunities for our movements to be innovative and exponentially advance their causes, if we can transcend some of the limitations and barriers they face.



Participants at Astraea's Dominican Republic CommsLabs, September 2018.

Credit: Carlos Rodríguez

### **Movement Building Highlight: CommsLabs, Global**

In 2014, Astraea launched CommsLabs (Communications, Media, and Technology Labs) to address the connected issues of communications, media and technology capacity, and digital security. To date, Astraea has organized CommsLabs in Latin America, the Caribbean, Eastern Africa, and Southern Africa. Tailored to the priorities of activists in each context, the participatory CommsLabs convenings focus on the co-creation of solutions that address activists' digital advocacy, security, and communications needs. In partnership with technologists, LBTQI activists build their strategies and knowledge to mitigate the harms and seize the opportunities that technology presents. By fostering cross-sector connections, CommsLabs supports a transnational network of activists and technologists to take up internet freedom and digital rights as feminist and LBTQI issues.



## 10. Partner with women's and other activist-led funds to ensure that funding reaches the grassroots

To shift power to grassroots feminist movements, donors can partner with the ecosystem of global and regional activist-led funds to make resources accessible to local women's and LBTQI groups. Many government, multilateral, and other large donors do not have the mechanisms to reach movements directly, making it all the more critical to partner with those who do. For instance, while 28% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) is tagged for gender equality, only 7% reaches civil society organizations, and of this, less than 20% (1.4% of total ODA) is for groups specifically focused on gender equality.<sup>8</sup> On the private philanthropy side, only 4% of foundation funding for human rights reaches LBTQI organizations<sup>9</sup> and 23% goes to organizations working with women and girls.<sup>10</sup>

Women's funds and other activist-led funds like the International Trans Fund and Intersex Human Rights Fund play a vital role in making resources directly accessible to local organizations and movements. These funds have expertise in making small, flexible grants; accompanying groups with meaningful capacity building support; and supporting movement building through convenings and other strategies.<sup>11</sup> Collectively, women's funds have a wide reach: from 2011-2015, members of Prospera - International Network of Women's Funds mobilized \$313.5 million and supported 5,127 women's human rights organizations in 173 countries.<sup>12</sup>



8 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2018). *Aid for Civil Society Organisations: Statistics based on DAC Members' reporting to the Creditor Reporting System database (CRS), 2015-2016*. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-Civil-Society-Organisations-2015-2016.pdf>

9 Human Rights Funders Network and Foundation Center. (2019). *Advancing Human Rights: The State of Global Foundation Grantmaking*. Retrieved from <http://humanrightsfunding.org/populations/lgbtqi/>

10 Human Rights Funders Network and Foundation Center. (2019). *Advancing Human Rights: The State of Global Foundation Grantmaking*. Retrieved from <http://humanrightsfunding.org/populations/women/>

11 Moosa, Zohra & Sunny Daly. (2015). *Investing Well in the Right Places: Why Fund Women's Funds*. Mama Cash. Retrieved from [https://www.mamacash.org/media/publications/mama\\_cash-why\\_womens\\_funds\\_feb\\_2015\\_final.pdf](https://www.mamacash.org/media/publications/mama_cash-why_womens_funds_feb_2015_final.pdf)

12 Prospera International Network of Women's Funds. (2019). *Impact 2011-2015*. For more information please visit [www.prospera-inwf.org](http://www.prospera-inwf.org).



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# Conclusion

The Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice is committed to centering the leadership, voices, and agendas of grassroots activists, organizations, and movements. We believe that the principles outlined here are critical to making progress on gender equality and justice, and to being an effective funder. As our grantee partners challenge power in their own contexts, we seek to do the same. We invite all donors to join us!









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