



Conference Program

GEO will continue to update this program with details about sessions as they become available. Contact the GEO Team at registration@geofunders.org with any questions.

Sunday, May 31, 2026

3:00 – 6:00 p.m. | Registration Open

Get Ready to kick off your conference experience. Go to registration to get signed in and acquire your name badge.

3:30 – 4:30 p.m. | First-time Attendee Gathering

Join GEO and past conference participants to learn about the possibilities that the 2026 National Conference can hold for you. This will be an open space to learn from peers, ask questions, and connect with fellow participants.

4:00 – 6:00 p.m. | Early Arriver Social

Start your networking early and join fellow conference participants for a social hour to kick-off your conference experience. Where you're a first-time GEO conference participant or have attended multiple GEO events, this is a great opportunity to connect with peers, catch up or build new relationships, meet the GEO staff and conference program and host committee members! Light appetizers and beverages will be served.

6:00 – 9:00 p.m. | Community Events

Community Events offer opportunities for conference participants to self-organize events for their peers to connect and deepen connections during the conference.

Monday, June 1, 2026

7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. | Registration Open

7:30 – 9:00 a.m. | Breakfast Buffet

Breakfast is available for conference participants before we kick-off the conference.

9:15 – 10:30 a.m. | Opening Plenary: Grounded in Place and Purpose

Rooted in the lived wisdom of community leaders from across the Northeast, this session features a series of brief vignettes from nonprofit and community leaders advancing change through deep commitment to community, collaboration, and care. Speakers will reflect not only on what anchors their purpose, but also on the complexity of leading in this moment – the tensions they hold, the challenges shaping their communities, and the lessons emerging in real time. Together, these voices will set the tone for the conference by grounding participants in place, honoring local wisdom, and illuminating what it means to lead with purpose in meeting this moment.

10:30 – 11:00 a.m. | Break

11:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. | Breakout Sessions Round A

Select one of 12 options.

A1. Preserve, Protect & Promote: Funders and Field Leaders for Census and Data Integrity

The United States has the most trusted and accurate statistical system in the world. Data collected by various federal surveys is relied upon for many purposes. A high-stakes example is the 2030 Census, which is used to distribute more than \$2 trillion in annual federal funding, draw political boundaries, and inform decisions by governments, nonprofits, and businesses. The federal statistical system, including the census, faces numerous threats: budget and staff cuts, the elimination of advisory committees, and efforts to weaponize data that will suppress participation and erode trust, harming communities that rely on accurate information to thrive.

Even without these threats, some communities have been persistently undercounted, including young children, people of color, immigrants, and rural communities. And other communities have yet to see themselves reflected in our nation's data – LGBTQ people,



people with disabilities, and others — making their needs and experiences invisible. Virtually all funders rely on federal data, whether focused on health, education, environment, the economy or democracy. That’s why funders must act now to protect the census and invest in the future of public data. Join this session to learn how two funder collaboratives — Census Funder Collaborative and Funders for the Future of Public Data — are mobilizing philanthropy to confront undercounts and build a more inclusive, resilient federal data infrastructure.

A2. Do Not Obey in Advance – Leadership Reflections on What It Takes to Stand Up and Fight Back

This session will explore what it means to exercise courageous leadership, drawing on speaker lessons and reflections on their experience filing legal action against the federal government for the unlawful termination of their federal grants. With the sweeping and seemingly unrelenting reduction and elimination of federal funding to support critical research and essential services, often without justification, participants attending this session will hear from the leaders of Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (non-profit organization), the Minneapolis Foundation (funder), and Philanthropy Northwest (philanthropy infrastructure organization) who became co-plaintiffs in filing a successful lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for the unlawful termination of congressionally authorized funding to support community-led environmental protection work in underinvested communities.

Topics to be explored include exercising values driven leadership in the face of extraordinary headwinds; navigation of the inherent tension between standing on principle and managing risk; and leading through high levels of uncertainty and unpredictability. Attendees will take away broader perspectives on considerations for taking courageous leadership, enabling conditions necessary in taking collective action, and attending to self-care in the face of unprecedented times.

A3. How Three Community Foundations Reimagined Collaboration Through a Guaranteed Income Pilot: The Evolution of the CT Urban Opportunity Collaborative

What happens when three community foundations decide to trust communities — and each other — with a bold idea? In this session, participants will explore the launch of the CT Urban Opportunity Collaborative (CUOC) and implementation of a direct cash assistance pilot conducted across three cities in Connecticut. This initiative — grounded in racial and economic justice — centers residents as co-designers and policy advocates, reimagining what responsive philanthropy can look like in practice.

We will discuss how this partnership aligns funding, shares a staff person, engages nonprofit partners, and moves past differences to create a pilot rooted in the lived experiences of community members. Participants will hear from foundation and CUOC staff. We will examine how the collaboration unfolded through participation in the Community Foundation



Opportunity Network’s Nexus for Equity + Opportunity Nationwide and lessons from implementation of the pilot. We will highlight the groundwork laid for the pilot, how challenges with public benefits are addressed, how foundation and other community networks inform the work, and how our collective efforts lay the groundwork for future collaborations in these uncertain times.

A4. Reparative Philanthropy, an Urgent Healing Force in a Fractured Political Landscape

Philanthropy stands at a critical juncture. We face constitutional crises, rising authoritarianism, and direct threats to our sector. The challenges are accelerating harm at an unprecedented pace. As inequality deepens, communities bear the brunt – in health outcomes, climate resilience, economic security, and basic human rights.

The unprecedented flow of investment and divestment aimed at dismantling our democracy has created damage that will take generations to repair. While philanthropy alone cannot close every government funding gap, it has a unique opportunity to use “money as medicine” – modeling and facilitating repair for past and ongoing harms. DWP’s Reparative Philanthropy Framework offers a healing path to restore balance and build solidarity. In this session, we’ll explore the rapidly growing global movements for reparative action and reparations – both within communities and across the philanthropic landscape to transform wealth into collective wellbeing. You’ll discover how intentional, medicine-like investments in truth and repair can transform our work, confront historical and current injustices, and begin to heal a nation teetering on the brink.

Session Goals

1. Introduce Decolonizing Wealth Project's Reparative Philanthropy Framework and help participants understand its global impact on the sector.
2. Learn from Funders who are exploring institutional repair journeys to be inspired to take steps to get into "right relationship" with community, including interrogating the origins of their institution's wealth to create paths to repair.
3. Understanding why supporting the work of truth, healing, repair, and reparations is more critical now than ever to bridge a divided and torn nation.

A5. Sustaining Civil Society: Practical Funder Approaches to Wellbeing

As civil society faces unprecedented disruption – from global funding cuts to growing strain on nonprofit leaders – philanthropy is being called to look beyond programs and outcomes, and toward the people who make social change possible. While “wellbeing” can sound abstract or overwhelming, the truth is that many funders already support wellbeing in practical ways, often without naming it as such.



This session invites funders into a grounded, peer-based exploration of what wellbeing looks like in everyday philanthropic practice. Drawing on real examples from the Funders & Wellbeing Learning Group (FWLG), a global peer learning community of foundations hosted by The Wellbeing Project, the session will showcase tangible approaches funders are already testing. These include wellbeing stipends, investing in organizational and leadership development, strengthening grantee networks to support solidarity, learning, and connection and context-specific supports embedded within existing grantmaking.

Rather than presenting wellbeing as something new to design from scratch, the session helps demystify the concept and surface how funders may already be closer to this work than they realize. Through facilitated small-group conversations, participants will exchange ideas, learn from peers, and discover that there is no single model to adopt – and no need to figure this out alone.

A growing body of research on nonprofit burnout and funder–grantee misalignment on what’s needed also highlights why these practices matter now. At a moment when the stability of civil society is at stake, investing in wellbeing is not a “nice to have,” but a practical strategy for sustaining leadership, organizations, and long-term impact. Funders will leave with concrete ideas, renewed clarity, and a more accessible understanding of how wellbeing can be integrated into their work – starting where they already are.

A6. What Will It Take to Learn in Complex Systems? Exploring Four Shifts for Philanthropy

As foundations increasingly pursue systems change, many are discovering that conventional learning practices struggle to keep pace with complexity, uncertainty, and emergence. This interactive session invites participants engaged in – or preparing for – systems change work to examine what it will take for philanthropy to learn more effectively under these conditions. The session explores four shifts in learning practice across the strategic learning cycle: planning grantmaking, implementing and observing, analyzing and making meaning, and deciding and acting. Through a pulse check of their own learning approaches and peer storytelling, participants will reflect on where their current practices feel strong, where they feel constrained, and where new approaches may be needed. Participants will leave with clearer insight into how their learning practices can better support adaptation in complex systems.

A7. Catalyzing Community Foundations to Strengthen Local Grantmaking for Postsecondary Success

This session explores the complexity of transforming philanthropic practice through the Catalyzing Community Foundations initiative, which is a regranteeing model designed to shift



power, build local capacity, and close equity gaps in postsecondary education. Led by the Southern Education Foundation and ECMC Foundation, the initiative funds community foundations in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi to strengthen grassroots nonprofits working to increase college persistence and completion for under resourced students.

Participants will hear directly from community foundation (CF) and nonprofit partners about how this initiative moves beyond traditional funding relationships by both channeling dollars to grassroots organizations closest to students and building the technical expertise of CFs to support them in informed postsecondary grantmaking. The session will highlight how we, as intermediary, strengthen CFs' knowledge of postsecondary outcomes, barriers, and levers for change, while providing data-driven training on how to develop and grow the impact of the CBOs they fund. This intentional capacity-building approach offers practical models of what effective support looks like and equips CFs to recognize and address gatekeeping structures that limit postsecondary completion. Attendees will leave with strategies for aligning with local expertise, enhancing CF capacity, and using place-based partnerships to drive sustainable, systems-level change.

A8. Built to Last? A Peer Exchange on Strengthening the Durability of Philanthropic Investments for Systemic Change

Philanthropies that invest in systemic change inherently hope to seed lasting improvements. The challenges to make change endure are both legendary and evergreen. In this hands-on session, participants will deliberate on the question: What does it take to build change that lasts? Together, we will share what we have learned, reflect on what we may need to unlearn, and strategize on how best to move forward on the topic of durability of investments, especially in today's volatile world.

Building on insights from interviews with foundation staff at Pew, CHCF, and 10 philanthropies, session participants will engage in structured, small group discussions to examine real-world challenges, compare approaches, and explore what durability looks like across different contexts.

Whether you've been engaging with this topic for a while or relatively new to it, the session will create space to comfortably join the conversation in order to build mutual understanding, surface practical applications, make connections, and identify opportunities for future collaboration.



A9. Rooted and Ready: Endowments as a Driver of Equity and a Foundation for Institutional and Movement Durability

This session explores the transformative potential of nonprofit endowments as a strategic tool for equity and long-term sustainability, especially for Black-led and frontline organizations. Drawing on research from the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) and The Bridgespan Group, participants will explore how endowments have historically been deployed and the growing role they play in advancing outcomes in historically underserved communities.

In a moment of political volatility, retreat from equity commitments, and unstable funding, durable institutions and bold ideas are more vital than ever. Past nadirs inspired Black communities to build institutions that still stand today--from the NAACP to cultural and movement organizations. This moment calls for similar resolve. When equitably deployed, endowments provide leaders with the freedom to lead boldly, unlocking the brilliance and creativity already present in communities. They provide the long-term resources needed to ensure today's work endures and fuels lasting progress.

With new data, case studies like the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's approach, and open dialogue, this session will challenge assumptions, demystify endowment grantmaking, and offer tools to normalize this powerful strategy. It will also show how endowment capital amplifies the inherent genius of leaders of color and those rooted in community, enabling them to drive innovation and sustained impact.

A10. Catalysts for Equitable Systems Change: Shifting Power, Practice and Culture

Philanthropy is shifting in response to the current moment of reckoning and possibility, evolving beyond transactional grantmaking to become strategic catalysts of equitable systems change. This equity-driven, community-rooted transformation requires more than new strategies, it demands a shift in culture, mindsets, and relationships.

Drawing on new research from *Being the Change: 10 Approaches Foundations Are Taking to Create Systems Change* (forthcoming in 2026), this interactive session invites funders to explore the messy, courageous work of making change happen. Together, we will explore tools such as narrative change, community power-building, data mobilization, and field-shaping. These tools represent ways that foundations can create equitable systems change by reimagining power, risk, and accountability.

Participants will hear directly from two foundation leaders who represent diverse approaches to systems change, from influencing policy and shaping markets to deep collaboration with community. The speakers will highlight both the external approaches they are utilizing, as well as the internal structures, practices, and mindsets that support this



work. They'll share experiences with uncertainty, course corrections, adaptations, and tangible outcomes. Attendees will also engage in peer learning and reflective dialogue. Together, we'll explore how bold philanthropic leadership can drive transformation rooted in trust, equity, and community wisdom.

A11. Trust, Tools and Togetherness: Collaborative Funding to Advance Community-Centric Practices

In times of crisis, funding cuts, and funding cliffs, organizations can retreat to competitive and individualistic practices, especially when it comes to fundraising, and often at the expectation of funders. What if, instead, our grantee and nonprofit partners felt empowered, encouraged, and equipped to be mutually generous and abundant with one another, harnessing the resources already present within our communities?

To pursue this path, iF partnered with other regional funders and Michelle Shireen Muri, co-founder of the Community-Centric Fundraising Movement, to design and bring to life a capacity-building program that not only supports organizations in implementing more values-aligned fundraising practices but also in breaking free from organizational practices and expectations rooted in racialized capitalism.

In this session, you'll learn about the Ten Principles of Community-Centric Fundraising, see how they can be applied in the context of grantmaking and nonprofit organizations, and hear the lessons learned from Roots Rising, a community-centered capacity-building program piloted in 2024 and completing a second cohort in the spring of 2026. You'll also hear how grantmakers can work together to broaden the impact of capacity-building programs, particularly those that encourage collaboration between nonprofit organizations operating in the same ecosystem.

A12. The Power of the Pause: Shared Learning for Adaptive Philanthropy

In uncertain times, pausing to reflect can feel counterintuitive. Yet investing in intentional, routine learning practices, internally and with grantees, equips philanthropic organizations to adapt swiftly and strategically to emerging needs while staying grounded in their values. While learning with grantees and partners is important, creating space for internal organizational reflection is also key for building the shared understanding necessary to foster alignment and decisive action when responding to changing needs.

This session shares how the Bainum Family Foundation (BFF) and Children's Equity Fund (CEF) committed to all-staff learning sessions anchored in the "What? So What? Now What?" reflective model. These sessions increase transparency, cross-functional collaboration, and accountability across the organization, enabling real-time strategic shifts and more effective



responses to organizational, grantee, and community needs. This approach was also adapted for grantee convenings, creating safe, inclusive spaces for peer learning, trust-building, and power-sharing — deepening relationships and informing more responsive support.

Participants will leave this session with facilitation strategies and practical tools (protocols, guiding questions, and templates) that can be adapted in their own settings for internal learning conversations and grantee convenings, helping them move from insight to action and demonstrate collaborative, courageous leadership in uncertain times.

12:15 – 2:00 p.m. | Plenary Luncheon: Leading Democracy Forward

Explore how philanthropy can reclaim and renew democracy as a daily practice in service of nonprofits and communities for the next 250 years. As the nation approaches the 250th anniversary of its founding, this plenary invites us to imagine what the next 250 years of democracy could look like — and what leading role philanthropy must play in shaping it. In this conversation with philanthropic and community leaders, we'll center the idea of democracy to where it has always lived — in the hands of communities and movements working for justice and belonging.

2:00 – 2:45 p.m. | Break

2:45 – 4:00 p.m. | Breakout Sessions Round B

Select one of 12 options.

B1. Listening in Chaos: Practical Skills for Responsive Philanthropy

In a time of escalating uncertainty in the sector — shrinking federal support, politicized attacks on nonprofits, and growing demands on philanthropy — listening is essential. When the path forward is unclear, high-quality listening helps funders understand what's needed, navigate competing priorities, and respond with clarity and accountability. This interactive session offers practical, research-backed guidance from experienced foundation staff, feedback practitioners, and sector experts. Participants will learn and practice tangible tools for high-quality listening in crisis contexts, including how to solicit feedback without overburdening grantees, listen across ideological divides, and build internal alignment for listening efforts. This session will help you embed listening as a core practice — especially when the stakes are high.



B2. Accelerating Operational Resilience: Supporting Multi-Entity Infrastructure, Operations and Compliance

The rise of authoritarianism and governmental attacks on nonprofits and foundations amplify the need for strong operational infrastructure. Operations are key to organizational resilience and expanding the range of power-building strategies that groups can deploy. Organizations led by and serving communities of color are disproportionately impacted by these attacks and further hindered by complex legal and compliance requirements, forcing groups to make trade-offs between investing in community work and building infrastructure. But we know they are two sides of the same coin - building capacities for shared infrastructure, multi-entity compliance, and equitable and safe working environments leads to greater collective impact.

Come join the Power & Protect Operations Network, Back Office for Organizing in Michigan, and the Democracy Fund to learn more about multi-entity operations capacity-building and how we are equipping staff to find creative and compliant solutions that support power-building and policy advocacy. In this session we will share a long-term vision for values-aligned operational capacity, examples of how groups on the ground are building shared infrastructure, and priorities for protecting civic engagement work this year. We will also create space for foundation operations leaders to consider how they are building values-aligned infrastructure within philanthropy and for program officers to discuss how infrastructure and multi-entity grantmaking augments on-the-ground impact.

Through a panel discussion, PON will share a landscape perspective, BOOM will share an on-the-ground perspective, and DF will share a funder perspective. In addition to a Q&A portion for the panelists, participants will have small group conversations facilitated by the panelists to address 2-3 questions that support participants to integrate and apply what they have heard to their own foundations and grantees.

B3. Student-First Funding Practices: Flexible Grants to Meet Changing Needs

With the higher ed sector facing almost daily challenges, it's essential that funding pivots to reflect the changing needs of students. Experience what "meeting the moment" with flexible funding practices looks like from the point of view of a grantmaker, university, and student. Learn how the Hector and Gloria Lopez Foundation (HGLF) works together with its partners to do scholarships differently.

This interactive session weaves grantmaker, university, and student points of view together, putting you "in their shoes" as you walk through a board game designed to simulate making strategic choices in today's tumultuous landscape. While specifics are drawn from higher ed, broader lessons are applicable to many grantmaking contexts.



Case studies explore how flexible funding approaches in grantmaking (multiyear with flexible line items and operating support) and scholarships (no application or GPA requirement, multiyear commitments, up to full cost of attendance, with flexible timelines for students who need it) have worked in parallel to support an over 9 in 10 retention rate for first-generation students in Texas.

B4. Participatory Grantmaking and Environmental Justice: A Case Study

Justice Outside is a grantmaking intermediary focused on racial justice and the environment, and we are continuously working on finding creative ways to minimize barriers to funding for historically underfunded communities. We've been piloting a new participatory grantmaking approach this year, involving community members in deciding their preferred grantmaking structure as well as which new topic area of grantmaking should be prioritized. In this session, we will present this pilot journey as a case study, passing along practical tools and lessons about community-driven, participatory grantmaking. We will detail the design phase and explore the recommended timeline, detailing lessons from an unexpectedly delayed implementation process. Participants will gain knowledge of a practical example of participatory grantmaking, as well as how intermediaries can help to promote equity for historically underfunded organizations. This session will also include practical tools such as timelines, surveys, and focus group structures, as well as a resource toolkit highlighting key sources of information highlighting community-driven, participatory grantmaking best practices.

B5. Resilient Movements Need Resilient Money: Supporting Grantees With Independent Revenue Generation

Philanthropy is at a crossroads. Political, legal, and economic headwinds are reshaping the sector, and the organizations and movements we support are navigating the same storms, often with fewer buffers and greater risk. In this moment, funders have an opportunity to expand how we think about grantmaking. Beyond essential short-term support, we can invest in the long-term capacity that helps grantees build independent revenue streams and more resilient organizational models.

Drawing on lessons from more than 200 grassroots organizations across the country, this session will explore how funders can support diversified, sustainable revenue strategies that reduce overreliance on traditional philanthropy. Participants will hear from Progressive Multiplier and The Boston Foundation, both investing in this shift, alongside insights from Youth in Action in Rhode Island, which has strengthened its financial sustainability through intentional revenue diversification.

Together, we will examine what is working, where challenges remain, and how independent



revenue generation advances equity, autonomy, and long-term movement power.

Through interactive breakouts, participants will reimagine funding models in an era of disruption and leave with practical tools, fresh strategies, and peer connections to help build a culture of philanthropy that sustains resilient movements.

B6. Co-Design, Risk-Taking, and Real-Time Learning in Scaling a Solution to the Children's Mental Health Crisis

What happens when a foundation sets out to tackle an entrenched problem with no ready-made solution? Nearly a decade ago, the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation (RSSFF) partnered with community health centers in Massachusetts to address the overwhelming and unmet mental health needs of children and families. The result is TEAM UP for Children — an integrated, equity focused care model co-designed with clinics and communities, rigorously evaluated in real time. Following an initial proof of concept, The Klarman Family Foundation partnered with RSSFF to expand TEAM UP to additional pediatric clinics. TEAM UP is now scaling to serve more than 80,000 children by mid-2026. This session will unpack the funder practices that made TEAM UP possible: embracing risk, embedding evaluation as a driver of co-design, committing multi-year resources, and creating space for nonprofit and community leadership. Speakers will share candid lessons learned, including what didn't work, how challenges were addressed, and how philanthropic practice evolved over time. Participants will leave with concrete strategies for structuring funding, partnerships, and learning systems that make large-scale, sustainable solutions possible — even in a climate of shrinking federal dollars and growing need.

B7. Governance When the Going Gets Tough

What does resilient and equitable governance mean when organizations are confronted with significant uncertainty and volatility? How can a grantmaker board prepare itself to be a well-informed, thoughtful, and supportive partner when rapid response, calculated risk, and deep commitment are needed? During this session, we will hear stories of how foundation boards have shifted their mindsets and skill sets to build governance that is thoroughly grounded in the values and mission of their organization and community. Among the questions we will address together:

- What is the most important work of the board?
- What are the mindsets and skill sets to cultivate, and how have boards successfully cultivated them?
- How can governance be structured and nurtured so that it enables thoughtful risk taking to protect nonprofits and communities?



- How can boards add value and energy to a foundation’s work, rather than unintentionally being a drain on staff energy?
- How can boards dream together about what could be vs. only reacting to what is?

B8. Reckoning With Institutional Legacies: Philanthropy, History and Transformative Action

What might be possible if funders viewed our own history and that of our grantees not as a liability to manage, but as a shared inheritance to repair? For institutions with histories shaped in some way by exclusion or complicity in injustice, the call to engage in honest self-examination is not only ethical, it is an essential act of institutional mission and responsibility. As storytellers, advocates, and stewards of history, funders can use philanthropy to tell the full story and drive change. This session invites reflection on how diverse institutions, varying in size, mission, and geography, are reckoning with their complex legacies to develop more inclusive internal culture, foster civic learning, and support institutional transformation. We’ll engage attendees in nuanced discussion about the role of philanthropy in building belonging at a time of political and cultural upheaval. Attendees will leave with guiding principles, concrete examples, and actionable ideas for integrating inclusive history into their own strategies, positioning philanthropy as a constructive partner alongside their grantees.

B9. Uniting in Advance for Our Communities, Philanthropy and the Freedom to Give

As communities face increasing uncertainty and unprecedented challenges, the need for charitable foundations and nonprofits has never been greater - neither have the efforts to discredit, undermine, and severely limit our institutions from pursuing our missions. A variety of foundations across the ideological spectrum, grantmaking areas, and geographical locations have joined forces to "Unite in Advance" to defend the fundamental freedom to give to the causes they care about in the communities they care about. Jacques Hebert (McKnight, Minneapolis), and Stefan Lanfer (Barr Foundation, Boston), and Kristen Mack (MacArthur, Chicago) are communications leaders of foundations active in the coalition, which has already successfully navigated sector-wide attacks, and has been a resource to them and their colleagues whose communities have faced significant and increasingly complex challenges. Beyond just defending, they are working to leverage research, strategic communications, and their broad network to strengthen the sector’s position. Jacques, Kristen, Stefan, and their peers are part of a group of communications leaders working to build new narratives that strengthen trust and support for charitable organizations and increase understanding of the sector's critical role in our society. The breakout session will share lessons of communicating powerfully in coalition – through complexity and uncertainty – and offer space for participants to be in dialogue about their own approaches



and curiosities about how strategic communications can be leveraged as an asset in their response and planning.

B10. If We Care About Justice, We Have to Care About Nonprofit Endings

Government attacks, DEI-backlash, and wealth inequality are just some of the forces increasing demand for the nonprofit sector's services, advocacy, and chutzpah.

At the same time that civil society is so sorely needed, many organizations are reaching a breaking point. Leaders are burning-out and succession planning is under-resourced, organizations are financially strapped, and program officers are inundated with requests from hopeful and current grantees.

Last year, 46% of polled nonprofits reported they may need to close or merge. If we believe closure=failure and mergers=capitulation, this statistic can paralyze us or leave us feeling we should "save" every nonprofit. However, what if we paid more attention to how rather than whether organizations close? What if we averted the unfunded, sudden closures that deepen inequities? What if closing well — rather than merely limping along — were an expansive, even transformative, experience?

This session will open up a taboo topic: nonprofit closure. We will ground in speakers' experiences shepherding closure from nonprofit and philanthropic perspectives, including helping boards become "closure-comfortable." Most of the session will be an interactive workshop exploring questions, fears, challenges, and opportunities surrounding nonprofit closures. Participants will leave with practical guidance for wherever they are on the closure journey.

B11. Ain't No Mountain High Enough: Equity Centered Tools to Show Up for Grantees When It Matters Most

How can grantmakers show up for grantees in moments of crisis while being strategic and values aligned?

This session will help participants move from intention to action by introducing a five- step framework grounded in tested principles for making capacity-building efforts more equitable and impactful, particularly during times of crisis. The framework will guide reflection, action planning, and peer support throughout the session.

Participants will see how the framework works in practice through the RISE program, a three-year initiative with community-based organizations led by and serving people of color. RISE integrates principles from the framework, including multi-year unrestricted funding,



leadership coaching, peer learning, and tailored organizational support.

Participants will hear from nonprofit leaders in the RISE program and a capacity-builder in RISE, sharing what's helping organizations sustain and grow their work, the roadblocks they face, and insights on delivering equitable, responsive support in times of crisis.

Following the panel, participants will reflect, assess their practices, and exchange strategies for advocating on behalf of grantees internally.

B12. Transforming Evaluation Contracting Practices to Embrace Local Expertise

Grantmakers recognize the unique value of partnering with evaluators who are geographically, demographically, or contextually closer to the communities and issues they support. These evaluators have greater access to people, networks, and local knowledge systems, giving them a better understanding of the problems grantmakers are addressing and deeper insights into solutions' appropriateness and effectiveness. Leveraging these local resources to ensure that interventions have positive, lasting benefits is critical. Yet, grantmakers' contracting practices may not be well suited for partnerships with these evaluators who often operate within small or solo organizations.

Through the [Strengthening Evaluation Contracting Partnerships Initiative \(SECPI\)](#), we work with grantmakers to identify contracting practices that better welcome these relationships. During this session, we will share [our learning to date](#). Evaluation officers from the Ford Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation will describe why they value partnering with small and solo proximate evaluation firms, their contracting practices that invite them in, and where they still have room for growth. Participants will then discuss their experiences creating more enabling conditions for these partnerships. All will leave this session with practical ideas about contracting practices that can strengthen partnerships between grantmakers and small and solo proximate evaluation firms for mutually beneficial outcomes.

4:00 – 4:30 p.m. | Break

4:30 – 5:30 p.m. | Community Events & Active Hour/Mindfulness Moment

Community Events offer opportunities for conference participants to self-organize events for their peers to connect and deepen connections during the conference.



5:30 – 6:00 p.m. / Break

6:00 – 8:00 p.m. / Welcome Reception

Join us for an offsite reception at [Artists for Humanity](#) to continue conversations with your peers, hear a live DJ and engage with local art. Shuttles will be available starting at 5:45 p.m.



Tuesday, June 2, 2026

7:00 – 8:00 a.m. | Active Hour & Mindfulness Moment

8:00 – 5:00 p.m. | Registration Open

8:00 – 9:00 a.m. | Networking Breakfast with Community Events

Community Events offer opportunities for conference participants to self-organize events for their peers to connect and deepen connections during the conference.

9:00 – 9:30 a.m. | Break

9:30 – 11:30 a.m. | Workshops

Select one of 12 options.

W1. Disability Justice in Grantmaking

Discuss the questions and topics about disability you've been wanting to address! Learn foundational knowledge about the disability justice movement from disabled nonprofit leaders, followed by a discussion about disability questions and topics. Participants develop skills to identify disability justice perspectives on pressing topics, and to find the answers by accessing disability knowledge created by disabled communities. Topics covered can include disability language, disability inclusion and accessibility, intersectionality between disability and other identities, integrating disabled communities and disabled people into existing grantmaking, and identifying unmet needs of disabled people and communities in current grantmaking.

W2. Shifting Power Through Foundation Governance: Practices for Centering Community Voice and Leadership in the Boardroom

Including impacted community members on the governing board can accelerate a foundation's efforts to shift power to community. But this is not just about changing the composition of the board or adding a twist to the recruitment strategy – it requires an orientation to transforming the culture of the board and the entire foundation. This session will feature a foundation executive and board member sharing their first-hand experience of a transformation in progress. We'll draw from BoardSource's [Purpose-Driven Board](#)



[Leadership](#) framework and new publication [Authorized Voice & Power in the Boardroom](#), as well as Listen to Community's new resource, [Community on Board: A Tool for Shifting Power through Foundation Governance](#), to engage participants in self-reflection, discussion, and trying on practices that support community-driven governance. Join us to gain practical insights and actionable ideas for how the board can better reflect, respect, and respond to the communities at the heart of your work.

W3. What Makes Capacity Building Actually Work? Reimagining Readiness, Relationships and Power

Despite increasing investment, many nonprofits still experience capacity building as fragmented, consultant-led, and slow to gain traction. At the same time, funders often struggle to provide cohesive, comprehensive support due to barriers like resistance to non-grant spending and difficulty identifying the right providers. This session shares learning from a bold Greater Boston-based experiment: a cross-sector table of funders, nonprofits, and intermediaries that surfaced key considerations for defining, delivering, and funding nonprofit-centered capacity building. At the center are principles and trade-offs for equity-focused capacity building: guidelines and practices for navigating critical choice points on readiness, provider alignment, pace, and enabling conditions. Participants will engage with these learnings through design activities and critique, leaving with resources to make capacity building more equitable, implementable, and grounded in nonprofit-defined thriving.

W4. Remaining Focused and Purpose-Led During Uncertainty

Philanthropy is operating in a time of profound uncertainty and urgency - marked by political polarization, shifting policies, and growing threats to the most vulnerable communities. This moment calls for bold, strategic action beyond business-as-usual. How can funders thoughtfully navigate this complexity and clarify their role?

This session will equip participants with a concrete, easy-to-use tool - the [Protect, Resist, Build, Bridge framework](#) - to help funders assess and sharpen their response to today's rapidly shifting environment. Participants will hear from two funders about how their approach to supporting local communities has shifted and how they are balancing across the four strategic domains of the framework. Participants will then engage in facilitated small-group activities to apply the framework to their own work and explore how it can spark courageous values-aligned conversations and action within their organizations.

Whether you are navigating challenges of internal alignment or determining how to respond externally, this session will offer a framework to support deeper conversations and strategic action in this time.



W5. From Risk to Resilience: Building Values-Aligned Risk Management Frameworks for Philanthropic Organizations

From Risk to Resilience draws on the real-world collaboration between Seattle Foundation and Slalom to offer philanthropic organizations a practical, values-aligned approach to managing risk in today's complex and dynamic environment. Your workshop hosts will share their learnings from building an enterprise risk management framework for Seattle Foundation in 2025, blending philanthropic leadership experience with practical risk management tools and guidance. This session aims to reframe risk as a strategic tool to guide values-based decisions — helping organizations evaluate where they must be risk-averse and where taking bold, mission-aligned risks can unlock greater impact. Participants will learn how to define risk appetite and tolerance, build alignment among senior leadership and board members around shared language, and apply an adaptable framework to challenges such as reputational, financial, regulatory, equity & inclusion, and mission-related risks. Attendees will leave with concrete tools they can apply within their own organizations, and a clearer path to strengthening organizational resilience while staying true to their values.

W6. Not Just a Moment: Funding Leadership Transitions for Long-Term Impact

This interactive workshop equips funders with practical, equity-centered strategies to support nonprofit leadership transitions before, during, and after a new leader takes over. Participants will hear insights from a movement organization that has recently undergone an executive leadership transition from a founder, a field builder which hosts learning circles for incoming and outgoing Executive Directors, and a peer funder who has creatively supported organizations undergoing transitions. From them, participants will hear how transitions supported with proper resourcing can be transformational for movement organizations – especially critical at a time when nonprofits advancing justice and power-building need resourcing to be bold, courageous, resilient and hold ground to carry out their missions. Then participants will have a chance to workshop some of these insights and explore the tool [Leading Forward Funder Action Guide](#) to dig deeper into trust-based leadership transition support practices that put grantees in the driver's seat. In small groups, they will reflect on good funder practices, where gaps remain, and the shifts in mindset, policy, or funding that are needed to lead with trust during grantee leadership transitions. The session explores how leadership transitions are critical for healthy organizations, resilient movements and a vibrant democracy. Participants will learn strategies to normalize and fund leadership transitions as part of capacity strengthening and organizational effectiveness priorities. By the end, participants will leave with a personal commitment to action and concrete ideas they can pilot or advocate for in their own institutions.



W7. Moving Toward an Adaptive and Resilient Sector: The Full Cost Framework

Grantmakers and nonprofits alike are asking themselves how to evolve in the new reality the sector is facing. This session will equip them with practical tools and insights to build a more adaptable, equitable, and resilient sector by embracing the full cost framework.

According to NFF's 2025 State of the Sector Survey, 81% of nonprofits report challenges securing funding that covers full costs. Historical under-investment has magnified this for nonprofits led by and serving people of color. In this session, NFF will demystify the concept of "full cost," examining its components and discussing how underfunding these areas undermines resilience and community impact.

Through Boston-based case studies, discussion with full cost champions, peer learning, and an interactive game, we will explore how nonprofits and philanthropy can shift practices, both big and small, to foster financial health, adaptability, and trust.

Attendees will leave with a deeper understanding of how full cost can be a lever for stronger community impact and practical tips for how to advocate for and implement these practices within their institutions.

W8. AI Readiness for Grantmakers: Navigating Tensions, Centering Values and Building Practical Capacity

Generative AI is transforming every sector — including philanthropy — but the pace of change leaves many of us asking: How do we integrate these tools without losing our values, relationships, or equity commitments? In this interactive session, grantmakers will step into a "Creative Tensions" format — literally positioning themselves on the tension lines of AI dilemmas: Is AI a force multiplier for community impact, or a threat to trust and authenticity? Can generative AI free us up for meaningful work or will it zap critical thinking? How might generative AI reshape grantee submissions, innovation and effectiveness, and what will that mean for funders?

Through facilitated debates, small-group reflection, and peer sharing, we'll explore how AI can both advance and challenge community-driven philanthropy.

Along the way, we'll share examples of problem solving using generative AI, consider organizational dimensions that may be shaped by AI, and examine a short list of practices and policies that are good candidates for your to-do list.

There is no one size fits all approach to the use of generative AI in our sector. Our goal is that you walk away feeling more equipped to navigate the tensions of AI adoption — keeping equity, trust, and leadership at the center.



W9. Learning in a Shifting Landscape: Where Are the Opportunities to Strengthen Our Value?

Philanthropy is navigating a volatile and uncertain landscape. Political polarization, contested knowledge, weakened public evidence infrastructure, and rapidly advancing technologies are reshaping how learning and evaluation (L&E) are perceived, resourced, and used. But the picture isn't uniform — some foundations are expanding L&E capacity while others face new constraints, and the forces hitting consultants look different from those affecting internal teams. A joint survey by Engage R+D and ORS Impact of nearly 200 practitioners found that while most foundation L&E budgets held steady in 2025, nearly 60 percent of consultants reported fewer opportunities, with firms owned by people of color hit hardest. Meanwhile, AI is shifting expectations across the field.

At its core, L&E exists to help philanthropy be effective — to hold itself accountable for impact in a world of growing needs and finite resources. That mission is more urgent now than ever. Drawing on survey findings and sensemaking with foundation leaders and evaluators, this session explores forces reshaping L&E at macro, institutional, and consulting levels. Participants will engage with emerging patterns, assess how pressures and opportunities are showing up in their own contexts, and identify strategies for building resilient L&E capacity that reinforces its value — even during disruption.

W10. How Can Queer, Afro-Indigenous Praxis Prefigure the Future We Want? Tools for Navigating Chaos

With manufactured chaos causing increased threats and real impacts to our safety, we face even greater challenges in understanding how and where to strategically invest time, money, and energy. Among us, we need to do four things: Block, Build, Believe, and Be. This mini-lab is designed for grantmakers who are supporting these efforts and who are looking for tools and practices for navigating complexity and chaos in service of building a just and safer future that centers liberation and sovereignty. Part presentation and part experiential workshop, the session is rooted in queer, womanist, Afro-indigenous praxis. In it, we will introduce two frameworks rooted in this praxis, including one that can support decision-making when things are uncertain. Together, we will think through how to apply these frameworks in our work.

Participants will leave with:

- A ready-to-go experiment for taking action that supports what's needed now: blocking, believing, building, and/or being.
- A resource outlining the basics of applying a queer, womanist, afro-indigenous praxis model.
- A resource outlining the basics of applying complexity theory in liberatory leadership.



- A worksheet to support the implementation of learning.

W11. Sustaining the Frontlines: Reimagining Funders' Role in Grantee Wellness

When philanthropic dollars can't fill the gap left by government disinvestment, funders must think differently about how they support the people doing the work. This interactive session invites participants to explore transformative approaches to grantee wellness. After a brief overview and candid reflections on two wellness initiatives in North Carolina, participants will dive into hands-on simulations. Each table will receive a fictional grantee profile facing challenges such as burnout, staffing shortages, or funding pressure, along with a resource toolkit and a budget. Teams will design a creative support plan, share their ideas, and engage in facilitated group reflection. Together, we'll generate strategies that center rest, healing, and sustainability in an environment that prioritizes curiosity, honesty, and imagination over ready-made solutions.

W12. What We Are For: New Arrangements for Philanthropy

After years in the field - as grantseekers, observers, and then grantmakers, we have each become frustrated and alarmed by many practices in the field. And more than that, by the ways we have been unable to support the organizations we believe in to thrive. We asked ourselves what a new version of philanthropy that had different arrangements, inspired by ideas we care about, would look and feel like. Would those new arrangements lead to the kind of beneficial outcomes (effects) that animates much of our current work but seem elusive?

In this session, we will highlight strategies for sorting between the existing structures of philanthropy that serve us well and the ones that we can leave behind. We consider a practice that aligns with the urgencies of the moment. We will invite participants of this workshop to use the Ideas, Arrangements, and Effects framework to be lovingly critical of their work, and to consider how to "try this at home".

11:30 – 1:15 p.m. | Plenary Luncheon: Leading with Love

Love is a foundational practice of philanthropic leadership, moving beyond strategy and metrics toward the underlying forces that enable transformation. Join a conversation between three philanthropic leaders, who are actively integrating love into their organizational cultures and decision-making. Together, they will examine questions at the core of this theme: What happens when love – rather than strategy – is the starting point for how philanthropy leads and partners with nonprofits and communities? Through personal stories and concrete practices, this plenary will highlight how love can guide leadership amid



complexity and urgency, offering a vision of philanthropy rooted in humanity and accountability.

1:15 – 1:45 p.m. | Break

1:45 – 3:30 p.m. | Short Talks

Short Talks are designed to share provocative ideas and unique perspectives from thought leaders both within and outside of philanthropy. Join up to three Short Talks by selecting one speaker/topic during each of three rounds. There will be a short break between each talk to allow you time to make your next selection and change rooms if necessary.

1:45 – 2:10 p.m. | Short Talks: Round 1

Select one of three options.

- 1A. Glen Galaich, “Control: Why Big Giving Falls Short”
- 1B. Dauda Sesay, “The Invisible Bridge: Grassroots Crisis Response in the South”
- 1C. Lisa Owens, “Leaning Into Transformation: Taking Risks, Getting Uncomfortable, Building Power”

2:25 – 2:50 p.m. | Short Talks: Round 2

Select one of three options.

- 2A. Megan Ming Francis, “Litigation Will Not Save Us: Funding, Strategy Development and the Future of Civil Rights”
- 2B. Joseph Jackson and Chiara Liberatore, “Telling the Truth Out Loud Through Art, Listening and Change”
- 2C. Ambar Cristina Hanson, “When Disaster Hits, Working at the Speed of Trust Is Essential”

3:05 – 3:30 p.m. | Short Talks: Round 3

Select one of three options.

- 3A. Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson, “What Winning Looks Like: The Next Step to ‘Fund Us Like You Want Us to Win’”
- 3B. Nichole Maher, “Believing in Communities Is Free”
- 3C. Shanique Rodriguez, “Massachusetts’ Voting Crisis: The Problem and Solution You’ve Ignored”



3:30 – 4:00 p.m. | Break (30 minutes)

4:00 – 5:00 p.m. | Active Hour & Mindfulness Moment

4:00 – 5:30 p.m. | CEO & Trustee Session & Reception

4:00 – 8:00 p.m. | Community Events

Community Events offer opportunities for conference participants to self-organize events for their peers to connect and deepen connections during the conference.

5:30 – 7:00 p.m. | NCRP 50th Anniversary Celebration Reception



Wednesday, June 3, 2026

8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. | Registration Open

8:00 – 9:00 a.m. | Networking Breakfast with Community Events

Community Events offer opportunities for conference participants to self-organize events for their peers to connect and deepen connections during the conference.

9:00 – 9:30 a.m. | Break

9:30 – 10:45 a.m. | Breakout Sessions Round C

Select one of 10 options.

C1. Redefining Wealth and Promoting Co-Liberation for Black and Indigenous Communities

In the wake of the 2020 racial uprisings, philanthropy faced a critical call to do more to address systemic racial injustice. The Bush Foundation answered with a bold commitment of \$100 million to address racial wealth disparities. But they didn't act alone; they partnered with Nexus Community Partners and NDN Collective, who each designed and launched innovative grant programs that put resources directly into the hands of individuals in Black and Native communities, supporting their journeys toward generational wealth.

This session brings together leaders from all three organizations to share how this work has reimagined wealth — grounding it in community-defined values, cultural strength, and self-determination. Speakers will reflect on the risks they took, the lessons they've learned, and how practicing co-liberation reshaped their partnerships and impact.

Participants will leave inspired and equipped with practical insights to advance reparative philanthropy within their own institutions — moving from intention to transformative action.

C2. Supporting Civil Servants Advancing Racial Equity: Lessons for Philanthropic Strategy

Join this interactive session where Third Sector and Race Forward's Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) will share actionable strategies for advancing racial equity and justice that philanthropy can adopt to better support government partners and fill gaps left by federal policy reversals. The session -- based on in-depth research with civil servants from progressive and conservative jurisdictions -- will help unlock your ability to support racial equity work in challenging political environments, understand how to adapt messaging



and programming to different political contexts, and develop tools for assessing when and how to support equity work that may face political opposition.

C3. “Don’t Tell Us What to Do, Just Give Us the Money”: Using Co-Creation as a Critical Tool for Philanthropic Narrative Change and Authentic Power-Building

Responsible and equitable stewardship of funding demands flexibility and unique ways of working. We see co-creation as a critical tool for fostering a collaborative process, building transformational relationships, trust, shared power and a joint vision to catalyze movements for long-term, systemic social change. This interactive breakout session will be held in partnership with our learning and accountability partners, Creation Stories Studio. Leaning into our learning posture, this session will highlight the power, successes, and struggles of co-creation. We’ll explore with participants how to foster authentic co-creation spaces with grantees in order to shift traditional grantee/grantor relationships and ways of working (thus transforming philanthropic narratives). We will also explore how co-creation builds power and reactive and anticipatory nimbleness that allows us to adapt to the seen and unforeseen.

C4. Cross-Sector Ecosystem Change: How the Funder- Intermediary Model Catalyzes and Sustains Impact

How can organizations from the philanthropic, public, and nonprofit sectors work more effectively to create sustainable systems change? What role do intermediaries play to facilitate both short and long-term impact? Presenters will share learnings from two Boston-based efforts focused on citywide, systems-level change led by EdVestors, an education non-profit serving as an intermediary. These multi-year initiatives are:

(1) [Boston Public Schools \(BPS\) Arts Expansion](#), a citywide, public-private partnership to expand and ensure equitable, quality arts for all students

(2) [New Skills Boston](#), a cross-sector partnership making quality career pathways accessible to more Black, Latinx, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities.

The session will focus on how collaborative, public-private partnerships led by intermediaries provide critical backbone functions such as convening and communicating; monitoring implementation and fidelity; and research, policy and evaluation, resulting in systemic changes that strengthen the overall education ecosystem and prioritizes equity and access for all students. Attendees will discuss opportunities and challenges for collaboration in their communities, the role strategic philanthropy plays in catalyzing systemwide change, and explore how an intermediary providing backbone supports could be adapted into their own contexts. The session will also include the sharing of specific tools and resources created as part of this work.



C5. Equity-Centered Strategy: Adapting to Our Community's Needs through Process, Practice and Product

The last five years have proven that traditional philanthropic strategies can often collapse in the face of global upheaval. From COVID-19 to the shifting political landscapes we are currently facing, foundations have increasingly abandoned their long-term plans to meet immediate community needs. These moments of crisis have laid bare systemic inequities and sparked a critical question: Can strategic planning be adaptive in the midst of deep, fundamental societal shifts?

We believe the answer is yes. Join us to explore Equity-Centered Strategy, a tangible model synthesized from years of deep practice and real-world insights. Moving beyond high-level theory, this session is designed for foundation executives, staff and board members who are ready to turn the strategic planning process into a catalyst for sustained impact.

Together, we will answer questions like:

- What does equity-centered strategy look like?
- How should funders set goals and to whom would they be accountable?
- What roles do board members, staff and community play throughout the process?
- How are trust and equity centered?

Attendees will leave with:

- Case studies of foundations that have successfully developed equity-centered strategies that sustain time and change.
- Ready-to-use tools to transform your next strategic planning into a catalyst for sustained change.

C6. Listen to the Kids: A Case Study on Incorporating Youth Co-Design Into Grantmaking

This session explores how one funder launched its first Youth Grantmaking Project, empowering students to co-design and shape the grantmaking process. Participants will learn how to build youth participatory models that move beyond simply elevating student voice to authentically sharing power — enabling young people to assess community needs, review real proposals, and directly influence funding decisions. Discover how students gained hands-on experience in philanthropy and nonprofit work while collaboratively awarding \$1 million to support their local community.



C7. Beyond Grantmaking: Building Capacity to Weather the Storm

The operating environment for frontline organizations that advocate for racial, gender, queer, and/or disability justice is as fraught as it has ever been over the past quarter-century.

Whether it's private actors doxxing a staff member or a government agency asking an organization for information about its operations, today's funders often must think and act to protect both the organization and the people who take on frontline social justice work. This includes supporting the physical and digital security, as well as the health and wellness, of grantees' staff in this environment, as well as the legal compliance and operational hygiene of grantee organizations.

Drawing on the discussants' experience as funders, technical service providers, and grantees, this session will offer participants key considerations and concrete ideas and approaches to support grantees' physical and digital security, health and wellness, and operational compliance. It will be anchored by the Proteus Fund, which has a body of over 60 grants and almost a decade of experience partnering with grantees on these precise topics through its role as a funder of frontline organizations working on critical social justice issues, as well as its role as a funder organizer working with funders to support organizations and their staff.

C8. From Reactive to Ready: How One Funder Collaborative Built a Real-Time Risk Assessment Tool to Strengthen Sector Resilience

In early 2025, the Greater Cleveland Funders Collaborative (GCFC), which consists of 20+ funders, faced rising threats to thousands of nonprofits it collectively supported. Funding instability, legal challenges, cybersecurity attacks, and heightened scrutiny of equity work became real risks without a clear way to provide the limited resources at the disposal of this Collaborative as a group or as individual organizations. The GCFC responded by launching a self-guided risk assessment system that uses real-time data to triage nonprofits into the right support levels (from webinars to clinics to deep one-on-one consulting) and to inform state and federal advocacy. This interactive session shares the real-world wins, missteps, and ongoing uncertainties while helping attendees think through how they can build their own equity-centered, multi-tier emergency support and coordinated grantmaking model.

C9. Persistence Through Polarization: Black-Led Nonprofits Navigating Funding in an Evolving Philanthropic Landscape

Black-led nonprofit — organizations with majority Black leadership serving predominantly Black communities — possess unique community knowledge yet face persistent funding barriers. Despite increased attention to racial equity following 2020, most Black-led



nonprofits report unchanged or worsened funding access, with only 50% maintaining annual foundation relationships compared to 65% of other nonprofits. This session shares the latest results from an ongoing, multi-year and multi-modal research collaboration between ABFE and Candid examining how Black-led nonprofits navigate complex funding relationships through research combining historical grants data (2016-2023), interviews with 24 nonprofit leaders, and surveys from hundreds of organizations. Three complementary presentations reveal funding disparities, strategic adaptations in organizational messaging, and experiences with race-based grantmaking advice. Speakers analyze how nonprofits balance mission authenticity with funder expectations, document changes in identity-based language use, and explore the burden of code-switching in proposal writing. Together, these findings illuminate pathways for more equitable partnerships between foundations and community-led organizations working toward sustainable social change.

C10. Advance Impact. Avoid Injury. Data and AI That Don't Hurt the People You Care About

AI can accelerate your impact. It can also accelerate harm. You're already using tools like Excel, Tableau, and AI to clean data, predict outcomes, and allocate resources faster. But if you haven't explicitly included your equity values in these steps, you've outsourced judgment to tools that don't share your mission.

The cost of "neutral" AI is inequity at scale. Without clear guardrails, your efficiency gains come at someone else's expense by embedding historical bias into resource, strategic, and funding decisions that shape communities for years.

You cannot make tools - AI or otherwise - perfectly good. You can make them measurably less harmful.

In this hands-on session, we'll work through real data and impact projects to identify where AI advanced impact and where it quietly derailed it. Together, we'll redesign those points with concrete safeguards. Drawing on the We All Count Data Equity Framework and Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles, you'll learn to translate equity commitments into operational data & AI practices.

You'll leave with: an Equity Alignment Checklist and Harm Reduction Plan that strengthen both performance and accountability; and tools you can implement immediately.

If you are going to accelerate impact, make sure you're not accelerating harm.



9:30 – 11:30 a.m. | *Philanthropy Massachusetts Session*

Philanthropy as Civic Practice

Massachusetts is home to the first Constitution and has long been a place where civic imagination and collective action have helped shape the course of the nation. Across generations, philanthropic leaders in our Commonwealth have played a quiet but powerful role in that tradition — supporting institutions, advancing new ideas, and investing in communities so that opportunity, innovation, and civic life can flourish. Philanthropy is civic practice! This session will explore the role our sector is playing today and how our work moving forward ensures inclusive and vibrant democracy for generations to come.

Join Philanthropy MA to share updates, insights, and ideas about the role of philanthropy in MA in support of democracy and civic life. The philanthropy sector is a vital component of civil society and philanthropy itself an act of civic engagement. At its best, philanthropy helps communities imagine what is possible and invest in building it. As such, how can we, as statewide community of funders, shape what comes next?

Whether you are curious about a funder's role in democracy and civic life, have nascent or growing democracy related initiatives, or evolved, defined programming, this session is for you. To jump start our conversation, we will hear briefly from thought leaders and peer funders.

Following the introductory remarks and time for questions, we will move into facilitated group conversations. The purpose of this time is to share where your foundation is in its democracy related work, what has surprised you, what is challenging, and what comes next. We will explore who is doing what and what else is needed.

The session will conclude with a group conversation about ideas for collaborative action, including a Funders Democracy Table.

Session Goals:

- 1) Establish parameters for this session of what we mean by democracy and civic life
- 2) Learn about high level, nationwide trends for how funders are acting in support of civic life.
- 3) Identify, in real time, democracy and civic engagement oriented grantmaking by MA based funders. This real time, crowd-sourced exercise will provide the foundation for an informal database of activities.
- 4) Share information, reflections, inspirations, challenges and ideas amongst peers.
- 5) Articulate a list of priority next steps when it comes to collaborative action.



10:45 – 11:45 a.m. | Break (60 minutes)

11:45 – 1:45 p.m. | Closing Plenary: Courage in Leadership

Courageous leadership lives in the everyday moments, choices, and practices we commit to. Leaders don't just stand up and respond, they also focus on the future and plant seeds for change. Where can we act boldly? Where are we waiting for permission? What are we being called to risk — and what values will ground us when we do? Valarie Kaur, a renowned social justice leader, lawyer, and bestselling author, is the founder of the Revolutionary Love Project, a national movement to reclaim love as a force for justice. She will explore the risks that leaders take when they stand up for equity — and why it matters, leaning on ancestral wisdom to reimagine a collective vision of courageous grantmakers working in service of thriving nonprofits and communities to create a just, connected and inclusive society where all can thrive.

Author book signing scheduled immediately afterward in the Grand Ballroom Foyer.

2:00 – 4:00 p.m. | Community Events

Community Events offer opportunities for conference participants to self-organize events for their peers to connect and deepen connections during the conference.

