



Powering Nonprofits. Advancing Justice.



## Power



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Black migrants—asylum-seekers, refugees, and immigrants—are often neglected in funding conversations about immigrant justice. The [Black Migrant Power Fund](#) (BMPF) is a new community-led fund that aims to change this by connecting Black, migrant-led nonprofits with long-overdue resources.

Ola Osaze, lead advisor to the BMPF and Deputy Director of the [Four Freedoms Fund](#) at [Neo Philanthropy](#)—the funder intermediary that houses the fund—says that BMPF started to come together in October 2021 at a funder briefing on Centering Collective Black Power for Migrant and Racial Justice.

That meeting was organized and held one month after the circulation of photos of US Customs and Border Patrol agents' [violent removal of Haitian asylum-seekers at the border near Del Rio, Texas](#). The images recalled 18<sup>th</sup> century slave patrols that were formed to catch escapees and quash Black revolt.

Discussions of the violence at Del Rio and the need to invest in Black migrant organizations and leadership led these groups to issue a call to action to funders: Raise \$10 million to benefit Black-led migrant justice organizations in 2022. These organizations serve diverse communities of Black migrants and have partnered with each other to transform their organizations, the immigrant justice movement, and the philanthropic landscape.

Now, Osaze is working with these and other Black migrant organizational leaders to develop a community-led grantmaking process as part of the Black Power Migrant Fund. Thirteen Black, migrant, grassroots organizations operating at local, state, and national scales have joined this collective effort, namely: the African Bureau for Immigration and Social Affairs (ABISA), African Communities Together (ACT), Afroresistance, Black Alliance for Justice Immigration

(BAJI), Black LGBTQIA+ Migrant Project (BLMP), Black Immigrant Collective, FANM, Haitian Bridge Alliance, Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees, Louisiana Organization for Refugees and Immigrants, PANA, UndocuBlack Network, and Women Watch Afrika (WWA).

In partnering with one another, these migrant justice groups prioritize the leadership of LGBTQIA+, undocumented, youth, women, and formerly incarcerated Black migrants to lead transformative change with their communities. Like many of BMPF's community partners, Osaze, a former co-director of the BLMP, also brings lived experience of these intersectional identities to their organizing work.

## Honoring Juneteenth and Struggles for Black Freedom

The BMPF campaign, launched in February 2022, hopes to meet its \$10 million fundraising goal by Juneteenth—or June — 2022. The day honors the ongoing Black freedom struggle by commemorating the emancipation of enslaved Black people in the US and celebrating the vitality of Black culture. Juneteenth marks the anniversary of [General Order No. 3](#), which brought the Emancipation Proclamation to the last state of the confederacy with institutional slavery: Texas. Later that year, on December 6, 1865, the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment abolished chattel slavery throughout the United States.

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Juneteenth celebrations began the following year, in 1866, in Galveston, a gulf coast city in southeast Texas. On June 2021, 155 years later, [Black activist leadership](#) and [racial justice protests in defense of Black lives](#) pushed the Biden administration to recognize Juneteenth as a national holiday. Two months later and 400 miles from Galveston, at the other end of Texas' southern tip, border police on horseback whipped Black asylum-seekers. The Border Patrol's actions made it clear how much and how little has changed in the past century and a half: A holiday to honor Black freedom now has national recognition, but Black people at the border and in the US continue to struggle for this freedom—for themselves and for everyone.

Advocates for funding immigrant justice are quick to point out that the violence at Del Rio was *not* an exception. Rini Chakraborty, Senior Director at FFF and Neo Philanthropy, emphasized this while discussing the multiple forms of structural, physical, and psychological violence that migrants face at the border and in the US. "This brutality is not an 'aberration,' and it is really important for immigration funders to understand this."

This violence must be understood in the context of US interventions to destabilize the world's first free Black . in 1915–1934 started [a century-long cycle of crises and interventions](#)—among them, US-backed dictatorships—that have impoverished Haitians, made them vulnerable to recent disasters, and propelled their migration. [The US government's response to Haitian asylum-seeking](#) since the 1970s has exacerbated this cycle and led to [the creation of today's immigration detention regime](#). Now, as Haitians migrate to escape ongoing political unrest and structural violence, [the US continues to mistreat and expel them](#).

Against this history, Haitians and other Black migrants contend with the intersecting violences of anti-Black racism and the US immigration system. They are at [greater risk of detention and deportation](#) due to what some activists call [the prison-to-deportation pipeline](#). And during the COVID-19 , which has [disproportionately impacted the health and well-being of Black and Brown communities](#), [Black migrants face unique challenges](#). The service jobs they work do not provide health insurance or paid sick leave—but as undocumented immigrants, asylum-seekers, or temporary visa-holders, Black migrants [have little-to-no access to a complex patchwork of state and federal public benefits](#), leaving them without health care or economic support.

**Black migrant groups' victory in defending TPS and their resistance to Title 42 are just two of the many ways in which they are at the forefront of today's movements for racial, economic, and immigrant justice.**

# Building Black Migrant Power

Osaze and Chakraborty cite [recent research from Pew](#) that shows that Black migrants are the fastest growing group among US migrants and within Black communities. According to [a 2020 report](#) from [State of Black Immigrants](#), a research institute and initiative of the [Black Alliance for Just Immigration \(BAJI\)](#), one in 10 Black people in the US is a migrant. Pew reports that the increase in the US's Black immigrant population accounts for 19 percent of the growth of the overall Black population in the past 40 years, and between 2020 and 2060, the US foreign-born Black population—people who advocates would identify as Black migrants—is expected to double.

As these communities grow, they have increasingly come together, building collective power to organize for rights and resources. Osaze shared with *NPQ* how different communities came together to defend [Temporary Protected Status \(TPS\)](#): Instead of waiting for government officials to act, Haitian, Cameroonian, and other Black migrants organized among themselves and rallied together to push for relief for TPS-holders so they could live and work without fear of deportation. Black migrant groups' victories in defending TPS and [ending Title 42](#) are just two of the many ways in which [they are at the forefront](#) of today's movements for racial, economic, and immigrant justice.

BMPF's leaders note that the fund is an intervention into a philanthropic landscape that has been historically steeped in anti-Black racism. [As NPQ has written](#), the [field of philanthropy has racist and colonial origins](#), a legacy that persists in funding practices—particularly in decisions about who gets funded, how much, and for what. Even though resourcing from philanthropy increased in 2020 in response to the pandemic and uprisings for racial justice, [little of this money has gone toward racial justice efforts](#) and [only 4 percent has gone toward Black- and Latinx-led nonprofits](#).

Immigrant justice groups remain woefully underfunded, with less than two percent of philanthropic dollars going to *all* pro-immigration groups—including less than one percent to those that directly support immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Black migrant groups are also [consistently excluded in immigrant justice and racial justice philanthropy](#). According to the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, [they received only \\$23 million—or 0.006 percent](#)—of \$364 billion dollars in 2016–2020 foundation giving, approximately 1.4 percent of the \$1.7 billion of foundation funding that explicitly benefited immigrants and refugees, and 0.04 percent of funding granted to Black communities during this time.

## The Challenges of Black Migrant Fundraising

Given this landscape, it comes as no surprise to hear that Black migrant justice leaders have found fundraising to be challenging.

Part of the problem is that smaller nonprofits—particularly those that are local and engaged in service provision—are caught in a catch-22 around capacity building. Fatou-Seydi Sarr, founder of the [African Bureau for Immigration and Social Affairs \(ABISA\)](#), observes that funders look for organizations that have already proven their ability to scale up their work. ABISA, a Black, immigrant, women-led organization for Black migrants in Michigan, has served its community for more than a decade under the following mission: To bridge the gaps in resources, information, and access that limit Black migrants or render them invisible.

Despite this track record of community work, ABISA only received its first set of operational seed funding last year, in 2021. Sarr says, "It is very difficult to hear funders over and over tell you that they will only fund you if you can prove your capacity, but [they] are not willing to fund you to build that capacity. It is like asking us to make a cake without batter."

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Without sufficient funding for daily operations and capacity building, nonprofit migrant justice organizations and campaigns are faced with a dilemma: Use resources that have been made scarce to scale one effort—like providing preventive health care to community members without health insurance—or put their limited financial resources toward multiple projects for a holistic approach that serves fewer people.

Such difficult choices are familiar to all nonprofits, but Osaze, Chakraborty, and BMPF's community leaders all agree: It is

especially difficult for small, community-led organizations that are already doing so much with so little funding—even as they have less room to “break things and fail.” The demands that funders make of these small, migrant-led organizations also consumes additional time and resources that undermine the very efforts that funders claim to support. Observing that fundraising burdens land especially hard on grassroots organizations, BAJI’s fundraising and development manager, Olamide Goke-Pariola, says, “Whereas many organizations have several staff members for fundraising, we have only one, and thus we require flexibility from our funders in completing all the administrative work that goes along with fundraising.”

## Toward Intersectional Migrant Justice

BMPF’s leaders also emphasized the need for an intersectional response to funding BIPOC-led movements for racial justice and immigrant justice. As ABISA’s Sarr put it, “Community-led initiatives are successful because they are run by community members that are impacted and live at the heart of the issue they work to solve.” BAJI’s Goke-Pariola added, “Our communities need advocacy, but they also need direct cash assistance and mutual aid.”

The organizations that came together to form BMPF understand the unique needs of Black migrants because many of their leaders are members of the communities they serve. Black migrant communities in the US are diverse in national origin and ethnicity, class, immigration status, ability, gender, sexuality, and more. As a result, Osaze notes that their needs range widely and include humanitarian aid at the border for asylum-seekers; basic survival needs like food, shelter, and health care; work authorization for those with documented status; and legal services at all stages of the immigration process—whether it’s deportation defense or filing for permanent residency and citizenship.

The desire to fund work led by impacted Black migrants was echoed by Glory Kilanko, Director and CEO of [Women Watch Afrika \(WWA\)](#), a Black, women-led nonprofit serving immigrants and refugees from 23 countries in the Metro Atlanta area. Kilanko urged funders to include refugees and immigrants in funding processes—in part, through direct, no-strings-attached giving. Of the BMPF, she said, “It is our hope that this fund will benefit Black-led migrant justice organizations by putting money directly in the hands of those impacted who are doing the work.”

In addition to serving their communities’ direct needs, Goke-Pariola also hopes the fund will support staff at these organizations. “At BAJI and other Black migrant organizations, the folks who are doing this work are members of the very community they serve; thus, it impacts us on a different level. The work is personal for us, and it can be very emotionally draining.”

## Building Solidarity and Black Migrant Power

In seeding a community-led fund, Four Freedoms Fund and Neo Philanthropy found models in several funding organizations and networks. Osaze and Chakraborty highlighted the [Democracy Frontlines Fund](#), which was launched with the help of the Libra Foundation to resource Black-led racial justice organizations by leveraging multi-year, unrestricted support; the [Trans Justice Funding Project](#) for BIPOC-led trans communities looking beyond the 501(c)3 model; and the [Southern Power Fund](#) for an example of an intersectional, community-led, no-strings-attached Black-led fund. They also pointed to mutual aid networks that were working on a grassroots level across the country to pull together resources for marginalized folks during the coronavirus pandemic.

The partners leading BMPF also found inspiration in other community-led organizations and funds and found opportunities for cross-racial and multiracial solidarity through collective action. As Kilanko of WWA noted, “Grassroots organizing is an expensive endeavor. [We] partner with other migrant organizations serving Latinx, AAPI, and other racialized communities because we strongly believe that what we cannot do individually, we can achieve collectively.” WWA organized recently with the Latino Community Fund to support workers who were laid off from factory farms and meat processing

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Even as they draw inspiration from other organizations and participate in multiracial coalitions, Black migrant justice leaders reiterate the need for building their own power. “While we work for the greater cause, issues affecting Black migrants specifically are often the last ones being addressed by such a coalition,” said Sarr of ABISA. “It can be taxing and tiring to always be an afterthought, so we continue to highlight that #ImmigrationIsABlackIssue to ensure that our migrant ecosystem decolonizes the way we all work together.”

In the meantime, they find strength and inspiration in one another and their organizing and advocacy for Black migrants. As Goke-Pariola said, “Coming together in this way... has been incredibly inspiring and powerful. We are proud to be a part of this collective movement.”

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### About the author

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Kitana Ananda is the former Racial Justice Editor at Nonprofit Quarterly. She has worked on program outreach and communications for nonprofits ranging from community-based organizations to higher education. Prior to joining NPQ, Kitana was an associate editor for two educational learning and assessment programs; a nonprofit consultant; and a postdoctoral scholar at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, where she led communications and public engagement for the CUNY Humanities Alliance, a Mellon-funded initiative for equitable teaching and learning. Kitana earned a Ph.D. in socio-cultural anthropology from Columbia University, where she researched war, migration, and diasporic political communities. Her writing has appeared in *Prism*, *CNN Opinion*, the *New York Times*, and elsewhere.

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