



Mary Reynolds Babcock

Program Description



Helping people and places move out of poverty and achieve greater social and economic justice is our mission.



Our Vision

We envision a South celebrated for its diversity, culture, beauty and abundance, where everyone's experiences, wisdom and wellbeing are valued.

Where everyone has free and fair access to the ballot, and government reflects the demographics of its constituents. Diversity in leadership yields policies and practices that benefit everyone, particularly people of color, low-wealth individuals and rural communities.

Characterized by people-centered prosperity, with shared wealth and asset ownership. All workers have access to safe and meaningful work with wages high enough to support the needs of families.

Liberated from white supremacy, where communities are no longer segregated, and intersecting identities – race, gender, sexual orientation, geography, ability – no longer predict individual achievement, to the clear benefit of everyone.

Where people are safe from harm, and sufficient public resources are dedicated to building strong and healthy communities. Everyone has clean air, water, energy, and access to high-quality education and health care.

We believe our vision of the South is possible. We invite you to join us in pursuit of it.



Our Values

With patience and urgency, we pursue this vision with our grantee partners, adhering to four long-held values

RACIAL EQUITY

To ensure all people can thrive, we must understand their distinct challenges and support solutions that meet their needs, create opportunities and dismantle obstacles to potential. These include structural racism as well as sexism, homophobia, classism and all forms of oppression.

DEMOCRACY

Everyone should have fair and unfettered access to the levers of power and change.

COMMUNITY CENTERED

The voices and experiences of people affected by structural challenges are central to creating solutions that work.

RISK-TAKING

We are willing to take the measures needed to advance justice with and through our grantee partners, our financial resources and our voice.

Our Pathways

We believe progress along all three of our pathways of change—democracy and civic engagement, supportive policies and institutions, and economic opportunity—is critical to helping people and places move out of poverty and achieve greater social and economic justice. We believe organizations and networks advancing along multiple pathways with clear analyses of how race and power are operating make the strongest, most sustained progress toward social and economic justice:

DEMOCRACY & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Advancing social and economic justice requires organizations and networks to build power with and for people of color, low-wealth communities and all groups who have been shut out from the decisions that affect their lives. Across the South, organizations and networks are challenging entrenched structures and building more democratic systems through community organizing, leadership development, inclusive community planning, voter education and get-out-the-vote efforts. We are always seeking to learn who is building power, with and for whom. Access to power may be in the electoral, legislative, administrative, judicial/legal, corporate or narrative arenas.

SUPPORTIVE POLICIES & INSTITUTIONS

Public and private policies have profound influence on people's quality of life. Examples include voting rights, budget and tax fairness, judicial systems, immigration enforcement, health care, education, climate, public transit and workplace protocols. Many of our grantee partners push all levels of government, public and private institutions to implement policies that better serve all communities, families, students, workers and individuals through research, advocacy, strategic communications and community organizing.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

America's economic systems were structured with the express intent to enrich white people while extracting labor from Black, Latinx, Asian and Indigenous Americans and denying them the tools to build wealth. To this day, these systems continue to expand the racial wealth gap. Justice-minded organizations and networks across the South are working to erode these systems and construct equitable alternatives through access to non-predatory financial services, local control of community assets, entrepreneurship support, new business models and training for family wage employment. We support these groups not only to serve their communities, but also to grow their organizational capacity and develop new leaders. This way, they remain durable and stable to build for the future, and nimble and responsive to the needs of a given moment.



Our Approaches

LAYERED STRATEGIES

The Foundation makes investments in organizations and networks that deploy complementary strategies based on their analyses of how race and power are operating in their distinct contexts, and what communities need to achieve greater social and economic justice. These aligned groups hold common visions for their places and fulfill distinct roles in service of their shared goals.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The Foundation provides multiyear general operating support to our grantee partners and offers funding for organizational development needs: program, governance, management, administration, finance, equity culture, etc.

ENGAGE WITH ALL ASSETS

Our program staff spend considerable time fostering relationships and learning about the places where we work so we can allocate our grantmaking dollars in the most strategic, effective ways. In addition to making grants, we make program-related investments and market-rate investments in service of our mission and region. Through convening, networking, strategic communications and partnerships with fellow philanthropic foundations, we make the case for increased, responsible, sustained investment in the South.

SHARED LEARNING

Since our founding in 1953, the Babcock Foundation has been building on our experiences to hone our work and tell a truer story of the South. We share these lessons broadly with our grantee and philanthropic partners and use it to guide our strategy and how we support our grantee partners on the ground.

ROBUST NETWORKS

Our grantee partners collaborate via strong networks that enable them to align strategies, share resources and identify distinct roles, thereby increasing the efficacy of each member organization. This approach also provides grassroots groups, community organizers and emerging leaders with opportunities to grow their influence and impact.

PLACE-BASED

There are many Souths. Each state or subregion has its own context, history, challenges and opportunities. We believe an understanding of and focus on place are central to defining unique opportunities, challenges and partnerships to move people and places out of poverty.



Who Should Apply

The Babcock Foundation invites proposals from local, statewide, regional and national nonprofits, community organizations, and financial intermediaries serving the South that have track records of helping people and places move out of poverty and achieve greater social and economic justice. We look for the most promising opportunities to support power-building work to advance racial equity and social and economic justice. A likely candidate for funding would align with the Foundation's mission, vision and values and demonstrate the following characteristics:

ACCOUNTABILITY TO LOW-WEALTH COMMUNITIES

Our grantee partners have meaningful connections with low-wealth people and are accountable to communities through their governance structures. These organizations have people of color and people directly affected by systems of oppression in leadership positions, including their boards of directors, steering committees and executive roles.

CLEAR ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIES

We look to partner with groups that have a clear analysis of how race and power are operating in a given context at a given moment. This analysis informs strategies for increasing impact, fostering trusting relationships with communities and leveraging political will to dismantle harmful systems and policies at the local, state, regional and/or institutional level.



Who Should Apply

NETWORKS, ALLIANCES AND RESOURCES

We look to support goal-oriented, values-aligned networks to leverage resources, share strategies and achieve impact in ways that make sense in their places. These networks may be formal or informal, short-term or long-term, and structured in a variety of ways. We encourage networks that include both grassroots organizations and statewide or institutional partners.

LONG-TERM VIEW

Change rarely happens overnight, particularly in the South. Our partners take a long-term view of what is needed to change systems and policies, build power, and advance social and economic justice and racial equity.

STRATEGIC

In addition to supporting long-term, patient systems change work, we aim to be nimble and responsive when the moment to act is now to improve the lives of people and communities.

The Foundation also remains open to new thinking about how to address poverty in the South. In addition to our primary strategy, MRBF is interested in supporting new approaches to achieving economic opportunity, systems and policy change, or democracy and civic engagement outcomes. These efforts must demonstrably advance our vision of social and economic justice in the South.



Our Geographic Priorities

The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation funds work that builds power to advance racial equity across an 11-state Southern footprint: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

One way we learn about promising work across the region is through our open inquiry process. We are pleased to receive organizational summaries from organizations that meet our eligibility requirements and fit with our program description.

Examples of work the Foundation **does not fund** include:

- Direct service programs
- Individual elementary or secondary schools – charter, private, or public
- Scholarships
- Athletes, teams or sporting events, including charity golf tournaments
- Fundraising events such as walk-a-thons, telethons and sponsorships
- Endowments and cash reserves
- Grants to individuals



How Funds May Be Used

TYPES OF GRANTS

Organizations may use funds for:

- General operating support
- Project support
- “Glue” support for networks of grassroots and partner organizations
- Organizational development

SIZE AND DURATION OF GRANTS

The size and duration of grants are matched to an organization’s scale of impact, needs, capabilities, and opportunities. Once invited to apply, potential grantees will work with a network officer to determine the amount and duration of grants.

PROGRAM-RELATED INVESTMENTS

PRIs are Babcock’s most values-aligned investments and they are structured to absorb different kinds of risk on behalf of the communities we serve versus the more standard asset allocations in our market rate portfolio. We generally make PRIs with high-opportunity and under-invested nonprofit and for-profit financial intermediaries serving individuals and communities often overlooked by more traditional financial institutions, and some Babcock PRIs are direct investments in projects. Through these investments, MRBF aims to support historically marginalized communities to build power in the form of increased financial capacity and wealth generation. Through this strategy, the Foundation aims to reimagine risk, by exploring missed opportunities when traditional risk assessments keep us from investing in transformational opportunities so needed in our current times.



How to Apply

EXPLORING POTENTIAL ALIGNMENT

A prospective partner can submit an Organizational Summary at any point in the year.

- This Organizational Summary helps Foundation staff to get familiar with an organization's strategies, networks, and goals. This is not a grant application nor a letter of intent- but an opportunity for the Foundation to learn about your organization's work and explore potential alignment with current funding priorities.
- After the Organizational Summary is reviewed, staff may reach out to set up a learning call to explore potential alignment with MRBF's funding priorities and strategic directions.

APPLICATION PROCESS

If funding is available and work aligns with priorities, the Foundation may invite the organization to submit a proposal, along with instructions and guidelines.

- Once a full proposal is received, staff conduct a learning meeting to learn more about the work and strategies.
- If the applicant organization is a good fit for MRBF funding, staff will write a recommendation for the board of directors for approval.



Mary Reynolds Babcock
FOUNDATION

Get In Touch

Phone 1.336.748.9222

Email info@mrbf.org

Website mrbf.org