



Mary Reynolds Babcock

# Strategic Directions



**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**

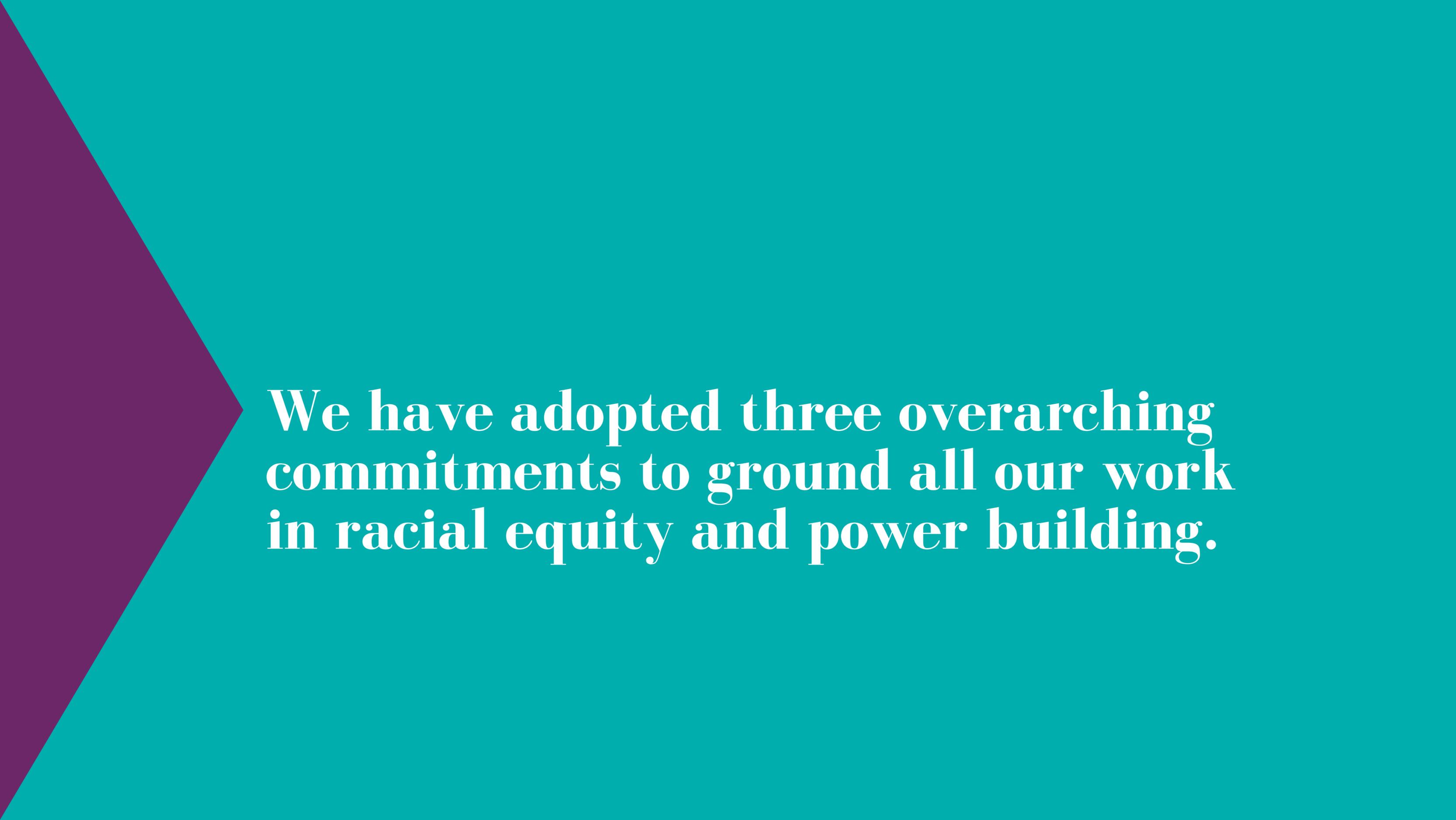
Everyone should have fair and unfettered access to the levers of power and change.

## **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.



**We have adopted three overarching commitments to ground all our work in racial equity and power building.**

# Commitment One

**All Foundation strategy reflects racial equity and power building.**

To advance a stronger vision of the South, across all our work, we ask:

*How do structural racism and other barriers influence this context, and how are people working to address them?*

*How is power being built, by and for whom, and in which arenas (electoral, legislative, administrative, judicial/legal, corporate and narrative)?*

The answers to these questions will inform the strategies we prioritize, the organizations and networks we support and how. We aim to:

- Support partners who are seeking to advance racial equity, who demonstrate an understanding of structural racism's harms and a real commitment to dismantle it
- Grow our partners' racial equity capacity through grants and other forms of support
- Communicate proactively about why racial equity and power building matter, particularly in the South
- Apply these racial equity and power building considerations across all our work, including impact investing, advocacy and influence efforts

# Commitment Two

**We strive to eliminate structural racism in all our work — and within our organization.**

Centering racial equity and power building requires us to examine and improve the Foundation from within. We seek to:

- Develop an organizational culture grounded in authenticity and empathy, that nurtures the efficacy and wellbeing of all staff, particularly staff of color
- Enhance our ongoing learning about white supremacy and the challenges of structural racism, and sharpen our board and staff members' racial equity competencies
- Develop a strong race-forward intersectional lens to understand how discrimination inhibits opportunities based on one's sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, geography, ability and more
- Build a staff and board that reflect the demographics of our diverse region, with people of color in leadership roles
- Regularly review our policies, staffing structure and operations to align them with best practices



# Commitment Three

**Act with humility and  
“the fierce urgency of now.”**

We understand structural change takes patience and time. We also know discrimination, inequality and violence are pressing, immediate issues for many people. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us of “the fierce urgency of now,” the need to act with all deliberate speed to promote justice. To accelerate change and support the movement toward a more equitable South in this moment, the Foundation is increasing our grantmaking. Building sustained power with and for communities of color and white communities who share our vision is the basis for a region and a country that value, protect and work better for everyone.

We understand there are no simple answers, so we will act with humility, grace and compassion as we learn to become better partners. We will gather and share helpful information, apply clear criteria in our decisions and make choices based on thoughtful conversations that reflect the complexity and diversity of the South. We know this journey is fraught, particularly for communities of color, and will require challenging conversations, effective listening and nimble support.

# Why are we doing this?

**White supremacy and structural racism maintain wealth and power for white people by creating considerable barriers for people of color, and these barriers impede everyone's wellbeing.**

Removing those barriers would benefit everyone, including rural communities and low-wealth white people. We must ensure people of color, underrepresented communities and people working to advance democracy and justice have seats at decision-making tables. Their influence on policy, electoral, administrative, corporate, narrative and legal systems can shape our society to work better for everyone. Goals include:

- Increase the representation, engagement, capacity and power of more people of color and others who are directly affected by structural barriers
- Grow multi-racial, cross-class coalitions that see shared interest in taking down the forces that exploit race to divide and advancing a vision of government and other systems that work for everyone
- Spotlight the challenges racism poses for the South today and develop more robust responses with creative thinkers and doers



# Our Primary Strategy

**Our main strategy to advance our goals is to strengthen state-based infrastructure for power building to advance racial equity in 11 Southern states.**

We intend to help build power for people of color and people who have suffered from systematic disinvestment. This power is focused particularly at the state and local levels, across six arenas of change: legislative, administrative, corporate, judicial, narrative and electoral. This includes supporting durable collaborations among leaders of color, including networks that provide resources and strategy alignment, and strengthening organizations that are building power with and for people directly harmed by systems of oppression.

To advance these goals, the Foundation deploys all the tools available to us, including grantmaking, investing, influencing, leveraging, communications and learning.

## **WHY HAVE WE MADE THIS OUR PRIMARY STRATEGY?**

State and local governments wield broad power to influence multiple sectors and aspects of daily life, and they have largely perpetuated racial and class inequities. Building power to influence public policies, elections, jurisdictions and courts is central to advancing justice across the South. The organizations and networks that comprise these infrastructures are building leaders and coordinating strategies to promote better systems and advance racial equity and people-centered prosperity.

# Our Complementary Strategy

To build power and advance racial equity, MRBF understands from our partners on the ground that values aligned, economic capital in the context of market forces can develop impactful community outcomes. Through this complementary strategy, the Foundation aims to learn alongside partners engaged in restorative economic models that promote democratic practices, solidarity, and community ownership.

Contemporary inequity is sustained by dominant, interlocking political, economic, and cultural systems, which have enabled a small class of mostly white and male elites to accumulate wealth and power by extracting vast value from human labor and the natural world. In the U.S., much of this wealth can be traced back to industries that relied on economic practices of extraction and exploitation, such as enslaved labor, stolen land, and the exploitation of the natural world. A crucial role for philanthropy in transforming these interlocking systems of oppression toward a just and sustainable world is to redistribute wealth, democratize power, and shape narratives to shift equitable economic control to the community.

MRBF is seeking to support systemic change efforts to build wealth and power in low-wealth communities and communities of color through strategies that democratize ownership and governance of capital, land, and labor.

Essential to that work are our program-related investments (PRIs), our most values-aligned investments that 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. Consistent with power-building and racial equity lenses, we aim to go beyond promoting income and living wages toward systemic change strategies which acknowledge wealth's role in building power for BIPOC communities and for people in under-resourced places within the US's integrated political and economic systems.

In addition to PRIs, some grantmaking is also a part of our complementary strategy, along with other Foundation's resources such as leverage and influence in the sector, narrative change and mission investing - which are required to better understand how economic capital and market forces can create racial equity outcomes.

# 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 We Support

**The Babcock Foundation invites proposals from local, statewide, regional, and national non-profits, 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 promising opportunities to build power to advance racial equity and social and economic justice. For more details about the kinds of organizations we support, please see our grants page or our full program description.



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FOUNDATION

# Get In Touch

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