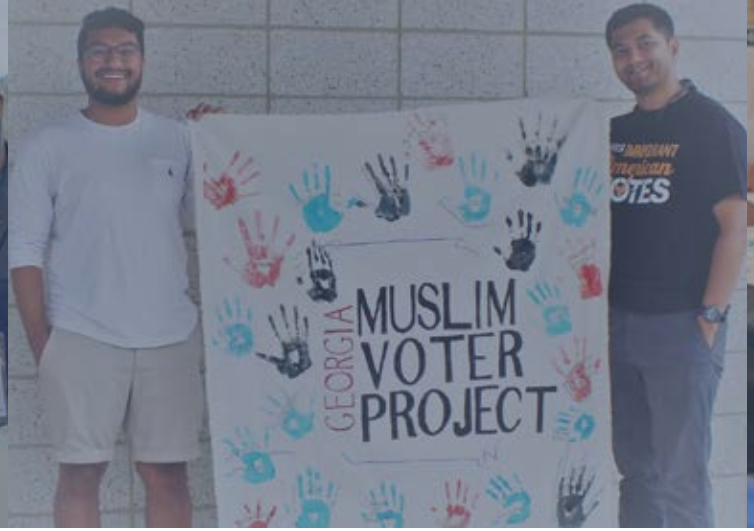


Southern Partners Fund

BIENNIAL REPORT | 2022–2023

Advancing
Social Change
in the Rural South

Southern Partners Fund

OUR MISSION

is to support grassroots community organizations in the rural South seeking racial, economic and environmental justice by providing financial resources, technical assistance and training, and access to systems of information and power.

OUR PURPOSE

is to help build the capacity of grassroots community leaders and organizations; and to foster relationships and networking that build power toward achieving a more just South.

OUR VALUES

are based on compassion and community—cornerstones of our democratic approach to philanthropy. Compassion is rooted in our inherent understanding and concern for communities lacking the political power to impact decisions that affect their lives. We came from communities that were like that until we learned to organize. Community comes out of the connections we have to one another, the glue that holds us together.

A WORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

While the nation, fresh "out" of the COVID-19 Pandemic, continues to unravel—a supreme court emboldened to overturn legal precedent, spiraling-yet-avoidable gun violence, and increasingly frequent and destructive natural disasters (to start)—it can be tempting to shut out the noise. Though the covid public health emergency was lifted in May 2023 following a drastic decline in cases, the disproportionately impacted, rural, predominately BIPOC low-income communities we serve through our tireless grantee partners—grassroots organizations at the frontlines of social justice—are still grappling with the aftermath.

The communities we support are also the most vulnerable to climate change and are being forced to rebuild their lives far more often with new natural disaster records set every year. Responding to the needs of those communities, SPF increased funding towards its grantee partners focused on environmental justice, and we intend to make this a funding priority for the foreseeable future by adding it to SPF's major initiatives for 2024, which currently consist of voter rights and engagement, immigration rights, and education reform.

With all of these potentially life-altering distractions, it's no surprise that communities just trying to get by often don't have time to worry about elections or Supreme Court decisions. In 2022 and 2023 alone, the Supreme Court upended decades of legal precedent, from the overturning of Roe v. Wade and subsequent state abortion bans, particularly in the South, to ending Affirmative Action. Again, we are so fortunate to be able to partner with grassroots organizations led by trusted members of their respective communities. Their neighbors listen when sharing essential information on how their communities are impacted and what can be done following court decisions like these. In one positive sign, the Supreme Court sided in favor of the Voting Rights Act in the 2023 redistricting case, Allen v. Milligan, one in which Alabama Forward, a grantee partner that also employs one of our Young Leaders for Social Change fellows, Khadidah Stone, took part and won.

This is why our sustained support to these groups and the communities they serve is so essential. Despite philanthropy trending downwards in 2022 and 2023, our approach to grantmaking since inception—what is increasingly being referred to as trust-based philanthropy—is coming back to us, many times over. In addition to significant, longstanding support from funders like the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, SPF also received a multi-million-dollar grant from the Wellspring Philanthropic Fund and another unsolicited and unrestricted gift from noted philanthropist, Mackenzie Scott, of $5M.

Investing Ms. Scott's first gift of $10M at the end of 2020 has also helped us maintain our annual regular grant cycle at an all-time high of $800K, three years in a row. We have also been able to further invest in the foundation's Social Justice Institute (SJI), which houses the foundation's programs centered around election protection and redistricting, as well as the Young Leaders for Social Justice (YLSC) fellowship and Capacity Building series. And for the first time since going virtual in 2020, SPF held an in-person convening of grantee partners focused on election protection work in the lead-up to the 2022 midterms—elections which ultimately broke voter turnout records and represented a return to more progressive values. Despite the brave new world at our feet in the wake of the pandemic, climate change, and polarized political landscape heading into 2024's Presidential Elections, we hope you know that SPF's commitment to racial and economic justice in the rural South is unshaken and we're growing stronger by the year.

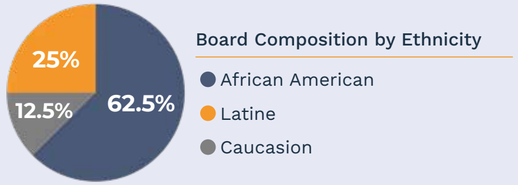
Fernando Cuevas, Jr.
Executive Director

GOVERNANCE

SPF employs a two-tiered membership-based structure of governance that forms a system of checks and balances to foster a space in which democratic and participatory philanthropy can flourish. Members are selected for their regional expertise, sound judgment, management skills, and leadership potential.

SPF's membership is derived from leaders of currently or previously funded grassroots organizations. Enshrined in SPF's by-laws, at least 80% of its members are people of color grassroots leaders (see chart below) from the rural South. They serve on committees, including grantmaking and finance, and are actively involved in the organization.

Term-limited board members are elected from within SPF's membership pool to ensure SPF remains led by those it's meant to serve. SPF's experience has indeed confirmed for us that grassroots community organizing is the strategy with the greatest potential to produce viable, progressive, and institutional change for a more economically and racially equitable South.



2022-2023 **BOARD**

Dianna Freelon-Foster
(Board-Chair)
E.D., Activists With a Purpose
Grenada, MS

Tirso Moreno
(Board- Vice Chair)
Farmworkers Consultant
Apopka, FL

Erin Dale-McClellan
(2023 Board-Treasurer)
E.D., The Partnership Funds
Raleigh, NC

Margarita Romo
(Board-Secretary)
E.D., Farmworkers Self-Help
Dade City, FL

Brett Bursey
(Board-Member At-Large)
E.D., South Carolina
Progressive Network
Columbia, SC

Carolyn Ford
(2022 Board-Treasurer)
E.D., N. Florida Education
and Development, Corp.
Gretna, FL

Karen Watson
(Board)
E.D., Positive Action
Committee
Sylvania, GA

Gardenia White
(Board)
Retired Community
Organizer
South Carolina/New York

MEMBERSHIP

Vivian Anderson
South Carolina

Brett Bursey
South Carolina

Andre Cheek Castleberry
Georgia

Nadeska Concha
Florida

Shaq Cosse
Louisiana

Marcos Crisanto
Florida

Carolyn Ford
Florida

Omari Fox
South Carolina

Dianna Freelon-Foster
Mississippi

Marilyn Hunter
Florida

April Jarocki
Tennessee

Leroy Johnson
Mississippi

Rose Johnson
Georgia

Kattie Vinson-Kendrick
Georgia

John Littles
Georgia

Ashley McKay Dandridge
Mississippi

Erin Dale McClellan
North Carolina

Tirso Moreno
Florida

Bryan Perlmutter
North Carolina

Marshall Pierite
Louisiana

Larverne Robinson
Georgia

Margarita Roma
Florida

Darla Saunders
Florida

Kameisha Smith
Mississippi

Corry Stevenson
South Carolina

Erendira Vasquez
Arkansas

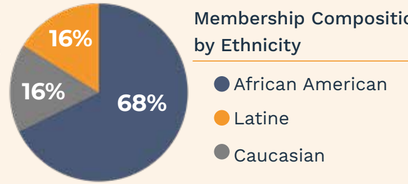
Karen Watson
Georgia

Gardenia White
South Carolina

La'Meshia "L.A." Whittington-Kaminski
North Carolina

Karen Woodall
Florida

John Zippert
Alabama



GRANTMAKING

SPF serves as a model of democratic philanthropy, demonstrating that grantmaking decisions that reflect the experience of people living in the communities served are effective and powerful. In 2022 and 2023, SPF made 223 grants to 108 rural grassroots organizations throughout the 12 Southeastern states the foundation funds, with the average grant size now $15k. Total grantmaking, including SPF's Hubert E. Sapp Regular Grant Cycle (RGC), the Justice Fund for Disaster Relief and Renewal, special initiative funding, and the discretionary fund, matched our record-breaking prior two years of grantmaking, landed again at $3.3M.

Still adhering to our Southern Organizing Strategy (SOS), SPF allocates approximately 60% of RGC funds to three major initiatives: voter rights and engagement, immigration rights, and education reform. The remaining 40% of grantmaking is allocated amongst the other program areas listed in the chart below. As the worst effects of climate change continue to wreak havoc on the low-income rural communities SPF serves, in 2024, the board will formally vote to add enviromental justice as a fourth major initiative.

Grantmaking by Program Area (SOS)

2022–2023

MAJOR INITIATIVES

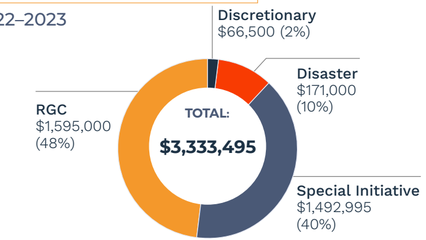
- Voter Rights & Engagement - 28.2%
- Immigration Rights - 23.2%
- Education Reform - 8.5%

OTHER PROGRAM AREAS

- Environmental Justice - 14.7%
- Economic Justice - 6.0%
- Incarceration Reform - 1.6%
- Women & Girls' Leadership - 3.4%
- LGBTQ+ Rights - 3.1%
- Disability Rights - 0.3%
- Housing Reform - 6.0%
- Healthcare Reform - 1.3%
- Youth Leadership - 3.8%

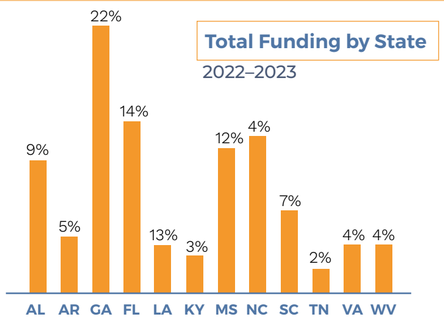
Total Grantmaking by Fund

2022–2023



Total Funding by State

2022–2023



IMPACT

GRANTEE PARTNER SPOTLIGHTS

Louisiana Organization for Refugees & Immigrants

The Louisiana Organization for Refugees and Immigrants (LORI) is dedicated to improving the lives of immigrants and refugees, while promoting a welcoming environment in Louisiana. A former refugee, himself, Dauda Sesay created LORI to build bridges, organize, and advocate for equitable and humane immigration policies. He adds, ***"In celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month, we're reminded of the rich diversity that strengthens our social fabric. At LORI, we are steadfast in empowering every immigrant and refugee, ensuring their voices are heard, their rights upheld, and their futures are filled with opportunity and hope."***

LORI, representing immigrants and refugees of all nationalities, has taken a proactive approach to engaging the Latino community of over 80,000 in Louisiana. Its legal clinic has provided essential support to hundreds of immigrants, assisting them in navigating legal pathways with a focus on citizenship attainment. This enables them to exercise their right to vote and hold their leaders accountable. In collaboration with local partners, we have so far hosted six non-partisan candidate forums as we head into the local elections including the gubernatorial race.

Kiran

Kiran's mission is to end the cycle of abuse and to serve and empower South Asian victims of domestic violence in North Carolina by providing culturally specific services and comprehensive economic, social and community resources. We often get asked, ***"Why do South Asians need their own dedicated domestic violence organization?" While the abuse itself does not manifest differently in South Asian communities, there are a number of elements of South Asian culture that complicate identification of abuse and help-seeking. These elements include the stigma of divorce, collectivism, patriarchy, joint family households, and concepts of honor/reputation ("izzat.") –Seema Kak, Executive Director, Kiran***

More recently, Kiran launched a Mindfulness Support Group as part of its Empowerment program. which was only open to Kiran's clients to provide them with a safe space in which they could speak openly about their abuse and build new life-skills that prioritize self-care in their healing process. Young teens were provided with an open and non-judgmental space to discuss their challenges as they live and grow in a multi-cultural environment.

SOCIAL JUSTICE INSTITUTE

ABOUT THE SOCIAL JUSTICE INSTITUTE

For SPF and its grantees to continue forging ahead, our plans and actions must be thoughtfully nuanced, flexible, and sustainable. The Social Justice Institute (SJI) was born out of this need in 2009 and serves as SPF's leadership development and capacity-building arm, which houses the foundation's varied programming. SJI's programs build knowledge, teach best practices in organizing and organizational management, and help participants network and develop a collective understanding of civil and human rights issues in the context of historical southern movement building.

Programming in 2022 and 2023 continued to focus on election protection and follow-up redistricting work, and on building philanthropy from within low-income communities as part of SPF's Pathway to Philanthropy program.

SJI's formal capacity-building program strengthens nascent grassroots organizations by helping them become more grounded and effective community leaders. The program provides a grant to organizations fighting to reverse economic, environmental, and social inequities in the rural South and the opportunity to build capacity and strengthen organizational and individual leadership.

Wrapping up our second class following a hiatus, SJI's Young Leaders for Social Change fellowship enhances skills, knowledge, and civic participation among young and emerging community organizers and nonprofit professionals under the age of 35 who are committed to progressive social change across the rural South. Projects have ranged from creating a mobile dream lab for K-12 students, a know your rights campaign for poultry plant workers, and a youth activist toolkit to 24/7 accessible micro pantries in Bowling Green and a restorative-justice focused healing space for Black and Brown girls.

Young Leaders for Social Change Spotlight : ISAIAH WITHERS

I am incredibly proud to share that two potential workplace discrimination cases have come out of this work and that we are continuing to move the work forward."

- ISAIAH WITHERS

Following my research project and withcontinued support from the YLSC fellowship, I launched the Black Legal Action Community Knowledge (BLACK) Initiative, in which I have continued working with volunteer organizers alongside an amazing team of movement attorneys so we can document actionable cases of workplace violations.

With the BLACK Initiative, one of our main goals was to ensure that meat-packing workers being exploited in this way knew they were not alone, that we could relate on some level, that we had their back, and that we could all be part of a movement to fight for basic human rights in the workplace.

FINANCIALS | 2022–2023

FULTON & KOZAK
certified public accountants

Southern Partners Fund, Inc.

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

To the Board of Directors of
Southern Partners Fund, Inc.

Opinion

We have audited the accompanying financial statements of Southern Partners Fund, Inc., (a nonprofit organization) (the "Fund"), which comprise the statements of financial position as of December 31, 2023 and 2022, and the related statements of activities, functional expenses and cash flows for the years then ended, and the related notes to the financial statements.

In our opinion, the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Southern Partners Fund, Inc. as of December 31, 2023 and 2022, and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements section of our report. We are required to be independent of the Fund and to meet our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the relevant ethical requirements relating to our audit. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Responsibilities of Management for the Financial Statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America, and for the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is required to evaluate whether there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about the Fund's ability to continue as a going concern within one year after the date that the financial statements are available to be issued.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not absolute assurance and therefore is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve

collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control. Misstatements, including omissions, are considered material if there is a substantial likelihood that, individually or in the aggregate, they would influence the judgment made by a reasonable user based on the financial statements.

In performing an audit in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards, we:

- Exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit.
- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, and design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks. Such procedures include examining, on a test basis, evidence regarding the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Fund's internal control. Accordingly, no such opinion is expressed.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by management, as well as evaluate the overall presentation of the financial statements.
- Conclude whether, in our judgment, there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about the Fund's ability to continue as a going concern for a reasonable period of time.

We are required to communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit, significant audit findings, and certain internal control related matters that we identified during the audit.

Zoltan & Kozak LLC

Morrow, Georgia
August 19, 2024

Southern Partners Fund, Inc.

STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION

December 31, 2023 and 2022

ASSETS	2023	2022
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	$ 7,086,321	$ 3,896,112
Cash – donor advised	5,933	6,357
Marketable securities	11,775,180	9,597,966
Contributions receivable	216	216
Pledges receivable	250,000	190,000
Prepaid expenses	10,296	21,591
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	19,127,946	13,712,242
MARKETABLE SECURITIES – ENDOWMENT	6,230,341	6,230,341
PLEDGES RECEIVABLE – LONG-TERM, NET	47,619	-
FIXED ASSETS, NET	24,167	17,945
OPERATING RIGHT OF USE ASSET	89,756	133,568
SECURITY DEPOSIT	3,779	3,779
TOTAL ASSETS	$ 25,523,608	$ 20,097,875
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accounts payable	$ 36,516	$ 60,659
Grants payable	182,500	172,500
Payroll liabilities	63,747	42,625
Lease liability	52,346	50,082
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	335,109	325,866
LEASE LIABILITY – LONG TERM	54,680	107,026
TOTAL LIABILITIES	389,789	432,892
NET ASSETS		
Without donor restrictions	18,309,039	12,395,274
With donor restrictions		
Restricted by purpose or time	594,439	1,039,368
Restricted for endowment	6,230,341	6,230,341
Total net assets with donor restrictions	6,824,780	7,269,709
TOTAL NET ASSETS	25,133,819	19,664,983
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	$ 25,523,608	$ 20,097,875

Southern Partners Fund

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(404) 541-9091 | **southernpartnersfund.org**