Acknowledgments

Writer: Susan Raffo
Designer: Amir Khadar
Graphic Design: Adam Shaw
Copy Editor: Bosede Cajuste
Astraea team: Bridget de Gersigny, Sarah Gunther, Kim Kaletsy, Cara Page, Sabrina Rich, Brenda Salas Neves
Wellspring team: Justin Hashimoto, Rebecca Fox

We are deeply grateful to the people who consented to talk and engage with us on these lineages of healing justice. We know this report can only share a taste of their power and wisdom and that of the communities they represent:

Tasha Amezcua, Former Staff of Audre Lorde Project
Reverend Jennifer Bailey, Faith Matters Network
Tatiana Cordero, Urgent Action Fund – Latin America
Alexandra DelValle, Groundswell Fund
Shalini Eddens, Urgent Action Fund
Sandra Ljubinkovic, Independent Consultant & Facilitator
Jelena Dordevic, Co-Author of What’s the Point of Revolution if We Can’t Dance? by Urgent Action Fund
Naa Hammond, Groundswell Fund
Prentis Hemphill, Resilient Strategies, BOLD, generative somatics
DJ Hudson, Southerners on New Ground
Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective
Isaac Luria, Nathan Cummings Foundation
Franciscas Porchas, Mijente and Resilient Strategies
Guadalupe Rocio Chavez, Dignity and Power Now
Adaku Utah, Harriet’s Apothecary
Erica Woodland, National Queer & Trans Therapists of Color Network
Crystal Zaragoza, Trans Queer Pueblo
Dear colleagues and comrades,

This is a critical moment for the world and for our movements. Heightened anti-immigrant, anti-Black, misogynist and anti-LGBTQI violence, increased government surveillance and policing; and the closing of civil societies are all part of an intense conservative backlash that calls on us to respond on all fronts.

Frontline organizers are facing daily attacks on the dignity, safety and basic survival of their people. How do we hold depression and grief from the deportation of loved ones or the loss of community members to police violence? How do we work through generational trauma from oppression and war? How do we confront and transform histories of medical abuse on queer, trans, disabled and incarcerated bodies? The list of state and communal violences perpetrated on communities goes on and on. As survivors of violence, many movement organizers are working to discover what transformation can look like when we center political, spiritual, physical, emotional and psychic wellbeing as integral to our communities, movements and the world we are trying to build.

Over the last decade, we at Astraea have witnessed and been moved by the emergence and rise of healing justice work—resiliency and survival practices that center the collective safety and wellbeing of communities—as an integral part of our fight for collective liberation. We have learned from our grantee partners how these practices and traditions can be tools for building power, and how they can deepen and sustain the long and hard work of movement-building. Rooted in their wisdom, we continue to work to integrate healing justice as a core aspect of our grantmaking and accompanying to organizations and movements, both in the U.S. and globally. We are also increasingly working to support the holistic security—integrated strategies for physical, digital and psychosocial wellbeing and collective care—of grantee partners. Both frameworks hold wellness, resilience and sustainability at their core, with holistic security specifically intervening on safety and healing justice seeking to confront and transform generational trauma. They differ but are inextricably intertwined. While this publication focuses on healing justice, we include some information about holistic security as it resonates closely with this work.

Healing Justice: Building Power, Transforming Movements doesn’t seek one answer or definition of healing justice, but opens the door for there to be a multitude of ways for it to be understood and applied—allways rooted in place and grounded in cultural and political context. We spoke with grantee partners, community advisors and peer funders to harvest what has been learned and what can be gained from this work. We lift up their brilliance, resiliency and creativity in elevating and sustaining it over so many years. From their stories and learning, we hope that we as funders can grow and learn ourselves—unpacking and unraveling our assumptions of what healing and safety can look like within movements, and better equipping ourselves to answer the call of resourcing this work for the long haul.

Together with our partners at Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, we are deeply honored to offer this report as a resource for our funder colleagues to learn more about healing justice work. It is an invitation to each one of us to step more fully into it.

In solidarity,

Brenda Salas Neves, Senior Program Officer
Cara Page, Director of Programs
Sarah Gunther, Director of Philanthropic Partnerships
I

Family separation was a hard blow where we anything. That is a very hard place to be morally.

opportunities are to win or even to stop

movement. We are not clear on where the

“Trump has been very disorienting for our

contradictions in our work. We are already doing, some of the gaps and

ways that our communities are addressing it,

manifesting in our communities, some of the

trauma. We took the time to name what is

Brown conversation about state violence and

criminalization and deportation: a Black and

to have a conversation about healing justice,

different places across the country. I wanted

Resilient Strategies:

Interview with Francisca Porchas, Mijente and

Healing in Resistance

Voices from the Ground

Phoenix of about 40 people, with half from
different places across the country. I wanted to
have a conversation about healing justice, criminalization and deportation: a Black and
Brown conversation about state violence and trauma. We took the time to name what is
manifesting in our communities, some of the ways that our communities are addressing it,
and then, without ignoring or undervaluing what we are already doing, some of the gaps and
contradictions in our work.

Trump has been very disorienting for our
movement. We are not clear on where the
opportunities are to win or even to stop
anything. That is a very hard place to be morally.
Family separation was a hard blow where we
had actions happening across the country,
but even with these actions, we still aren’t
clear how we are going to stop this separation
of children from their parents. But this isn’t
the only movement in history when we have
gone through medieval times. We aren’t the
only movement who has asked, ‘How we are
going to get out of this onslaught of possible
devastation?’

“This is a time where healing work can remind
us that in these moments we care for each
other. We build each other up morally and
spiritually. I built a collective of healers and our
folks have been tending to our people. There are
healing sessions that happen twice a month on
Saturdays and every other Thursday. There are
healing circles, emotional literacy classes and
basic care like acupuncture. We have healers
saying, ‘We are here. We care for you.’

“People are more open these days than ever.
I am being hit up by folks in different places
about needing therapy, about being open to
counseling of some sort because people are
suffering losses or being deported. Our people
know they need help to move through this. Right
now the first and most urgent step I have felt
we need is the creation of a Latinx network of
mental health practitioners. We call this Healing
in Resistance.

“And while we take care of each other, the
organizing doesn’t stop. I never could have
dreamt that ‘Abolish ICE’ as a rallying cry was
going to spark people’s imagination. We need to
continue organizing and focus on the issues that
have caught fire. We are going to keep fighting
and caring for each other and we have to figure
out how to resource this work, particularly when
funders focus so much attention on how you are
going to win.

“We are living under a regime my generation
has never before experienced, and while the
organizing still needs to be front and center, this
is a moment when healing justice also needs
to be centered. Organizers are telling funders,
‘Hey, healing matters; we have to be able to rest
and support each other.’ When we come out
the other end of this I believe we will come out
stronger. We are going to learn how to create a
sense of safety. This is one of the big questions
we have to figure out right now. How do we
create a sense of safety knowing we are never
safe under this kind of oppression and state
violence? We have never been safe. We have to
create a sense of safety and at the same time
transform this harm so that we come out on the
other side.”

Healing circles are defined in many different
ways: as pop-ups in moments of urgency, as
ongoing spaces for learning and sharing healing
practices, as opportunities for communities to
come together around an identity or an issue
and in remembrance of a time in history or in
honor of ancestors.

Almost every person we spoke with referred to
different kinds of healing circles organized for
those impacted by state violence in a particular
moment, for those experiencing the loss of a
beloved community member or for times when
there’s a break in organizing and care is given to
those experiencing burnout and exhaustion.

Interview with Kindred Southern Healing
Justice Collective:

“C

ommunity organizers from across the
South increasingly began to call on us to
show up and hold healing space or partner on
a gathering or conference with them. We would
say that we want to honor the legacy of healing
and medicine, so we would ask participants to
bring objects that represent their lineage of
healing and medicine. Together we would then
create sacred or reflective space where people
would have the opportunity to transform energy
and honor lineage. As part of Summer Solstice
and Juneteenth celebrations, for example, we
would create reflective spaces with Project
South in Atlanta, Georgia to understand how
our medicines, foods and traditions built our
resiliency during slavery and continue to sustain
us despite systemic violence and oppression.
We created reflective spaces as part of harvest
and seasonal festivals.

Interview with Francisca Porchas, Mijente and
Resilient Strategies:

“In March of 2018 I held a meeting in
Phoenix of about 40 people, with half from
different places across the country. I wanted to
have a conversation about healing justice, criminalization and deportation: a Black and
Brown conversation about state violence and trauma. We took the time to name what is
manifesting in our communities, some of the ways that our communities are addressing it,
and then, without ignoring or undervaluing what we are already doing, some of the gaps and
contradictions in our work.

Healing circles are defined in many different
ways: as pop-ups in moments of urgency, as
ongoing spaces for learning and sharing healing
practices, as opportunities for communities to
come together around an identity or an issue
and in remembrance of a time in history or in
honor of ancestors.

Almost every person we spoke with referred to
different kinds of healing circles organized for
those impacted by state violence in a particular
moment, for those experiencing the loss of a
beloved community member or for times when
there’s a break in organizing and care is given to
those experiencing burnout and exhaustion.

Interview with Kindred Southern Healing
Justice Collective:

“C

ommunity organizers from across the
South increasingly began to call on us to
show up and hold healing space or partner on
a gathering or conference with them. We would
say that we want to honor the legacy of healing
and medicine, so we would ask participants to
bring objects that represent their lineage of
healing and medicine. Together we would then
create sacred or reflective space where people
would have the opportunity to transform energy
and honor lineage. As part of Summer Solstice
and Juneteenth celebrations, for example, we
would create reflective spaces with Project
South in Atlanta, Georgia to understand how
our medicines, foods and traditions built our
resiliency during slavery and continue to sustain
us despite systemic violence and oppression.
We created reflective spaces as part of harvest
and seasonal festivals.
Freedom Harvest

Interview with Guadalupe Rocio Chavez, Dignity and Power Now:

“Freedom Harvest is a program where Dignity and Power Now lives out our values of abolition, healing justice and transformative justice beautifully. During Freedom Harvest, we set up outside of Los Angeles county jails to provide care for family members going to visit loved ones who are incarcerated. Those spaces are so cold and cruel, not a space where love, freedom and interdependence can be easily nurtured. The concrete buildings, the tiny windows ... and then all the emotions of family members; it can be a somber place most of the time. We literally set up in the parking lot of the jails. Some of the jails are in desert-like areas where the parking lot is scalding hot concrete. There are very few spaces where there is shade and a few benches. And there is always a long line of people visiting their loved ones. This particular jail is called the Wayside, Pitchess Detention Center. People show their ID and then wait in another area before they are bussed up and down some hills to where their loved ones are. To set up our wellness stations, our art-making stations, in a space like that is life-affirming to all those who participate. It begins to chip away at that concrete. It transforms the experience of the folks who are going to visit their loved ones.

“In the summer we have what we call a ‘large scale’ Freedom Harvest series, where we set up our pop-up clinic every other week for two months. The summer series has about eight stations. During the rest of the year we host a Freedom Harvest at Lynwood Women’s Jail every other month with fewer healing stations. We have a team of committed acupuncturists who do community acupuncture and we give massage and foot soaks. Our member healer offers crystal bowl healing and chakra re-alignments. We offer this healing for people, many of whom are turned away from their visit because they forgot their ID or their purses are too big or one of the hundreds of reasons the sheriffs stop families from coming in. It’s inhumane: we often receive people who are devastated, who have traveled a long way to visit their loved one and are kept from going in. In Freedom Harvest we have places where people can sit and drink water or tea if it’s cold, and just be listened to. We also offer concrete support, helping people learn where they can go to make a complaint, helping people fill out paperwork and connecting them with other resources, including our campaigns.

“A highlight of the clinics are the flower crowns we make. This has been brilliant. You have these beautiful children and older women mostly who are drawn to these flower crowns and learn how to make them for themselves. You see folks leaving with flower crowns from the jail. Flowers have many healing properties and uplift folks in connection to the earth. It can be so hard to get to a patch of earth in LA, let alone access to growing space.

“Another special thing about Freedom Harvest is that it is facilitated by a team of volunteers, healers and consultants called Building Resilience. We also have a new program where formerly incarcerated people receive support from Dignity and Power Now to pursue the study of a preferred healing modality. Our member healers lead this work. We build relationships with one another and make hundreds of wellness kits. The kits are simple: a bag with a Dignity Power Stick sticker on it and a healing quote, handmade gifts like bath salts, spritzers, tea and aromatherapy rolls. We also skill-share with folks how to make the items we put into the kits. We offer these kits outside the jails. Folks can take them home and continue their self-care.

“The principle of abolition is very present in this work. We don’t believe that wellness kits or pop-up clinics will bring an end to these cages, these concrete buildings, but they are a form of showing up in protest. Through our presence we are stating that instead of these jails, this is what we believe in. We believe in healing together, coming together in community, sharing meals together. We share water. We share stories. We write songs together. This is how we heal and this is how we organize.”
Healing Justice and Holistic Security Frameworks

Healing justice and holistic security are frameworks that have emerged and evolved in relationship to place-based organizing. They are concepts and practices that we, as funders, are seeing more and more in many different cultural communities and movement spaces.

Over the last two decades, there has been an increase in movements recognizing the impact of generations of trauma, systemic violence, oppression and war on their communities. Organizers are refusing to separate an awareness of the traumatic impact of state violence from their strategies to build collective power towards abolishing that violence. We have seen an increase in grant requests that name the need for more resources to address conflict within organizations and movement spaces, safety and security trainings, healing spaces and access to transformative health practitioners; to learn about healing traditions and birth work; and to understand the medicinal traditions of ancestral communities across the world. We are hearing organizations ask: What did we do to survive genocide, war, violence and natural disasters, and what can we do now?

Organizers and healers have long been present and providing care in movements, but did not necessarily name it as healing justice. In 2006, the Kindred Healing Justice Collective, a network of political healers, health practitioners and organizers in the U.S. Southeast, began using the term healing justice as a framework to identify how we can holistically respond to and intervene on generational trauma and violence, lifting up individual and collective practices that can transform oppression in our collective bodies and lives, particular to the experience of living in the U.S. Southeast and the Global South. These Southern organizers—Black, Indigenous, women of color, LGBTQI and allies—connected the reality of generational trauma to the ongoing histories of slavery, genocide and economic disenfranchisement based on the slave labor economy and colonization. Stemming from these histories, the healing justice framework lifts up resiliency and survival practices that center the collective safety and emotional, physical, spiritual, environmental and mental wellbeing of communities. These practices address the impacts of violence and trauma, including interpersonal, systemic and generational violence, and they promote our collective safety, sustainability and wellbeing. When integrated into movement strategies, these practices support us, as organizers and communities, to prioritize our safety and to care for each other towards our long-term survival.

At approximately the same time, women’s human rights activists across the globe were taking up similar questions, talking with each other across borders and continents about safety and security. They developed the framework of holistic security, naming psychosocial, physical and digital wellbeing and diverse security strategies as fundamental components of movement work. In contrast to the traditionally individualistic approach to protection and security, feminist activists, many of whom were connected to the Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights, began to claim wellbeing as subversive and political, radically expanding individualistic concepts of security to center collective care and resilience. Just like healing justice, holistic security is context-specific and place-based, responsive to the particular needs and challenges of a community or movement, and defined by activists themselves. Holistic security is also distinguished by a strong focus on digital security, lifting up information and data management not only as a crucial component of overall safety but also as an act of political empowerment.

Collective protection emerges from a reflection and honoring of traditional (Indigenous and Afro) practices of care. This is different from how safety and security has been usually understood in the West, where most often it is concerned with individual protection alone. Thus, in this non-Western perspective, holistic safety is at its core both the protection of the individual through the collective and the protection of the community through the collective as well.”

Tatiana Cordero, Urgent Action Fund – Latin America

Both healing justice and holistic security respond to patterns of systemic abuse and oppression that reinforce the controlling of our bodies, wellness and cultures, and our capacities to transform our conditions. Both depend on, an interplay between safety and wellness as integral to our political liberation and freedom.
Generational and present-time trauma from ongoing experiences with state and other forms of violence deeply impacts those working in movements for social justice. This trauma impacts how organizations build leaders and strategies, and take care of their people.

Everything we want to change in the world around us also exists right here in our bodies. We carry the histories of our people’s trauma and our people’s resilient strength. We are raised as part of families and kin networks that are shaped by these histories. Centuries of Indigenous teachings from around the world name oppression, colonization and white supremacy as held on a cellular level and passed down through generations. Western science, which includes the newest epigenetic research, is only recently coming to the same conclusion: the impact of violence does not disappear but instead imprints on the collective body. Violence—perpetrated not only by state institutions but also by families and in communities—is passed down from one generation to the next, until repair, restoration, and come out the other end somehow. Our ancestors have so many lessons for us. In this moment it’s hard for our younger folks and our people on the ground to remember how amazingly strong and resilient we are and that we will be okay even if we aren’t okay. I really believe that. I think this is a big part of centering healing right now, a big task of those who want to do healing work in this moment. We have to build and integrate practices that help us remember our histories, our ancestors and our survival. Francisco Porchas, Mijente and Resilient Strategies

Healing justice is a response to this trauma, lifting up practices that support resilience, wellness, safety and security as a necessary part of organizing and movement work. This increases the strength and long-term sustainability of our movements.

Organizing and healing are not separate from each other. Both are focused on reconnection and repair towards an interdependent and thriving collective liberation. A healing justice framework supports practices that help us to rest and reconnect while making sure our lives and locations are secure and safe enough for us to do our work. Not everyone who does this work calls it healing justice. Folks on the ground also call it spiritual work, creative work, cultural work and transformational work. Whatever you call it, healing justice strives to integrate and transform how historical, generational and individual trauma impacts our people in movements. This increases individual and collective resilience for dealing with present-time violence and struggle by minimizing the impact of unfinished historical and generational trauma. This integration increases the strength and long-term sustainability of our movements.

Healing justice doesn’t stand in isolation. It’s informed and grounded by economic, racial, disability and reproductive justice movements. Healing justice is constantly in conversation with and deeply embedded within all of these different movements and also can’t fully thrive unless it is standing strongly with the wisdom of these different movements. To hold it in isolation does a real disservice and harm; it means we do not fully understand the lived realities and possibilities of the communities and movements that we are working to sustain and nourish. Healing justice is an homage to the legacies of resilience and resistance that we have come from, that inform how we heal and how we are accountable to healing into the future.

Adaku Utah, Harriet’s Apothecary

Healing justice work has to be grounded in a community’s particular experiences, traditions and needs, and it has to be able to shift and change. The needs of movements are constantly changing. Impacted by sudden incidents of violence, by political changes and by changes in the lives of those doing the work. The uncertain nature of conditions on the ground increases a community’s need for healing justice practices while also making it difficult to get enough time and space to slow down and implement those practices. This can make organizations feel stuck, uncertain of how to make change but clear that something must shift.

The healing justice practices that we learned about emerged from cultural traditions of a community’s membership, relationships already established with different kinds of practitioners in community and the creative energy of the organizers in relationship with these community resources. Whether bringing in traditional healers or therapists or singing together, the shape and form of these practices are deeply defined by the languages and practices of each specific group.

A lot of organizations just need support. We are in a political moment of such great upheaval. So many things are shifting quickly. The fractures and fissures we see make sense in this context and we know that the ways we have been operating inside of our organizations no longer work. I am being asked by organizations: how do we build a stronger-center together, how do we claim practices we can return to, how does healing justice inform our political strategies, how do we use this as an opportunity to get more responsive, more agile, more connected? People need support because the terrain is changing. A lot of organizations will not make it through this period because conflict is going to tear folks apart. Our lack of skill around dealing with mental health is going to tear our people and our organizations apart. Our organizations need to get better.
There is a deep and important relationship between work and healing. Everyone wants to talk about healing justice until you say you have to pay for it and you can’t work healers to death and that to really do this work, you have to commit to restructuring the way you do movement. Healing justice is not going to get any deeper unless we restructure the way that our organizations relate to work.

**Prentis Hemphill, Resilient Strategies, BOLD, generative somatics**

Organizations and movements need access to more healing justice practitioners with shared experience. Healers need to be supported in order to sustain themselves as they work to transform trauma and build safety and security.

Organizations and movements need access to more healing justice practitioners who have shared lived experience with the communities they are working with. Many of those we talked with are building networks of healers, and/or health practitioners, including birth workers, energy workers, herbalists, body-based practitioners and other forms of healers, to make healing and wellness more accessible. They are building relationships with practitioners both within and outside of mainstream medicine, yet there still aren’t enough practitioners who are politicized and ready to work within movement spaces.

There is a strong need for the support of people who can hold space and attend to conflict in organizations and movements, and who can hold deep and complex trauma when it shows up among individual community members. There is also a need for regular consistent relationships and communication are supported at work alongside expectations of the timeline and content of work productivity. How our organizations are structured shapes how people experience themselves in the workplace.

Ensuring the wellbeing and safety of our people on the ground also means creating and maintaining security plans that include information security—that is, protecting organizational resources such as contact lists, strategy documents and materials that point to movement actions and intents. And this is where it comes full circle: the need to keep information safe and secure is not just about safety and security systems; it is also about an organizer’s and organization’s wellness. Trauma defines the kind of safety we feel is possible and it shapes our relationships to ourselves and each other. Practices that support dealing with this trauma together help ensure the safety of the individual and the safety of the organizational resources that each member has access to. Healing justice is not just about what happens on the sidelines; It’s about how a whole system operates in support of transformation.

**DJ Hudson, Southerners on New Ground**

Applying a healing justice framework is not just about access to healers and healing spaces. It’s also about rethinking organizational infrastructure, human resources, budgeting, safety and security, and supervision.

People are looking for organizational models that are transformational in their alignment with a healing justice framework. This means looking at organizational budgeting and human resources policies including hiring and firing, conflict and grievances, supervision and sick or wellness leave within the context of understanding the impact of historical and generational trauma on the people who make up our organizations. It means looking at how relationships and communication are supported at work alongside expectations of the timeline and content of work productivity. How our organizations are structured shapes how people experience themselves in the workplace.

Ensuring the wellbeing and safety of our people on the ground also means creating and maintaining security plans that include information security—that is, protecting organizational resources such as contact lists, strategy documents and materials that point to movement actions and intents. And this is where it comes full circle: the need to keep information safe and secure is not just about safety and security systems; it is also about an organizer’s and organization’s wellness. Trauma defines the kind of safety we feel is possible and it shapes our relationships to ourselves and each other. Practices that support dealing with this trauma together help ensure the safety of the individual and the safety of the organizational resources that each member has access to. Healing justice is not just about what happens on the sidelines; It’s about how a whole system operates in support of transformation.

**Tasha Amezcuia, Former Staff of Audre Lorde Project**

This is always a question of capacity. We want the people leading our movements to be the ones most impacted by the oppression we are seeking to destroy. But then, how do we keep them in this work? How do we increase retention of our most impacted people? Retention as a concept doesn’t even begin to get at it. How do I fully center you instead of marginalizing you or using your life as an object? How do you lead the movement in a way that fully honors the truth of your life and the impact of this work on you? From an HR perspective, it’s really hard. For self-care, people need to set their own schedules. We are sick. We are disabled. We have trauma and we are asking each other to confront systemic and collective trauma every single day. There is impact in the work so how do we fully take care of each other while continuing to move the work forward?

Conflict is one outcome of stress, held trauma and unexpressed grief. There is a need for skills-building and non-judgmental support from mentors and elders to help transform conflict in the moments when it arises.

Sometimes relationships fall apart or a conflict means that work fails or stops before it can start again. Those we interviewed spoke of conflict within organizations and between organizations and movements. They talked about the sense of scarcity and competition that can grow between organizations and movements and the way that conflict can prevent deeper partnerships that could build capacity and the scale of the work. Everyone we spoke with shared a need for deepened skills of learning to confront and struggle in transformative ways—in ways that can hold compassion for the truth of past and present pain, provide space for these intensities to be witnessed and expressed and help people move closer together rather than further apart. These moments of conflict hold the potential for some of our strongest relationship- and movement-building to take place, building integrated groups of people who have taken risks and been vulnerable together.

Healing justice, as a part of and in relationship to transformative justice, provides a framework for understanding why conflict happens and supports practices that can help movements and organizations come together to name the trauma and to work towards its transformation. Unfortunately, organizations often feel caution around telling funders about internal conflict and struggle out of fear of reprisal or loss of support.

---

1 Transformative justice recognizes that oppression is at the root of all forms of harm. It is an alternative form of justice that gives individuals the opportunity to address and repair the harm. Transformative justice involves the state’s criminal justice system, builds personal and collective capacity to respond to trauma and supports community accountability.
Conflict always has a lot to do with trauma, and skillfully navigating conflict is challenging. It’s something we have to get good at. We have to understand accountability even more deeply and understand and experience the possibilities inside accountability. Conflict is this site where our deepest fears and longings surface. It can really feel like life or death for folks because so many things have been life or death. That is where I have been putting a lot of my attention lately, trying to understand what is happening inside of conflict and to understand skillful ways of moving through it. Conflict is a powerful force for learning and it is also a powerful force for tearing us apart.

Prentis Hemphill, Resilient Strategies, BOLD, generative somatics

Funders can’t fund this work without practicing it as well.

Funders don’t just fund this work but are in it alongside organizers. The organizers we spoke with were clear about funders needing not only to resource healing justice and holistic security work, but also to build their own practices and understanding of how generational trauma has shaped their work. Indeed, many funders are asking similar questions about their relationship to the resources they manage and distribute. Funders are assessing their relationship to power, looking at what they are asking of grantee partners and why they are making the requests they make, and talking more directly about the histories that have determined who has access to resources and who does not. Different types of funders have different types of access and constraints. Public foundations, especially those that are community-led, are more likely to experience some of the same stresses that movement organizations experience. Private funders often have greater ability to make time for rest and integration. But in general, funders have more space to try new things and fail. Funders can set the pace, determining grant schedules and influencing grantee partner activities.

It also is important that funders are in practice. None of us escape trauma and violence. We are all impacted by violence and systems of domination and oppression. We are what we practice and so when we stop the natural process of healing from what is happening or we disengage or actively choose not to ground ourselves inside of healing practices that help us move towards embodiment, we end up replicating systems of domination that cause harm. Part of how funders get to understand healing justice is by being inside of a community of practice and accountability. This makes it even more real and makes it more than this thing that we are excited about in this hot moment. This work is about our lives. This is about the restoration of our lives.

Adaku Utah, Harriet’s Apothecary
What do we need to bring about safety and our people? How do we sustain and nourish a community? We asked ourselves, and we asked ourselves as political liberation. We listened to organizers at the Audre Lorde Project, El/La Para Translatinas Ground, Communities United Against Violence, and Grantmakers for Southern Security. We learned from the visionary work of grantee partners like Southerners on New Ground, Communities United Against Violence, the Audre Lorde Project, El/La Para Translatinas, and Buried Seedz of Resistance, among others, who all lifted up healing as integral to their political liberation. We listened to organizers ask themselves, and we asked ourselves as a community funder: How do we take care of our people? How do we sustain and nourish organizers and movements for the long haul? What do we need to bring about safety and wellbeing as part of our liberation?

Astraea Foundation

Recognizing the power of healing, community, culture and joy, one of our first grants four decades ago was to a lesbian choir. More broadly, we have always supported queer, trans and gender nonconforming people of color and migrant-led organizations, rooted in communities that face institutional, state and interpersonal violence and experience present-day and generational trauma. Over the last decade, we have seen organizers in the U.S. increasingly working to revive and practice ancestral traditions and to build new organizing models that center safety and wellbeing—models that are community-led and self-determined, outside of state control and intervening in trauma from multiple forms of violence. We learned from the visionary work of grantee partners like Southerners on New Ground, Communities United Against Violence, Audre Lorde Project, El/La Para Translatinas and Buried Seedz of Resistance, among others, who all lifted up healing as integral to their political liberation. We listened to organizers ask themselves, and we asked ourselves as a community funder: How do we take care of our people? How do we sustain and nourish organizers and movements for the long haul? What do we need to bring about safety and wellbeing as part of our liberation?

During such critical moments as the rise of police brutality, the 2016 election and the rampant increase of transphobic, anti-Black and anti-immigrant violence, we reached out to our U.S. grantee partners and asked them what their most urgent needs were and how we could support their sustainability. The top two needs were mental health/wellness support for organizational leaders and community members, and holistic security support to keep members and organizations safe. We responded by securing resources from a long-term funder of ours to create intentional spaces of learning, practice and support for healing justice. We started by organizing a strategy meeting in 2017 with 12 movement leaders steeped in the use of healing justice practice as part of organizing work. Everyone shared how needed and timely it was for them to connect and build with each other, to not feel in isolation during such a volatile time and to amplify the impact of their healing work. These discussions led to small grants, $3,000–$5,000, that supported a range of projects: training and organizing they are doing, participants also raised the need to politicize the role of healthcare providers and healing practitioners, both to reduce their complicity and to increase the support available for folks in detention and incarceration.

After the convenings, we invited grantee partners to apply for dedicated support for healing justice work. These grants, small grants, $3,000–$5,000, that supported a range of projects: training and organizing they are doing, participants also raised the need to politicize the role of healthcare providers and healing practitioners, both to reduce their complicity and to increase the support available for folks in detention and incarceration.

Out of that meeting, we developed plans for a larger skills-building convening as well as a small healing justice grants program. The second convening brought together 30 organizers from across the country, including folks with years of experience in healing justice work and those just coming into it. A strong learning was how place-based this work is and needs to be, despite the reality that everyone is grappling with the same national forces and trends. Participants raised pressing issues such as how to hold immense loss and grief, how to embed and resource the labor of healing in our organizations and movements and how to better support community-rooted practitioners. Underscoring how intertwined healing justice is with the political organizing they are doing, participants also raised the need to politicize the role of healthcare providers and healing practitioners, both to reduce their complicity and to increase the support available for folks in detention and incarceration.

After the convening, we invited grantee partners to apply for dedicated support for healing justice work. These grants, small grants, $3,000–$5,000, that supported a range of projects: training and organizing they are doing, participants also raised the need to politicize the role of healthcare providers and healing practitioners, both to reduce their complicity and to increase the support available for folks in detention and incarceration.

 Organizations and organizers newer to this work need time to dive into healing justice language, theory of change and practice in order to more deeply consider how to integrate healing justice into their work. We need to find ways to support folks in these very different places. We also noted interests that a critical mass of grantee partners wanted to further explore. For example, many folks were interested in developing a deeper understanding of the intersections of disability and environmental justice, which were core to healing justice thinking at its origins but have since fallen out of the conversation. Grantee partners also expressed interest in learning about holistic security and indigenous healing practices that organizers are using in diverse geographies around the world.

Beyond this initiative, we work to integrate a wellness and healing framework into all of the convenings that Astraea organizes, centering the needs of our grantee partners. This started with our U.S. Movement-Building Initiative in the 2000s in partnership with the Disability Justice Collective, and now is a central part of our global CommsLabs program, which is a movement-building initiative that interconnects holistic security, technology, media, communications, grassroots innovation, healing and resilience. We’ve partnered with Harriet’s Apothecary and other indigenous healers to organize healing tracks at CommsLabs convenings. The healing tracks integrate practice and strategy, lifting up healing as an ancestral technology that is core to movement-building. Grantee partners consistently tell us that the centering of healing in these convenings has been one of the most meaningful experiences for them. Through CommsLabs, we also support grantee partners to advance projects that interweave healing with...
Groundswell Fund

**Naa Hammond, Program Officer & Alexandra Delvalle, Director of Programs**

“Groundswell has a long history of supporting healing justice work. We continue to learn what our support for this work can look like.”

“We first began by seeing Reproductive Justice grantee integrating mind-body practices, such as Forward Stance (a technology developed by Norma Wong that is a mind-body approach to movement building). Healing work has also shown up in our Birth Justice Fund, which is a bit different from our other funds that focus on community organizing in that it has a dedicated portfolio supporting the field of birth workers of color. The Birth Justice Fund was cofounded by practicing midwives, so how we think of that work has a lot more space for supporting a holistic care model. One of the projects this Fund supports is a group of women of color birth workers in the Bay Area who have built a sweat lodge in the back of one of their homes to care for themselves and deal with their secondary trauma as practitioners. This isn’t always named as healing justice work but it’s such an integrated part of the care, recognizing how birth workers of color are focused on legacies of trauma in our communities.

“Our Wellness Fund is another initiative that supports healing justice. Right after the 2016 election, we made a decision to set aside a pot of money to provide resources to frontline organizers and our long-term grantees at this very critical moment. We were witnessing a number of our grantees experience burnout and an increase in health challenges. We really wanted to support leaders in this moment, leaders who we depend on and who were not doing well. We were overwhelmed by the volume of requests that came back; we received three times the amount of requests that we had money to give. In the end, we were able to support 17 organizations with grants. Groups could self-determine what the money would be used for, including organization-wide wellness activities such as working on human resources policies that better integrate social justice values or supporting leadership coaching for staff of color. We were often pressed to serve as first responders in moments of crises. Such safety and security work be undocumented or at an increased risk of police violence. Such safety and security work fits within the larger conversation about healing justice.

“We continue to ask, how do we support a community’s ability to respond rapidly and safely? The midwives and doulas we support are often pressed to serve as first responders in moments of hurricanes, other natural disasters and in response to crisis events like the white supremacist march in Charlottesville, Virginia that traumatized Black communities. We are also thinking about how to integrate a climate justice lens into our funding as a part of our commitment to security.

“Critically, there is a need to respect the self-determination of grassroots leaders in how they define healing justice. Each person, organization and community gets to define what healing, wellness and sustainability looks like for them. It’s essential for groups to work with their own healers and to go at a pace that is appropriate to them. Funders can do a lot of damage by trying to force grantee partners to adopt methodologies in order to get funding, by creating forced relationships between consultants and grantees, but by encouraging groups to work with practitioners that are not indigenous to grantees’ communities and don’t understand their contexts. Self-determination and consent are central to healing justice; they need to be central to our funding.
our practices, about the way as funders we relate also risks that are internal, that have to do with risk comes from is deeply important. Risks come from this work when we talk about care or wellbeing, we are to be a willingness to question power. Because around and from a place of resistance, there has as an ethics of living and that in order to organize this wider network of caring. We talk about careMaking care a reality in one’s life happens within we have to always take care of the collective. our economic resources to take care of the one; we relational wellbeing. We say that we cannot use about practices of collective protection. This is “The concept of holistic security and safety and even healing justice is woven throughout our grantmaking. Our rapid response grants fund a range of approaches, from digital security training to supporting a woman who needs to evacuate from her community because she is being threatened or attacked.”

“Through this work, we’ve learned more together about practices of collective protection. This is why we don’t talk about self-care. We talk about relational wellbeing. We say that we cannot use our economic resources to take care of the one; we have to always take care of the collective. Making care a reality in one’s life happens within this wider network of caring. We talk about care as an ethics of living and that in order to organize around and from a place of resistance, there has to be a willingness to question power. Because when we talk about care or wellbeing, we are talking about risk. There are risks in this work and so broadening the understanding of where risk comes from is deeply important. Risks come from the outside, and yes there are threats and conditions outside of ourselves, but there are also risks that are internal, that have to do with our practices, about the way as funders we relate to activists, about the way we relate to each other. Continuing to deepen our understanding and experience of this has meant also revising our practices and power relationships through the fund.”

Tatiana Cordero, Urgent Action Fund - Latin America

“In mainstream protection and security funding, evacuations only cover the defenders, but we make sure that the defender and all of their immediate people are safe. This could include covering school fees for children, supporting any family that might be dependent on the caretaker and so on. Our work isn’t just about the safety of the human rights defender but about the safety of their whole family and immediate network. We believe that safety is not only physical; we also want to keep the defender safe emotionally and mentally. “The importance of healing justice and holistic security and collective integrated security is not only necessary for survival, but it’s also an important political framework where we root our movements. When the UAFs talk about care as being political, that isn’t just feel-good stuff. This is a thread that goes through all four of the UAF sister funds. Care is political and that is why we do our work in the way that we do. “Recently, we invited a series of collective integrated security pilot projects to help us understand what it would look like if we actually funded holistic security. We funded six pilots in six different countries. We wanted to know what it would look like if we supported organizations and movements to think about practices for safety, security and risk protection that moved away from an individual approach to a more collective approach. A key learning was that collective security is contextual. For example, a group in Turkey that works with trans sex workers chose to do a project using restorative justice practices with local law enforcement. This looked different from our partner in Pakistan doing work on cyber harassment with young feminist journalists and bloggers, focusing on how to stay safe. “We were asking similar questions with our rapid response grants. We provided a rapid response grant to ten Muslim women leaders in New York who were organizing after the current administration’s third executive order. They were exhausted and burnt out—all while continuing to face incredible amounts of trauma. We funded four of them to go on a retreat and learn together about practices of care, stress, anxiety and trauma and then come back and teach these practices to the women they work with in Queens. We asked those who received the support, ‘Has your security situation changed since you received resources to do this kind of work and focus on these practices? ‘What we heard from everyone was that no, it hadn’t. If anything, the situation had gotten worse. What had shifted, they told us, is that they had knowledge now. They shared that they had the time and space and resources to talk and think about how they might react to the trauma they faced. They had the time to reflect and strengthen their analysis of what was taking place. This surprised us. We hadn’t fully recognized that knowledge is critical. Sometimes the impact of resources isn’t about changing the environment because we can’t actually do that, but there is value in knowing what to do, in knowing how to engage with your trauma and to be able to name the entity you are fighting or the context of the environment. Taking the space to reflect and know, to remember, is an important part of this work which often goes unvalued and yet, as our partners showed us, it is very important. It’s a part of care work.”

Shalini Eddens, Urgent Action Fund
Over the past several years, we have seen more and more funders beginning to support healing justice work. Foundation staff are responding to the needs of communities on the ground, as well as their own experiences, asking how philanthropy can best support the long-term care and sustainability of movements and the organizers who work within them. Feminist funds like the Astraea Foundation, Groundswell Fund, Third Wave Fund and the Urgent Action Funds have long been on the vanguard of this work. More recently, private foundations are centering healing justice in accompaniment programs like the NoVo Foundation’s Move to End Violence, operating targeted grantmaking and learning initiatives like the Ford Foundation’s Next Generation Fund, integrating healing into transformative justice and other related portfolios like at the Open Society Foundations, making timely grants after the 2016 election like an anonymous donor and creating stand-alone portfolios like at the General Service Foundation. We welcome these initiatives that seek to align philanthropic resources with this pressing movement agenda.

The recommendations that follow emerged from the conversations that we had in creating this report and in other spaces with grantees and funding partners. In particular, they come from listening to the wisdom of organizers on the ground. We recognize that supporting healing justice asks us to deeply interrogate our assumptions about what this work looks like. We heard too many grantee partners refer to the caution they feel about being fully transparent with their funders about needing resources for healing and especially for conflict transformation. How, as funders, can we hold this better?

What everyone agreed upon is this: funding this work is not just about doing the right thing or supporting grantee partners to feel better in the face of overwhelm and trauma. It is actually a strategic engagement. Healing justice is an effective way to sustain movements when the onslaught is intense and ongoing. We cannot pay attention to movement-building without paying attention to the impact of this work on organizers. Healing is a technology and a tool that supports our movements to succeed and to sustain themselves on their own terms.

So, what can funders do?
Recommendations

1. Be clear in the framing of your work to applicants and grantee partners that you are aware of the impacts of trauma on the communities you support and on their movements for social justice. In order to do this, do your own work. Seek to understand how both historical and present-time trauma impact the communities you fund.

2. Ask your grantee partners questions and listen openly, with awareness that conversations about healing and trauma must be held gently and respectfully. Without asking grantees to explain their trauma to you, create space for dialogue. Ask questions like: What strategies are you already using to support your safety and wellbeing? What is the best role we can play to bolster your efforts?

3. Many different things fit within the framework of healing justice. Respect indigenous practices and organizational autonomy and remember that there is no one-size-fits-all model to healing. Ask grantee partners how they sustain themselves rather than providing a list of practices you support. Don’t impose healing justice on grantee partners as “the new thing,” but create space and opportunities for grantees to access resources if they wish.

4. Set aside intentional, additional resources to support healing justice practices and communicate with your grantee partners that this funding exists. Assume it is needed. Make it accessible and with limited reporting. Encourage your grantees to use it.

5. Be aware that healing does not have a goal or an endpoint. Work to move away from ableist notions that only see one type of body as healthy. Healing justice is meant to be expansive and self-determined by our communities, not defined by a medicalized or socialized idea of wellness.

6. Stretch on how you measure impact. Healing and change work is ongoing. What are meaningful indicators of success? Invite narrative or other creative forms of reflection from your grantee partners. Ask them if and how they notice differences as a result of this support.

7. Rather than defining capacity building practices for grantee partners, ask them what would most support their work. What would help them to build their own capacity or to feel that they have the energy needed to do their work? Capacity building is not always about doing more; within the context of healing justice and holistic security, it’s about finding ways to do work without being harmed by it. It’s being able to rest and remember ourselves, and remember why we are here doing what we are doing.

8. Consider how your funding practices may be contributing to the stress and urgency that movements are experiencing. Are there ways in which you can move more slowly and deliberately? As funders, we need to practice this work ourselves. Healing justice calls on us to do our work to understand what feels urgent and why, and to be more mindful of how our sense of urgency impacts grantee partners. It is important that we are able to assess and shift our sense of urgency at every level of grantmaking, including grants management and operations as well as programs.
Many of the people interviewed for this report have written materials about their work. The resources below are not an exhaustive list but are provided to support the beginning of deeper learning. Please look to them as you continue to learn more about concrete examples of this framework.

**Healing Justice Resources**

- People’s Movement Center. “Resources.” www.peoplesmovementcenter.com/resources.html

**Holistic Security Resources**

- Urgent Action Fund. *What’s the Point of Revolution if We Can’t Dance?*. 2007. urgentactionfund.org/resources/publications/

**Philanthropy Resources**


**Other Related Resources**

- Transform Harm. 2018. www.transformharm.org
Sadly, too many of us have had our stories taken and used for someone else’s gain without our consent. This has been true in philanthropy as well as in other fields. In order to center and respect the voices of those doing work on the ground, especially grantee partners, Astraea used a consent practice for this report. It looked like this:

- The person being interviewed consents to the interview.
- After being interviewed, they receive a copy of their mostly unedited narrative. The person being interviewed can edit, delete, add, change or shift anything they want. They send this piece back and the writer builds the report from this changed interview.
- Once the draft report is complete, a copy is sent to each interviewee with their quotes or reflections highlighted so they can see how their story fits within the context of the report. This is another opportunity for them to make changes.
- Once each person interviewed has approved their story within the body of the report, the report’s content is complete. There is always the chance that minor edits will be made for design or clarity, but any major edit or change has to go back for approval.

We know that as funders there is always a complex power relationship between ourselves and our grantee partners. Our hope is that with a transparent consent process, we can be in right relationship with our grantee partners and others whom we interview.
The Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice is the only philanthropic organization working exclusively to advance LGBTQI human rights around the globe. We support brilliant and brave grantee partners in the U.S. and internationally who challenge oppression and seed change. We work for racial, economic, social, and gender justice, because we all deserve to live our lives freely, without fear, and with dignity.

116 East 16th Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10003
P: 1.212.529.8021
F: 1.212.982.3321
info@astraeafoundation.org
www.astraeafoundation.org