In honor of LGBTQ History Month, this zine spotlights some of Astraea’s organizational milestones in the 90’s, a time where women-led fundraising was generally on the rise. The 90’s were a pivotal decade for Astraea—the organization came out as a lesbian foundation in 1990, adopting the name Astraea National Lesbian Action Foundation. Also in the 90’s, Astraea founded its International Fund for Sexual Minorities, shifting its strategy to include grants dockets both in the U.S. and globally.

Today, Astraea continues to call itself a lesbian foundation, grounding its values in the lesbian feminist ethos of its founders, despite funding activists across the LGBTQI acronym. Astraea also continues to fund globally, with approximately half of its grants each year going to organizations based outside the U.S. It’s no wonder that this period is also when Astraea’s archives began to accumulate!

The name Astraea (“Starry One”) was the Roman title of the Goddess of Holy Law or Libra, who was also known as the Goddess of Justice. In most ancient writings, Astraea is associated with truth, natural law and matriarchal justice.
Before the 90's

Founding Mothers

Astraea’s founding mothers were a group of cross-class, multi-racial lesbian activists. It all began at Nancy Dean and Beva Eastman’s kitchen table, where a group of radical women made a political choice to start a women’s fundraising group.

Their names were Stella Alvo, Audrey Barnes, Nancy Dean, Barabara Grant, Joyce Hunter, Roberta Kosse, Cynthia Long, Achebe Powell, Joan Watts and Leslie Kanes Weisman.

In 1990, Astraea came out as a lesbian organization and changed its name to Astraea: The National Lesbian Action Foundation. It was the first and only national funding organization run by and for lesbians.

The decision to come out was not a strategy for narrowing its grantmaking, but a political act to recognize the often invisible multi-racial lesbian feminist labor and leadership in all kinds of movements.

Quote from “Queer as a $3 Bill” article, 1990

“Lesbians have been politically active in every movement,” says Acey, who has a seven-year association with Astraea as a board member and has served as executive director for the past three years. “It’s time to put ourselves first as lesbians and women.”

Headline from article covering Astraea’s “coming out”, 1990

Queer as a $3 Bill
National Funding Group Is out of the Closet and in the Money
1996: Moving Forward
International Grantmaking

Astraea’s International Fund for Sexual Minorities was founded in 1996, thanks to a gift from Astraea donor Ise Bosch. The Fund’s first grant cycle awarded a total of $59,000 to 17 groups from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Central and South America. This was a crucial moment in Astraea’s history. Since the Fund’s founding, Astraea has made grants to over 500 groups globally and continues to fund internationally today.
Astraea Extravaganzas
Fundraising and Celebration

At Astraea, we center joy in our activism. Presented here are old gathering invitations and photos of Astraea members enjoying themselves at “Astraea Extravaganzas”, gatherings and parties. Here’s a look back at Astraea’s previous celebrations to remember its community and impact during this decade.
90’s Bulletins and Event Materials

From Beijing to Washington: 
LESBIAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Lesbians marching for Human Rights in Beijing.

"Lesbian Rights and Human Rights" from Winter 1995 bulletin

Astraea National Lesbian Action Foundation introduction from bulletin in the 90’s

"Lesbianism is based in a belief that between women, power is shared, which makes it a radical act"

Chryssos
"The Night Gown"
In Her I Am

Cover of Lesbian Writers Fund Gala, 1995.

Graphic from an old news bulletin in the 90’s
Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice is the only philanthropic organization working exclusively to advance LGBTQI rights around the globe. We support hundreds of brilliant and brave grantee partners in the U.S. and internationally who challenge oppression and seed social change. We work for racial, economic, social, and gender justice, because we all deserve to live our lives freely, without fear, and with profound dignity.

www.astraeafoundation.org

Astraea Updates  astraeafndtn  AstraeaLFJ

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