

NEW MODELS OF JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY: The St. Louis Regional Racial Healing + Justice Fund©

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POLICY BRIEF

About Forward Through Ferguson

Forward Through Ferguson (FTF) is an anti-racist, systems change organization that stems from the Ferguson Commission's sunset in 2015. FTF is serving the greater St. Louis region through policy and systems change advocacy, building racial equity capacity, and supporting and strengthening community ownership of solutions to advance Racial Equity. Forward Through Ferguson has a regional focus identified as St. Louis City, St. Louis County, and surrounding counties in Missouri and Illinois. FTF identifies as an intermediary organization— an entity that facilitates access, communication, agreement, and understanding between individuals and groups within the St. Louis region and beyond. FTF acts as an intermediary between people most impacted by racism, grassroots organizers, foundations, elected and appointed leaders, and governmental bodies. FTF's work is intended to focus on impacting the St. Louis region, and through meaningful change in St. Louis, innovating replicable models and frameworks that can inspire the nation.¹

Forward Through Ferguson, in partnership with the Saint Louis region and allies all over the nation, is working to *heal the core* of systemic inequities through capacity building and healing justice, and to *change the conditions* of the region by leveraging systems change solutions with a Racial² Equity lens,³ addressing the root cause factors that lead to inequitable outcomes over generations. FTF's data & research initiatives and policy recommendations take a deep dive into the impacts of residential and institutional segregation, and the cultural impacts that antiblack racism has had on the formation of and investments in St Louis' anchoring institutions, particularly those of Education, Philanthropy, Public Health, Public Safety/policing and Criminal/legal systems.

Poor health outcomes, high crime rates, and the subsequent negative reputation of St. Louis are *symptoms* that reflect decades of intentional disinvestment in and disenfranchisement of Black St. Louisans. The root causes of these symptoms and the priorities of influential power holders who maintain power through compliance with oppressive structures, should be addressed at the systemic level within every institution. St. Louis cannot simply reduce its determinants of public health and safety down to issues of crime and class, and also should not continue to turn to oversimplified and inadequate solutions such as recruiting more police officers or building more healthcare centers that are underfunded, understaffed, and lack a critical mass of antiracist healthcare professionals. The public health and safety systems, as well as the philanthropic landscape, must courageously examine themselves and recalibrate to address the underlying structures within their sphere of influence. Together, we are able to resource and empower impacted communities to be leaderful co-owners of meaning change and shared success. FTF's Justice Philanthropy Initiative, including the pilot of the Racial Healing + Justice Fund is a testament to what is possible.

Mission, Vision & Brief Overview of RH+JF

The Racial Healing + Justice Fund (RH+JF) was established by Forward Through Ferguson, Deaconess Foundation, and the Missouri Foundation for Health to invest in racial healing as a core component of achieving Racial Equity and to make space for affected residents, Black and Brown St. Louisans (defined regionally), to have direct power over the distribution of resources for healing, justice, and transformation. Through these investments, the Racial Healing + Justice Fund aligns local and national philanthropy, community-set priorities, and community-led grantmaking that puts racial equity, healing and justice at the center, creating a future St. Louis where all residents have the opportunity to thrive. During the 2020-23 pilot of the fund, \$1.6 million was committed over a three year period by approximately 20 philanthropic partners, with the largest investment from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Although the Racial Healing + Justice Fund was founded in 2020, its origins can be placed with the 189 calls to action from the [Ferguson Commission report](#) following the death of Mike Brown, Jr. As such, it is important to consider the conditions of the St. Louis region that led to his killing, and those that persist nearly a decade that has followed. Included as a key call to action from the Commission Report, significant energy and effort championed by FTF and others has been invested in the creation of a “generational” managed or endowed fund that intentionally supports Black and Brown changemakers in the St. Louis region.

Granting Philosophy

The Racial Healing + Justice Fund leverages a holistically healthy, racially equitable, and justice-based grant-making approach that distributes charitable funding across the St. Louis region in support of Black, Indigenous and people of color-led (BIPOC) community members, organizations and project ideas. The fund uses a participatory grantmaking approach to scale and sustain Racial Equity work through trust-based philanthropy, community-centric fundraising and capacity building. Under this model, the founding organizations and contributing foundations do not have decision-making power over the allocation of funds—these decisions are made by the Community Governance Body made up of Black and Brown residents that were chosen by the St. Louis region via a community participatory process. The fund seeks to foster regenerative and authentic partnership between philanthropy and community that explicitly dismantles the traditional power dynamics between the grantmakers and grantees.

Why Healing + Justice?

The *Healing* focus of the Fund invests in:

- Creating space to share truth narratives, communal grieving, and communal connection on race and systemic racism;
- Enabling restoration, reverence, respect, and trust, at all levels of a community;
- Building and exercising individual power and resilience;
- Providing support for the spiritual and emotional health of community organizers and advocates.

The *Justice* focus of the Fund invests in:

- Changing the conditions of racial inequities by continuously supporting current and future leaders of color;
- Centering, growing, and activating grassroots knowledge;
- Broadening resident engagement to operationalize policy maker accountability structures and practices;
- Uplifting communal mobilization for systems change.

Who leads RH + JF?

The Community Governance Board (CGB) is a voting body of nine to fifteen BIPOC community members from St. Louis City, St. Louis County, and St. Clair County who are directly impacted by structural racism at the intersections of their assigned identities. The CGB guides the granting and community engagement processes, reviews applications, and has full decision-making power over how funding will be distributed to St. Louis Black and Brown communities' healing efforts, programs, and initiatives. Deaconess Foundation and the Missouri Foundation for Health have served as the core funder partners of the pilot of this fund. Deaconess Foundation is the pooled fund fiscal host, and FTF is the project manager and lead facilitator of the community engagements related to the fund.

Institutional Mandate

The Racial Healing + Justice Fund seeks to:

- Uplift reciprocal accountability within philanthropy to achieve racial equity, healing, and justice.
- Demonstrate the power of healthy, transformative collaboration between community members impacted by racial oppression and organizations that hold financial power and resources.
- Build and strengthen philanthropy by embracing a community-centric model vs traditional white-dominant philanthropic practices.
- Foster a culture that empowers the spirit of exploration and questions traditional philanthropic practices and frameworks.
- Embracing mistakes by learning and growing from them and accepting multiple forms of success that may not be traditionally identified or uplifted.
- Learning and growth to improve the positive impact on Black and Brown community;

Outcomes of RH + JF to date:

- FTF led a community participatory process to set funding priorities and structures of the fund, and in 2020 welcomed the first **Community Governance Board of 9 members**;

- By 2022 the group has brought in new members and expanded to a **Board of 14 members**;
- **Over \$1.35M** of the Fund's \$1.69 million has been granted to Black and People of Color-led initiatives that directly address community wellness, access to quality mental support capacity-building, public safety, social innovation and more
- **77 awards granted** to approximately 70 organizations and initiatives over three grant cycles;
- **Fiscal sponsor accessibility partnerships** secured for grantees without formal 501(c)3 nonprofit distinction. This enabled approximately 1/3 of grantees to receive funding that they would not have received without 501(c)3 status.

Next Practices in Local Philanthropy

The RH + JF set a precedent for a transformational collaboration between philanthropic leaders that, locally, was previously unheard of. The success of RH + JF enabled FTF to convene the Philanthropy cohort of the Racial Equity Roundtable, a peer-learning group of funders serving the St. Louis region who sought to better understand, coordinate and align their funding requests and local giving in order to achieve momentum around racial equity and address health and wealth disparities. This group of philanthropy sector leaders convened over a span of nine months from 2022-2023 to: (1) assess the capacity, conditions and arenas for public policy change; (2) analyze current philanthropic investments in systemic change initiatives; (3) identify gaps and overlaps in funding for system change components (e.g., organizing capacity); and (4) recommend strategic priorities to ensure base funding for long-term systemic change. The resulting mapping of resources and priorities revealed where funds and capacities can be strategically invested to ensure maximum impact, sustainability and continuity of support for St. Louis's Racial Equity efforts and Healing Justice movement.

Idealized Goal

Ultimately, the goal for the Racial Healing + Justice Fund is to heal the *core* of the community and change the *conditions* that reinforce systemic racial inequities and endanger lives in the St. Louis region. Specifically, the fund seeks investments that will *heal* individual and community trauma, *engage* a broader range of residents in systems change work, *prepare* leaders of color to organize and capacity-build for healing justice and *align* resources for long-term sustainability. As initially outlined in the Ferguson Commission report, it would be a 25-year managed fund or lifetime endowment.

Obstacles

- Philanthropy and foundation establishments that do not support equity, racial justice, or systems change: large amounts of money are filtered through philanthropic systems such as foundations, charities, parochial organizations and other structures that aren't readily available or accessible to BIPOC leaders and audiences due to practices of secrecy, complex application requirements, 501(c)3 status and other restrictive eligibility requirements, and a general culture of paternalistic practices that prevent BIPOC and BIPOC-serving

organizations from gaining resources.

- Traditional culture and habits of philanthropy creates a “slow to change” landscape.
- Reporting structures over-emphasizing programmatic results/impact over generational/longitudinal systems change strategies, data and research, professional development, and capacity-building.
- The philanthropy landscape’s unwillingness to provide general operating and capacity building funding on a multiyear or multi-cycle basis, which are necessary support measures for progress to occur and in a sustainable way.
- Gatekeeping, lack of transparency, and lack of reciprocal partnerships between philanthropy organizations and local nonprofits create accessibility issues, and difficult power dynamics to navigate. Black and people of color-led initiatives that have a systems change or racial justice focus bear the brunt of these dynamics, and do not receive as much attention nor funding as white-led counterparts.⁴
- The need to project manage a robust strategy to steward and sustain the future of the fund past the pilot phase is currently challenging because of the small staff teams and small operational budget dedicated to project management.

Conclusion

The disparate outcomes between residents of the St. Louis region, and the nationally-recognized prevailing narratives are direct consequences of decades of adamant refusal to invest in transformational measures of public health and safety. Black women and their unborn babies in Saint Louis experience death and disease at alarming rates,⁵ and their population-level risks for preterm birth and illness are exacerbated by racist practices of high-visibility policing and predatory revenue-gaining practices of fees and fines.⁶ Regional leaders have placed the majority of health and public safety resources into punitive structures (policing and jails), and treatment structures (expanding healthcare centers, managing sick populations), consequently reducing the systems of *Public Health and Safety* down to issues of lifestyle, crime, class, and poor choices or bad behaviors of individuals—making it permissible to condemn, chastise and neglect St. Louis’ Black, people of color, and low-income residents (see [figure](#) in appendix).

Local philanthropy is not equitably supporting BIPOC-led organizations to do systems change and data & research work to address structural racism in public health and safety. Longitudinal studies such as the [Equity Indicators](#), to track systemic progress on aforementioned issues have not been funded since 2018, therefore little accountability is foreseeable in the near future. Philanthropy as a sector has failed to identify and reconcile the structures and practices that prevent equitable grantmaking. The Saint Louis region is a microcosm of the systemic, structural, cultural, and political barriers to public health and safety in the United States, and continues to shape and inform the ways in which philanthropy prioritizes and responds to the need for investment in transformational changes to these systems.

To learn more about Forward Through Ferguson’s Data and Research initiatives, Capacity-Building Opportunities, or the Racial Healing + Justice Fund, reach out to faybra@forwardthroughferguson.org or rhjf@forwardthroughferguson.org to view the full version of this brief [click here](#).

Acknowledgements

Faybra Jabulani is Executive Director of Forward Through Ferguson (FTF) and a member of the Anti-Racism Consortium. Nichole Murphy is Director of Community Partnerships at FTF. Jian Lian Yang is Directory of Storytelling and Communications at FTF.



FTF believes one day St. Louis can be a region that achieves Racial Equity – a state in which life outcomes are no longer predictable by race. Embracing the Ferguson Commission’s mandate, we center impacted communities and mobilize accountable bodies to advance racially equitable systems and policies that ensure all people in the St. Louis region can thrive.

Learn more about FTF at forwardthroughferguson.org.

Follow FTF on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#) @stlchange.

Sign up for Forward Through Ferguson’s [monthly updates](#).

Explore transforming911.org to learn more about how the 911 system works in St. Louis, and to understand why we have to transform 911 to reimagine public safety. Explore stlequity.org to learn about the St. Louis Regional Equity Indicators Tool. Explore stillunequal.org to learn about the public education landscape and the state of school segregation in the St. Louis Region.

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Appendix

Data Visualization

In St. Louis and Other Similar Cities, Policing Tends to Get More Resources than Human Services

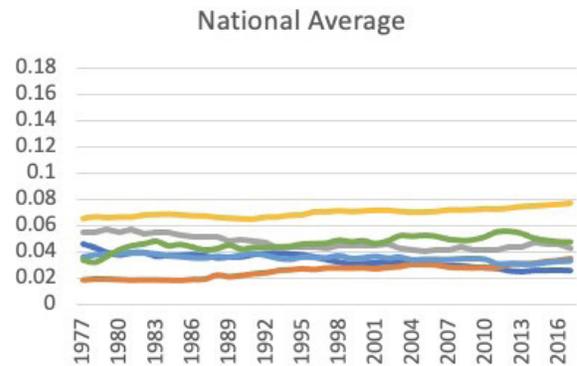
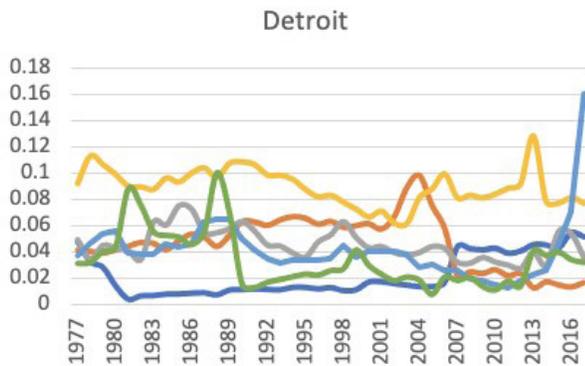
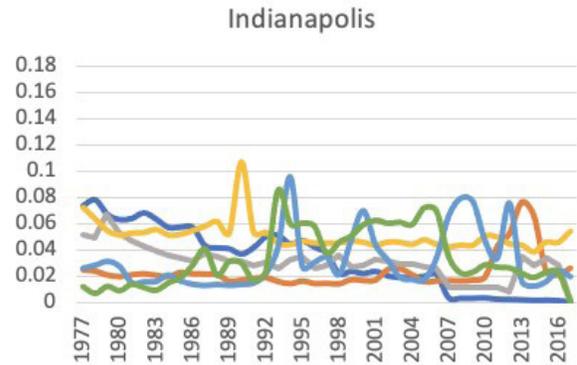
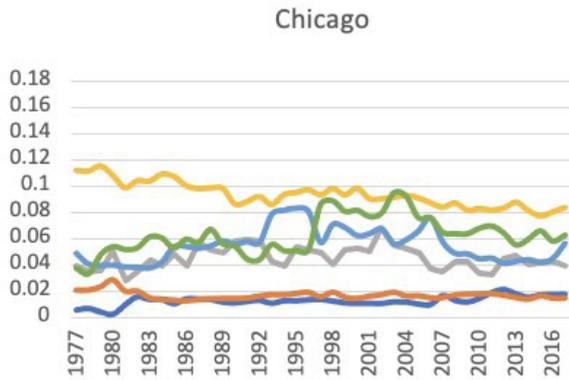
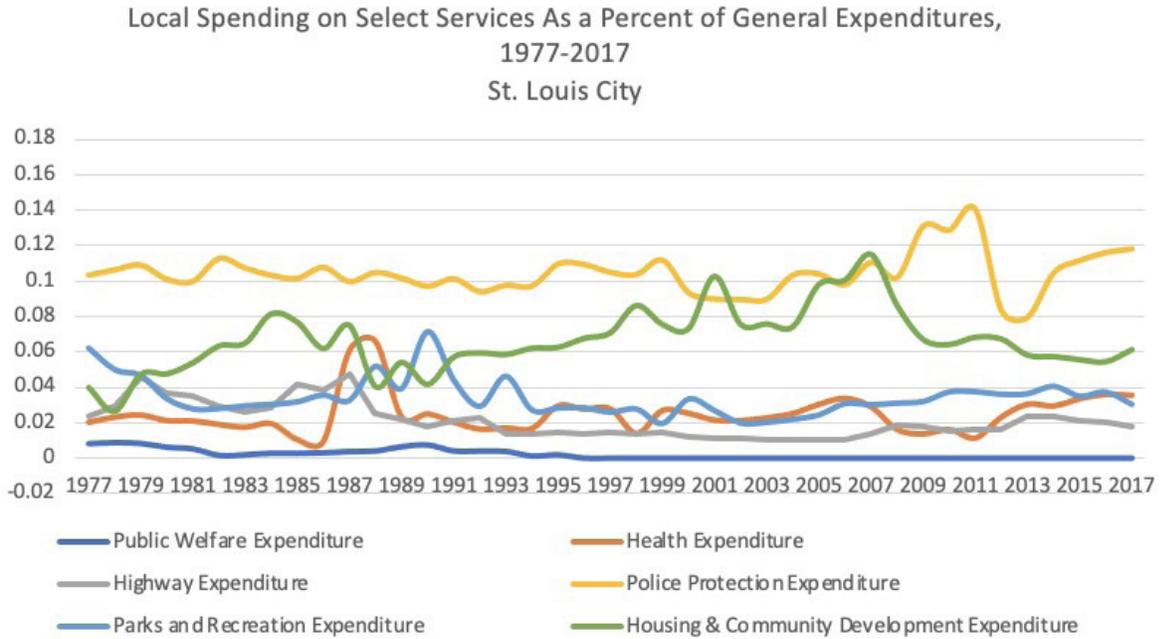


FIGURE I. Of the services shown here, policing tends to get the largest share of local dollars. That has been more-or-less true for four decades. In St. Louis, spending on human services (health, welfare, housing) receive a much smaller share of funds than policing. Public welfare, especially, has essentially flatlined in recent years.

Source: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. [Fiscally Standardized Cities database](#). Analysis and visualization completed by FTF.

FTF Tools and Frameworks

A significant part of FTF's work is to capture learnings and outcomes into tools for catalysts across the region and beyond, who seek to advance Racial Equity. Some of the Racial Equity tools we've produced include:

- [The Path to Racial Equity](#)
- [Advancing Positive Change Toolkit](#)
- [#STL2039 Action Plan](#)
- [State of the Report](#)
- [St. Louis City Equity Indicators Dashboard](#)
- [Regional Equity Indicators Dashboard](#)
- [State of St. Louis: State of Police Reform](#)

Initiatives & Advocacy Tools

- [The Racial Healing + Justice Fund](#) - A community led fund that promotes systems change, joy and wellness, and community healing and racial reconciliation in the St. Louis Region
- [Transforming 911](#) - An introduction to the intricacies of St. Louis' 911 system, and to understand why if we want to reimagine public safety, we need to transform 911
- [State of the Report](#) Series - Movement tracking report that uncover the St. Louis region's progress towards achieving the 189 Calls to Action
- [Still Separate Still Unequal](#) - A landscape study of the regional barriers to high quality, racially equitable k-12 education
- [Barriers & Blessings](#) - Examines the relationship between commercial property taxes and the Education system
- [Still Compromising](#) - Uncovers the early, racialized impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the St. Louis Region

References

1. Forward Through Ferguson Strategic Plan. Learning For Action. 2023
2. [Fostering Systems Change](#). S. Gopal & J. Kania. 2015
3. [Path to Racial Equity Worksheet](#). Forward Through Ferguson. 2017
4. <https://racialequity.org/mismatched/> -Mismatched: Philanthropy's Response to the Call for Racial Justice (Summary.) 2022

5. [Missouri Associated Pregnancy Mortality Review](#). 2018

6. [The impact of county-level fees & fines as exploitative revenue generation on US birth outcomes 2011-2015](#).

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