



NFG's 40 YEARS STRONG NATIONAL CONVENING SERIES

Get It Together: How the Amplify Fund Supports Black-led Power Building and Organizing

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>> **COURTNEY BANAYAD:** Hi, everyone. Welcome to “Get It Together: How the Amplify Fund Supports Black-led Power Building and Organizing.” This is the next session in NFG's 40 Years Strong virtual convening series. I'm Courtney Banayad, she/her pronouns, and Director of Communications. I'm going to hand it off to Amy Kenyon, but before I do, I want to let you know you can introduce yourself in the chat by adding your name, pronouns, and organization. You can turn your camera, but please keep your mic muted unless you're speaking. This will be recorded and you're able to rewatch it on NFG's website.

>> **AMY KENYON:** Good afternoon, my name is Amy Kenyon. I use she/her pronouns. I'm a proud NFG board member, a senior program officer at the Ford Foundation. And a member of the steering committee. It's a pleasure for me to introduce you to this session.

For 40 years NFG has been bringing together funders who believe in the power of people to transform communities. And since 2018, NFG has honed in on our core purpose of moving more money to grassroots organizations through our first pooled grant making fund. The Amplify fund which was born out of NFG's Democratizing

Development Program and is driven by a core belief of community power. Learning through action together. I know for myself and others, other colleagues, whether you work in a small foundation or a large institution, work in philanthropy can be isolating at times. It's through the work of NFG and the Amplify Fund that I find a political home and an opportunity to work together with leaders and colleagues who challenge and inspire me.

Today you will get to hear from some amazing women about Amplify about its support for Black-led power and organizing. I will hand it over to Rini Banerjee, my fellow steering member.

>> **RINI BANERJEE:** Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Rini Banerjee. Thank you, Amy. As she said, I'm Rini Banerjee. And as you know the title of today's session right now is "we'll all get it together." And learn from Amplify about Black-led power and organizing. This is Amplify's theory of change, which represents how Amplify works. It's a collaborative and learning community operating around the core belief that community power is a key driver of just and equitable development. While Amplify is a short-term fund, the work is designed for long-term impact. And I've seen the impact at play in many, many ways. From my perspective as a president at the Foundation, we learned a lot.

Noyes has historic funded in issues-specific areas. In 2016, we actually let go of those areas and thought about multi-issue power building work. We decided Amplify would be a great place for us to learn together with a whole group of colleagues and really understand place-based grant making. We learned quite a bit and changed the way we worked because of amplify. We grounded our work in place and now Noyes specifically funds in Mississippi and New York state.

And the other part of Amplify that is quite exciting and innovative is the way that they developed their grant-making strategy by following local expertise with participatory methods that Noyes has also adopted in our place-based work. In addition to direct grantmaking in eight place, Amplify engages local, regional funders to make sure it's funded in the long-term. It takes quite a bit of investment and really a change in philanthropic behavior at every scale to make sure long-term power building lasts. Next slide, please.

So, I get to really, I'm excited to be part of the panel and I'm the host because we have some incredible speakers. Over the next hour, we'll have the pleasure of hearing directly from Amplify team members, local strategies advisers, and partners about how Amplify is doing this work in South Carolina, one of the eight places. And how Amplify's presence has shifted philanthropic conversations around power building and Black-led organizing.

As there are beautiful head shots on the slide, as you can see, you'll also meet all of these brilliant women in action today. They're so intelligent, so strategic. It's an honor for us to hear from them and also to learn and gain from their perspective. But I'm going to quickly touch on, and their full bios are on the NFG's website at nfg.org.

But we have Tami Spann from the Hollingworth Funds, Chi-Ante Singletary, Edie Blakeslee, and then our very own Melody Baker, a senior program officer at the Amplify Fund. Next slide, please.

I want to give you a quick, quick sense of what to expect for the rest of the session, today's flow. For the next few minutes we'll share a short six-minute video montage that highlights a number of Amplify grantees and is narrated by NFG's own Melody Baker, and then Melody will be live in real time to give us a few additional points of context. And then we'll go into a dynamic panel who will talk all things South Carolina and then we'll have a dance and bio break and then leave 30 minutes for Q&A from the audience. That's our plan. We're excited for all of you to join us.

And now we're going to get ready. So, sit back, relax. You're very, very lucky to get the world premiere of this new video from Amplify Fund.

[VIDEO]

>> Who has the power? Who has the power? We have the power to make change today! [Music]

>> Amplify is a funder collaborative and a learning community born out of Neighborhood Funders Group's Democratizing Development Program. It's the first fund housed at NFG, and we believe those closest to the problem are really the best at creating solutions. At amplify, we recognize that white supremacy, racism, and power really have always fundamentally shaped the arc of development in communities and so we work with organizations that are really focused in their work on bringing critical perspectives around race, gender, and economic justice issues.

>> Living in the inner city my entire life, I realized the social ills I saw happening in my community were happening because people who were making the decisions did not necessarily reflect our community. So, we realized we needed to build power not just from a state or local or federal government level, but from the communities that were directly being impacted by some of those policies.

>> Build power with us. Building power with us is sharing your story. Start with

sharing your story. And we really need all of y'all to really get to this issue so we can fight to change these policies.

- >> Despite the history of segregation, sabotage, we're the heartbeat of Nevada's Black community.
- >> I know if I was a man I would have all the money that was needed when I put my vision down on a piece of paper and present it to people. And if I wasn't a Black woman, the level of disrespect I'm asked to tolerate would not happen.
- >> While there are themes that happen across our places like just recovery from climate disaster, like Black ownership, housing, displacement, and economic justice, economic development really looks different depending on where you are and which communities you're working with. As a senior program officer, I really spend a lot of time, you know, speaking with powerful leaders across the country who are working on issues related to development and building power in their communities. They're really truth tellers, they are working in their respective places to challenge harmful policies and politics and really, you know, fighting with their communities and their bases for just and equitable development.
- >> What we're trying to do is outline all of the rights that tenants have and add reinforcement mechanisms and add a new slate of rights.
- >> It's time to fight for our city. Closing the workhouse is the right thing and it's time to close it now.
- >> We really envision reality in which Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are the ones making decisions about places where they live. This reality includes investment in community infrastructure, specifically investment in Black people, Black futures, and Black communities.
- >> It's enough of us here to bring the spiritual energy, it's enough of us here to move mountains. [Music]

>> **MELODY BAKER:** Hi, everyone. It's so funny. I feel like I'm wearing the same outfit as in the video. But I love seeing all the grantee partners from around the country. It makes me nostalgic for when we could see everyone in person and connect with folks. My name is Melody Baker and I use she/her pronouns and I can't wait to hear from our panelists in just a few minutes, but I wanted to share before handing over the Zoom floor to them a couple of pieces about Amplify.

First I wanted to say and share a word about how Amplify selected the eight places that we work in. We fund in the places where we work because they are politically

alive and all of them are facing key development issues, a range of development issues, but are generally overlooked by national funders. Given this, we were also clear that a number of our places needed to be located in the South, including South Carolina. And so, that was one important piece for us.

Another piece you heard briefly in Rini a little bit earlier about how Amplify co-designs grantmaking strategies locally. In each of our places, we invited about 4-8 local leaders to participate in a roughly 5-6 month local strategy planning process. This was a mix of community leaders and local funders. And the process really involved kind of one-on-one meetings and group strategy sessions and ultimately co-writing a strategy document together, which really took me back to this group project college days. But that was a really sort of engaging process. And this really helped ensure that local grantmaking strategies were responsive to local contexts and grounded in Amplify's theory of change. And, you know, one of our core values is really being guided by local leadership and we wanted community control over the development kind of each one of our local grantmaking strategies.

In that process, we were sure to also make, you know, six-month grants for roughly \$25,000 to the community organizations that the local strategy advisers represented to compensate for their wisdom and time and labor and the strategy process. And Tami and Edie, who you'll hear from in a few, served as two of our seven local strategy advisers in South Carolina.

Finally, I'll add that Amplify has been able to engage with local and regional organizations and funders for kind of longer-term impact, not only by following local wisdom, which again is one of our core values, but also by building relationships through a team of place-based program consultants like Chi, who we'll hear from in a bit. She holds relationships with our partners in North Carolina and South Carolina. And helps Amplify kind of stay connected to the day-to-day in each place so we can be present and accessible locally and keep up to date on local context and capacity needs and generally be a resource for our grantees in each place and local funder partners. And I'll just say this has greatly expanded our team capacity so that we can be the kind of place-based funders that we want to be as a full-time staff of three. I'll hand it over to Chi to introduce herself and lead a conversation with Edie and Tami about what our work has been in South Carolina.

>> **CHI-ANTE SINGLETARY:** Hi, everyone. I'm a South Carolina native and someone who returned back home to do work in the Carolinas. I'm happy to be here to share about our beloved state of South Carolina and how we've been able to build a joyful and joy-centered community with each other as we've kind of gone through this process and other processes.

So, I would love to invite Edie and Tami to share a little bit more about themselves,

their institutions, and their regional focuses, and then how they kind of came to be a part of Amplify. And I'll toss to Edie first.

>> **EDIE BLAKESLEE:** Thank you, Chi and everybody on the phone. It's a pleasure to be with you today. Thank you for giving your time and being willing to listen to us. So, I'm Edie Blakeslee. I work with Coastal Community Foundation. We're headquartered in Charleston, but we have two offices. One is in the Myrtle Beach area, which is close to the North Carolina border, and one in Beaufort, which is close to the Georgia border. Our organization spans all of South Carolina. Our footprint has grown in my time. And the work that we do has grown over time. And our focus area, while we're a community foundation is very broad. We do have some strategic goals around access to economic opportunity, education, and affordability.

I'll stop there for a minute and then toss it over to Tami.

>> **TAMI SPANN:** Hi, Edie and Chi. Happy to be here with you. Thank you for your time. And I'm going to thank you in advance for your attention. So, if you decide to do something else, you should feel guilty. While you're watching. (Chuckling) My name is Tamera Spann or Tami Spann, and I'm the director of strategic initiatives for Hollingsworth Funds. We are a place-based funder in Greenville, South Carolina. We are located between Atlanta and Charlotte. If you're traveling from one to the other, you have to go to Greenville.

We're a type-one supporting org, which means we have named beneficiaries. 55% of what we give every year goes to a firm and university, a private university here in Greenville County, near and dear to our founder's heart, and also the YMCA, another organization that was pretty special to him. We wholly own a for-profit real estate development company and we also have a leasing arm, as well, of our business. So, our primary focus is on increasing economic mobility in our community for those in the lower quintiles and I will stop there and turn it back over to Chi.

>> **CHI-ANTE SINGLETARY:** Thanks so much. We are continually smiling because we love getting to talk together. As I reflect on this panel being called "Get It Together," it's something which makes we reflect on what our wins and successes look like in South Carolina. A lot of times people write us off as a very conservative state and a state where not much is going on, but don't really understand what it takes to build successful movements in a state like ours or how to recognize what a success looks like.

This past election we had almost 80% of the electorate turnout, which is in part because of organizing around groups, doing GOTV work for the first time. And that's a huge success for us because we're incredibly territorial. You'll almost never hear

someone in the Low Country talking to someone in the Upstate other than you're boogie. Or that you have the best food. Tami and Edie, I would love to know when you hear about what people should share about our state, what would you share?

>> **TAMI SPANN:** I'll take that one, Edie. You summed it up really well. South Carolina, we are fiercely loyal to South Carolina. We think there's no state better. But internally, we are very competitive with each other. The area where I live is the upstate. We're in, I'd call it like the valleys. We're like below the mountains. And traditionally people have always seen that part of the state as highly resourced and the politics played out that way. When the power is in the middle or the lower part of the state, Spartanburg and Greenville can be ignored. Because of the amount of perceived wealth is there, when actually the wealthiest part of the state is in the lower part of the state.

But yeah. The people here are really warm and caring, but, you know, we're not any different from any other part of the nation, you know, where people feel really loyal to the place where they live and really just kind of want the best for the communities that they live in. It's really, really a small state when you think about the sense of community. A lot of the people in the upstate know a lot of folks in the middle part of the state and the lower part of the state. They socialize with each other. But yeah. It's just an interesting, it's an interesting place to live. And because of that, because people are so much in community with each other, sometimes we get a lot of things done and other times we can't.

>> **EDIE BLAKESLEE:** I think that what I can add as a non-native. I'm originally from Buffalo, New York, and I am reminded all the time that I'm not really from South Carolina, even though I've been here for more than 20 years. For me, it is a very small state. It's a small community. It's a small town. But we also have a huge influx of Yankees and others, you know, moving to this part of the world. And there's definitely a tension and a push and pull between, you know, people who have been here and the people who are coming here.

And there's sometimes some divide between that., you know, especially in the areas that have a large influx of folks from Ohio or wherever else they come from in the country. That's number one. Number two, I will say that the philanthropic community generally does things very quietly for the most part. They don't like sharing and let people knowing their business sort of thing. It's interesting coming from a different place that, you know, philanthropy was much more celebrated and vocal and out front. But it is a very generous place, just not overtly so. It's almost like it's not in good taste to talk about it. Somebody will tell you, oh bless your heart, which is not a positive thing.

>> **TAMI SPANN:** (Chuckling).

>> **CHI-ANTE SINGLETARY:** Absolutely. I think that is what makes the Amplify strategy so special and unique for South Carolina. It is a strategy that focuses on having a robust, paid ecosystem of organizers, which is almost unheard of across our state where people are paid to do organizing work and can sustain themselves. It is a strategy that very clearly focuses on Black landownership and Gullah and Native landownership. How do we preserve that work.

Something that's clear on what a greater investment in communities of color could look like, or even starting to think about how can we increase the amount of capital that communities of color have, recognizing that South Carolina is the private lending capital of the U.S. if not the world. In that every other state around us has banned predatory lending, and we are the headquarters of predatory lending. Lots of people are traveling to our state because of this access to capital issue.

I would love to hear from the two of y'all how did it kind of feel for y'all to be engaged in the development of a public strategy that was as kind of hush hush and in your face as the one that we built together? And how did that kind of shape your engagement with Amplify?

>> **EDIE BLAKESLEE:** I'll jump in and I'll take this one. I loved it. It was refreshing in so many ways. It wasn't smarty pants philanthropy, which is what I call when a bunch of very smart people get in a room and decide how to do good things. It was just refreshing.

And I will say Chi, especially for you, you always asked who should I be talking to. Who else is there? Who is not here? Who do you know or who knows somebody else who knows somebody else? And it's very relational. I think you talked about that before. Way of doing the work, which is so important in such a small place as South Carolina. Because we only know who we know. I might have been able to tell you a few other people to talk to, but then Tami had more and everybody else had more. You were opening the circle rather than closing it and keeping it very tight was a breath of fresh air really.

>> **TAMI SPANN:** Yeah, I totally agree with that. You know, it was interesting. Because I live in and I work in a community that's so red, the idea of bringing this type of, of daylighting this type of work, I'll be honest with you, I wasn't hesitant, I was ready to dive into it, but I was very cautious in terms of thinking, okay, how do I, how do I relay this information back to my community? How do I take what I'm learning and how much does this broaden my thinking about how you get in community and in

conversation with folks who are actually doing the work, what does this look like when I'm having conversations with colleagues and stakeholders in my community? And what's the proper context in which to relay this concept so that it doesn't get shut down right away?

And Chi, you and Edie both know, South Carolina, when you guys watched us over the last month or so, and so you kind of get an idea of the challenges that we have. So, it's been, it has been a breath of fresh air. I have very much appreciated this idea and this concept of us building together. Edie and I are both members of the South Carolina Grantmakers Network. And we have had conversations at our meetings where there's been this kind of why can't we get national funders to come in and invest in our community?

And recently, one of the gentlemen who has since retired just said well, you know, we're tired of them coming in and telling us what to do. We don't like them coming in here and telling us what to do. They don't have any context for what's happening in our state. And they can be working in our community and no one has contacted us. And that's a real feeling and experience and this, I think this was a great way to approach, you know, how do you build community, how do you work in South Carolina, how do you find out where work is happening or where work needs to happen. So, I really appreciated this, the process that you used to kind of engage us. It's been really a rewarding experience.

>> **CHI-ANTE SINGLETARY:** It has been such a joy to be in community together. And as I think about get it together, I think we have gotten each other together. I can't tell you how many times I have randomly popped up at the Coastal Carolina office and sat down and said can I just work here for a couple of hours or have someone ask me a couple questions or work with Tami and think through a strategy or solution or provide some support to Ariel, and really being here to think through the strategies together and hold each other together.

A question I have for y'all is how have y'all felt supported through some of the more challenging work within y'all's foundations or even within the larger, more conservative philanthropic space in South Carolina?

>> **TAMI SPANN:** Yeah. I'll start there. My organization, I would say it's fairly new. We had our first hired philanthropic staff person full-time, he was hired in 2013. I came aboard in 2015 and we were a small staff of four people specifically dedicated to the philanthropic side. But our work was around economic mobility. We've always been focused on systems and realized we couldn't really make any real change funding program after program after program, but there needed to be some alignment and connection, and there needed to be the breakdown of some policies and practices

and changing, you know, resource flows and changing minds about how people think about things.

And when we started that work, it was lonely. There weren't a whole lot of funders that were talking that way in our community. And, you know, we worked really a lot with getting other folks involved in that conversation. But since doing this work with Amplify, it has amplified the conversations that we're having about, you know, we can't continue to look at the grass tops and expect the change we want to see.

We've got to start investing in the communities and the people who have been, you know, working very little to help build their capacity and build infrastructure so those communities can be a part of this discussion we're having about what does economic mobility look like in our community, who is being left out, how do you include them?

So, this, I would say that now I feel like I have, there were a lot of times when you and I spoke, Chi, and you probably don't even know it. You dropped a nugget about the importance of leaving the funder hat outside the door and really just allowing the person to lead the conversation and taking that information and contextualizing it and recognizing that just because they don't speak our language, and when I say our language, you guys know our community we've got jargons and acronyms and all that stuff. But by listening to them, helping to craft their argument, if you will, to others so that others feel like they have permission now or they feel more comfortable with actually talking to people who don't look like them.

So, I think that's where I'll leave it. I can go a whole lot more. But Edie, did you want to add anything?

>> **EDIE BLAKESLEE:** I think I agree totally. And I think the two points that I want to raise is one, I was constantly reminded that this is a practice. You know? And Chi's nuggets or whatever. But I would get impatient with something or I would see something yet again, but really this is a practice. And you keep on doing and doing and practicing and practicing and you get better each time. And it's really helped open up personally in this field, but then also to take that sort of mantra. Because we want change. We want to see something good come out. We want to engage community. We want to lift up community wisdom and honor it because there's so much there. But it's not a magic wand. At least I don't have it.

And then the second thing I wanted to say is that, you know, for every idea or something that I would run across, I'd be like, hey, what do you think of this idea? Or is this crazy? Or oh hey, would you serve on a grants committee for us? Or hey, we're thinking about doing this, but how can we really lean in? And all those oh, hey moments either texting or calling or whatever, have just been so incredibly important. It gives us, you know, a sounding board and, you know, y'all are really good about saying if something is really kind of not fully fleshed out in nice terms or if like there's

something really there. You've been really good about pushing and galvanizing and amplifying (Chuckling).

And I've just appreciated feeling like I'm part of a community, like I'm part of this isn't a hey, you've done something for a little while and see ya later. I feel like after Amplify, the sunset is still around. I'll be able to say hey, Melody, what do you think of ABC? I've really appreciated that in particular.

>> **CHI-ANTE SINGLETARY:** Tami, were you going to add something there?

>> **TAMI SPANN:** I'm looking forward to it. For the benefit of us and everybody else, our organization is going through an organizational refresh. Our board members hate the idea of strategic planning. And a lot of that is now we're in the strategy piece of it where what are we going to be doing? What's the work look like on the ground? And I'm looking forward to pinging you and Melody about, you know, when we talk about eliminating cultural barriers and building capacity, that's not something that we're experts in. We've not done that work.

Admittedly, we've been guilty of kind of the sitting in the white ivory tower in some instances. I'm just going to leave it there. But we recognize that that's not our expertise. That's not something we do very well. And so, you know, I've already kind of thrown your guy's name out there as our strategy team and how we implement that. And that is a benefit from this process that, you know, I'm walking away with. So, I really appreciate that.

>> **CHI-ANTE SINGLETARY:** It has been so much of a pleasure and a joy to sit in all of y'all's grantmaking committees or help push board members to be a little bit more liberal or to make statements about supporting the movement for Black lives or even thinking about what it looks like to fund folks who previously just don't have the right language, that just don't have the right words, that don't have the right things in order to be able to get grants.

And I think as my last question for us that I would love for y'all to reflect on is hey, where is the joy? Our work is so filled with joy. Our time together has more laughter and biscuits and jam and pictures of cats and dogs and of our children and of TikTok videos that we love than probably any other work that I've ever done, and then what advice would you give to other people doing donor organizing in a conservative state?

If I would give any advice, I would say take it slow. We have been building this relationship now for over a year together and we are now at a point where our donor organizing feels really natural and it feels like being in deeper community with each

other. And my joy is getting to spend more and more time with y'all, both in our work that directly impacts our communities, but also in just how I get to be a part of y'all's daily lives and get Christmas cards and birthday hellos and just little texts and e-mails of encouragement. I will pass it over. Where is the joy in your work? And what advice could you give someone else trying to do this work?

>> **EDIE BLAKESLEE:** So, the joy is that I have been able, this has been a space and an opportunity to share honestly without retribution or judgment. It has been such an uplifting, positive experience because everything we do isn't great and perfect. In fact, we make lots of mistakes and we stumble. So, the joy for me is I can authentically be who I am. I can bring something forward and y'all don't laugh at me.

Or go that Coastal Community Foundation is never going to make it. That's my joy. My advice is this is not a destination. Equity work and power building, you don't arrive. It doesn't matter where you are, like how liberal your foundation or how conservative or in between, there is always some step you can take, and you just keep on taking them. Kind of a spin on "go slow."

>> **TAMI SPANN:** Yeah, that's good, Edie. My joy is I feel like I'm not able to just show up, but lead more authentically within my organization. I struggled a little bit with trying to figure out how to balance that argument of supporting grassroots and being able to make that connection for my board members. And as a Black woman, you know, especially growing up in this area and some of the things that you do here. And the noise that we hear about, why is it Black Lives Matter, why isn't it blue? Well, this made me unapologetic, this experience about it.

Because, you know, what I got to be a witness to, especially with the work down in the Charleston area, it made me more conscious of the lack of it in the Upstate, and my role as an advocate, in the seat that I'm in to start lifting up. Let's not blame people for poverty. That's not the solution. Let's talk about these systems that have created this. And let's talk about communities where people have had some agency and they've made change and their communities look different.

Just showing up and looking at my work differently and knowing that I've got some folks that I can turn back. Edie and I will have different conversations now. We've always talked to each other when we see each other, but they're different conversations. Conversations about this work and the celebrations and also the failures and what we learned from those. That's what I would say the joy is for me. It's in feeling unapologetic now about giving voice to people who need it. About setting the stage for them and letting them take over the microphone.

And I'd say, you know, I don't know that I differ very much from the lesson or the

advice. I think the advice is to recognize that, you know, South Carolina is different. You know? We were the first state to secede from the nation. That's not an accident. And that attitude has not left us. We had the gentleman who is still in Congress, God help us, who said to President Barack Obama, "You lie." He's from South Carolina.

But on the other side of that, relationships matter. And when you get in relationship with people here, especially when you can find the things that you share in common, then there is progress that can be made. It may not, and to be patient with that progress and to recognize that what happens in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and North Carolina is not going to be the same as the progress that might be made as the progress in South Carolina, but there is progress to be made.

And I'd also say, you know, it's kind of funny when Melody said earlier in her comments about the states that they were working in. She said AND South Carolina. And I thought, "Yeah, AND South Carolina." Because I think we get ignored a lot. And because we've been ignored by the nation, you know, national funders, and the great work that's being done around us, we have a lot more building to do, a lot more capacity and building and infrastructure to build. Yeah, be patient, but be dedicated. Don't come in and think, gosh that just went through my mind, but because it did I'm going to share it with you. It's not a hit it and quit it state.

>> **CHI-ANTE SINGLETARY:** (Chuckling) I love that so much. We are not a hit it and quit it state. Before we kind of pass it over to some questions and answers, I just want to say thank y'all so much for listening to us about a state that we love so much.

And if you hear nothing else about our work, it is that we are committed to seeing our beloved home become a space that is comfortable for all of us to come home and we are not hit it and quit it kind of people. (Chuckling) We are here to stay and do this kind of organizing and I'm going to pass it over to Rini.

>> **RINI BANERJEE:** Well thank you, thank you so much Chi, Edie, and Tami for sharing your honesty, your joy, your stories, and helping us bring it all to life. I know in the Q&A you're going to bring in even more joy, more honesty, more depth of what is happening in South Carolina and really the durable relationships you've all created through sort of working with Amplify and how that's even going beyond that.

And I'll be moderating and working on the Q&A with you all, but before we dive into all of that, we want to let everyone have a little bit of a bio and dance break for one song, just three minutes. So everyone will be back in three minutes. And also during that time, please put in the chat any questions you have for our fantastic panelists. We'll also bring back Melody, so, Melody will be joining the conversation.

We'll take a three-minute dance break. But please be back and bring all your

questions for a really exciting 30-minute conversation with our panelists and we can even get into more deeper and juicier conversations.

[BREAK]

>> **MELODY BAKER:** Hey, everyone. Welcome back.

>> **RINI BANERJEE:** All right. Please, please drop questions in the chat. We're all checking it out and we have this fantastic panel with us. For the next 30 minutes, we're really going to dig into these questions and really bring to light the work that's happening in South Carolina in particular. I was going to actually ask, Melody, you had a great question. Did you want to start that off or kick that off. I have several questions on board after that.

>> **MELODY BAKER:** Sure, happy to. My question was really for y'all, Tami and Edie and Chi, as well. Would love your thoughts on what it would take to build an aligned kind of funder strategy in South Carolina to support more progressive organizing and Black-led work and how any additional ideas about how Amplify and/or NFG could be of support in that.

>> **TAMI SPANN:** There's a group of funders in our state who are thinking more about how to work together to build power in the state. And communities of color in underrepresented communities. I think the way to have that more aligned is, you know, as much as you might hear some funders complain about national funders coming in, there's still a certain luster, if you will, or a certain level of importance that comes when you have a national funder come into the state and say we want to invest in South Carolina and the intent is to build community with the funders and build in community.

That's kind of the best way to do it to find the multipliers within that community who if, you know, we know in the upstate in Greenville in particular, if Hollingsworth raises their hand to say we're going to do X, or we want to see what's going on, a lot of other funders will come aboard or we'll watch and wait to see what we tell them. It's the same with the Coastal Community Foundation, the same with Central Carolinas Foundation, with Joann in Columbia, and some others. In building community with whoever the multipliers are and helping and having a conversation about this is for you guys, this is what our work is, this is what we would like to do, talk to us a little bit about do you see a need for this in your state. Hopefully they would say yes. And how can we bring our resources, how can we combine our resources not just financial, but our intellectual capital, as well, along with our reputational capital, to bring, how can we bring us to bear on this issue. I think that's probably the best way to do it.

Because again, it's recognizing that there is some value to what exists, but it's leveraging what you, who are outside of the state, it's leveraging your resources, all of your philanthropic capital, if you will, along with ours in the state, to then create just exactly what Amplify did, create a strategy to then go out and execute. That's kind of my thinking about that.

>> **EDIE BLAKESLEE:** Yeah, I agree. I do think the other thing is about having an open invitation and a regular invitation. I can think back to South Carolina grantmakers, for example, that we've been talking about for years and years and years. Maybe we should fund stuff together. Maybe we should do something together. It took probably like 10 years. And we actually did collectively fund work around the census, which was, you know, I can't remember how many of the foundations, you know, community and private foundations came together and kicked into the kitty. And that was like monumental. You know, and I think we need to build on that. You know, having the funder community having opportunities.

I know we're not in person anymore, but even the convening we had in Charleston not too long ago, there were other funders who were invited who came but some of them who didn't come for whatever reason but were interested and curious. I think if we can continue to build on that and then we all talk more regularly, you know, it's not that we all have to say we're going to fund only this one thing together, but if we recognize the importance of this one thing and sort of what happens around it, that way we can still fund and plug in and come closer together. It's not necessarily agreement on one exact specific thing.

And I see movement. I mean, you know, even again for the grantmakers, I mean we had APFI come and do one of our sessions. Edward talked about all of the imperatives and what it looked like and it was really well attended. It wasn't one of those sessions where only the more progressive people showed up or only the program people. So, I think it's a continuation of sort of the things that the things, the seeds that have been planted and the continued invitation in this virtual world that we're in at the moment.

>> **RINI BANERJEE:** Great. I don't know, Chi, do you want to chime in on the question, Melody's question?

>> **CHI-ANTE SINGLETARY:** I think the only thing I would say is encouraging folks to have funder events in South Carolina. What would it look like for them to have events in South Carolina like in Columbia. It would encourage folks to come and engage who are curious to learn and it would show a willingness to be with us where we're at like in our state, in our communities and kind of hearing us out.

>> **EDIE BLAKESLEE:** That's a really great point. Especially since we do things at conferences, but to actually invite people home here and to learn and to grow, that's a totally different thing. That's a great idea.

>> **RINI BANERJEE:** Great. Thank you. We have a great question from Amy Kenyon, who just spoke earlier. She says as an Amplify funder, we're on our own journey of centering racial justice and Black leadership in our grantmaking and steering committee culture. She would love to hear more about both of your foundation's evolution around centering racial equity, and how the relationship with Amplify and NFG supports you in that. Who would like to take that? Edie or Tami?

>> **EDIE BLAKESLEE:** I'll jump in. So, our journey was really rooted in the massacre at Mother Emanuel. It was something that was indisputable. You couldn't ignore it. You couldn't not pay attention. Of course, we didn't know necessarily what to do or how to do it. And we, you know, we tried a whole bunch of things. One of my epic failures of all times in my career happened at that time. But there were also some really important things. So, it was a lot of small things.

We have a neighborhood funder funding program that does small funding to grassroots leaders and we were able to attract more money to do the leadership development piece of it. And that was like little bits of money, here and there. Not only how we do our grantmaking but how we do HR and how we do development, you know, who we hire, what our vendors are. And I'm glad to share it. We've been on the journey for a long time, building and building and building.

But your question about funding Black-led social change, essentially funding Black and Brown led organizations, we are just now coming around the bend on that. We did look at some of our data around who and what we funded. It was not a huge snapshot, but it was our competitive funded and it showed that we generally fund organizations led by white people versus others. We gave more restrictions for organizations that were Black and Brown led. We gave lesser amounts. I mean add on the rural aspect of it. And it didn't really tell a good story.

And so we made incremental progress. We borrowed an equity tool kit from the California Endowment and applied it on our competitive grantmaking. We started having different conversations even with our donor advisers who were open and willing around, you know, Tami mentioned the forms of philanthropic capital, the Smurf which opened up a whole different conversation.

And finally, and I will say participating with Amplify and doing this work and having all of y'all come to Charleston was a big a che moment. The Ford Foundation came? Holy cow. How to be bold and strategic and lead with our values. It looks different in our

footprint. You go to Myrtle Beach, it's much different than Charleston and much different than Jasper County. We've been able to build all of these runways and these onramps to different things that I'm really excited what's coming. I think we will set goals around what it looks like and what it should look like and how it should represent the communities that we serve. But it has been a six-year plus in the making.

But it goes back to my earlier point of it's not a destination. This can't be we're capitalizing on a moment. About this, it has to be part of the way you do your work and how you move and how you engage and who you listen to and who you talk to. There is a lot I could share, but persistence, tenacity, and celebrating the tiny, small wins is really important.

>> **RINI BANERJEE:** Thank you, thank you. That's poignant and honest. It does take time. You have to move along the journey. But that's helpful to hear. Tami, is there anything you want to add? Or Chi, to that?

>> **TAMI SPANN:** Yeah. Here is a contrast to the great work that Edie and the Coastal Community Foundation has been doing. We, in our region, the upstate, and I'll speak specifically to Greenville County. I'll speak specific to my organization. We just started really. As staff we've been having these conversations around racial equity and our data points, just lift it up.

When you look at who is not graduating from high school, who doesn't have post secondary attainment, who are not homeowners, you know, who the poverty level, children in poverty, it's all really Black people, people of color and Hispanics. So, we were having a difficult time as staff because we were talking and doing differently than what our web page said about our work. And because we shifted to really wanting to be more systems focused and less programmatic, we recognized that we had to bring our board along because we were getting frustrated.

We knew we wanted to be more explicit about our work so we could stop getting the calls from the vendors for dogs. They do great work, but that's not what we're trying to fund right now. We took an inventory of everything that has influenced our thinking over the last few years. Economic mobility in the United States. That's a foundational document for us. The Water of Systems Change by FSG. And then several of the organizations, billion dollar bets and the work around racial equity and equity in our work. We also engaged a woman of color to lead our organizational refresh work.

Because we recognized that our vision needed to be a little bit more explicit and our mission needed to be more explicit. And whenever we've done any type of work like that, it was always usually a white male or sometimes a white female. But we wanted

somebody who had a lens specifically around social justice and racial equity and worked from a foundation point of view. So, we found, someone I knew, and I bumped into her from the Grantmakers for Southern Progress Conference last year, I believe. Tracy has helped us to organize our work so we had an educational piece to every meeting we have and we organized it around systems change, around economic mobility, and more importantly, around equity, racial equity. And just started having these meaty conversations about each one of the readings that we had and how they connect to our community.

Why are we talking about racial equity? We've got some clear issues in our community, some underlying issues, not just as a nation, but as a community, we need to grapple with so we can help eliminate some of these barriers and create pathways for people to be successful. And so that's led us to, you know, the board embracing a different set of values where equity is clearly one of them. It's changed. We have a theory of change. We haven't released any of this. But we introduce them to a theory of change where we say systems change plus an equity lens plus our Smurf will lead to increased economic mobility.

And honestly, a lot of the thinking, because that came to me, I'm the one who introduced Tracy to the organization. And I was pushing that we had to have somebody with that lens to help us do that work. And it's interesting because I will say this. I became more conscious of that, need for that, through this work with Amplify. I don't know that I would have gotten here this quickly had I not been a part of this process. We got the gamut on our board. We've got some very conservative people on our board. And we've been able to have some meaningful conversations about the condition of our community. So, much so that there's been this knitting of dare I say the aisle, but opposite sides of this coin where people recognized that yeah, we've got some issues around racial equity, but the other folks say what is the economic argument for that. Right?

And so keeping us honest, not honest, but keeping us focused on you got to think about the context of the community that you're in and then take this information so that it speaks to, you know, this audience needs to hear this more, this audience needs to hear that more, but you can combine that so it's a comprehensive story around this work. So, you know, that's kind of the way we have started centering racial equity. I don't know that you, just because of where we are, you know, because one of our board members was like I don't know if we can say racial equity, but we can say equity. And if you say equity, when you get to equity, it's obviously going to be about race.

So, that's just our journey. That's been our journey. We have a long way to go. But our board, I've been there for five years now. And we started having this conversation at the beginning of the year. I see that as a big win for us to even get them to the point where we have a theory of change that actually says systems and equity. That's a big win for me. I celebrate that.

>> **RINI BANERJEE:** That's great. You have to celebrate the wins. I think Chi and all of you said that in the earlier panel. It's so important especially in this day and age. And as you said earlier, too, as you said about South Carolina and everyone is quite fiercely loyal and also a little territorial. It's about building those bridges. They're in so many multiple levels. From the ground and from even the philanthropic space, too. We have a whole bunch of questions coming up to you. And everything from, and I'm going to give you a couple.

So, one is this. Sima from House U.S. asked what are some of the issues in 2021, from your perspective, what are the issues for Black-led organizing, how do you go from issue-based work to multisectional power-building work? If anyone could tackle that? What are the 2021 issues, where do you see the multisectional work?

And I'll add a third question into that, which has already been asked, maybe you want to lift up a grantee. What are one of your grantee partners who excite you who are centering the work around Black-led organizing, and if you want to talk to us specifically about building power. If it's in a multi-issue or multisectional approach. I think it would be great to hear from the audience about what does power-building look like in South Carolina? Whether it's through issue specific or multi-issue intersectional approach, where do you see the kind of identifying factors, the durableness of organizing, how would you sort of, what excites you about some of the work that you're doing on the ground? And where do you see sort of the issues or the priorities in 2021? Who wants to take that?

That's a lot. But I wanted to throw that out. I think we have like 10 minutes left. I wanted to sort of get all those questions, and if you want to think about it a little bit, but what excites you, what kinds of issues, what's intersectional work look like, particularly Black-led organizing, what does that look like on the ground? Who wants to take that?

>> **EDIE BLAKESLEE:** Oh, gosh. I will try.

>> **RINI BANERJEE:** Go for it!

>> **EDIE BLAKESLEE:** I will say that our topical areas: Access, education, and affordability came from the community conversations we had a couple years ago. So, we interviewed a whole bunch of people, most of them didn't know who the heck we were, we were invited into communities, and they talked about a lot of things. But those were the three topical areas that were prioritized by our board. And those were all, I mean nothing is an easy, in a nice little box.

They're intersectional. And for us, there have been a couple strategies, but two I'll talk about is one is our impact investing fund which we launched last year and we're doing equity, loan, and loan guarantees for non-profits or for-profits. And it had to be around one of those topical areas. And it was a first time for us doing that, for us launching it. But it was really to try to support the community, non-profit or for-profit in a different way around social impact and how to measure it and what it looked like.

And I can talk about it a little bit more if anybody has questions about that afterwards. But that was a really important strategy for us to get at some of the issues in a meaty way and then also to attract coinvesting, whether that meant from grants or from other local angel investing in our area. So, that's one.

The second one is I'll lift up we work in a lot of areas, but one of the neighborhoods we work in is a neighborhood called Liberty Hill, which is in north Charleston. It's a partnership between us, Boeing, Reverend River's church, whose name escapes me at the moment. But also for parents who are unemployed and also about housing. It has a couple of different dimensions and trying to build capacity and support and come alongside a community and developing those plans and strategies. We're actually in our fourth year, I think, with that. And that has been really, started out very small, but the intent was always to grow it to something much more meaningful and much more significant that would have long-term impacts in a neighborhood that is often overlooked and underinvested in.

So, that was hopefully brief enough, but enough information to get at that. Oh, and what am I excited about? I'm excited that we might, no, not that we might. I'm excited that Charity Baptist, thank you Chi, I'm excited that the work we're going to do next year will be deeper and more forward-leaning than it has been this year. And I'm excited that we have our board members regularly talking about understanding the landscape of Black-led organizations within our footprints. Like we don't know who we don't know. And we kind of need to know the landscape to really do something in a meaningful way. And that multiple board members are talking about it and advocating that we actually have money to invest in it. I'm so, that is happy dance moments for me. So.

>> CHI-ANTE SINGLETARY: I think if I can, oh, going to hop in here real quick Tami, something that is important for me to lift up is South Carolina to overrepresented in the highest number of evictions in the country, with three South Carolina cities being on the list and North Charleston being number one. Civic engagement. People are now starting to say civic engagement and this type of organizing is something that helps us deal with issues like housing. And then also like land loss. And what does it look like to deal with the fact that people are getting pushed out more and more, not just from cities, but now even rural communities that haven't been touched.

We're talking about spaces 45 minutes outside of Charleston starting to experience gentrification in a way they never have before. And the growing housing crisis in the state is pushing folks to do a different level of organizing because they have to. Always doing amazing work organizing police audits and teaching folks how to organize and riling up the religious community and everyday folks step by step, who are working at the intersections of the criminal justice system and reentry and doing a lot of that advocacy and policy work, and really thinking about how do you pair that with economic development and housing. And also just healing and joy-centered work.

So, two of my, you know, and no one has favorites. But if I had to say two folks I'm excited about hearing how they grow over the next year, I think those would be my two. And the housing issue I think is the one that feels like it's the most poignant right now as our eviction crisis continues to grow.

>> **TAMI SPANN:** Yeah, I don't know that I'd add anything different. Partially because I think we're in baby steps in this work, really. And I will say step by step came to mind when you mentioned that. You know, a group that I'm excited about. Because we have been supportive of some efforts in our community to bring about the expungement legislation.

When I say emergence, they were always there, but I had not engaged them. And I just happened to be contacted by someone else about them and of course introduced them to Chi. And I think that work is probably what I'm most excited about. But I think what I'm getting really excited about is just the opportunity to take a minute to do the landscape. Who's doing the work? We have no clue. I mean we got the also communities, right? Your organization. You've got your urban league and some of the local other organizations in our community.

But there are others who are doing this work who are making a lot of impact. And I'm curious to see what would it look like if the flow of resources changes to be more supportive of them versus these organizations that have been, I call it kingdom building. You know. They've started with one mission and rather than partner with someone else who is doing some work, they decided to bring it in house. And, you know, we've been guilty. We created that Frankenstein monster, but what is it going to look like when we bring it to organization who are in community.

>> **RINI BANERJEE:** Thank you so much! Melody, Chi, anyone have any comments?

>> **MELODY BAKER:** I will just say I am excited about we have now I think eight grantees in South Carolina across the state, both in the Lowcountry and by Tami upstate. And we

are just super, and half of those groups, we just started funding over the summer. So, we're really excited to be working with a wide range of organizations that work on issues from like heir's property, to economic justice issues, to policing to move funds to the community. And we are looking forward to being in partnership with Edie and Tami and other folks locally.

And prior to our pre-COVID Charleston visit that we did in person before everything went crazy this year, there are a number of funders in South Carolina that we hope to continue to build relationships with, especially now that we have a core base of grantee partners to really be of service and be of support as Amplify and NFG work in this work.

And as you said, Edie, think about the practice of this work. What does it mean to change internal foundation policies to upend the status quo of what we've been doing and working this whole time. It looks like changing our reporting, our like crazy reporting requirements and it looks like making the application process have less barriers. And it looks like, you know, the really kind of functional operational pieces of this I think are the practice of the work, as well.

And so just thinking collectively about and trying out new and different ways of doing that together I think is how, what I'm excited about. And seeing what that then results in the support of powerful work in the state and in the region. So, very excited about that. And just excited to be in person again someday soon with y'all.

>> **RINI BANERJEE:** Exactly! Well I'm looking at the time and we have unfortunately a minute left! (Chuckling) So, I wanted to first thank Chi, Tami, Edie, and Melody for this fantastic panel. We could go on and on and on. I was in South Carolina in February, my last work travel. I have many memories and lots of learning. Noyes has benefited from that visit alone and others. If you want to learn more about Amplify, reach out to Amy. I really want to thank Chi, Tami, and Edie about the honesty, the joy, the breaking of biscuits, and I think we're at close now at 5 o'clock. So thank you very much! [Music]
