

# Grantee Learning

As a pooled fund committed to supporting under-invested regions, we recognized that our grantees may be less connected to national organizations and have less access to capacity building and technical assistance providers. We also knew that, by funding in 8 places, there was opportunity for grantees to connect within and across places, and to learn from one another. When the COVID-pandemic forced virtual gathering, we took the opportunity to launch Amplification, a virtual, optional convening space to connect, see how people were doing, and build community. During the first Amplification meeting, we asked “what do you need from us at this moment?” Four needs emerged, therefore, we offered all grantees free access to training and technical assistance on

## Digital organizing

Social Movement Technologies provided 1:1 coaching, small group training and graphic design certification.

## Financial resilience

Michael Anderson Consulting offered three webinars, 1:1 support to grantees and two peer exchange sessions between our grantees.

## Narrative

Grantees were able to attend trainings offered by the Center for Story-Based Strategy.

## Fundraising

JustFund, our grantmaking partner, provided tips about using their platform for fundraising.

As a way of further describing our grantee learning & capacity building work, we have included details in the next two pages about our work with grantees in Eastern North Carolina.

## WE ALSO OFFER FINANCIAL SUPPORT BEYOND GENERAL OPERATING GRANTS TO SUPPORT GRANTEE LEARNING AND CAPACITY BUILDING:

### COVID-19 Rapid Response Grants

\$5,000 per organization to address grantee needs  
April 2020

### Wellness Grants

\$3,000 per organization  
grantees requested this support  
November 2020

### Capacity Building Grants

\$3,000 per organization to use as grantees saw fit  
June 2021



## EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA EXAMPLE

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In 2019, Amplify Fund partnered with local strategy advisors in North Carolina to co-create a grantmaking strategy. The advisors recommended focusing on Eastern North Carolina because of the particular needs and opportunities of the region, so, in 2020 we gave \$25,000 general operating grants to 15 Eastern North Carolina organizations to:

- Clarify what issues and strategies Amplify should prioritize in its regional funding;
- Understand how best to support capacity needs and learning priorities of regional groups.

### IDENTIFYING CAPACITY & LEARNING NEEDS

With the support of two consultants, we virtually gathered information from 15 organizations in 1:1 conversations, and two group convenings. They identified capacity and learning needs including:

- Intergenerational leadership development including youth leadership training
- Board training
- Organizational financial training
- Organizing training
- Civic engagement and education training
- Technology training for elders
- Economic development policy advocacy training

### CREATED A REGIONAL COHORT TO SUPPORT LEARNING

At the end of 2020, when the Eastern North Carolina strategy was finalized, grantees decided they wanted to continue meeting regularly, but make participation optional. With continued support from local consultants and Amplify Fund staff, Eastern North Carolina grantees met quarterly in 2021 and 2022, including an in-person meeting for the first time in June 2022. The agenda for these meetings included:

- Skill-up sessions: where grantees would share skills with each other. Sessions included: Blueprint NC's on civic engagement strategies in between electoral cycle; and A Better Chance A Better Community's on GIS mapping.
- Strategy circles: where grantees would discuss specific topics like environmental justice.

Amplify Fund also provided funding for coaching support. This allowed grantees to request individualized support from other grantees or from the local consultants facilitating the cohort meetings.

## EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA EXAMPLE

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### TAKING ADVANTAGE OF FUND-WIDE CAPACITY BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

While some of these overall needs intersected with the specific needs identified in the Eastern North Carolina strategy, grantees in that region took advantage of all our offerings. Eastern North Carolina grantees also regularly attended our grantee-wide meetings, eventually titled Amplification Sessions, to connect with grantees in other places, to connect with Amplify Fund staff, and to learn from trainers and practitioners.

### APPLYING FOR COLLABORATION GRANTS

As mentioned above, in June 2021, we offered \$3,000 Capacity Building grants to all grantees to use however they wanted. However, we also offered two rounds of Collaboration Grants in 2021 for Amplify grantees to work with others in ways that expanded their reach, learning, capacity-building and/or impact. In the application process, we provided examples of collaborations we would fund including: joint capacity or technical assistance support, group training or cohort-based learning, and grantee organization learning exchanges. Of the 16 collaborations we funded, seven were explicitly about building the capacity of grantees including a collaboration between Brunswick Housing Opportunities, Columbus County Forum, and Pender United intended to provide training, administrative/Human Resources, accounting, management, information sharing, and back office support to small Black- and Brown- led community nonprofits in Eastern North Carolina.



# LESSONS LEARNED

## **GRANTEE LEARNING AND CAPACITY BUILDING MUST START WITH RELATIONSHIPS.**

Amplify Fund has a Program Team of staff and consultants who interact with grantees. The Program Team has invested in building trusting and understanding relationships in order to get an honest answer to “what do you need?” from grantees. With these trusting relationships, our locally-rooted, but nationally-cognizant Program Team members have made connections, and offered suggestions, that have supported grantee learning without feeling imposed or required. We have also supported grantee relationships within places through our local strategy process (LINK) that has led to continued grantee learning.

## **PEER-TO-PEER EXCHANGES ALLOW FOR SOME OF THE DEEPEST LEARNING, BUT REQUIRE THE GREATEST CAPACITY**

Both Eastern North Carolina grantee gatherings and cross-place Amplification sessions required staffing to support logistics, including simultaneous Spanish interpretation, grantee outreach, agenda creation, and preparation support for presenters. At some point, there were six staff members and consultants ensuring that these peer learning sessions were accessible and well-run. Funds interested in this form of grantee learning must budget accordingly.

## **MANY GRANTEES DON'T HAVE CAPACITY TO PARTICIPATE IN CAPACITY BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES, EVEN THOUGH ALL ARE OPTIONAL**

The majority of our grantee learning and capacity building sessions took place virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and all grantees experienced virtual fatigue at some point in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Grantees were also asking for support beyond training. For example, rather than a communications training, grantees need communications staff, or in-house communications support from Amplify Fund. This additional staffing capacity is seen as more sustainable than skill-building capacity for already over-extended staff.

# LESSONS LEARNED

## **OFFERING CAPACITY BUILDING AT TWO LEVELS ENSURES GREATER REACH.**

Amplify Fund offered individual organizations the opportunity to focus on their specific needs through training (in group formats or in 1:1 sessions), coaching, grants, and Program Team support. However, as a fund, we are focused at the ecosystem level; therefore, offering capacity building support by place aligns with our theory of change. We began place-based learning during the local strategy development process, and extended it (by request) in Eastern North Carolina through the cohort model. This dual approach to capacity building meant that individual organizations were becoming stronger, and better able to participate in broader learning opportunities.

## **THE COHORT MODEL PRESENTS SOME CHALLENGES.**

After three years, the Eastern North Carolina cohort is seeing a lot of transition - in Program Team members, facilitators, and grantee organization leadership. Because relationships are so critical in capacity building and grantee learning, we are grappling with questions about whether we continue supporting people who are no longer grantees, and how we can support new cohort participants as they join. We are working through these questions so we welcome learnings from others experienced in creating flexible learning cohorts, and from our own grantees.