

# SOUL FIRE FARM



## Equity Guidelines for Donors & Foundations



1972 NY HWY 2  
Petersburg, NY 12138  
(518) 880-9372  
love@soulfirefarm.org

## EQUITY GUIDELINES FOR DONORS AND FOUNDATIONS

Soul Fire Farm surveyed hundreds of farmers and food system leaders in our network with the question, “How can funders help end racism and support the grassroots?” Here is what we found:

1. **Racial Equity:** Work together with the grantmaking community to conduct a racial justice assessment of where donors are currently investing and what kind of disparities exist, publicly share the results, and create strategies for correcting those inequities. We ask that all foundations dedicate a percentage of their giving towards explicit “reparations” for [organizations led by people of color](#). Note the Grantmakers for Effective Organizations has an [equity statement](#) to guide this process.
2. **Non-Extraction:** Please do not ask frontline organizations to promote your brand, image, products, programs, services, or message. Our job is to be accountable to our communities and run our programs, not to promote your organization. Asking us to do so compromises our integrity.
3. **Geographic and Class Equity:** Prioritize funding for the [Deep South](#), focused on organizations led by the communities they serve. Look beyond “academic speak” when reviewing applications, prioritizing instead people’s deep lived experience in movement work. Provide video/audio application processes instead of exclusively written applications. Provide translation services to applicants to overcome language barriers in the application process.
4. **Funding What Counts:** Grantmakers, please fund general operating expenses, “overhead,” salaries, insurance, and capital campaigns. It takes both people making a living wage and infrastructure for organizations to succeed. Enough with the deference toward “projects,” “innovation” and “direct costs.” Look around to see who is doing the real work and fund those people, letting us decide exactly how to allocate resources. All grants should be multi-year and renewable. Consider a donor advised fund which would be managed or directed by farmer groups to rotate loans and credit- tangible resources our folks need. Provide a “matching grant promise” fund for organizations to use for USDA grant programs.
5. **Respect:** Donors, please hold your privilege consciously. Much of the wealth being distributed was accumulated on the backs of exploited people, often the ancestors and relatives of these grassroots organizations. It is an honor for donors to get to be in relationship with frontlines organizers. Please do not pressure organizers to spend social time with funders, please respect personal boundaries, and do not use patronizing language referring to organizers. Remember that people on the frontlines are “experts” in their community and should be treated with respect and deference, never with an air of paternalism or entitlement. From the first moment of contact, please offer detailed transparency about who you are, what you are offering, and what you are

requesting of the organizers so they can make a fully informed decision about investing time into the relationship.

6. **Streamline Applications and Reporting:** Permit organizations to use their standard annual report and LOI to meet your application and reporting requirement. Organize in your giving community and create a common application and common reporting format. Set up *one* online portal where we can put all of our information *one* time. Donors can work together to figure out how to make sure frontlines organizations are funded. This will increase the amount of time frontlines groups have to do the work on the ground.
7. **Calendar:** There is a current trend for donors to be in relationship with grassroots organizers and to move beyond “transactional” relationships into something more meaningful. While this is laudable, it also means that organizers are expected to spend more and more time with donors. In many cases, this becomes a full time job and little time is left for the mission work. Please request, not demand, time from organizers, giving months of advance notice and be sparing with those requests. Please be conscious of non-Christian holidays and pre-existing community commitments in your scheduling.
8. **Incentivize Sanity:** Donors, please work to change culture where grantmakers demand “over-promising” and constant “innovation.” Offer grants specifically for grassroots organizations to pay a living wage and offer benefits to their employees. Celebrate depth over breadth, quality over quantity, seventh generation thinking over instant “results.” Fund reflection and planning. Invest in metrics that get at transformation beyond what we can quantify. Real change is not simply a result of “numbers of people served.”
9. **“Partnering:”** Larger nonprofits should apply for the big government and other challenging grants and write emerging organizations into the grants - transferring wealth to frontlines, take little for themselves, transfer most. Large nonprofits and government should donate administrative resources - grant writer, accountant, bookkeeper, database subscription, data entry, blog writer, web development, videography, graphic design, etc. so frontlines communities can “do the work” and not get bogged down with administration. Large nonprofits should offer no or low cost fiscal sponsorship to grassroots organizations without 501c3 status.
10. **Technical Assistance:** Support grassroots organizations in accessing culturally responsive technical assistance, including project management, fundraising, development planning, budgeting, strategic planning, board development, proposal writing, website development, marketing, consulting, legal, networking, accounting, and reporting. Provide samples of model grant applications and budgets so that grassroots organizations can learn from these examples.
11. **Be the First and Biggest Dollar:** Rather than wait for others in the funding community to validate the legitimacy of a grassroots effort by putting the first dollar on the table, tune in to who community members say they trust. Take the “risk” to put real dollars toward grassroots projects.



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Give fewer grants at larger amounts. Organizations should not have to maintain relationships with more than 5 funders in a given year. Plan to fund 15% or more of their operating expenses.

#### **Further Reading on Equity**

- [A Funders Resource Guide on POC-Led Projects](#). By InDeep
- [We Need a New Definition of Effectiveness](#), Kathleen Enright CEO at GEO
- [Policies, Practices, and Programs for Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) by D5
- [Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide](#) by Annie E. Casey Foundation
- [SAFSF Diversity Resources](#)
- [Breaking Bad Philanthropic Habits](#) by Justice Funders

#### **Recommended Training Programs for Dismantling Racism**

- Opening Doors <http://diversity-project.org/national-facilitation-team/eduardo-gonzalez-jr/>
- People's Institute for Survival and Beyond <http://www.pisab.org>
- AORTA Collective <http://aorta.coop/>
- Catalyst Project <http://www.pisab.org>
- Training for Change <https://www.trainingforchange.org/>
- Beyond Diversity 101 <http://www.beyonddiversity101.org/>
- White Noise Collective <http://www.conspireforchange.org/>
- Center for Study of White American Culture <http://www.euroamerican.org/>
- Interaction Institute for Social Change [www.interactioninstitute.org/](http://www.interactioninstitute.org/)
- Soul Fire Farm's Uprooting Racism in the Food System [www.soulfirefarm.org](http://www.soulfirefarm.org)

**The Soul Fire Farm community asks that our funding partners engage in self-reflection on the following themes:**

1. To what extent does your foundation encourage grassroots communities to define "success" for ourselves?
2. To what extent do you prioritize the leadership of people of diverse ethnicities, gender identities, and classes in your organization?
3. To what extent are you involved with [EDGE funders](#), [GEO](#), or other networks of foundations committed to supporting grassroots organizing, equity, and addressing the root causes of injustice?



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4. To what extent have you taken efforts to reduce paperwork and time burdens required of your grantees, e.g. common applications and reports, flexible format for apps and reporting, no required events, limited phone calls?
5. Do you consider your organization anti-racist? Which of your organizational policies and practices reflect an anti-racist commitment?
6. In what ways do you incentivize reflection, staff well-being, and holistic measures of success for your grantees?
7. To what extent is your organization's wealth garnered through the exploitation of human beings or planet Earth? Do you have a reparations analysis?
8. To what extent do you prioritize funding organizations often overlooked in the grantmaking process - those led by people of color, non-English speakers, people without college degrees, and those in rural areas and the Deep South?
9. To what extent are you committed to multi-year, unrestricted funding?
10. To what extent are you interested and committed to being changed, transformed, affected, inspired by grantees (versus one-directional learning)?
11. Can we speak to one of your grantees who defines themselves as frontlines and/or people-of-color led, to hear about their experience working with you?