



Funding Opportunity: Building Leadership and Organizing Capacity (BLOC)

February 2018

Overview and Background

Launched in 2013, Perrin Family Foundation's Building Leadership and Organizing Capacity (BLOC) Initiative is a three-year, cohort-based capacity building and grant making program designed to build the research, analysis, campaign development and organizing capacity of youth-led social change groups in Connecticut.

PFF's seminal field scan on youth-led social change in Connecticut documented multiple obstacles faced by those engaging youth in social change work around the state. The BLOC initiative seeks to directly respond to these challenges by:

- Creating a learning community among youth and practitioners where they can share their expertise and learn from others while building trust, respect, and a sense of belonging to a broader youth-led social change movement in Connecticut.
- Providing BLOC partner organizations with multiyear general operating grants to support their efforts to deepen and strengthen their youth-led social change efforts.
- Pairing BLOC partner organizations with experts in the field of youth-led social change and community organizing so they can participate in hands-on, experiential learning opportunities where they will develop the research and organizing skills necessary for sustained youth leadership development and the implementation of long-range strategic change campaigns.
- Helping BLOC partners ensure their institutional culture, practices, and policies create an organizational environment conducive to youth-led social change.

On a statewide level, **the long-term goal of BLOC is to 1) strengthen relationships among and between youth organizing groups across the state and 2) develop strong and effective youth organizing groups engaged in campaigns that address root causes of injustice and inequity in their communities.**

On a cohort and organizational level, PFF expects that BLOC partner organizations will:

- Increase the meaningful inclusion of youth in leadership or decision-making roles in their organizations.
- Gain tools and skills related to research and organizing that will enhance their ability to develop and implement effective youth organizing campaigns that lead to concrete and lasting change around the issues that youth have identified.
- Build collaborative relationships and partnerships with others committed to building a movement for youth-led social change in Connecticut.

BLOC Eligibility and Funding

To be eligible for participation in BLOC, organizations must meet the following criteria:

- Be based in Connecticut.
- Be a current grantee partner of PFF or, if not currently a grantee partner, be invited to apply by the Perrin Family Foundation.
- Have a demonstrated commitment to youth organizing, evidenced by at least one of the following:
 - A clearly articulated vision about the role of youth organizing in the organization's future trajectory.
 - Explicit language about youth organizing embedded in the organization's mission, theory of change, or strategic plan.
 - Currently have a youth organizing campaign under development or in progress
- Have the organizational capacity to fully participate in the BLOC capacity building components and strategies described below, including sufficient staff time dedicated to advancing the organizing work.
- Have strong evidence of how youth voice and decision-making are currently embedded in programmatic and/or organizational decision-making.
- Be a fiscally sponsored project or a 501c3 organization.

We anticipate engaging 4 organizations in the next BLOC cohort.

The four organizations selected as a BLOC partner will receive a grant of \$105,000 over a three-year period (\$35,000 per year), with the possibility of receiving an additional \$10,000 in targeted capacity building supports in the second and third year of the initiative (up to \$5000 per year).

BLOC Capacity Building Components + Strategies

Full participation in the following capacity building components is a **core requirement** of BLOC funding.

- **Retreats:** twice each year, youth and staff representatives from BLOC partner organizations will participate in a multiday day retreat that will serve as a teambuilding, training, and reflection space throughout the initiative.
- **Monthly cohort meetings:** each month, youth and staff representatives from BLOC partner organizations will participate in a cohort learning/dialogue session. These sessions will take place in the afternoon/evening and will generally last 3 hours.
- **Organizer roundtables:** staff organizers will be expected to participate in a monthly Organizers Roundtable, which will focus on deeper skill-building, strategic coordination, shared accountability, and relationship building among organizers around the state, including – but not limited to – organizers participating in BLOC.
- **Individualized support and follow up:** BLOC partner organizations will be responsible for implementing the learning and work discussed at monthly cohort meetings. Individual 1:1 support may be provided between cohort meetings as needed and made available by the Field Building Fellow.

BLOC's approach to capacity-building is anchored in the following strategies:

- **Peer-Driven Learning Community:** BLOC seeks to build a spirit of trust and collaboration that will enable participants to see **each other** as a learning and support network. As such, BLOC partner organizations will identify their areas of expertise and their learning needs; this information will play an instrumental role in determining and customizing the learning goals for the cohort. A portion of monthly cohort meetings will be dedicated to having partners respond to each others' learning needs by sharing their own best practices, and/or bringing in outside training/expertise on the priority areas defined by the cohort.
- **Experiential Learning and Applied Training:** A portion of each monthly cohort meeting will be dedicated to targeted training that will enhance research and organizing skills in order to prepare youth, staff, and organizations to develop and implement strategic youth organizing campaigns.
- **Organizational Assessment and Development:** In order to operate strong and effective youth organizing campaigns, organizations themselves must have solid and sustainable organizational infrastructure. BLOC also seeks to support its partner organizations in navigating the shifts in organizational culture, practice, and funding streams necessary for creating organizational environments conducive to youth led social change. Each BLOC partner will be supported to conduct an organizational self assessment, the results of which will help shape and inform annual workplan goals.
- **Engaging in Shared Action:** Over the duration of the initiative, BLOC partner organizations will engage in at least one shared, collective, direct action – to be planned and determined by cohort members – as an opportunity to practice intersectional thinking and strategic coordination and learning by doing.
- **Reflection, Evaluation, and Continuous Learning:** Each BLOC partner organization will be asked to identify 2-3 goals each year of the initiative against which they and PFF will assess their progress. At regular points throughout the year and at the conclusion of each phase of this initiative PFF will hold reflection and assessment sessions to secure feedback about the progress of the initiative, and make course-corrections and revisions as necessary.

BLOC Phases + Training Topics

PFF recognizes that three years is a significant amount of time for organizations to invest in a capacity building initiative. The length of the initiative reflects our respect for the complexity and intricacy involved in engaging young people in youth organizing. As the Youth Organizing Overview (attached separately) indicates, effective youth organizing requires organizations simultaneously manage organizational development, youth leadership development, base-building, and campaigns. We expect that incorporating these components into the culture, fabric and structure of your work is a complex process. We know that “social change” does not occur in the span of a single year, and we understand that deepening your youth, staff, and organizational capacity to engage in social change will take time as well. The three-year arc of this initiative is designed to provide ongoing learning, community, and support during that process.

BLOC has three phases, with each designed to build upon the other. Please be aware that the summary below is designed to give you an idea of the topics that BLOC aims to address, but PFF is committed to being responsive, flexible, and adaptive as the initiative proceeds so that this initiative effectively responds to the various realities and circumstances of the cohort members. Some organizations may enter the BLOC initiative with a campaign already in progress; others will be at the early stages of campaign development.

Phase One: (Summer 2018 – Spring 2018)

Laying the Foundation and Organizational Self Assessment

Phase Two: (Spring 2018 – Spring 2019)

Deepening Analysis of Youth Organizing and Preparing to Launch Your Youth Organizing Campaign

Phase Three: (Summer 2019- Summer 2020)

Deeping Analysis of Youth Organizing and Implementing your Youth Organizing Campaign Efforts

BLOC Cohort Representatives

Organizations interested in participating in BLOC will be asked to identify **at least one adult and two youth representative(s)** from the organization that will be responsible for attending all BLOC-related training, leading the implementation of what has been learned within the organization, and sharing the learning content throughout the organization. Each organization may assemble a team of **up to five** representatives, but **all** members of the team must commit to full participation.

To maximize impact, youth representatives selected by the organization should have a demonstrated experience and investment in the organization's youth-led change efforts. Continuity of staff and youth representatives for the duration of the initiative is highly encouraged, but we recognize it may not be possible. We understand that turnover in staff and youth leadership may occur, and PFF will work proactively with cohort members to ensure mechanisms are in place to share learning throughout the organization's staff and youth leadership. In order to accommodate a shared learning space for youth and adults, cohort meetings will be planned during times that youth can attend and fully participate. PFF also welcomes the participation of young people who have a history of leadership and ongoing connection with your organization even if they recently graduated from high school.

Finally, to ensure that youth organizing work is understood throughout the organization as a whole, there will be at least one session each year that will require the participation and engagement of organizational stakeholders beyond the BLOC Cohort Representatives, including Board members.

BLOC Design Team and Key Partners

The capacity building components of the BLOC initiative will be designed and executed by the BLOC Design Team, which includes PFF's Field Building Fellow, Chiedza Rodriguez as well as alumni representatives from the first BLOC cohort. The Design Team will be responsible for leading monthly cohort meetings and retreats, and the Field Building Fellow will provide follow up support as needed between sessions. Other guest presenters, facilitators, and trainers may be engaged throughout the initiative.

The [Katal Center for Health, Equity and Justice](#) will be facilitating the monthly Organizer Roundtables.

PFF staff will lead the grants management side of the BLOC initiative, including reviewing applications, reports, and workplans and working to leverage and grow a broader base of philanthropic support for youth organizing efforts.

BLOC Application and Selection Process and Timeline

Organizations interested in applying for BLOC must:

1. Attend the BLOC Information Session.

2. Submit a BLOC application, through PFF's online application system.
3. Participate in a one-on-one conversation with a BLOC alumni organization to better understand the benefits and demands of BLOC.
4. Staff, board and youth representatives participate in an interview with PFF staff.

The following application process is designed to maximize dialogue and learning between interested organizations, BLOC alumni, and PFF. PFF staff, along with identified youth organizing stakeholders, will review applicants and together make a recommendation to PFF's board, who votes on all grant awards.

Key Dates and Timeline:

March 1, 2018	BLOC Information Session <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time: 12:30-2pm• Location: The Grove, 760 Chapel St New Haven
March 2, 2018	BLOC Applications Made Available
March 23, 2018	BLOC Applications Due
April 2018	BLOC Interviews
May 15, 2018	Notification of selection to BLOC cohort partners
June/July 2018	BLOC Launches

PFF Organizational Contact:

If you have questions about the BLOC initiative, your eligibility, or the application process, and to RSVP to the BLOC Information Session, please contact PFF's Program Officer, Amarilis Pullen at apullen@perrinfamilyfoundation.org