

# MEMPHIS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ORGANIZING LANDSCAPE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The Memphis Advocacy & Community Organizing Landscape Analysis, conducted by a coalition of advocacy organizations and funders led by Stand for Children Tennessee, seeks to provide a comprehensive view of advocacy and organizing across Memphis, Tennessee. This report presents findings on focus areas, approaches, barriers, needed support, and opportunities identified by local organizations committed to enhancing the Memphis community. Our goal is to strengthen the overall advocacy and organizing landscape to advance systems change for social, economic, and environmental justice in Memphis and beyond. This report also aims to use these insights to assist local, state, and national funders in offering targeted support and fostering collaboration.*

## ***Importance of Advocacy and Community Organizing in Memphis***

Memphis has a rich history of advocacy and community organizing, deeply rooted in the fight for civil rights and social justice. The city's legacy includes pivotal movements from the economic and political organizing of Robert Church Sr and Jr to the 1968 sanitation workers' strike, which brought Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Memphis and underscored the power of organized labor and collective action. This tradition of activism has continued through recent movements addressing systemic inequities and advocating for marginalized communities.

In recent years, Memphis has seen a surge in grassroots organizing, particularly in response to issues of racial injustice, economic disparity, and environmental threats. Movements like the fight against the Byhalia Pipeline, which successfully halted a project threatening predominantly Black neighborhoods, highlight the ongoing struggle and resilience of community advocates. Additionally, the response to the tragic death of Tyre Nichols sparked nationwide protests and local legislative actions to limit pretextual traffic stops and increase police transparency.

This historical and contemporary context emphasizes the critical role of community organizing in shaping a more equitable Memphis. Advocacy efforts in the city focus on amplifying the voices of those most impacted by systemic injustices, fostering community solidarity, and driving policy changes that reflect the needs and aspirations of all Memphians.

## ***Key Insights from the Memphis Advocacy & Community Organizing Landscape Report***

This comprehensive report provides an in-depth analysis of the advocacy and community organizing landscape in Memphis, Tennessee. Based on surveys from 59 local organizations and interviews with leaders, the findings reveal a strong commitment to tackling systemic issues impacting Memphians, especially in the critical areas of education (47%), housing (44%), and racial justice (40%).

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## *Key Insights from the Memphis Advocacy & Community Organizing Landscape Report (cont.)*

The data highlights that the vast majority of groups serve the entire Memphis area, with a higher concentration of work in high-poverty northern and southern neighborhoods. There is also a significant focus on serving Black communities, low-income families, and children/youth. Most organizations engage impacted communities through outreach, relationship-building, and elevating community voices in decision-making.

However, the resource landscape poses major challenges. Community organizing groups primarily operate on extremely limited budgets under \$1 million annually, facing unique hurdles in building capacity and longevity. In contrast, organizations focused solely on advocacy efforts are more likely to have budgets over \$2 million. Despite constraints, grassroots entities have proven effective when deeply engaging impacted people and utilizing direct action tactics like protests.

A concerning trend is the backlash these groups, particularly smaller under-resourced ones, face from elected officials and opposing power structures. This adversarial climate underscores the urgent need for strategic, multi-year investment to strengthen and protect efforts.

The report emphasizes that national funding trends increasingly recognize the importance of transformative capacity-building approaches that prioritize trusting relationships, culturally resonant practices, leader wellbeing, and collaborative networks. Trust-based philanthropy models anchored in openness and mutual accountability are vital.

Additionally, there are growing calls to bolster support for smaller grassroots organizations led by people of color that are uniquely positioned to drive systemic change through their community entrenchment. However, commitments to racial justice remain unfulfilled, with funding still not flowing equitably.

Looking ahead, the report outlines priorities like strengthening partnerships and coalitions, nurturing more neighborhood-level initiatives, enhancing training for skills development and organizer pipelines, and prioritizing the wellbeing of organizers combating burnout. Given the difficult state and national political landscape targeting advocacy voices, sustained investment is more crucial than ever.

**The report provides a comprehensive roadmap with the following recommendations:**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR **FUNDERS**

- *Provide Multi-Year Unrestricted Funding*
- *Shift Power Dynamics & Embrace Trust-Based Philanthropy*
- *Prioritize Support for Black-Led and People of Color- Led Organizations*
- *Bolster Capacity Building*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR **ORGANIZATIONS**

- *Nurture More Neighborhood & Place-Based Organizing*
- *Strengthen Partnerships & Coalitions*
- *Enhance Training and Skill Development*
- *Implement More Well-Being Supports for Organizers*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR **ELECTED OFFICIALS & GOVERNMENTS**

- *Adopt a Collaborative & Open-Minded Approach*
- *Commit to Transparency in Decision-Making*
- *Implement Protective Measures for Advocacy & Organizing Groups*
- *Facilitate More Access to Resources & Information*

***READ THE FULL REPORT HERE*** →

