

AS THE SOUTH GROWS

GROUNDWATER



GRANTMAKERS ———
FOR SOUTHERN
————— PROGRESS



“ This is a moment where it’s even more important to invest in rest and create nurturing opportunities for leadership because if folks burn out now, whatever comes next, folks won’t be there for that. ”

Ben Barge
FIELD DIRECTOR

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR
RESPONSIVE PHILANTHROPY

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INTRODUCTION



It's been five years since GSP worked with National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) to release the first *As the South Grows* (ATSG) report series. We've seen a pandemic, racial uprisings, and the birth of many movements in that timeframe. If anything is for certain, it's that *As the South Grows* has an even more significant meaning now. Southern communities are facing a new day of assaults, leaving them more vulnerable than ever. It is undeniable that the last five years have shown us that funders have a particular role in the social justice ecosystem. Funders should not view themselves as drivers, gatekeepers, or even sustainers of the ecosystem, but rather as strategic allies and resource generators. As funders, our role requires us to align with the solutions created by social justice movements led by Black, Brown, and Indigenous organizations, which will help shift the needle toward equity and justice. We can no longer shy away from supporting the transformation of unjust structures in our society that collectively hold us back. Social justice organizations across the South are putting everything on the line to protect our most vulnerable communities. As the South grows, funders must move resources consistently and deeply to strengthen the structural change infrastructure in the South.





The first report series laid the groundwork for how foundations should be in accountable relationships with movements led by Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. This iteration will be a guide to help you, as funders, know how to navigate in a time when communities need strategic allies. It will name the critical issues, set the context for political organizing today and the imminent threats communities of color are facing. As with the last report series, ATSG will also offer recommendations on the transformative ways to support and resource movement organizers driving the work on the ground. Funders have the opportunity to lift radical approaches by resourcing movements and the ability to provide political and economic cover to Southern movements. Southern communities can no longer wait on philanthropy to consider the burden of risk. As funders, we must boldly embrace uncertainty, invest deeply in Southern movements, and center equitable structural change in the South.

Sincerely,

Tamieka Mosley

Director

Grantmakers for Southern Progress



— OUT OF THE —

\$1.35B

— DONATED TO RACIAL —
JUSTICE GRANTS IN 2020

ONLY \$.49B

— WENT TO —
GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

**Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE) — Report: Mismatched: Philanthropy's Response to the Call for Racial Justice*

LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD



In 2017, Grantmakers for Southern Progress (GSP) partnered with the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) to create a series of reports that lifted stories from across the South. These stories highlighted both the beauty of the region – the most diverse demographics in the nation, vibrant and varied cultures, and breathtaking natural resources – as well as the many challenges preventing Southerners from living whole and happy lives – persistent poverty, racialized violence, the disastrous effects of climate change, underinvestment in communities, and more. The goal was clear: use these stories as a catalyst to increase and sustain funding for marginalized communities in the South, fund strategies that are informed by directly impacted communities and improve the quality of life and build power among Southern people.

What We Learned

Movements and funders cannot do this work without being in relationship with one another. Underinvestment in the South and an increasingly volatile political climate endangers our lives. The progress made so far would not be possible without Southerners' unique ability to produce incredible work even with scarce resources, build bridges across issue areas, and commit ourselves to fight white nationalism generation after generation. Knowing that Southerners are accountable to and can trust one another allows us to be nimble when disaster strikes and celebrates the deep joy of building a South that cares for all its people.

To explore these ideas, GSP interviewed frontline leaders and organizations to learn what support funders should offer to bolster structural change in the South. Some of the key learnings included:

- **Philanthropy must put people first.** Funders should build trusting relationships with Southern movements, see Southerners as experts, and trust their leadership.



Look back at the stories that contributed to our first *As the South Grows* reports.

- **Southern context matters.** Place has a profound impact on the kinds of challenges people face, and solutions must be informed by, accountable to, and agreed upon by directly-impacted communities.
- **Resource the work like you mean it.** Fund grassroots movements in a flexible way that builds capacity, regardless of their nonprofit status. Invest in these organizations long-term, support infrastructure-building, and measure success using metrics that reflect the context of Southern communities, not surface level understandings of the issues influenced by stigma and harmful narratives about the South. Take risks and be open to learning. Support innovative economic development that is truly community controlled while rejecting extractive industries that keep communities under resourced. Understand that a vigorous economy is not enough on its own for people to have what they need to thrive.
- **Southerners are in the eye of the storm.** The South is disproportionately affected by the effects of climate change and needs significant investment to endure long-term structural change. This need is especially critical for poor communities of color, which experience higher rates of flooding, pollution, and displacement.
- **Investing in the South benefits everyone.** Harmful, reductive policies are incubated in the South and exported to other regions in the United States. By grasping the issues at the root, we pave the way towards prosperity for the rest of the nation. If we can win in the South, we can win anywhere, but we must be bold enough to try.



What We Know Now

A new relationship between movement organizations and philanthropy sparked in 2019. The importance of these operational and relational shifts is becoming clearer to us each day. Under the pressure of COVID-19 and racial uprisings, the sector saw several social justice funders reimagine their definitions of risk and test the limits of how quickly money can be moved through institutions. These funders reassessed their application and reporting requirements, re-established previous granting relationships, and dipped into reserved funds to respond beyond their normal grantmaking structures. Funders moved because we were all in a state of crisis. However, a state of crisis is not a stranger to frontline leaders working to protect communities on the ground daily. The pandemic and racial uprisings were simply new crises to face. Today, the fallout of those events coupled with multiple climate catastrophes, a volatile economy, and an increasingly hostile political climate have brought on a new series of challenges Southern movements are facing.

Though resources remain sparse, movement has won several victories over the last few years and is clear on current and future needs for collective liberation. The progress movement has made is a testament to the ways Southerners continue to build coalitions across race, gender, immigration status, class, and more.

Southerners have historically punched above their weight by doing more with fewer financial resources than their counterparts in other regions. They have managed through capacity shortages and increasingly challenging legislative battles. It is time for philanthropy to help level the ground movement marches on by investing in the region at scale. Led by the voice of grassroots organizers and social justice funders across the South, the *As the South Grows* report series will unpack learnings around the work identified as present-day threats and victorious paths to liberation. The report series will highlight ongoing issues, such as:

- Reproductive justice
- LGBTQIA+ justice
- Worker justice
- Criminal justice
- The rise of fascism and impending threats to democracy
- Climate infrastructure and environmental warfare

As the series delves more deeply into each of these issue areas, our learnings will be grounded in this question:

How can philanthropy support movement in transforming systems so that the harms of structural racism, economic exploitation, gender-based inequities, and anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments cannot exist, persist, or otherwise be recreated?

MOVEMENTS NEED TO BE NOURISHED NOW



Movement leaders are exhausted. While many leaders are attempting to push past depletion, others are reckoning with leaving their work behind to preserve their health and wellness. These leaders are already the most impacted folks fighting for

communal liberation. With less than 10% of all philanthropic dollars being invested in the largest geographic region in the nation, funders must do more to enable movements to build power, especially ahead of the next national election cycle.



“You want to give movement \$75,000 over three years to save democracy without giving money to protect ourselves or to support the ongoing work that was already being done or to prepare for the next crisis?”



Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson,
*Co-executive Director of
the Highlander Research
& Education Center*

PEOPLE NEED TO BE PROTECTED

The South is a social, political, and economic battlefield. Southern organizers have been on the front lines fighting white nationalism for generations. While their strategies continue to disrupt harm and provide the blueprint for our struggle towards justice, organizers cannot keep fighting without sufficient armor. Violent attacks against Southern progressive organizations and movement leaders have proliferated in



the last five years. From the 2019 arson at Highlander Research and Education Center to the state-sanctioned murder of climate activist Tortuguita in 2023, our opposition continues to wage war against Southern visionaries. Despite these intimidation attempts, Black, Brown, immigrant, LGBTQIA+, and Indigenous leaders have remained committed to liberation.

NEW LEADERS ARE EMERGING AND NEED SUPPORT



Sustaining the Southern progressive infrastructure will require several key elements. Southern movements must build a pipeline of leaders with the fortitude to carry on the work of their elders. Existing movement leaders need the capacity to welcome and nurture early talent — shifting from full-time crisis management to leadership development and capacity

building. Our elder leaders need to have the health and financial resources to be able to retire in dignity. Funders need to be open to alternative leadership models and should focus on relationship building rather than being prescriptive with their resources. Trusting and elevating Southern leadership by investing in their genius is the key to growing the movement.

ON THE HORIZON

Southern movement is on the precipice of radical transformation, but they need strategic investments to strengthen the infrastructure. Philanthropy has always had the capacity to leverage their resources and apply an intersectional lens to their funding practices, but they have not always been willing to. The time to change that is now. Hear from funders and movement leaders who are invested in harnessing the collaborative environment and the unique ingenuity the South possesses in the next series of *As the South Grows*. Throughout 2024, GSP will release five reports that highlight ongoing movement work, philanthropy's current investments, what's next on the horizon for Southern communities, and strategies for funders to engage in deep, transformative relationships that resource the South. *As the South Grows* will highlight stories and data directly from frontline organizations and funder peers who know the South is more than capable of, and *already* is, winning across the following topics:

Political Infrastructure in the South

The 2020 Presidential Election and the 2022 Midterm Elections demonstrated the growing influence the South has on the nation. Dueling ideologies in the South have placed social justice wins and the entrenchment of white supremacy on full display for the rest of the nation

to see, and mimic, in the last three years. Movement leaders have and continue to advocate for education, bodily autonomy, reproductive access rights and more to protect the rights of our communities across the nation. Southerners are experiencing an increase in racist violence, bans against teaching Critical Race Theory in classrooms, and are now reckoning with the Supreme Court's decision to strike down Affirmative Action in June 2023. As the report examines the political infrastructure of the South and the US at large, funders cannot ignore that the democratic process no longer represents the people it claims to serve. In fact, this illusion of democracy enables the most powerful to prioritize their personal and financial interests against the wellbeing of community. Our governing bodies have worked to preserve white supremacy and employ new methods informed by old tactics to dismantle movements working to transform the Southern political landscape. Since 2021 alone, more than 130 bills have been introduced to strip away the voting rights of communities. Movement leaders are calling this era the "New Jim Crow" as voter suppression tactics continue to run rampant. While movement braces for another contentious national election cycle, taking the moment to redefine democracy through the lens of Black, Brown, immigrant, and Indigenous communities is imperative for us to systematically challenge harm imposed by the State. Organizations like the Rising Majority are focusing on creating solidarity and base-building strategies to combat the well-resourced opposition and prevent the nation from crossing the ever-close threshold into fascism.

“I think Georgia and Alabama give us glimpses of what’s possible if you can get the resources organized. We are looking at those examples and thinking about how they can apply to Arkansas. Since people of color have been sort of gerrymandered out of any real voting block power, we’ve gotta build power to be able to change things.”



Rev. Cory Anderson,
*Chief Innovation Officer
at Winthrop Rockefeller
Foundation*

Southern Climate Infrastructure

In a region where climate response happens year-round, the South has been disproportionately impacted by increasing storm fronts without the necessary investments into the infrastructure needed to prevent, plan, and prepare for extreme weather. Between 2019 and 2022, more than \$2.5 billion dollars were directed to the South in response to natural disasters and severe weather⁴.

Traditionally, philanthropy has employed the same strategies around climate response: grassroots leaders begin preparing community for impending disaster, disaster strikes, media attention ignites, and then philanthropy steps in with rapid response funding to make way for continued efforts on the ground. This rapid response model has been employed

for disaster after disaster with little to no support flowing between heat waves, extreme cold fronts, intensifying storms, and exposure to harmful pollutants. Building infrastructure outside moments of crisis is especially crucial in the South where Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable to natural and manmade disasters. The South is also home to more than a quarter of climate causing pollutants in the nation⁵. Those industries have been rapidly expanding, particularly in the Gulf South. However, climate action efforts, such as the just transition from dirty energy to cleaner more renewable energy and from powerful energy industry players controlling state politics to energy democracy are woefully underfunded. The time to build a cohesive strategy to support the infrastructure of just climate work is now. Philanthropy must invest resources in climate activists such as Valencia Gunder (The Smile Trust) in Miami, FL, who understand the importance of response and what it takes to slow the increase of climate disasters. The report series will highlight their work and the work of countless organizations working across the South to advance climate justice in the region.



“The South is one of the biggest hubs of the oil and gas industry in the world, most of it for export. We think about what those impacts look like in terms of health, but also economic realities in which people don’t have to work jobs that are literally killing them.”



Melanie Allen,
*Co-director of the Hive
Fund for Climate and
Gender Justice*



Healthcare Access in Black, Brown & Indigenous Communities

The dichotomies around health and healthcare access for communities in the South clearly illustrate the need for strategic investment in health infrastructure. With an astounding rate of hospital and clinic closures unfolding across the region and the continuous fight for Medicaid expansion, opportunities for quality, affordable care for Southern communities are dwindling. The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022 has led to a surge in harmful legislation banning essential, life-saving healthcare services like abortion and gender affirming care. It is no coincidence that as healthcare access is becoming increasingly limited, marginalized people are experiencing extreme health disparities. The South is home to the largest populations of

Black, queer and trans folks in the nation⁶, and they experience more systemic healthcare inequities than many other groups. Discrimination against Black women compounds their health outcomes – from not having their pain or treatment taken seriously by healthcare professionals, to not being included in medical studies, to the biological impacts of chronic stress – achieving wellness is almost impossible. Black mothers are three times more likely to die in childbirth compared to white mothers, regardless of income or education⁷. While only 13% of the trans population is estimated to be Black⁸, of the transgender people murdered over the past four years, 66% were Black trans women⁹. Stripping away healthcare access in the South has only one purpose: to deteriorate what little autonomy people have left. Issue areas like Black maternal mortality, reproductive justice and gender affirming care are critical areas of concern for advocates working to achieve access to quality healthcare and holistic wellness. But, the fight is not lost. In the upcoming healthcare and access report, the challenges and the wins for expansion of care for Southern communities will be highlighted, like the passage of Medicaid expansion in North Carolina in the spring of 2023.

“Your zip code shouldn’t determine your destiny. I have a pretty holistic perspective on what it means for a community to thrive and for families to be well. That’s addressing housing and stability and health and wellness and insurance at the same time. For the South to be vibrant, I think all those pieces have to come together.”



Katrina Mitchell,
*Chief Community Impact
Officer at United Way of
Greater Atlanta*

Economic Justice & Security

The South is home to extreme class disparity. The Southern economic infrastructure is built on and creates the outcomes of a plantation economy system, where the success of agriculture and manufacturing are predicated on



the exploitation of Black and Brown communities. These communities are deeply underpaid and often cannot locate affordable housing, creating an untenable increase in homelessness¹⁰ across the Southeast region. For folks on the ground fighting for workers, dismantling extractive industries and harmful capitalist practices poses an increased risk. As racialized capitalist frameworks become more prevalent in the philanthropic sector, many staff members within philanthropic institutions are seeing the necessity to support movement in economic justice efforts. However, they are often working against systemic barriers within their own organizations. The wealth housed within philanthropy’s ecosystem was accrued under racial capitalism, and as such, is intricately tied to a history of exploitative and extractive practices that rely on upholding current economic systems. Recognizing and accepting these connections can feel like an admission of fault for many boards, particularly because 79% of boards are predominately white¹¹. Instead of committing their institutions to following the work happening on the ground and shifting their funding strategies, many boards opt instead to maintain a cycle of divestment from directly-impacted communities and perpetuate the harms of traditional philanthropy. Nevertheless, movement remains committed to supporting worker justice, the fight against predatory banking, and other industry-led ills. ATSG will explore ways that philanthropy can double down on its commitment to building a just economy for Southern communities in future reports.



Solidarity & Infrastructure Building

No matter which topic, geography, or community is considered, frontline leaders cannot be successful without being grounded in solidarity. “Until we’re free” is not just a signifier of hope, it is an acknowledgement that none of us are free until all of us are free. Our fates are inextricably tied to one another. The intersections of identity within Southern communities are vast. Each of us are impacted by each other’s progress, stagnation, and struggle. The South is not a monolith, and the South has before us a great opportunity to build a coalition of movement leaders who are working in concert towards the goal of liberation.

Our freedom cannot be achieved without solidarity and the infrastructure to support the movement ecosystem. Philanthropy plays an integral role in this fight and has the ability to harness the collective power, resources, and influence of the sector to sustain the vision, strategies, and mobilization of movements that will irrevocably change the South.

“I think the biggest threats we face are climate, white supremacy and Christian nationalism. We need to be fighting like hell to beat it or at least slow it down. I do think we’re on a 2-5 year timeline if we don’t beat it, we need to be preparing people to survive it. We haven’t been fully funded to build the world that we want.”



Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson,
*Co-executive Director of
the Highlander Research
& Education Center*

STAY CONNECTED

Are you ready to invest in Southern grassroots movement work? Do you want to learn more about building equitable movement infrastructure in the South? We have the information you need to get started. This iteration of *As the South Grows* is the first in a bold, reimagined series that will feature the voices and stories of leaders on the frontlines through a series of reports and an online experience. Stay up to date:



g4sp.org/AsTheSouthGrows

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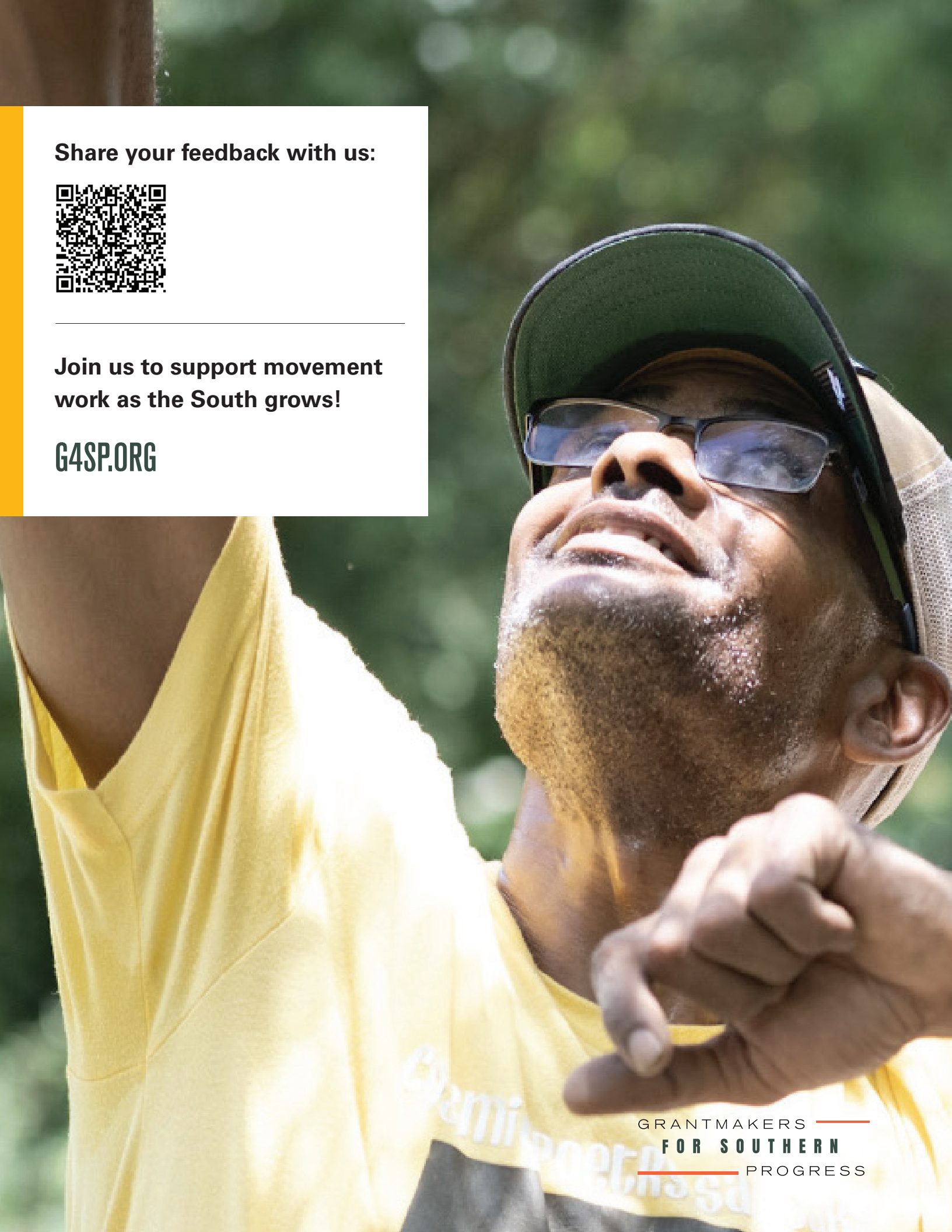
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