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# Fundraising with Power:

## A Southern Strategy

*From 2020's Promises to 2026's Possibilities*

**Fauzia Dawood**

*Head of Philanthropy & Strategic Partnerships, EPU*

*December 4, 2025*

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# Today's Journey

Summer 2020: When Philanthropy Made Promises

2025: The Receipts Are In

The Federal Funding Cliff

The South's Double Bind

Let's Be Strategic: What Actually Works

Five Things Making Fundraising Harder Right Now

What We're Building Together in 2026

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# Fauzia Dawood

*Head of Philanthropy & Strategic Partnerships @ EPU  
Atlanta, Georgia*



## **My Role at EPU:**

- Lead fundraising and partnership strategy
- Build relationships across philanthropy, community, and faith networks
- Align multi-year revenue planning with EPU's mission

## **Background:**

- 18 years in philanthropy and social impact
- Leadership roles: Global Health Corps, Women Deliver, Partners In Health, charity: water
- Extensive experience with faith-based partners and community-rooted organizations

## **What I Bring to This Work:**

- Elevating local stories and leaders for national philanthropic investment
  - Translating community priorities into compelling funding opportunities
  - Trust-centered relationship building with partners on the ground
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# Headlines announced **\$16.5B** committed to racial equity

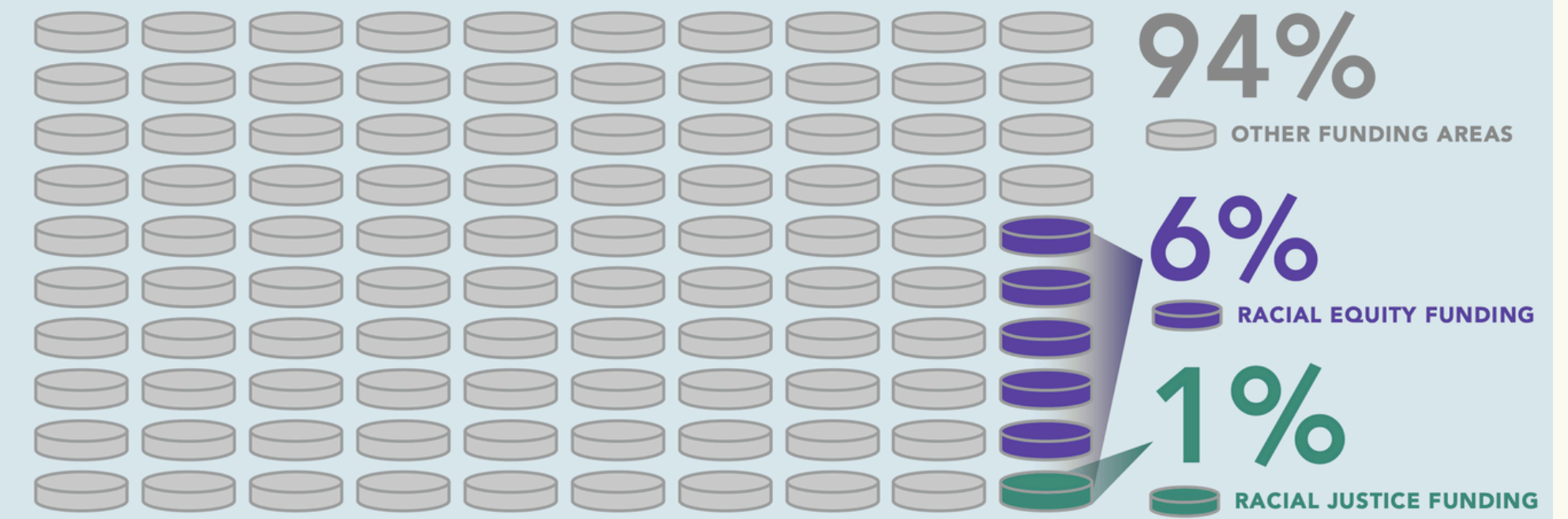
## The Reality:

- Actual grants awarded: **\$3.4B** (not \$16.5B)
- To racial justice work specifically: **\$1.35B**
- Reached grassroots organizing: **Only \$490M**

## Where did the "commitment" go?

- **Internal corporate diversity** programs
- **Supplier diversity** spending
- **Multi-year pledges** counted as single-year giving

PERCENTAGE OF ALL GRANTMAKING DEVOTED TO RACIAL EQUITY AND RACIAL JUSTICE, 2018



**Even with growth, racial equity remains dramatically underfunded relative to need.**

# 2024 Giving Landscape

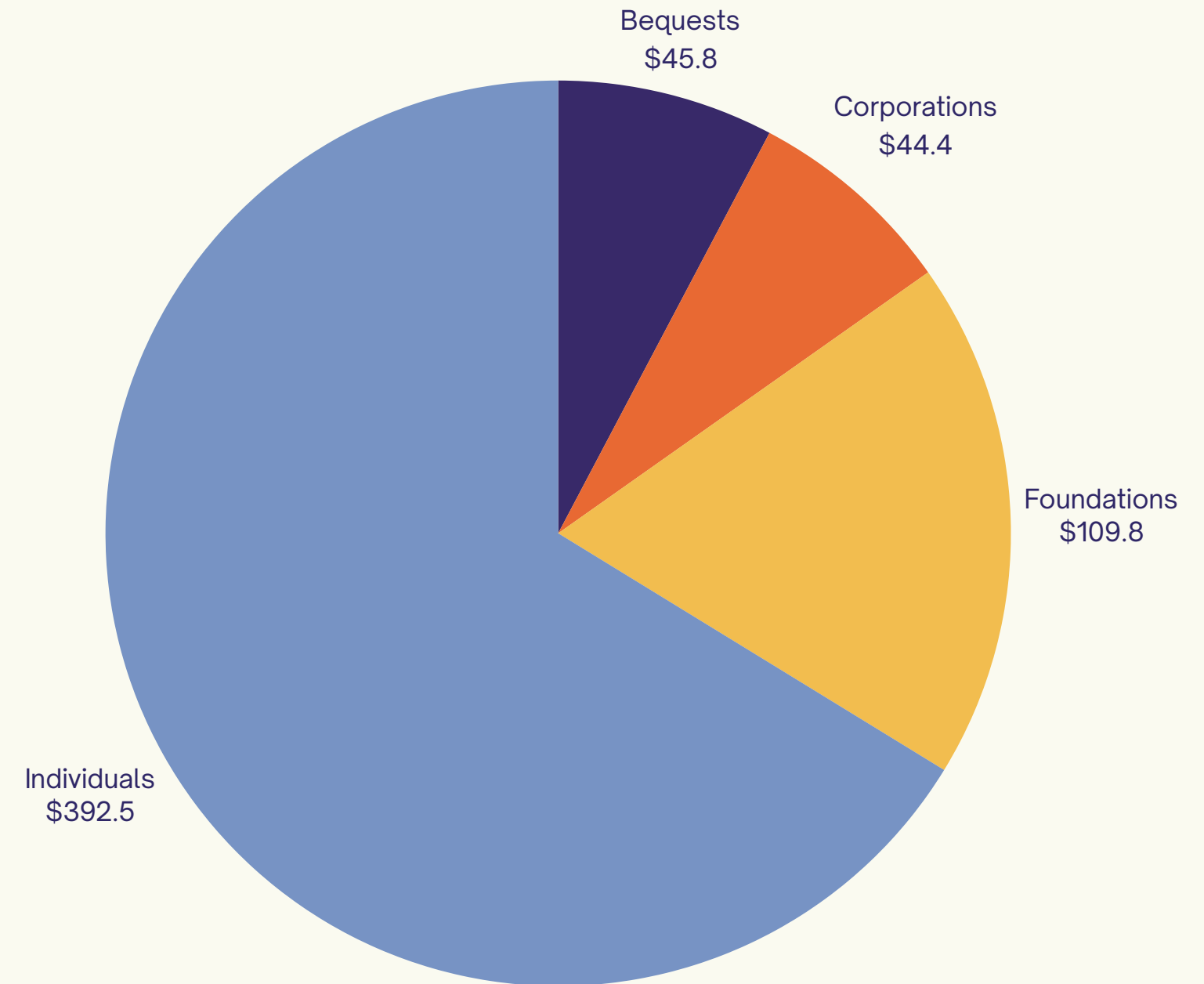
**Total: \$592.5B (↑ 6.3%)**

**By Source:**

- Individuals: \$392.5B (66%)
- Foundations: \$109.8B (↑ 2.4%)
- Corporations: \$44.4B (↑ 9.1%)
- Bequests: \$45.8B

*Growth driven largely by stock market gains*

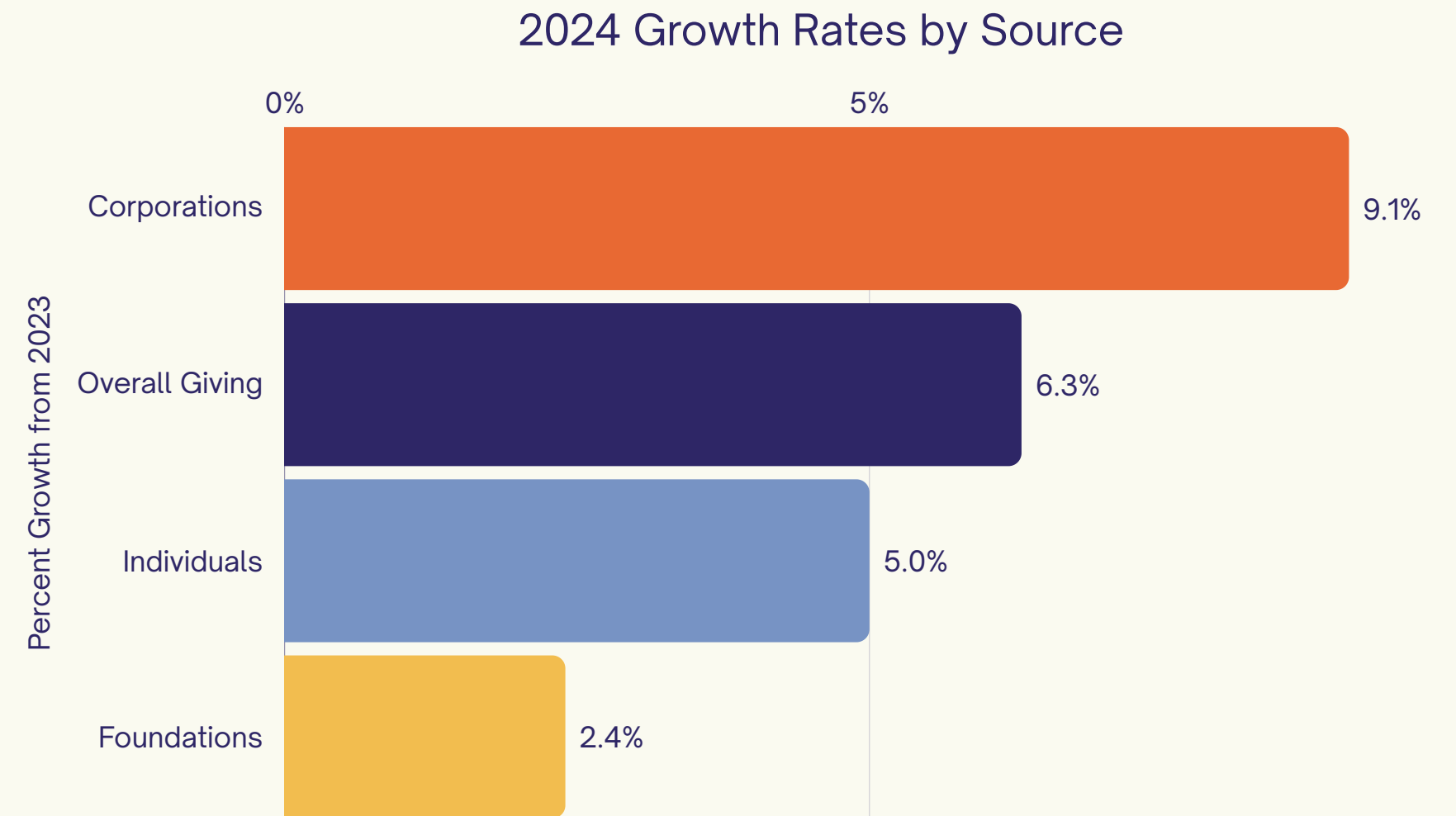
2024 Total Philanthropic Giving (in USD Billions)



# 2024 Growth Rates

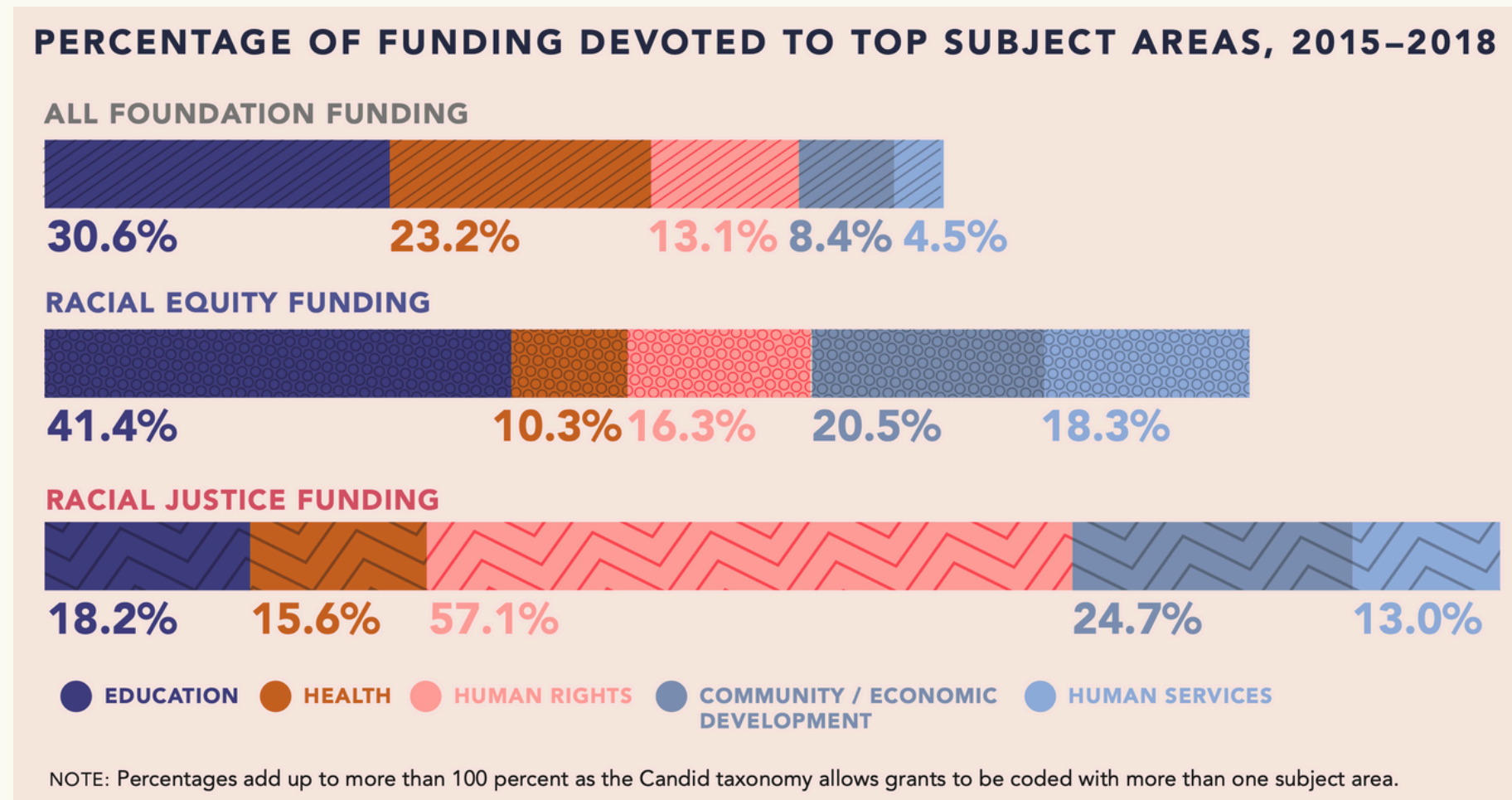
While overall giving grew in 2024, growth was uneven and driven primarily by wealthy donors benefiting from market gains—not broad-based participation.

However, this growth did not translate proportionally to racial equity funding, which plateaued after 2021.



**While wealthy donors saw portfolios grow 20%+ from stock market gains, racial equity funding remained flat. The rising tide did NOT lift all boats.**

# Where the Money Actually Went



**Top subject areas for racial equity funding:**

- Education: 30.6%
- Human Services: 23.2%
- Health: 13.1%

**Top subject areas for racial justice funding:**

- Human Rights: 57.1%
- Community/Economic Development: 24.7%

## The problem:

Even within education, **only 8% of all education funding (\$108B total) went to racial equity work.**



For organizations doing human rights work or grassroots organizing in the South, you're competing for less than 1% of all philanthropic dollars—while facing the highest need.

# What Actually Changed

## Public Reporting

Foundations began reporting equity investments

## Internal DEI

More foundations examined DEI practices

## Reduced Barriers

Reduced reporting, multi-year unrestricted funding

## BIPOC Leadership

Greater willingness to fund BIPOC-led orgs

## Pooled Funds

Creation of collaborative funding vehicles



These changes were real and meaningful.  
**But five years later, how much momentum remain?**

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# What has been **your** experience?

*Share in the chat*



**A - SUSTAINED GROWTH:** We secured new funding after 2020 that has continued.



**B - ONE-TIME SPIKE:** We got one-time grants but they didn't renew.



**C - NO CHANGE:** We didn't see any change in our funding.



**D - DECREASED:** We actually saw funding decrease.

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# Fewer Americans Give to Charity

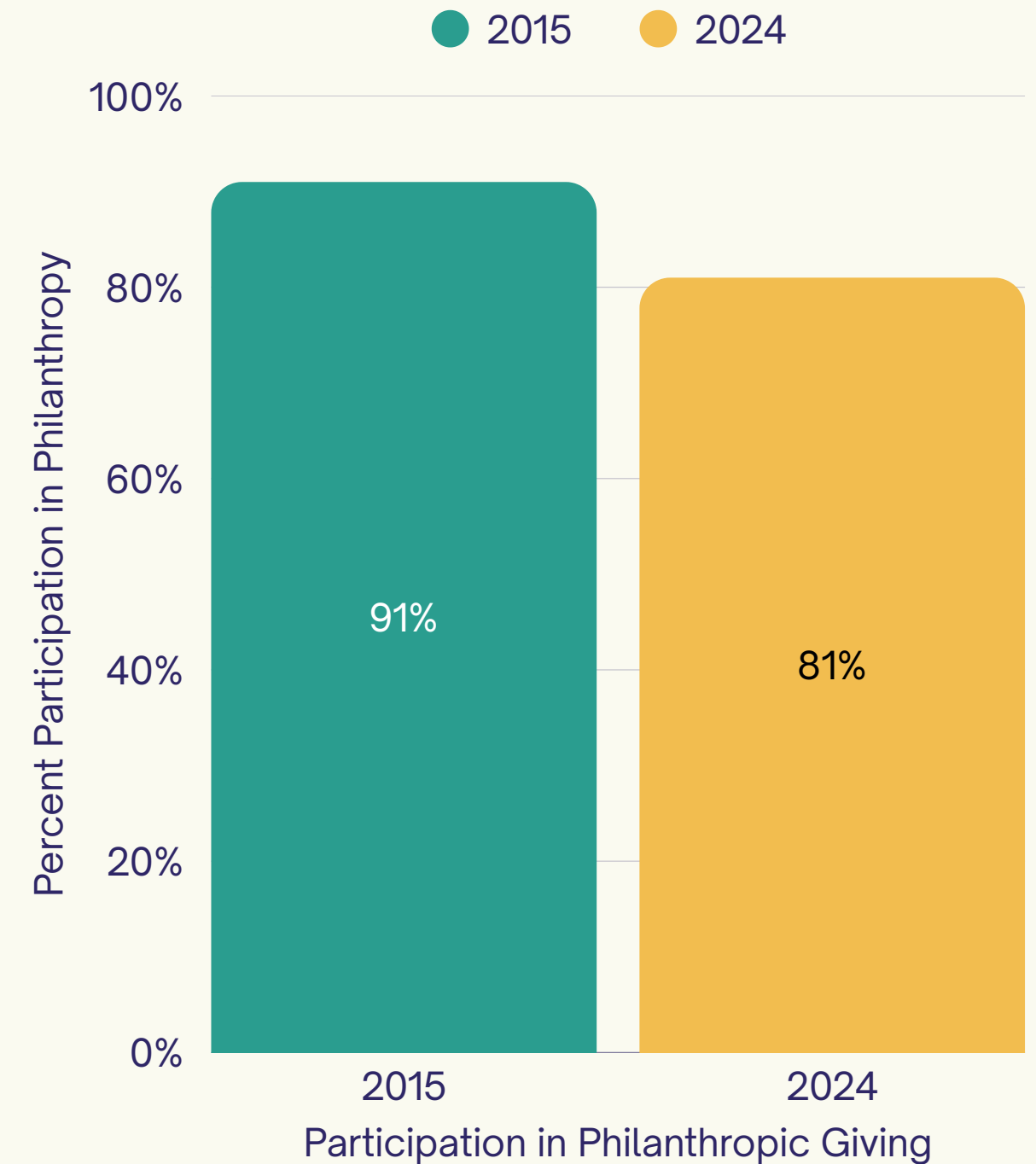
## The donor base is:

- Aging (average: 64 years)
- Giving less frequently (2x/year)
- More concentrated wealth



**Affluent giving dropped from 91% (2015) to 81% (2024).**  
Younger donors are interested but lack resources, concentrating philanthropic power in fewer hands.

### Affluent Household Giving (2015 v 2024)



# The Anti-DEI Backlash: A Coordinated Attack

2023

Supreme Court strikes down affirmative action

January 2025

Executive orders target federal DEI programs

2024 - 2025

Corporate retreat (Walmart, John Deere, Tractor Supply, Harley-Davidson, Lowe's, JPMorgan Chase)

2024 - 2025

200+ DEI positions eliminated at public universities (TX, FL, AL, TN)



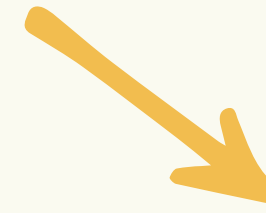
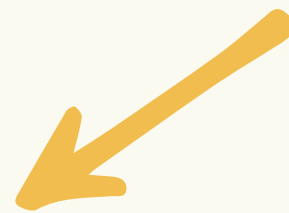
## The Impact:

- Some foundations removing "equity" language
- Others doubling down on commitments
- Triple threat for Southern orgs: Legal uncertainty + funder fear + political attacks + federal cuts

# A Divided Field: Two Paths

## Pulling Back:

- Removing equity commitments
- "Staying neutral" to avoid controversy
- Retreating under pressure



## Staying Committed:

- Equity as core mission
- Multi-year commitments maintained
- Continuing investments despite headwinds

### The Numbers:

POC-led foundations: **75%** actively engaging on equity

White-led foundations: **Only 49%** actively engaging on equity



**Don't waste time on funders who've retreated.  
Focus on those staying committed.**

How has your organization navigated conversations about **equity, DEI, and racial justice** with funders in the past year?

*Share a concrete example or challenge*

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# Why Federal Cuts Hit the South Hardest

## Federal Funding = The South's Safety Net:

- 33% of all nonprofit revenue
- 40-60% of rural Southern nonprofit budgets
- Southern states = highest poverty + most federal dependency

## Real Examples:

- **Mississippi:** Rural health clinics (250K+ people, 80% federal)
- **Alabama:** Head Start (22K children, 100% federal)
- **Georgia:** Community agencies (500K+ families, 60%+ federal)



**When federal dollars disappear in already-underfunded states, there is NO safety net.**

# January 2025: When the Money Stopped

## Before (December 2024)

- ✓ Programs running
- ✓ Staff employed
- ✓ Services delivered
- ✓ Communities served

⚠ JANUARY 27, 2025:  
Federal freeze ordered

## After (February - March 2025)

- ✗ **AmeriCorps:** \$400M cut, 32,000 jobs lost
- ✗ **FEMA resilience:** \$1B eliminated
- ✗ **USDA food programs:** \$600M-\$1B reduced
- ✗ Organizations unable to make payroll



**Southern states hit hardest:**  
MS, AL, LA, AR, WV

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# FY26: Not Just Cuts—A Restructuring

**The Proposed Budget:** 22.6% cut to domestic spending (\$163B)

**Targets:** Education, HUD, Labor, EPA, USAID

## The Rhetoric:

Nonprofits labeled as:

"Wasteful"

"Liberal"

"Radical"

## The Threat:

- Specific organizations attacked by name
- Threats to revoke 501(c)(3) status
- Hundreds of programs eliminated
- Thousands of jobs cut



**This isn't just about money.**

It's about delegitimizing the entire nonprofit sector.

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# When Federal Funding Disappears, Private Philanthropy Cannot Fill the Gap

## The math doesn't work:

- Federal cuts to Southern nonprofits: ~\$2-3 billion
- Total Southern foundation giving (ALL causes): ~\$8 billion/year
- Racial equity funding in the South: ~\$150-200 million/year

## Real foundation responses:

- **Denver's Rose Community Foundation:** Received 40% more emergency requests, had to reduce average grant size by 25%
- **Atlanta's Community Foundation:** "We're being asked to be the nation's safety net with a budget built for capacity building"
- **Southern foundations report:** 3-4x increase in emergency funding requests since January 2025

## The reality:

Even if every racial equity dollar in the South went to replace federal cuts (impossible), it would cover less than 10% of the gap.



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# The South Has Always Been Underfunded Relative to its Need and Population

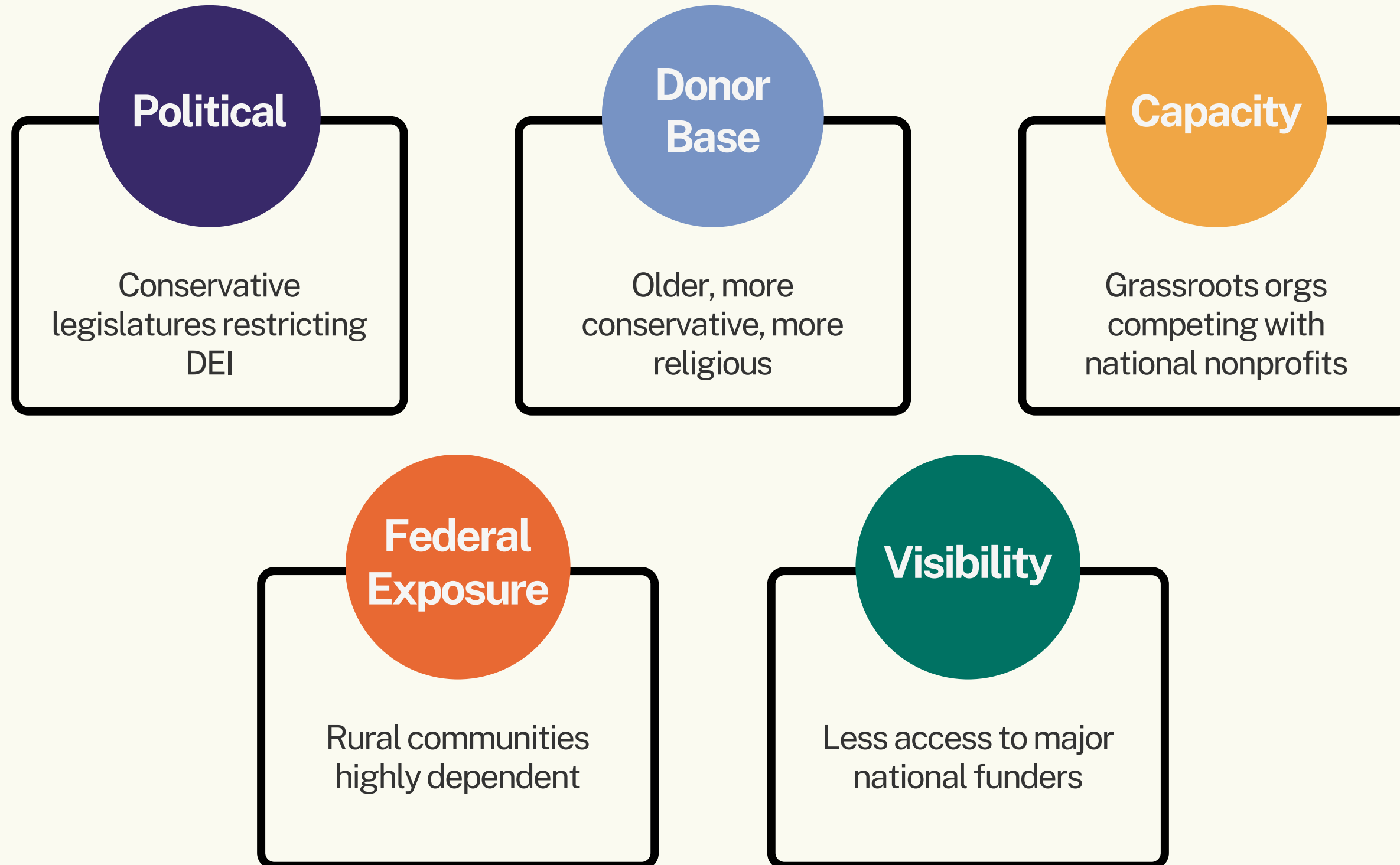
- **38%** of U.S. population
- **3-5X LESS** per capita foundation assets vs. Northeast/West Coast
- **HIGHEST** poverty rates in the nation
- **MOST** concentrated Black and Latino populations
- Legacy of Jim Crow and racial segregation
- Disproportionately less philanthropic investment
- Higher need, fewer resources
- Pattern spans generations



**This historical underfunding compounds current challenges,**  
as Southern organizations enter this crisis with fewer reserves and relationships.

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# Current Pressures Unique to the South

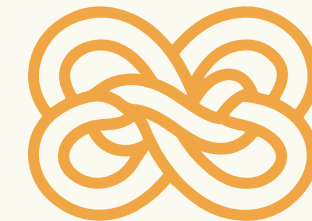


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# The Double Bind

*Southern organizations face an impossible paradox:*

- Work is more urgently needed than ever
- Yet, the mission makes you a target
- Federal support being withdrawn
- Private philanthropy more risk-averse
- Local donors may be skeptical
- Competing with better-resourced organizations



**The bind:**

The more urgent your work, the harder it is to fund—because urgency attracts opposition.

## In the chat...

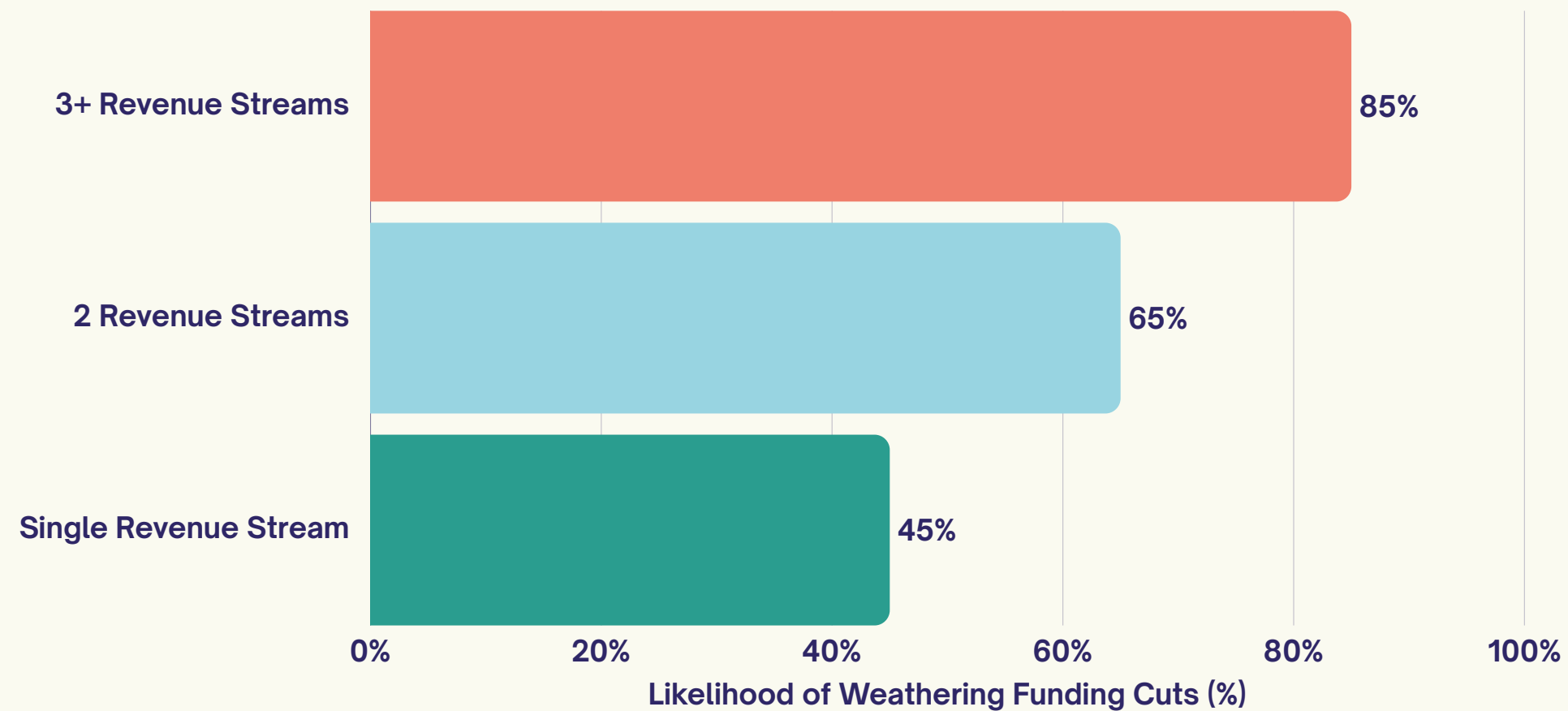
Share a concrete **fundraising challenge** your organization has faced in the past 6–12 months that relates to these **Southern dynamics.**

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# Let's Be Strategic: What Actually Works

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**Organizations with Diversified Revenue Are More Resilient**  
Based on Urban Institute nonprofit resilience research, 2020-2024



# Opportunity 1: Diversify Your Revenue Streams

- Build individual donor programs (mid-level \$500-\$5K)
- Develop monthly sustainer programs
- Explore community foundations & family foundations
- Investigate corporate matching gift programs (\$4-7B unclaimed!)
- Consider earned income where mission-aligned

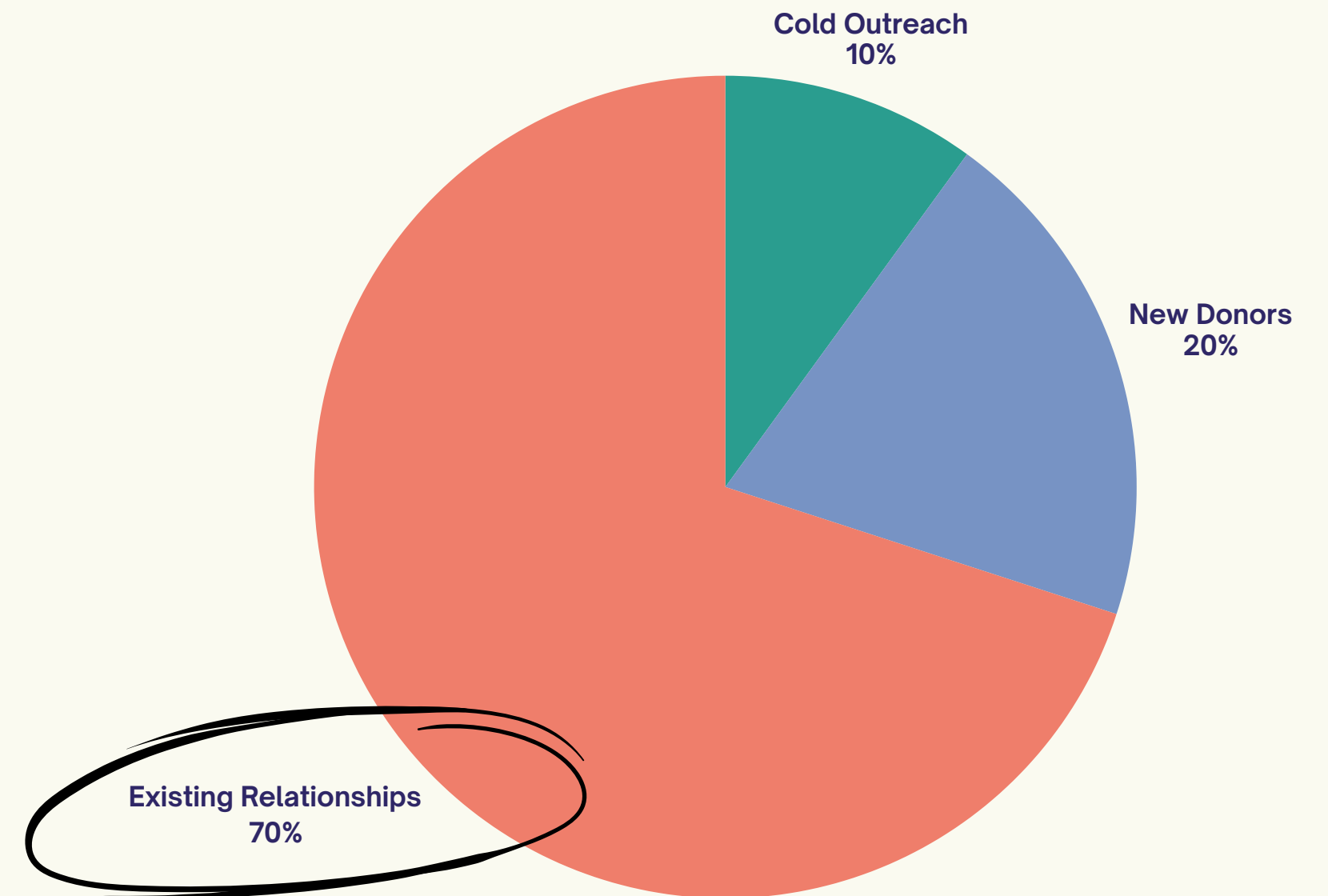


**Organizations with 3+ revenue streams are 40% more likely to weather funding cuts.**

# Opportunity 2: Invest in Donor Relationships

- Move beyond transactions to partnership
- Invite donors into the work (where it makes sense and is appropriate)—tours, events, strategy
- Steward with impact stories, not just appeals
- Segment donors and personalize outreach
- Trust and connection drive Southern giving

Where Southern Major Gifts Come From



**In the South, relationships matter even more.  
Donors want to know your staff, see your work, and understand your local impact before they give significantly.**

# Opportunity 3: Frame Work Strategically

01

Lead with outcomes and concrete impacts

02

Use values language: fairness, opportunity, dignity

03

Tell stories revealing systems without lecturing

04

Emphasize local leadership and accountability

05

Maintain explicit equity in mission, adapt public language



**Don't dilute your mission—translate it.**

Maintain equity in your mission statement, adapt language strategically for different audiences while staying rooted in your values and outcomes.

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# Opportunity 4: Target Aligned Funders

Research which  
foundations  
maintained equity  
funding

Prioritize POC-led  
foundations

Seek trust-based  
philanthropy  
practitioners

Look for multi-  
year general  
operating  
support



**Don't waste time on funders who've retreated.**

In a divided field, spending time on the wrong funders is a lost opportunity cost.

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# Let's Name What We're Up Against

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# Key Challenges Ahead

*While opportunities exist, we must be honest about what makes this moment uniquely difficult*

**Increased competition for shrinking resources:**  
More organizations chasing fewer dollars as federal funding disappears

**Donor fatigue and crisis overload:**  
Fundors overwhelmed by competing emergencies (climate, democracy, economic justice, immigration)

**Legal and political risk:**  
State-level restrictions on DEI work, potential lawsuits, and threats to 501(c)(3) status for disfavored organizations

**Capacity constraints:**  
Small teams stretched thin between program delivery, fundraising, and compliance—with no funding for infrastructure

**Mission drift temptation:**  
Pressure to chase available funding rather than stay true to core mission and values

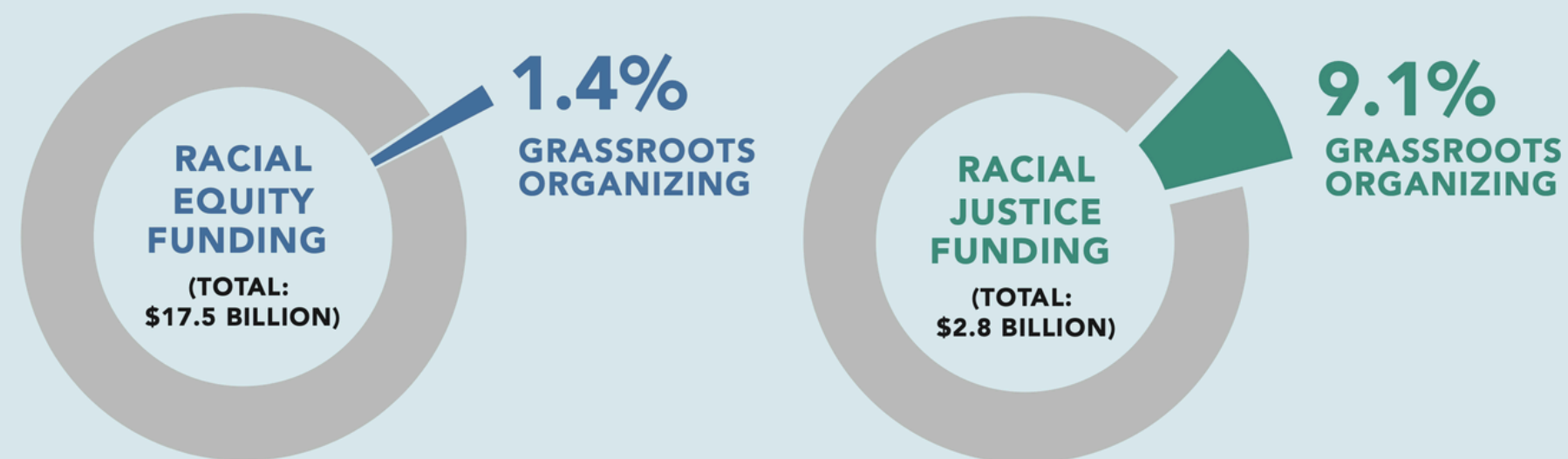


**Acknowledging these challenges isn't defeatist.**  
It is strategic. You cannot navigate terrain you will not name.

# The Grassroots Organizing Funding Crisis

*Despite billions pledged for racial justice, grassroots organizing remains critically underfunded:*

PERCENTAGE OF FUNDING DEVOTED TO GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING,  
2015–2018



## 2015-2018 data:

- Grassroots organizing = **only 9.1%** of racial justice funding
- Grassroots organizing = **only 1.4%** of racial equity funding

Funding never exceeded \$88.4 million in any year 2020 data. This is LOWER than 2016, 2017, and 2018 levels, both in raw dollars and as percentage of total



## The harsh reality:

While headlines touted billions for racial justice, grassroots organizing—the actual engine of movement building—saw less money in 2020 than in prior years.

# What We're Building Together in 2026

The Unum Alliance Fundraising Bootcamp Series

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# Unum Alliance 2026 Bootcamp Series

**Q1 2026:**  
Fundraising for Faith-  
Based Organizations

**February**

**Q2 2026:**  
Fundraising for  
Community Nonprofits  
(501c3s)

**May**

**Q3 2026:**  
Fundraising for  
Emerging & Fiscally  
Sponsored Groups

**August**

**Q4 2026:**  
General & Advanced  
Fundraising  
(open to all)

**November**












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# The Unum Alliance Philanthropy Resource Library

*A learning hub for Unum Alliance members across the South*

Southern organizations are building powerful, community-rooted solutions every day.

This resource library supports that leadership with clear, practical fundraising tools, strategic guidance, and equity-centered resources designed for Southern realities.

-  Sector Intelligence
-  Funder Research Tools
-  Grantwriting & Proposal Development
-  Donor Cultivation & Stewardship
-  Individual Giving & Campaigns
-  Events, Salons & Fundraising Campaigns
-  Equity-Centered & Trust-Based Fundraising
-  Southern Philanthropy Directory
-  Bootcamp Tools & Recordings
-  Worksheets & Practical Exercises
-  Template Library

**Your on-demand hub to explore, learn, and strengthen your fundraising practice at your own pace.**

# Questions & Discussion