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The Ascend Fund Invests Over Half a Million in 13 Organizations Working to Elect Women to State Legislatures

Pilot to accelerate gender parity in politics launched in Michigan, Mississippi, and Washington

SEATTLE, October 19, 2021 – Today, [The Ascend Fund](#), a collaborative fund dedicated to accelerating the pace of change toward gender parity in U.S. politics, announced \$600,000 in grant awards to 13 nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations in Michigan, Mississippi, and Washington as part of a pilot project designed to increase the number of diverse women serving in state legislatures.

“Recent debates in state legislatures over abortion, voting rights, and other critical issues illustrate the increasing power of state lawmakers in politics. We want to ensure that everyone affected has a seat at the table in crafting such foundational bills,” said Abbie Hodgson, Director of The Ascend Fund.

The Ascend Fund used an external review committee to evaluate applicants and select awardees from a diverse pool of applicants. Organizations received grants ranging from \$15,000 to \$100,000, with the average grant being \$50,000. The full list of awardees is below.

The state partners will form state-wide coalitions and work together to identify barriers, recruit candidates, and provide women with the training, resources, and support they need to run for office. Nationally, despite representing more than 50% of the population, women account for only 31% of state legislators. This pilot initiative was designed to test strategies in three states at different levels of women’s representation. In Washington, 41.5% of legislators are women, in Michigan that number is 35.8%, and in Mississippi that number is only 15.5%.

“What we learn in this three-state pilot will inform our work going forward. Only one state, Nevada, has reached gender parity to date, and we’re committed to achieving 50% representation in all 50 states by 2050,” Hodgson said.

Additional information:

- Learn more about The Ascend Fund’s [Start with the States strategy](#), read our column [“Partners in Parity: How 13 Organizations in Michigan, Mississippi & Washington are Paving the Way,”](#) and check out the fact sheets about women’s representation in [Michigan](#), [Mississippi](#), and [Washington](#).

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Michigan

- **Mothering Justice:** *Mothering Justice empowers mothers of color to influence policy on behalf of themselves and others.* Mothering Justice will partner with Michigan United, Detroit Action, and MOSES to form Black Womxn Win – Michigan, a 3-month leadership development program that will train 30 Black womxn from across the state to run for elected office and win in 2022.
- **Rising Voices Fund:** *Rising Voices Fund supports and funds the infrastructure to organize Asian American women and young people for power in the state of Michigan.* Rising Voices fund will engage in deep relational organizing to meet Asian American women where they are and provide rigorous leader development training and continue their cultural organizing and narrative work to increase the visibility of Asian Americans in Michigan as a political force.
- **Equality Michigan:** *Equality Michigan is a statewide lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer political advocacy organization.* Equality Michigan will develop programming specifically for LGBTQ+ women and pro-equality women allies and engage in work to mitigate barriers, create a pathway for success and building cohorts of women for continued mentorship, learning and networking experiences.
- **She Holds the Key:** *She Holds the Key works to remove barriers and provide support for center and center-right leaning women seeking elected office and appointments in Michigan.* She Holds the Key Receive will scale their programming to train and support center and center-right women to run for the Michigan State Legislature.

Mississippi

- **Mississippi Black Women’s Roundtable:** *The Mississippi Black Women’s Roundtable (MS-BWR), is an intergenerational, civic engagement statewide network of black women and girls that focus on increasing voter participation, civic engagement and champions equitable public policy on behalf of Black women and girls in Mississippi. MS BWR is an affiliate of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation/Black Women’s Roundtable.* The Black Women’s Roundtable will identify, educate, and prepare women of color to run in districts that continue to divest resources from its most vulnerable communities.
- **Mississippi University for Women:** *Mississippi University for Women’s NEW Leadership Mississippi educates college women about the important role that politics plays in their lives and encourages them to become effective leaders in the political arena.* Mississippi University for Women will provide training and mentoring to politically ambitious college women and further connecting them with a diverse network of individuals with key perspectives on Mississippi politics.
- **Women’s Foundation of Mississippi:** *The Women’s Foundation of Mississippi is a public foundation that works to eliminate the social and economic barriers faced by women and girls throughout the state.* The Women’s Foundation of Mississippi will expand their leadership and training development initiatives, including a virtual Fellows program and expanded mentoring program.

- **ACLU of Mississippi:** *The Mississippi affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union dedicates their time and resources to promoting and defending the civil liberties of citizens across the state through legislation, litigation, and advocacy. The ACLU of Mississippi will support community-based training and capacity-building including a program that will support emerging leaders in the Black community.*

Washington

- **OneAmerica:** *OneAmerica is the largest immigrant and refugee advocacy organization in Washington State, organizing with and advocating for diverse communities including Latinx, African, and Asian. OneAmerica will develop and grow a candidate cohort training program, targeting immigrant women of color candidates for elected office.*
- **Puget Sound Sage:** *Puget Sound Sage charts a path to a living economy in the South Salish Sea and Duwamish River Valley regions by developing community power to influence, lead and govern. Puget Sound Sage will offer holistic support for BIPOC women on the path to leadership including candidate training, a six-month leadership fellowship, mentorship, peer support cohorts, and ongoing resources for women once they are elected.*
- **Native Action Network:** *Native Action Network is a Native-led nonprofit organized to promote Native women's full representation, participation, and leadership in local, state, tribal, and national affairs. The Native Action Network will launch a new two-day program for 20 Native women focused on developing the knowledge, skills, and connections necessary to be successful advocates while providing a forum to network.*
- **Fix Democracy First Education Fund:** *Fix Democracy First Education Fund focuses on voter education, voter registration, outreach, and expanding civic participation across Washington state and beyond. Fix Democracy First Education Fund will launch the Women in Office Now program providing trainings to 50-100 women.*
- **Comunidad Latina de Vashon:** *Comunidad Latina de Vashon was founded by Latina women to cultivate youth and adult community leaders to use their strengths to change systemic injustices on Vashon Island. Comunidad Latina de Vashon will focus on encouraging Latinas to run for office as their authentic selves, and not change their narrative to conform to the white, patriarchal definition of a political leader.*



About The Ascend Fund

The Ascend Fund is an initiative of Panorama Global dedicated to accelerating the pace of change toward gender parity in U.S. politics. The collaborative fund pools philanthropic capital to support nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations that are working to ensure women have access to the resources and support they need to run for office, and that are breaking down the barriers that prevent women from running and winning.

The Ascend Fund has awarded over \$6.5 million in grants to date. In 2020, The Ascend Fund's 12 national partners trained more than 36,000 women and more than 500 women stepped up to run. Women trained by Ascend partners had a 70% win rate in their primaries and 62% win rate in their general elections – nearly double the national average for women candidates.

For more information visit theascendfund.org.

About Panorama Global

Panorama Global is the leading platform for social change dedicated to solving some of the world's toughest problems affecting people and the planet.

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