

A VISION FOR
Liberation
IN SEVEN GENERATIONS

2023-2024 BIENNIAL REPORT



In 2023, Deaconess Foundation launched a new strategic plan and framework developed from an 18-month engagement process with the community and stakeholders. We collected input from 663 community members and policy analysts in Eastern Missouri, Southern Illinois, and nationally through a variety of local gatherings, grant partner focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and national peer funder conversations.

This informed the creation of our new strategic aspiration, which firmly defines Deaconess Foundation as an institutional advocate that will orient its abundant relationships and resources in pursuit of liberation within the next seven generations.

The following report highlights grant funds and initiatives led by Deaconess Foundation in 2023-2024 that reflect this commitment to investing in the necessary work to realize the joy of freedom from oppressed systems.

The inaugural Movement Transformation Cohort (2023–2026) includes these 12 organizations:

ACLU of Missouri
Action St. Louis
ArchCity Defenders
Cornerstone CDC
Equity Legal Services
Faith for Justice
Freedom Community Center
Kids Win Missouri
Missouri Budget Project
Missouri Jobs with Justice
Missouri Organizing and Voter Engagement Collaborative (MOVE)
Power 4 STL

Seeding the Future Grants

Following our strategic refinement, we launched our new Seeding the Future (STF) Grants to support efforts that pursue accelerated change in conditions and systems transformation through coalition and base building, grassroots advocacy, civic engagement, community organizing, and public policy change. General operating funds are awarded for one year to organizations with proposals that align with Deaconess Foundation’s intended impact of the improved health and wellness of people in Eastern Missouri and Southern Illinois. In 2023 and 2024, we awarded 28 STF grants to 28 organizations totaling \$560,000.

Movement Transformation Grants

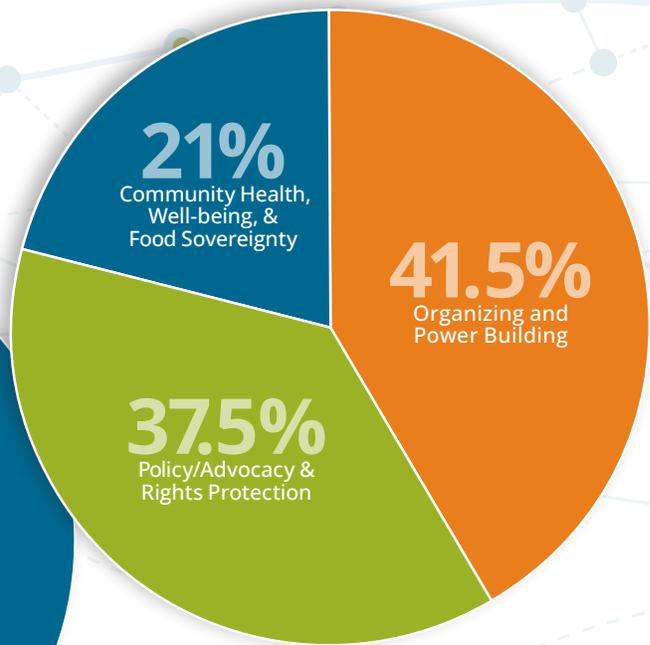
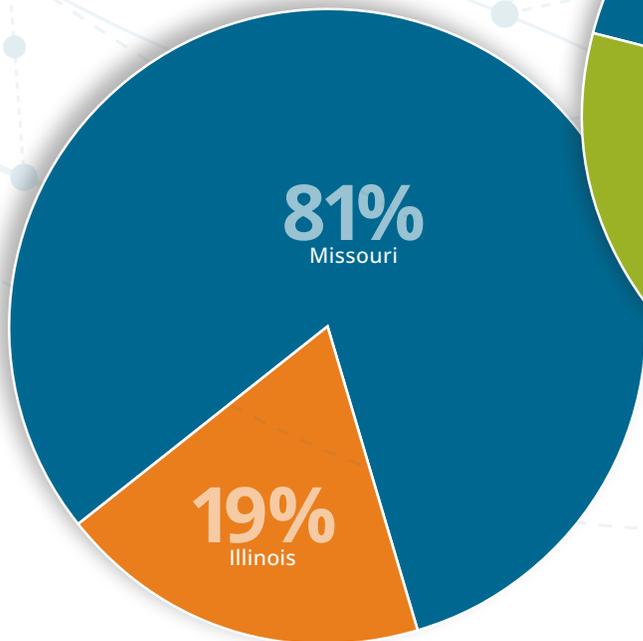
Seeding the Future Grants cultivate a partnership pipeline for our Movement Transformation Cohort. Organizations in the Movement Transformation Cohort are invited to be in partnership with Deaconess and receive annual grants over a three-year period for general operating support. These grants provide a stable source of flexible funding for organizational and civic infrastructure expansion, public policy advancement, and/or efforts impacting systems transformation.

Policy Campaign Grants

We continue to invest in policy and advocacy initiatives through our Policy Campaign Grants, which support timely issue-based campaigns to advance public policy through grassroots advocacy, civic engagement and community organizing aligned with our desired impacts. The grants are designed to support expanded capacity for movement infrastructure. In 2023 and 2024, our Policy Campaign awards totaled \$200,000. Recipients include:

- **Alive & Well Communities** to support their advocacy for student-generated policy priorities that emphasize the critical role of holistic mental health supports and student and educator well-being in creating safe schools and positive education outcomes.
- **Missouri Jobs** with Justice to recruit, and train supporters to educate voters, co-lead a statewide coalition to coordinate strategy, messaging, and outreach, and form a coalition of endorsing organizations for policies and initiatives including Paid Family Leave for St. Louis City and County workers, the St. Louis Direct Cash Assistance pilot, and the Guaranteed Basic Income pilot.
- **ArchCity Defenders** to support the launch of Freedom Summer STL, a multidisciplinary effort focused on four priority areas: voting, expungement, abolition, and housing justice.

**Total Investment:
\$1 million+**



2023-2024 FUNDING SNAPSHOT

Seniors Community Revitalization & Development Fund

Deaconess Foundation partnered with the Community Health Commission of Missouri to launch the Seniors Community Revitalization & Development Fund (Seniors Community Fund) in 2023, which aims to improve the public health infrastructure to better serve residents 55 years of age and older and promote transparency and accountability. The Seniors Community Fund's investment for 2023 and 2024 totaled \$700,000 which was granted to 17 organizations addressing the Fund's three priority areas: transportation, safety, and health navigation support for seniors in the Greater St. Louis region and nearby counties in Illinois.

St. Louis Regional Racial Healing + Justice Fund

The Community Governance Board (CGB) of the St. Louis Regional Racial Healing + Justice Fund, established by Deaconess Foundation, Forward Through Ferguson, and Missouri Foundation for Health, invested a historic \$800,000 to support 42 Black and Brown-led organizations in the St. Louis region. The Fund's unique model of trust-based philanthropy and its anti-racist focus enables community members who are most impacted by racism to redistribute resources and direct investments for transformative impact. The CGB exercises complete decision-making power over the allocation of funds. The lived experiences and firsthand understanding of community members is evident in the awarded grants, which supported a diverse set of initiatives.

This historic grant cycle was the conclusion of the Racial Healing + Justice Fund pilot, which saw over \$1.3 million invested in Black- and Brown-led initiatives in St. Louis over three grant cycles.

Institute for Black Liberation

Deaconess launched the Institute for Black Liberation (the Institute), a novel approach to developing liberatory consciousness through healing the hurts of internalized racism grounding in the Liberatory Consciousness Framework created by Dr. Barbara J. Love. The Institute gives Black leaders in the Eastern Missouri and Southern Illinois region the opportunity to name, reckon with, and heal from racial trauma and the pervasive effects of internalized and structural racism. Because liberation work that ignores internalized harm cannot sustain structural change.

Each cohort meets regularly over the course of nine months, including facilitated all-day in-person immersion sessions, monthly virtual group sessions, and individual coaching. Participants in the Institute take part in a process of self-discovery, reflection, intensive training, and learning focused on healing racial trauma and promoting well-being, identifying and dismantling internalized oppression, exploring strategies for celebrating racial identity, building power through collective development of leadership skills and kinship with others, and developing tools to sustain change through generations.

The Institute's multi-year pilot is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. With this grant, Deaconess expands its role as an institutional advocate for the improved health of the Eastern Missouri and Southern Illinois communities.

Deaconess Center

Deaconess Center is a vibrant public square that promotes a community of learning and healing. The Center is dedicated to fostering spaces for convening, engagement, and resources that support liberation-based public policy solutions, including:

- Hosting a range of partner organizations and events, from neighborhood gatherings to regional policy roundtables.
- Supporting the implementation of the North Central Plan and the equitable development of the Brickline Greenway.
- Partnering with frontline organizations to provide resources essential for well-being.

Deaconess believes that by elevating, celebrating, and inspiring liberated behaviors, we are creating the conditions that lead to individual and community wellness.

Furthering its role as a public square, Deaconess Center became a polling place for St. Louis City elections, including the 2024 Missouri state primaries and national general election.

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