Grantmaking Strategy Executive Summary

JUNE 2025

About Mission Telecom Giving

Mission Telecom Giving (MTG) confronts deep societal divides by investing in the systemic and political roots of inequity. Our grantmaking prioritizes grassroots organizing, policy change, and advocacy efforts with the power to shift what's possible—transforming not just outcomes, but the conditions that create them. We are guided by the belief that those most affected by injustice are best equipped to lead the work of change.

Launched in June 2025, MTG is the philanthropic arm of Mission Telecom, a nonprofit advancing digital equity and systemic transformation through affordable broadband access and bold, justice-driven funding.

Our Grantmaking Principles

- *We seek transformative and systemic change, prioritizing upstream solutions and root causes.*
- *We are unapologetically bold, political, and risk-taking in our approach*
- *We support innovation and experimentation where traditional approaches have failed.*
- *We invest in authentic leadership from the most impacted communities, often by providing early funding.*
- *We are agile and responsive to the evolving needs of grassroots leaders and changing needs of the field.*
- *We maintain personal and organizational humility both internally and in community with grantee partners.*

Developing Our Strategic Approach

Our strategic approach was informed by extensive research, including dozens of interviews with movement leaders and content experts, to determine how our unique philanthropic assets could best serve the field, in line with our grantmaking principles.

We learned that our most unique offerings included:

1. the ability to offer highly flexible and rare 501c4 funding for advocacy that creates systemic change;
2. a Board and leadership with extensive background in racial and social justice work and a willingness to support bold and innovative work;
3. Leadership and staff with deep expertise in telecom justice.

Our three-pillar strategy was born of the marriage between the principles and values expressed by our Board and leadership (the change we aspire to be in the world) and the assets we could uniquely offer to leaders and organizations committed to racial and social justice.

Our Three Pillar Strategy

Our grantmaking strategy is built around three core pillars.

Pillar 1: Multiracial Democracy & Power-Building
Core support for work that builds power for the New American Majority

"Multiracial democracy is a new phenomenon in the United States, dating back only to 1965 and the passage of the Voting Rights Act. It is fragile, and yet to be fully realized. The great challenge for philanthropy in our times is how to protect and expand multiracial democracy, without which progress on any issue is impossible.[1]

"We can't simply invest in making better really bad conditions. Sometimes you have to, but it's insufficient. Usually we stop at the charity that is reducing the harm instead of actually stopping the harm from happening."[2]

[1] Bhargava and Picower, 2023
[2] Mitchell Interview, 2023

This pillar includes core support for work that builds power for the New American Majority which is made up of people of color, young people, and others who have the power to reshape US democracy. This work builds on the MT theory of change that systemic progressive change requires all communities to be equally engaged in our democracy and reflected in the leadership. This is the aspirational work of realizing the full dream and potential of American democracy.

The work included in this pillar is built on a theory of change that posits that systems that benefit all people are built from a population that is fully engaged and represented in the political process. Because people of color and low-income communities are the least represented in these processes, their interests are least served. In order to build more equitable systems, we must focus on directly engaging both the political process and the people who have traditionally been given the least power within it. In a moment that actual authoritarianism and the undermining of the electoral process is on the rise, content experts also pointed to the critical need to form and fund multiracial coalitions from the energy of social movements like the Movement for Black Lives where grassroots organizing and electoral organizing perspectives can be mutually reinforcing rather than segregated.

It is a failure of democracy that money is the most powerful form of "speech" in US elections. Experts pointed out to us that the money to engage powerfully in elections has almost always been exclusively in the hands of the wealthy. Those with wealth have, and have always had, the most power to participate in and influence the electoral process. The policy landscape has, therefore, always reflected the interests of those with the most wealth and privilege.

In a political system that is, very unfortunately, powered by money it is a powerful lever for change to put political funding into the hands of those who have least often had it. The goal of this pillar is to build the influence of people who currently have the least advantage in the political process with the ultimate goal of having representatives and public policies that are fundamentally more just and equitable.

Funding for data infrastructure also makes for smarter, more informed work. It also allows organizations and leaders to hear from and integrate understanding of the needs of communities more often and more deeply. Data is a form of listening.

One content expert pointed out that a lot of progressive ideas that center racial and economic ideas are mainstream but progressives have not been able to build "organizations that are commensurate with the popularity of our ideas." This content area goes to building organizations that are resourced to be firing on all cylinders so that ideas that win for communities have everything they need to translate into real change in real human lives.

Priorities

- Innovation and tools in direct service of racial and economic justice. This is work to build and support critical infrastructure in direct service of movements towards racial and social justice.
- Experimentation and model building
- Data and technology infrastructure
- Original research
- Communications and narrative
- Training, development, and support of movement organizations and operatives

> **Allocation Guideline: 20-30% of MT grantmaking.**

Pillar 3: Telecom Justice
Work that puts telecom access and power in the hands of all communities

"Almost every issue is becoming a tech issue as technology is more entwined in our lives." - Evan Greer, Fight for the Future

There is no equity, no racial or economic justice in these times that does not include full and unfettered access to the internet. The Telecom Justice pillar leverages the expertise of the Mission Telecom Board, leadership, and team to also be a part of a philanthropic ecosystem that supports full broadband access for all. This field was found to be both of crucial importance in the historical moment and suffering from a lack of both funding and content expertise among funders. Experts in the field told us that funders with an understandable lack of content background in technology or telecom work often lean heavily into funding the same things that may not actually be the best opportunities for change.

An example of this is the lack of organization or funding for the renewal of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) which provides a discount of "up to $30 per month toward internet service for households and up to $75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands" and "helps ensure that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare and more".[3] According to recent FCC figures, this program serves more than 20 million low-income families (many a carry over from a pandemic-era program, the Emergency Broadband Benefit). ACP is seen as unlikely to be renewed. The lack of public mobilization related directly to a small and under-funded field or leaders and organizations with the background needed to identify and engage in these moments.

Funders with content expertise in broadband can help make sure the field of those who work in Telecom Justice (who are often also doing important media justice related work), is strengthened with more general support dollars and supported by funders with the content knowledge to understand the needs of the work.

This area also extends to priorities like net neutrality and FCC proceedings and could involve work on key nominations contests.

Work that leverages telecom access and power towards equity for all communities. This is policy and advocacy work to ensure that every community has equitable access to affordable and quality broadband.

- Promoting affordable broadband access and combating the digital divide via policy and advocacy
- Increasing connectivity for communities that are low-income, people of color, and Indigenous
- Restoring the Affordable Connectivity Program and resourcing of the Universal Service Fund
- BEAD implementation
- Nomination contests
- Thought leadership
- Training, development, and support of movement organizations and operatives

Grantmaking Mechanics

The day-to-day mechanics of the grantmaking directly reflect the Grantmaking Principles centering the goal of Mission Telecom serving as a trusted partner to its grantees.

- Value and center reflective leadership from communities
- Consult and follow the lead of community leaders in developing a strategy
- Provide flexible funding in the form of general operating support
- Prioritize strategic use of scarce 501c4 funding and allowances for Political Campaign Activity (PCA) to support advocacy, organizing, and policy towards progressive social change
- Utilize lightweight application and reporting mechanisms that do not unnecessarily burden groups
- Prioritize multi-year support and larger grant sizes
- Grantmaking may be done in 1 or 2 cycles per yea,r with regard for early elections funding
- Allow for opportunistic funding happens throughout the year
- We collaborate with other funders with the goal of creating more impact with an orientation towards racial and economic justice, systemic change, and boldness throughout the philanthropic community

Conclusion

In a time of tectonic social and political change, we embrace this moment as a call to act differently, resource boldly, and trust deeply. When the stakes for equity, democracy, and access have never been higher, our grantmaking strategy is guided by a clear conviction: those closest to the problems are also closest to the solutions. That's why we prioritize the most flexible, trust-based funding we can offer—core support, multi-year commitments, and minimal restrictions. This kind of funding gives organizations the power to respond to emerging needs, invest in their teams, and sustain their work over time. The ecosystem of social change is alive with visionary leaders and transformative ideas—what they need now is the freedom and support to pursue their boldest strategies.