

WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA LOCAL STRATEGY

2025



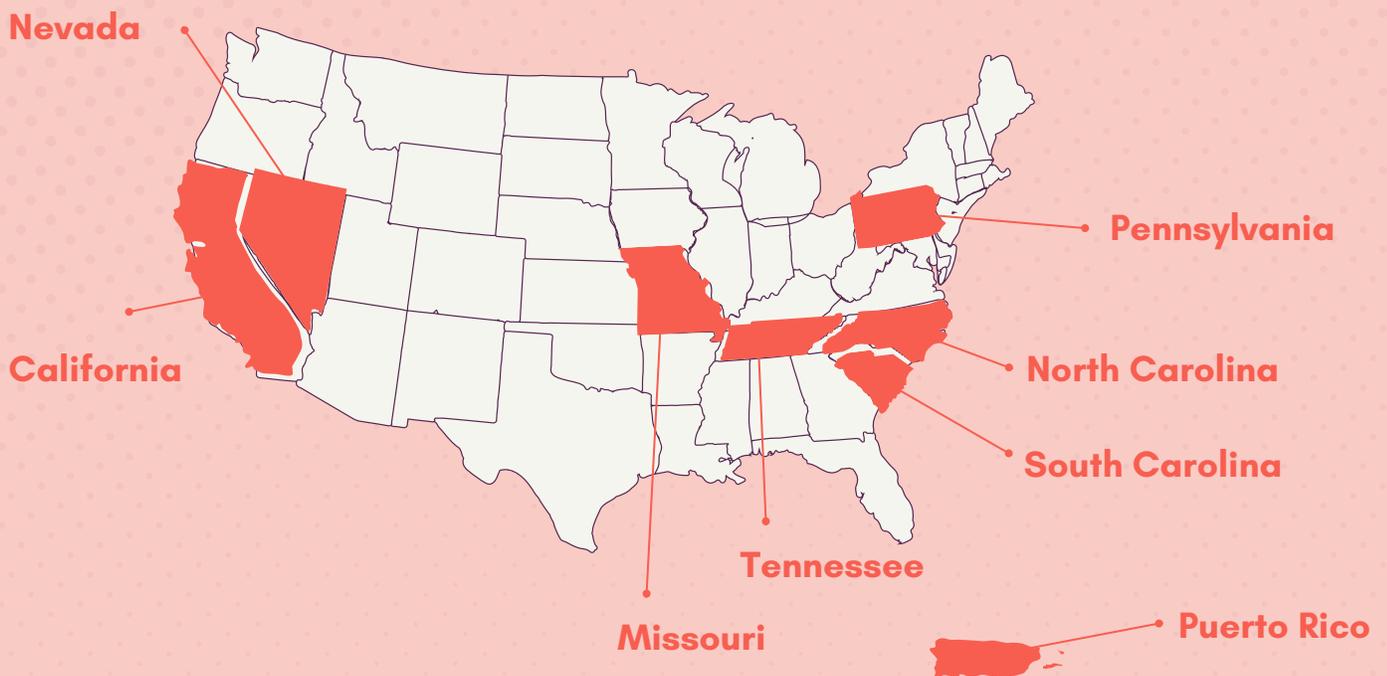
AMPLIFY FUND

NEIGHBORHOOD FUNDERS GROUP

Amplify Fund is a place-based pooled fund that supports historically marginalized communities in maintaining and building decision-making power.

We do this by funding community organizing groups working on land justice, economic justice, holistic wellbeing, and human dignity issues.

Each of our funding places has a unique historic, economic, political, and social context, so our grantmaking strategy is tailored to each place.



Local Strategy Design

In 2025, after committing to extend Amplify Fund 10 years beyond the original 4-year lifespan, we decided to update our local grantmaking strategies.

19 interviews

In Western Pennsylvania, we interviewed 19 leaders from our grantee organizations, other movement organizations, and value-aligned, local foundations. We asked about the most pressing challenges in the region, progressive solutions to those problems, the ecosystem of organizations and leaders working on those solutions, and capacities needed to achieve those solutions.

8 advisors

With that data, we identified eight local strategy advisors, three of which were grantees. Those advisors came together on June 16, 2025 to make decisions on what Amplify Fund should focus on for the next five years, and later provided written feedback on the final strategy. Those decisions, along with important context, can be found on the next few pages.



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Local Context

Situated squarely in the “Rust Belt,” Western Pennsylvania experienced the boom and bust of the steel industry. In the late 1800s, Andrew Carnegie took advantage of the region’s coal and iron ore reserves and access to three rivers to establish the world’s largest steel company. At its peak, Western Pennsylvania accounted for more than 60% of the U.S.’s total steel output. This amount of production had devastating consequences on the environment and people’s health. The region still houses the largest producing underground coal mine in North America, over three thousand fracked gas drilling operations, and Google AI data centers, with continued consequences for air, water, and land quality. →

The rise of the steel and coal industry, however, also produced a strong culture of labor activism. Western Pennsylvania steelworkers were central to the formation of the Steel Workers Organization Committee, the United Steelworkers of America was headquartered in Pittsburgh, and one of the most famous worker’s strikes took place at the Carnegie Steel Works plant in 1892. Union membership reached 20% in the late 1900s, but has been declining ever since due to anti-union legislation and globalization, which displaced industry and the working class. The healthcare sector prospered in the wake. The University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, the largest employer in Pennsylvania, has been actively resisting union efforts for years. Yet nurses are still engaging in union drives despite a hostile political environment. ↓

After selling his company to J.P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie became a billionaire, and along with Thomas and Andrew Mellon, Henry K. Frick, and others, laid the groundwork for a strong philanthropic tradition in the region. Grantmakers of Western Pennsylvania boasts a membership of 90 institutions. Despite this regional wealth, racial justice organizing groups struggle to access local grants, and national funders enter the picture mostly during election years because of Pennsylvania’s reputation as a swing state. Given the region’s overwhelmingly white demographics (even Allegheny County, the most diverse in the area, is about 76% white), organizations led by and serving diverse communities need support. ■

Along with the medical sector, universities play an outsized role in Western Pennsylvania. With over 20 higher education institutions in Allegheny County alone, along with other non-profit institutions, a significant percentage of land is non-taxable, which drives up property taxes for everyday people. These universities focus on research that sometimes extracts information from disadvantaged communities in harmful ways. While research can be an important tool for organizing groups, academia in Western Pennsylvania is often disconnected from local advocacy efforts. ←

Grantmaking Priorities

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Affordable Housing

Pittsburgh's Black population dropped by over 10,000 people from 2010 to 2020 due to increasing home prices, a reduced supply of affordable homes because of corporate purchases, more demand for affordable housing, and redlining. Local advisors recommended Amplify Fund support organizations promoting social housing, rent stabilization, tenants rights, and corporate accountability through community benefits agreements, land back agreements, and inclusionary zoning. Housing was far and above the top issue across multiple categories.

Jobs & Wages

An often-cited 2019 study of Pittsburgh concluded that Western Pennsylvania is the worst place for Black women because of high poverty, low median income, and low participation in the labor force. The race and gender gap of quality jobs and wages is notable in other populations, too. Local advisors recommended Amplify Fund support organizations using a racial and gender analysis to fight for increased minimum wage or guaranteed basic income, unionized workplaces, a worker bill of rights, and support for small businesses.

Healthy Food Access

Western Pennsylvania food banks and homeless shelters are seeing an increase in food insecurity, and closing grocery stores are increasing food deserts in the area. The Mon Valley, for example, is experiencing a form of food apartheid. Healthy food access is also tied to land access. Local advisors recommended Amplify Fund support organizations advocating for municipal or cooperative grocery stores, and land ownership for farmers and gardeners.

Land
Justice

Public Transportation

With major transit reductions being proposed in a region already sorely lacking in public transportation, Western Pennsylvania will see an increase in fares or have less access to services. Local advisors recommended Amplify Fund support organizations campaigning for expanded service lines, free transit options for particular populations, and better infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks, bus shelters)

Economic
Justice

Grantmaking Priorities

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PENNSYLVANIA

Healthcare

Western Pennsylvanians with mental health concerns have few options because of staffing shortages, funding cuts at the federal level, and carceral solutions to mental health crises. On top of that, there are deep inequities in the medical system for all health-related concerns. Local advisors recommended Amplify Fund support organizations providing culturally responsive and tailored services, spaces for rest and healing, and increased access to healthcare.

Air and Water Quality

Because the energy extraction industry is still prominent in Western Pennsylvania, residents are experiencing increased asthma and cancer rates due to polluted air, and increased mental health challenges. Industrial accidents, like the August 2025 explosion at a steel mill in the region, harm public health. Local advisors recommended Amplify Fund support organizations providing mutual aid, holding corporations accountable, banning harmful industry, and protecting public lands.

Criminalization and Militarization

Police departments have continued to expand and abuse their power as evidenced by a planned “cop city” on the former VA Highland Drive campus in Pittsburgh, and increased collusion with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to harass, assault, deport, and arrest residents. Those imprisoned in Allegheny County Jail and Shuman Juvenile Detention Center are then subject to heinous prison conditions. Local advisors recommended Amplify Fund support organizations demanding the closure of detention centers, reducing prison populations, and providing support to formerly incarcerated individuals, along with promoting greater oversight and accountability of law enforcement agents.

Holistic
Wellbeing

Human
Dignity



Capacity Building

When asked what kinds of technical assistance or capacity building support local organizing groups most need to deepen the impact of their work, local strategy advisors identified the following priority areas. They also emphasized the need for context-appropriate, localized support that helps build long-term infrastructure in Western Pennsylvania, rather than one-off, drop-in support.

1. **Backend organizational support**
for community-led groups, such as operations, human resources, and compliance, legal, and finance systems, that reduce the administrative burden on Executive Directors and overextended staff.
2. **Organizing training and leadership development**
for new organizers, and to build the skills of mid-level and senior leaders through peer-to-peer learning and mentoring.

As long as Amplify Fund continues to meet its fundraising goals, we will provide no-strings-attached, general operating grants to organizations in Western Pennsylvania working on the problems and solutions named by local leaders in this strategy paper. We will also offer capacity building grants related to the priority areas listed above.

We encourage our fellow funders to join our pooled fund, or fund Western Pennsylvania organizations directly, to support long-term change in the region.

If you have any questions about our local strategy process or would like to further discuss our final grantmaking strategy in Western Pennsylvania, please contact amplify@nfg.org.