

# CRISES AS A CATALYST 2.0

*A Toolkit for Thriving*   
*Through Uncertainty*

## CREATIVE COURAGE

*A workbook to support funders and their boards with navigating crises by strengthening equity-centered practices to create conditions for community thriving*

**WORKBOOK 5**

[proinspire.org](https://proinspire.org)



# PURPOSE

Funders are navigating the same interlocking crises that nonprofit and movement organizations face, from grappling with the risk of political retaliation and legal concerns when using equity and justice-centered language to having to rethink the strategic impact of their funding priorities under continued uncertainty and volatile change. Not to mention, stretched capacity and urgency in trying to meet the moment and protect immigrants, people of color, trans communities, and other targeted communities.

Yet, funders can also contribute to and perpetuate these very same crises on their nonprofit partners. By nature of their power and platform, philanthropy's response to these crises creates ripple effects, which leaves nonprofits reeling from the impact, especially when those responses are reactive and risk-averse.

This workbook invites funders to pause, assemble, and direct the visible and invisible forms of their power through imagination, adaptability, and experimentation. By fostering Creative Courage, funders can support and be in solidarity with communities experiencing disinvestment, political weaponization, and volatile change. Creative Courage is a tool of liberation that helps philanthropy align its resources, processes, and relationships with the world we are working to build.

## How to use this workbook

This workbook offers reflection and discussion prompts and sample exercises for key roles in philanthropy to foster Creative Courage in the face of intersecting crises. The opportunity of uncertainty is for philanthropy to lead with curiosity, creativity, and courage, rather than rigidity and fear. Use this workbook, if you are:

- Navigating increased pressure, scrutiny, or political tension
- Committed to equity-centered grantmaking
- Wanting to deepen trust with grantees and community partners
- Ready to reimagine strategies, processes, or structures to support thriving for communities and community-based organizations

We invite you to incorporate prompts during retreats, team meetings, or strategy sessions to strengthen alignment across staff, leadership, and board.

## What do we mean by Creative Courage?

Creativity in philanthropy is not about novelty. It is about rethinking what is possible, questioning inherited norms, reimagining what is needed, and redesigning how resources flow. When funders embrace creativity, they move away from transactional relationships rooted in paternalism and towards system-changing partnerships with communities based in humility, reciprocal trust, and power sharing. Creativity also fuels the energy and joy needed to persist when working on entrenched social challenges.

At the same time, actually acting on that creativity takes courage. It is courageous to disrupt old norms and experiment with new ones, especially when facing risks like political weaponization or backlash. We need funders who are rooted in their values and willing to use their power, with intention, even with the risks present.

# Three crises through the lens of Creative Courage in philanthropy

## **Crisis of Disinvestment and Downsizing**

When funders shift strategic focus away from equity-focused grantmaking, those community-based organizations end up competing with peer organizations for fewer resources, creating increased pressure on staff and volunteers. This disinvestment comes at a time when communities are already under increased pressures and relying on strong networks of support more than ever. Creative Courage helps funders re-examine their approaches for partnering with communities, responding to their emerging needs amidst the crises, and aligning investments with their vision for the future.

## **Crisis of Political Weaponization and Retaliation**

Political weaponization places equity-centered organizations at risk. Funders may experience pressure to distance themselves from grantees or silence values-driven work. Creative Courage allows funders to move through risk, not just manage it, by reconnecting to their deeper commitments and vision for empowered, resourced, and thriving communities.

## **Crisis of Uncertainty and Volatile Change**

Volatile change can leave grantmakers feeling unsure about direction, long-term planning, or strategy. In those moments, some funders respond by requiring unnecessary additional documentation or rigid metrics. Creative Courage pushes funders to remain agile and imaginative through uncertainty, without withdrawing support or diverting valuable resources and capacity from grantee partners.

**Creative Courage thrives in systems that invite experimentation, collaboration, and flexibility. Creative Courage guides funders to:**

- Provide tie-off grants when changing strategic direction
- Provide multi-year, unrestricted, or flexible funding, including increasing overhead cost allocation
- Reduce administrative burdens for grantees by replacing an application or reporting requirement with an alternative format
- Use philanthropic voice to counter harmful narratives and fund storytelling, narrative change, and legal support
- Publicly name equity-centered values, which empowers grantees to stand firm with their values
- Host convenings for grantees or community members to build relationships, map power, and support mutual aid between organizations
- Fund infrastructure, capacity building, and leadership or staff wellbeing, including sabbaticals and retreats
- Create opportunities for community advisory boards for shared decision-making and learn alongside communities rather than directing outcomes
- Pilot flexible funding models in partnership with grantees
- Reimagine and explore updates to an Investment Policy Statement
- Collaborate with other funders to pool resources and withstand scrutiny
- Experiment with divestment from extractive systems and investment in alternative regenerative systems
- And more!























# EXPERIMENTATION WORKSHEET

*When funders move with Creative Courage, they shift philanthropy from a gatekeeping role into a solidarity and power-sharing role.*

STEP	ACTIVITY	CREATIVE COURAGE IN PRACTICE
<p><b>Align with Values</b></p>	<p>Revisit your personal and institutional values. Identify one value that will guide your decisions and interactions for this cycle of experimentation.</p>	<p>Anchoring in a value allows you to move forward even when a risk is present.</p>
<p><b>Listen and Learn with Grantees</b></p>	<p>Review existing reports about grantee or community perspectives. If that is unavailable, schedule one conversation with a grantee focused only on relationship building and listening. Ask about their current needs, pressures, and hopes. No agenda. No additional requests or requirements from them.</p>	<p>Fostering empathy and shifting internal narrative from oversight to solidarity.</p>
<p><b>Experiment or Pilot</b></p>	<p>Choose one low risk experiment or change. This could be extending a deadline, simplifying a requirement, providing small flexible funds, or testing a relationship-based process.</p>	<p>Building a muscle to engage in creative processes using small, iterative shifts.</p>
<p><b>Reflect, Adjust, and Recommit</b></p>	<p>Review what you learned from the experiment and share lessons transparently. Consider, what's the next shift to make?</p>	<p>Embodying a learning culture, and practicing responsiveness, transparency, and accountability to the lessons learned.</p>

**\*NOTES:**

---



---



---

# ACTS OF CREATIVE COURAGE IN PHILANTHROPY

*that are inspiring to you*

## CRISIS OF DISINVESTMENT AND DOWNSIZING

### **Missouri Foundation for Health and The Marshall Project**

With the rapid disinvestment in journalism nationwide, many communities lack local newsrooms reporting on the critical issues impacting community health and well-being. Missouri Foundation for Health and The Marshall Project are collaborating to meet this gap in Missouri by establishing The Marshall Project - St. Louis, a new nonprofit newsroom dedicated to providing in-depth reporting on Missouri's legal system. We're inspired by the creative innovation and courage to invest in a new strategy that will provide residents with the factual information necessary to improve their environments and, ultimately, advance health equity. Learn more [here](#).

- *In what ways can your foundation meet this moment with deeper investment or bold action in your community?*

## CRISIS OF POLITICAL WEAPONIZATION AND RETALIATION

### **Immigrant Rapid Response Fund (IRFF)**

In response to escalating attacks on immigrant and refugee communities in Minnesota, a multiracial and multiethnic coalition of 32 philanthropic leaders stepped into creative courage by launching the IRFF on January 12, 2026. IRFF allocates funds to nonprofits on a weekly basis, with grants unrestricted whenever possible and no reporting requirements. At a moment when some funders are disinvesting in community-based work or requiring even more documentation to receive funding, IRFF is designed "to add resources to communities—not replace existing support while strengthening coordination and collective response." Learn more [here](#).

- *Where are there opportunities in your grantmaking to protect and move money to community partners more rapidly, without increasing their administrative burden?*

