

MARY REYNOLDS BABCOCK
FOUNDATION

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

MISSION, VISION AND PERSPECTIVE

The Babcock Foundation's mission is to help people and places move out of poverty and achieve greater social and economic justice.

We recognize that poverty is complicated and multi-faceted. We believe in the need for significant changes in the systems and structures—laws, behaviors, attitudes, policies and institutions—that make a difference to people and their communities. To overcome tough barriers, people often need concrete assistance, like access to employment, workforce training or affordable housing, that results in direct improvements and supports them in achieving their full potential. We also believe people who develop skills, expand their awareness and believe in themselves can successfully improve their own lives and act collectively to increase opportunity for themselves and their communities.

Our vision for the South is anchored in a belief in people, organizations and the power of partnerships. We believe more people must directly influence the institutions and leaders that shape their economic and civic lives. Better policy and more collaborative institutions, public and private, should provide supportive and equitable ladders of economic opportunity. More people and communities need to access, control and build assets essential for economic mobility and stability. Progress along all three pathways—civic engagement, supportive policy and institutions, and economic opportunity—is critical to moving people and places out of poverty.

We recognize there are serious challenges to this vision in the South and beyond: Structural racism and other forms of discrimination are major barriers. Political control remains too concentrated. Disinvestment in public goods like education and the safety net has eroded the foundation people need to get ahead. The economy too often rewards short-term market behavior that hurts low-wealth people, communities and natural systems.

We recognize overcoming these challenges and advancing this vision is not easy work. It takes long-term and patient investment. It takes collaboration among unusual partners. It takes effective and well-resourced organizations, enterprises and networks working together in new ways across race, geography, strategy and issues. It requires low-wealth and directly affected people to be central to the solutions in their communities and across the region. It takes a commitment to democracy, equity and inclusion.

While these solutions are not simple, we believe they are not only possible but essential to promoting economic opportunity and reducing poverty and inequality in the South.

PATHWAYS OF CHANGE

Three pathways of change represent priorities for layering our investments of money, time, relationships, leverage and learning: economic opportunity, democracy and civic engagement, and supportive policies and institutions. We think of these pathways as broad, *mutually reinforcing* approaches to social change. Our experience tells us networks and places that advance along more than one pathway are more successful at progress toward economic and social justice.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

People are better positioned to escape poverty when they have direct access to jobs and ways to turn income into durable assets. Some of these ladders of economic opportunity include work supports, job training and connections to employers seeking skilled, fair-wage labor. Others include access to non-predatory financial services, local control of community assets and tools to encourage entrepreneurship and new business models.



DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

We believe in the power of democracy and civic engagement to effect positive transformations. This happens when a broad range of people—including those who are low-wealth and directly affected by inequality—develop the knowledge, skills, networks and motivation to build democratic systems and challenge entrenched structures. Key strategies to support these outcomes include community organizing, leadership development, inclusive community planning, voter education and get-out-the-vote efforts.

SUPPORTIVE POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS

For communities to thrive, for-profit and nonprofit institutions and all levels of government must foster cultures and adopt policies that open doors to economic opportunity and democratic participation for low-wealth people. Supportive institutions can bring new resources to the table, effectively implement policy and leverage political will. Strategies toward these outcomes include research, strategic communications, advocacy and community organizing.

We recognize important work can and should happen in other ways and for other purposes. The Foundation believes these pathways and their intersections provide important opportunities to address real needs and accelerate progress toward our vision of the South.

MRBF'S APPROACHES

The following approaches cut across our work and inform how we operate:

Place-based

We believe an understanding of and focus on place a central to defining unique opportunities, challenges and partnerships to move people and places out of poverty.

Multiple, layered strategies

We don't believe in a "silver bullet" approach to poverty alleviation, but understand that investment in multiple organizations and coalitions over time, using complementary strategies and informed by th understanding of place, are effective at achieving ou desired outcomes.

Network approach

We support networks of people and organizations working together to bring a diverse collection of strategies, capacity and perspective for greater impact. We support efforts to develop leaders who are directly affected and connect them to partners and opportunities that increase their influence.

Engage with multiple tools

We strategically deploy 100 percent of our financial assets (grants, program-related investments and market-rate investments), use our intellectual and

reputational capital to influence and leverage additional investments from foundations and other sources, engage in strategic communications and look for opportunities to convene grantees and other partners for peer learning. We deploy staff as "network officers" to engage deeply in a place, learn the context and determine how best to support the work.

Learn deeply

We seek to reflect on and capture lessons from our work and share them broadly.

Build capacity

We aim to strengthen every dimension (program, governance, management, administration, finance, culture, etc.) of healthy organizations and networks through patient, long-term general support and attention to organizational development.



WHO SHOULD APPLY

The Babcock Foundation invites proposals from **local, statewide and regional nonprofits** in the South-eastern United States that have **track records of helping people and places move out of poverty and achieve greater social and economic justice.**

We look for the most promising work that reflects opportunity in place, aligns with the Foundation's mission and perspective and demonstrates the following characteristics:

Connections with low-wealth people: All applicants must have meaningful connections with low-wealth people and communities. We encourage networks that include both grassroots organizations and institutional partners. Applicants that are not accountable to low-wealth people through their governance structures must demonstrate 1) impact in low-wealth communities, 2) trusting relationships with low-wealth people and 3) an analysis of poverty that recognizes the need to address systems and policy.

Clear analysis and strategies: Competitive applicants will have clear, promising strategies for moving people and places out of poverty, including institutional or policy change at the local, state and/or regional levels. These strategies should flow from an understanding of short-term and long-term challenges and opportunities in their places.



Long-term view: We are interested in efforts that take a long-term view of what is required for people and places to move out of poverty, and systems and policy changes that open doors to democratic participation and economic opportunities.

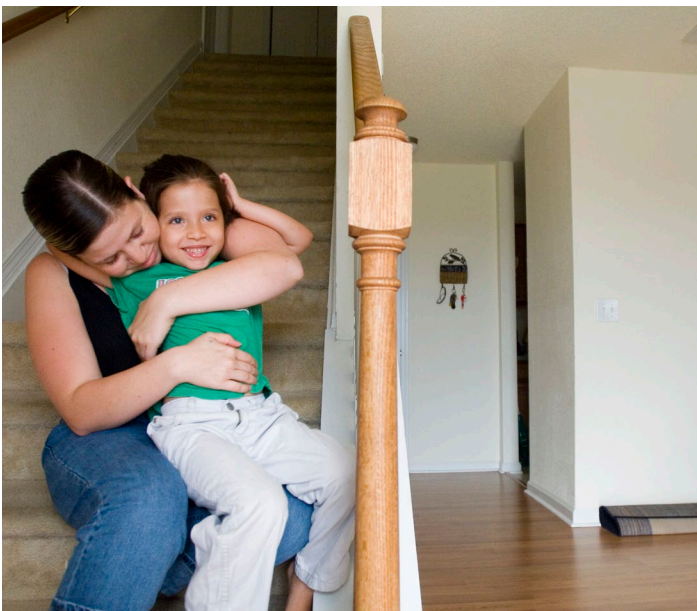
Strategic and opportunistic: We are interested in long-term, patient work to build critical infrastructure in local communities, states and the region. We are also interested in supporting work where the moment to act is now to make significant change or leverage significant resources that will have long-term impact on the lives of many people and communities.

The Foundation also remains open to new thinking about how to address poverty in the South. In addition to our primary focus, MRBF is interested in supporting **new approaches** (or significant revisions to existing ones) to achieve economic opportunity, systems and policy change or democracy and civic engagement outcomes. These approaches must reflect potential for meaningful impact, inform the work of existing partners and bring new partners to the work. These efforts must demonstrably advance our vision of social and economic justice in the South. Our annual grant-making allocation for new approaches is significantly smaller than for our primary focus.

OUR GEOGRAPHIC PRIORITIES

While the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation funds across the South, we seek to identify places and work that reflect the approaches and criteria described above. Given the size and complexity of the region, we focus the majority of our efforts in priority places where promising networks are advancing complementary outcomes over a specific period of time. At this time, we have particular interest in supporting economic transition work in central Appalachia, civic engagement for local and state policy change in Arkansas and North Carolina, and community economic development efforts in South Carolina.

One way we learn about promising work across the region is through our open inquiry process. We are pleased to receive an organizational summary from organizations that believe they meet our eligibility requirements and fit with our program description, regardless of geography.



Networks, alliances and resources: We look for goal-oriented, flexible relationships among the non-profit, public and private sectors to leverage resources and achieve impact. The networks may be formal or informal, short-term or long-term, and structured in a variety of ways. The networks should employ multiple social-change strategies or pathways of change (as described above) that make sense in their places.



HOW FUNDS MAY BE USED

Types of grants: Organizations may use grant funds in a variety of ways, including:

- General operating support
- Project support
- “Glue” support for networks of grassroots and partner organizations
- Organizational development support

Size and duration of grants: The size and duration of grants is matched to the applicant’s scale of impact, need, capabilities and opportunities, and typically follow these guidelines:

- We provide one-year funding for initial grants
- We consider continuation of funding in two-year increments
- We rarely make grants that exceed 30% of a project or organizational budget

Program-related investments (PRIs): We look for opportunities to make below-market-rate investments to advance economic development efforts in low-wealth communities. To qualify, an organization must have:

- Mission and impact consistent with our grant-making priorities described above
- A track record of managing debt or equity investments
- A solid business plan

The size and terms of the investment are matched to the use of capital and the business plan. The Babcock Foundation typically makes PRIs to organizations connected to our existing work in a place, or with a past history or current relationship with the Foundation.

APPLICATION PROCESS

The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation uses a rolling deadline for proposal submission. The Foundation’s board reviews proposals in June and October of each year. Full application guidelines are available online after submission of an organizational summary and invitation to apply.

