



AUDACIOUS THINKING

# 2020 IN REVIEW

A Year Like No Other

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**As we approach the end of 2020, we can begin to reflect on how our city has weathered the ongoing pandemic thus far; how existing inequities exacerbated enormous challenges; how OSI-Baltimore responded to emergent and ongoing needs; and our role—and the role of philanthropy more broadly—in creating a racially just and liberated Baltimore.**

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic challenged families, communities, systems, and governments like few events in recent history. How will these challenges—and the responses to them—change the way we live, learn, work, and heal?

For OSI, the tumultuous events of 2020 coincided with several internal changes: new leadership in Director Danielle Torain, who joined the organization in January; our first year without a significant fundraising program; and a stakeholder engagement and strategic planning process designed to clarify our mission and vision across program areas. In many ways, navigating how we as an organization could best respond to this year's challenges solidified our thinking around a core set of priorities.

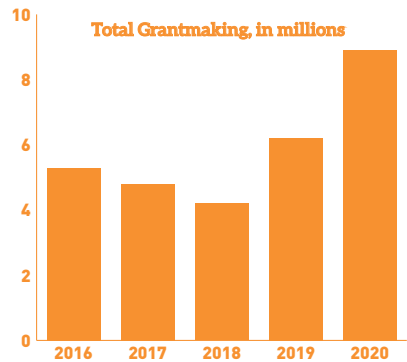
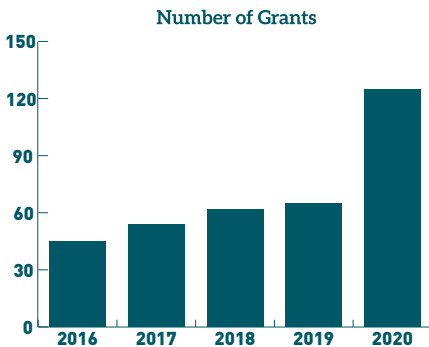
In 2020, in order to respond to the COVID pandemic and its deep economic impact as well as a wide range of other challenges and opportunities, OSI dramatically increased its grantmaking, making more than 120 grants—almost twice as many as in 2019—totaling over \$8.8 million (see graphs). Beyond increasing the number of grants and the dollars granted, OSI also shifted its approach, leaning into several public-private partnerships to support the people of Baltimore.

# LEVERAGING PUBLIC FUNDS TO TRANSFORM BALTIMORE

For years, OSI has served as a conduit between public and private institutions, communities, and individuals. This year, we built on that traditional role with several public-private partnerships that were able to leverage millions of dollars to support Baltimore residents struggling with the economic, health, and other impacts of the COVID pandemic, compounded by decades of disinvestment. Among those efforts:

- Collaborated with local government to leverage \$6 million in city funds to [launch the COVID-19 Emergency Assistance Program, delivering \\$400 debit cards to 15,000 residents of Baltimore's marginalized communities](#), who are most impacted by COVID-19 and yet often overlooked.

- Provided seed funding to establish [Baltimore Health Corps](#), a public-private partnership that leverages \$12 million in city funds to hire hundreds of unemployed Baltimore residents to be contact tracers and care coordinators for residents of Baltimore neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID-19.
- Partnered with Baltimore City to [provide technology and internet access in an effort to narrow the digital divide exacerbated by COVID-19](#), investing \$200,000 and shepherding a \$3 million city investment to create a “mesh network” to extend Internet access from school buildings to surrounding neighborhoods.
- Joined other local funders to support the city's new [Group Violence Reduction Strategy](#), which consists of several coordinated initiatives that aim to prevent violence by providing services to those most likely to be affected by violence.
- Collaborating and providing substantial funding for the enactment of the



OSI-Baltimore grant funding from 2016-2020

“Elijah Cummings, Baltimore Healing City Act of 2020.” Led by Councilman Zeke Cohen, [Healing City Baltimore](#) aims to unearth and reverse the causes of trauma in our city, by helping government proactively support the health of children and families, confronting injustice, and preventing violence.

- Supported [Emergency Relief for Immigrant Families \(ERIF\)](#), established by the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs to assist immigrant families impacted by the pandemic and with limited access to public benefits. To date, ERIF has provided assistance to over 2,000 families and 250 individuals.
- Supported the [transition of new Mayor Brandon Scott](#), with the inclusion of OSI Director Danielle Torain, Board Member Alicia Wilson, and Community Fellow Brittany Young as co-chairs of his Transition Team, and the involvement of many other partners, grantees, Fellows, and Board and Leadership Council members as chairs and members of the team’s committees.

“Before I joined OSI, I always appreciated the organization’s ability to bring together people in government with advocates and communities,” says Torain. “This year, faced with COVID and its brutal consequences, we were able to lean on those relationships and that convening capacity to leverage many millions of public dollars—more than OSI has ever been able to leverage in the past—to support people who needed it most.”



OSI Director Danielle Torain speaks at a press conference announcing the launch of Baltimore Health Corps, with Health Commissioner Dr. Letitia Dzirasa (left) and Mayor Jack Young. *(Mark Daniels)*

As OSI-Baltimore considers how it can best support transformative change in Baltimore in the coming years, it will build on the lessons learned in 2020 in many ways. One way could be to expand on the models of public-private partnership established in 2020 to support more long-term, non-emergency funding and to leverage funding from the state and federal level, in addition to local sources.

In a Leadership Council meeting in September, OSI staff and representatives from the Mayor’s Office and our community partners discussed the extensive infrastructure that had been established to facilitate the \$6 million COVID-19 Emergency Assistance Program. Council members asked whether that infrastructure could be replicated for other public-private partnerships, including ones with federal agencies. It was an inspiring conversation, one we hope to continue in 2021 and beyond.



## ALSO IN 2020

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Of course, not all OSI's work in 2020 was done in explicit partnership with government. As always, OSI has worked with a wide range of partners, including other funders, community-based advocates, and local businesses. A few highlights from those efforts:

**Worked with local advocates** to launch a campaign to decrease the Baltimore City police department budget by \$100 million (20%) over two years, institute an annual participatory budgeting process in Baltimore City, restore local control of the Baltimore City police department, and repeal the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights.

**Launched Bmore Invested**, a partnership with Baltimore's Promise that brings together 10 local funders and 24 community leaders to distribute more than \$2.3 million in pooled, private capital, including \$1 million from OSI-Baltimore, to local leaders of color who are working at the grassroots level to reimagine community-serving systems and advance community-based alternative approaches that promote healthy, safe, and thriving neighborhoods.

**Released a landmark study** demonstrating that Baltimore City Schools that have adopted restorative practices have seen dramatic drops in suspensions, improved school climate, and better relationships between students and teachers. The report, co-released with Baltimore City Public Schools, Johns Hopkins University Institute for Education Policy, and the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, earned local and national media attention.

**Responded to the unprecedented pivot to vote-by-mail election in 2020** by supporting local advocates' innovative efforts to educate and promote voting in margin-

alized neighborhoods in the primary election, resulting in unprecedented voter participation in Baltimore City and the use of OSF funds to scale these efforts to several cities in the general election.

**Granted emergency funding** to 23 local organizations providing COVID-response services to some of Baltimore's most marginalized populations, include people who use drugs, are incarcerated, or were recently released from incarceration, and thus at increased risks of contracting COVID-19, suffering a fatal overdose, or being re-incarcerated.

**Selected 12 Community Fellows**, including two Youth Activist Community Fellows, with funding from Open Society Foundations' Youth Exchange program ([learn more about the cohort on page 7](#)).

**Worked with nine grantee advocates** to initiate a multi-year decarceration campaign to reduce the number of currently incarcerated people who have served more than 15 years in Maryland prison, with executive, legislative, administrative, and community-based strategies.

**Provided \$220,000** in direct cash assistance for grassroots leaders and business owners through Black-led micro-granter CLLCTVLY.

**Supported COVID-response efforts** advancing policy and structural reform on behalf of populations left out of stimulus access, including formerly incarcerated people, Black workers, and non-custodial parents.

# OSI ENGAGES STAKEHOLDERS TO FORGE FUTURE STRATEGY

Early this year, before it became clear that 2020 would be so challenging and paradigm-shifting, OSI-Baltimore was planning to engage its many stakeholders to get a better understanding of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities—and those of local philanthropy more broadly—as a starting point for strategic planning for 2021 and beyond.

As the year progressed, and the enduring impact of COVID-19, the expanding movement for racial justice, and the volatile political landscape took shape, the stakeholder engagement process took on even greater urgency. With this in mind, a Stakeholder Engagement Committee made up of OSI staff worked with independent consultant Jonalyn Denlinger to develop evaluation tools to engage as many Baltimoreans as possible. They also worked with targeted stakeholders to get a better sense of how the organization can meet this moment and build more meaningful relationships.

The main evaluation tool, the OSI-Baltimore Stakeholder Engagement Survey, was designed to gather data and insights from the public that will aid the OSI team in assessing the broader local and philanthropic landscape, and general impressions regarding the current and potential future contributions of the organization. Two additional tools, targeted stakeholder interviews and focus groups, delved more deeply into questions and topics covered through the public survey and developed a more nuanced understanding of the survey responses.



“As an organization, it’s imperative that we do all we can to better understand how the evolving local and national landscape might impact our work and focus, and what role we can play to contribute to advancing sustainable solutions,” says OSI-Baltimore Director, Danielle Torain. “The Stakeholder Engagement process gave us a trove of information that we will mine as we set a path for our work in the coming years.

## WHAT DID OSI'S STAKEHOLDERS SAY?

### Some of the high-level issues in Baltimore that stakeholders identified:

- “A Tale of Two Cities” - the role of race and structural institutionalized racism in perpetuating local disparities across a variety of indicators of well-being – housing, education, safety, food access, income, technology, etc.
- Economic injustice - race and economic mobility; the income/wealth gap
- Lack of investment in leaders of color - nonprofit infrastructure needs and lack of capacity
- Community violence, safety, and criminal justice reform
- Social safety net, including housing and meeting of basic human needs such as food and healthcare access
- Education - access to and high-quality provision of education

### And these were identified as OSI's organizational critiques:

- Funding creates dependency and perpetuates existing power structures; lack of transparency in funding
- Convenes without knowledge or acknowledgement of its own power in the space; doesn't always listen to those who are experts in the space
- Leverages connections but doesn't bridge those connections for leaders in Baltimore, specifically leaders of color
- OSI's talent doesn't always show up outside of OSI (join boards, commissions, etc)
- Lack of clarity of overarching mission and vision of the organization, including how key bodies of work align
- Tries to do it all – get clear on what you hope to achieve and accomplish

### Some of the solutions that were identified:

- “Long-term, sustained movement building”
- Investment in grassroots organizing capacity and community-driven solutions – particularly organizations and movements led by people of color
- Advocacy, systems reform and systems change
- Greater collaboration across institutions

### These were identified as some of OSI's organizational strengths:

- Focus on racial justice
- History of investment in policy reform, systems change and organizing
- Willingness to make “risk” investments
- Willingness to invest in issues that others are not interested in such as community safety, criminal justice reform, addiction, and racial justice movements
- Early and sustained investor in social movements
- Exceptional, talented team

INTRODUCING THE 2020 COHORT OF

# OSI-BALTIMORE Community Fellows

In November, OSI announced the 12 people in its 2020 cohort of OSI-Baltimore Community Fellows, including two Youth Activist Community Fellows, whose fellowships are supported by Open Society Foundations' Global Youth Exchange Program. The new Fellows will each receive \$60,000 over 18 months to support local projects designed to address problems in Baltimore's underserved communities.



## **TEHYA JENAE FAULK\***

Tehya is establishing Orphan We, which will use digital spaces to collect and archive stories of people on the edge of society – primarily those with intersectional identities.



## **ATIYA WELLS**

Atiya will establish Baltimore Living in Sustainable Simplicity (BLISS) Meadows, which will provide the Frankford community access to fresh food and a connection to nature.



## **TROY STATON**

In partnership with various healthcare providers and other partner organizations, Troy will establish More Than a Shop as a network of barbershops and beauty salons that will bring healthcare, job training, and mental health resources to communities throughout Baltimore City.



## **MONICA LAPENTA**

Monica will establish Be a Chef for a Day (BaCFaD) Mobile Teaching Kitchen and Training Kitchen to engage North Baltimore youth ages 14 to 21 in culinary education and job training by making fresh meals for people in need.



## **JAMES HENDERSON SR.**

James will establish Pathways to College and Entrepreneurship as an innovative, multi-layered education program designed to expose underserved Baltimore youth to college readiness and entrepreneurship opportunities.







### **DARIUS WILMORE**

Darius will establish The Short Kuts Narrative Therapy Initiative as an innovative social impact project utilizing the creative process of therapeutic storytelling. The process is designed to aid in the healing of generational, personal, familial, professional, and environmental trauma.



### **ATEIRA GRIFFIN**

Through Building Our Nation's Daughters (BOND), Ateira will encourage healthy two-generation relationships, economic mobility, and educational achievement by providing single mothers and their daughters in grades 5 to 12, with mentoring, counseling, education, and career support.



### **ELIZABETH FINNE**

Through the Parole Hearing Preparation Project, Elizabeth will work to systematize parole hearing preparation by developing appropriate and effective materials, by empowering inmates and their family members to make their best case for parole release, and by engaging and guiding volunteers to support people in parole hearing preparation.



### **BREE JONES**

Bree is working to establish Parity, an equitable housing development company that is building a collective of motivated individuals who are cooperatively reviving West Baltimore neighborhoods through homeownership, civic engagement, and development without displacement.



### **WAYNE PAIGE\***

Wayne will establish The Beautiful Baltimore Project to support the educational and social development needs of McElderry Park's young people, incorporating the goals and passions of participants.



### **E.V. YOST**

E.V. will establish The Queer Crisis Response Unit (QCRU), an emergency services alternative designed to reduce the collateral consequences of criminalization experienced by the TLGBQIA+ survivors of interpersonal and systemic violence in Baltimore City.



### **ISAIAH JOHNSON**

Isaiah will establish The Greenmount East Leadership Project to connect community youth to positive role models who will assist them with developing life skills, healthy coping skills, and sound decision-making skills.

# Get to Know Jamar Brown

## THE NEW CHAIR OF OSI'S ADVISORY BOARD



This year, Jamar Brown, a partner at Rosenberg Martin Greenberg, LLP, and a champion of several justice-seeking organizations in Baltimore, stepped in as Chair of OSI's Advisory Board.

### **WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT BALTIMORE AND WHAT DO YOU SEE AS ITS BIGGEST CHALLENGES?**

I love the community – the in-it-togetherness of Baltimore's individual neighborhoods and the city as a whole. We are a city in need of local government leaders who, collectively, actually match the vision, promise, and determination of its residents. Our other major challenge remains systemic racial economic

inequality in Baltimore. Violent crime, poverty, addiction, and homelessness in our city are symptomatic of systems that created deep economic disparities based on race.

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL BE THE MOST LASTING IMPACTS OF THE TUMULTUOUS EVENTS OF 2020, INCLUDING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE OUTCRY OVER POLICE VIOLENCE, AND THE FRAUGHT NATIONAL ELECTION?**

I hope one impact is that Baltimore begins to emerge as a model for the rest of the country on issues of social justice. We have demonstrated the power to imagine a society that creates and promotes vibrant, equitable communities where all of our people thrive. COVID-19 has been the greatest public health crisis in the country's history. Here in Baltimore, we heeded the advice of medical professionals and supported our fellow residents in weathering the pandemic. When there were outcries over police violence in cities across the nation, including here in Baltimore, we did not see the type of uprisings that occurred in other places, in part, because we—as a city and through the work of OSI and our community partners—have been making the investments necessary to build and repair relationships between police and community since our own uprising following the death of Freddie Gray in 2015. And despite the fraught national election, here in Baltimore, because of the work of organizations like OSI grantee Black Girls Vote, we saw record turnout at the polls.



## WHAT ROLE CAN OSI, AND THE ADVISORY BOARD IN PARTICULAR, PLAY IN ADVANCING POSITIVE CHANGE IN BALTIMORE IN 2021 AND BEYOND?

OSI will continue to drive social justice movements in Baltimore by enhancing its efforts to direct capital and resources to leaders and organizations in impacted communities and by leveraging the expertise and innovative thinking of its staff and its ability to convene key stakeholders from across disparate constituencies to mobilize communities in Baltimore and throughout Maryland around solutions. The Advisory Board has a key role to play in shaping and articulating OSI's strategic vision to our community partners and providing diverse perspectives and experiences to better inform OSI's work, foster innovation, and challenge assumptions.

# In Memoriam

In 2020, OSI-Baltimore lost four beloved members of our community, including three members of the Community Fellows Network.

**REV. BERNICE BISHOP**, a 2013 Community Fellow, started Women Empowering Women Ministries and Women Empowering Women Education and Outreach Center, which began with a desire to feed as many hungry women and their families throughout Baltimore as she could, and expanded to teach women essential life skills.

**AVIS RANSOM**, a 2002 Community Fellow, founder of Income and Equality for All and an anti-racism consultant and workshop facilitator for Baltimore Racial Justice Action, Avis was a force – both as a mentor and as a member of her communities – who influenced, touched, and inspired many, including OSI-Baltimore Director Danielle Torain.

**WILLIAM MILLER, SR.** was a founding member of longtime OSI partner Bmore POWER and a champion of Baltimore's peer-led harm reduction movement who spoke out against the oppression of communities across Baltimore under the guise of public safety or public health.

**BETTY ROBINSON**, 2003 OSI Community Fellow was Civil Rights hero, organizer with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), lead organizer of the Citizens Planning and Housing Association, leader of Baltimore's Standing Up for Racial Justice chapter, and mentor to generations of advocates in Baltimore and beyond.

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