



[Deaconess Foundation](#), [Forward Through Ferguson](#) and [Missouri Foundation for Health](#) have collaborated to establish the St. Louis Regional Racial Healing Fund to invest in healing community trauma and changing the conditions that reinforce systemic racism. With a matching grant from [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) and a growing pool of participating organizations, \$1.4 million has already been committed to the effort. Through a community-led grant-making process, the fund will support efforts to develop capacity and infrastructure in the racial justice movement to envision, articulate and create a transformed St. Louis region through community organizing and healing arts.

The initial group of ten diverse funders of the effort include: Deaconess, Incarnate Word Foundation, Lutheran Foundation of St. Louis, Midwest Bank Centre, Missouri Foundation for Health, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, St. Louis Community Foundation, St. Louis University's Institute for Healing Justice and Equity, the Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock and YouthBridge Community Foundation.

“Nearly six years after the Ferguson Uprising, we have a renewed urgency in our nation to lean fully into the discomfort of racial healing required to build a just and equitable society for our children,” said Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson, president and CEO of Deaconess Foundation. “These partners realize the harmful, traumatic effects of systemic racism and are committed to supporting community organizers, activists and residents who are leading social change efforts.”

Recognizing the longstanding need to convert plans to support community wellness and resilience into action, a broad table of organizers and institutions helped develop the concept of the St. Louis Regional Racial Healing Fund. The collaborative, clear that the work of the fund must be grounded in community, will engage residents to participate in strategy development and grant-making decisions.

“We are proud to stand with partners who are committed to breaking down the structural barriers in our society that have prevented black Americans from thriving in this country, in our very own St. Louis region” said Dr. Bob Hughes, president and CEO of Missouri Foundation for Health. “Achieving racial equity is going to take all of us working together, respecting diverse voices, talents and ideas. The leaders of tomorrow—those vigorously fighting for racial justice require the ongoing support and resources that will allow them to heal and carry the work forward.”

Through this participatory grant-making process, a cohort of grassroots leaders, artists, creatives and residents of color will identify specific funding priorities and outcomes and distribute invested funds to a combination of mid-scale and grassroots organizations. These targeted investments, guided by a shared community-driven vision, aim to (1) heal individual and community trauma, (2) engage a broader range of residents in systems change work, (3) prepare leaders of color to organize for healing justice, (4) build local capacity to nurture support, and cultivate healing assets and (5) align resources for long-term sustainability.

With the focus on helping the region heal from the effects of racism and produce actionable change, the Fund Partners have collectively committed to a set of collaborative practices to assure sustained momentum for organized advocacy and civic action for systemic transformation. These include, in part:

- Expanding opportunities for community members to express grief, connect to sacred cultural assets, and seek/offer forgiveness through healing circles and other restorative practices;
- Investing in grassroots organizations that promote intragroup and intergroup healing and foster community resilience;
- Preparing and inviting more community residents to participate directly in leading and facilitating community mobilization, organizing, civic engagement, and system change; and
- Investing in community-wide, neighborhood level, and small group platforms that offer residents opportunities for deepening relationships through restoration, reverence, respect, and trust building.

These practices, informed by [The Ferguson Commission Playbook](#), will foster greater inclusion of underrepresented groups in the allocation of resources, increased civic and community engagement and a leadership pipeline of residents trained in racial healing practices and engaged in professional development opportunities.

“St. Louis’ Black and Brown residents rarely have direct power over the distribution of resources for racial healing, justice and transformation,” said David Dwight IV, executive director and lead strategy catalyst of Forward Through Ferguson. “It is our priority that residents directly affected by racial inequity are the ones who design the strategy and govern the investment of the funds into the community.”

[Forward Through Ferguson \(FTF\)](#) will lead the community outreach and engagement efforts this summer to form a cohort of community leaders that will drive the development and execution of the grant-making process. The cohort will include grassroots leaders, artists, creatives and residents of color. FTF will provide ongoing support to the cohort throughout the implementation of the grant-making process. For more information on the participatory grant-making process, contact David Dwight at davidd@forwardthroughferguson.org. Organizations and residents interested in getting involved in the design process should visit bit.ly/healingjusticestl.

For more information on becoming a Funding Partner, contact Kiesha Davis, director of partnership and capacity building for Deaconess Foundation at kieshad@deaconess.org.