



**WOODS  
FUND**  
CHICAGO

Justice for  
George Floyd  
Ahmaud Arbery  
Breonna Taylor

BLACK  
LIVES  
MATTER

THE  
MATTER

WATER

# LOOKING BACK ON 2022

*A YEAR OF FORTIFYING OUR FIDELITY TO RACIAL JUSTICE*

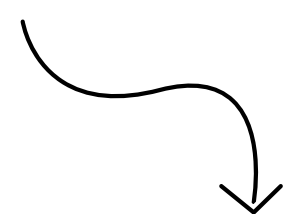


## **PRESIDENT MICHELLE MORALES**

Woods Fund Chicago has initiated three years of extraordinary transformation and restructuring. I wanted to share with you what our journey has been like in 2022. I have a need to constantly move forward and look for the next strategy or project to work on, instead

of pausing to reflect and/or celebrate our achievements. Blame it on the Virgo in me. The Woods Fund Chicago team strongly encouraged me, however, to write a look-back piece at the end of the year on the work that we have accomplished. To be honest, I cringed

at the daunting task, but they were right. We — I — must stop to celebrate what we have done. It's such an important and necessary component in this work of systemic, institutional, and transformative change.



# OUR COMMITMENT TO RACIAL JUSTICE & TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY

The lessons learned in 2020-2021 and the integration of grantee partner feedback helped us launch into action in 2022 as a now fully staffed organization. We started the year by finalizing the Foundation's strategic plan that maps out the next three years toward decolonizing our philanthropic practices and practicing trust-based philanthropy interpersonally and operationally. In 2022 we centered and deepened our commitment to racial justice. As a team of all cisgender women of color, we discussed how racial justice shows up in the Foundation's work — both in its grantmaking and its internal

culture. We turned to [Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity's \(PRE\) Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens](#) to guide our grantmaking criteria and the [National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy's PowerMoves](#) assessment guide to evaluate how we are internalizing practices of racial equity and justice *within* the Foundation. Centering a racial justice lens has allowed us to interrogate all the Foundation's practices — how white supremacy is embedded in philanthropy, how to best serve grantee partners, and what barriers to eliminate for BIPOC-led organizations. We know that it is often BIPOC-led, and more specifically BIPOC female-led, organizations that are not trusted, usually have more restrictions placed on their funding, and/or are asked for more documentation to “alleviate a Foundation's risk aversion.”

***When restructuring our grantmaking practices, we asked questions like Rigor for whom? Reports for whom? Who is afraid of risk, and why?***

This interrogation led us to embrace the principles of trust-based philanthropy, a framework that not only aligns with our values, but with the tenants of racial justice. If a pillar of racial justice is the systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all, then trust is at the core of this practice. We must trust one another, especially those who have been historically disenfranchised and marginalized if we hope to create a new future for our city and country. Trusting grantee partners and their leadership were the main principles we practiced in 2022. The Woods Fund Chicago team understood that the Foundation's work should follow the work of our grantee partners and that our role as a Foundation partner is to remove barriers for them and serve as a thought-partner and advocate in the philanthropic sector.

# IMPLEMENTING TRUST-BASED PRACTICES INTERNALLY

Embodying and upholding trust-based practices also meant examining the Foundation's internal culture and infrastructure and determining areas of strength and where we were falling short. We utilized the Four Dimensions of Trust-Based Philanthropy as we scrutinized our organization. We asked each other:

***Did the Foundation's infrastructure center women of color? Did its policies? Is white supremacy still evident in the Foundation? Is trust a core value? How does racial justice show up when we interact with one another, especially during a crisis?***

We asked lots of tough questions without always knowing what the path forward would be. We haven't always centered trust or fully committed ourselves to racial justice, but 2022 — two years after the onset of the pandemic and the social uprisings — demanded that we as staff and Board do so moving forward.

We spent considerable time exploring all areas where trust could be centered in our interactions: among staff and Board, respectively, between staff and Board, whereby the Board could trust staff's expertise and insight, and with philanthropic colleagues. We engaged with I-D Leadership to create an organizational culture focusing on trust and interdependency, and even more importantly, centering racial justice and each other's humanity. Our engagement with I-D Leadership and the coaching that they provided gave us the tools needed to name tension when it arises, lean into uncomfortable conversations (still a work in progress), and approach each other and our lived experiences with curiosity. This is helping us to communicate

more effectively and work more cohesively as a team.

The Foundation's executive team challenged everything this past year — from staff compensation/salaries, benefits, our collective well-being, how to embed rest as a part of our organizational practice, and how “productivity” manifests in our individual and collective work. We continue to examine how the “grind culture” occasionally rears its ugly head (Whew! I am the WORST at this), and we practiced closing the office for collective rest and instituting half-day Fridays throughout the year.



# STAFFING CHANGES

As we began the process of adhering to the values of trust-based philanthropy in the Foundation's grantmaking, we realized how much rests with the role of Program Officer. Because we found relationship-building and thought-partnering to be some of the more valuable aspects of our role as a Foundation partner, we realized that the size of the Program Officers' portfolios did not allow for the robust relationship-building we believe trust-based philanthropy demands. After much reflection and multiple staff conversations, we realized we were not tapping into and maximizing the diverse talents, skills, and competencies of team members, which capacity limitations exacerbated. With fresher and more imaginative eyes and minds, we re-envisioned existing roles while identifying the needs and opportunities for new ones. Our collective thinking led us to expand our programmatic team by increasing the position of Program Officer from two to three and

creating the Communications Strategy & Storytelling Officer position — a first for Woods Fund Chicago — and adding it to the Foundation's staffing structure. These new positions, materializing in 2023, will build our capacity, undergird our advocacy strategy, deepen our engagement with grantee and Foundation partners, elevate the visibility of Woods Fund Chicago and grantee partners, operationalize programming, and corral resources to support the organizational resiliency of the social justice sector in Chicago.

## ALIGNING FINANCIAL DECISIONS/ INVESTMENTS WITH CORE VALUES

Fully leaning into our organizational values and centering racial justice necessitated an examination of

our investment portfolio, which is currently invested in areas that bring harm to our communities and uphold systemic racism. This past year Woods Fund Chicago staff engaged the Board, especially the Finance Committee, in several discussions to share our concerns and ask critical questions. These discussions resulted in the Foundation's Board of Directors supporting impact over returns, beginning the process of screening our investment portfolio, centering our organizational values in the Foundation's Investment Policy Statement, and utilizing the Foundation's corpus to increase and deepen our support of organizing and advocacy in Chicago.



# OUT OF CRISIS, CAME OPPORTUNITY & LEADERSHIP

I would be remiss not to mention the personal health journey I have been on since April 2021. I had many ups and downs these past two years: two medical leaves following surgeries, sickness from chemotherapy and other treatments, and unexpected hospitalizations. The Woods Fund Chicago staff, however, supported me every step of the way.

At no point did I have to worry about the Foundation or its work. Our Board of Directors also reassured me, checked

in on me, and never made me feel like my role or job was in jeopardy. We often think that it's not easy to support someone experiencing a personal crisis, but I believe that the staff and Board's support of me and my family aligned with the values that Woods Fund Chicago so loudly proclaims — that to center racial justice throughout our organization not only means investing in our staff, but also being there and supporting them when the world throws its worst at them. My personal crisis provided an opportunity to elevate the executive team's leadership — both externally and internally — and to prioritize the collective well-being and the whole person over deliverables. The upcoming year of 2023 calls on us to continue this process and the path of racial justice. It requires a renewed and determined commitment

to the ongoing work of decolonizing philanthropy and creating liberated workplaces. As Grace Lee Boggs said,

***“For our own survival we must assume individual and collective responsibility for creating a new nation...Each of us needs to undergo a tremendous philosophical and spiritual transformation.”***





***What a transformative year 2022 has been!***

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***Thank you for being on this journey with us. I look forward to the year ahead.***

*Michelle Morales*

Michelle Morales  
Woods Fund Chicago, President

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