

# THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY

News and analysis  
June 07, 2018

<https://www.philanthropy.com/article/New-Fund-to-Support-MeToo/243600>

---

## New Fund to Support #MeToo Efforts

By Megan O'Neil



Chelsea Guglielmino/FilmMagic/Getty Images

The New York Women's Foundation will soon start making five- and six-figure grants through a new fund dedicated to advancing the #MeToo movement and bolstering frequently overlooked community activist like Tarana Burke.

"I could rattle off about seven or eight grass-roots organizations led by women of color from various races across the country right now who are doing various kinds of work around interrupting sexual violence or supporting survivors," says Burke, who started the #MeToo movement a dozen years ago. The longtime [nonprofit leader](#) will be part of a small group that will help decide how the dollars will be spent.

The foundation's president, Ana Oliveira, says that a longtime female donor to the foundation made a \$1 million gift to seed the fund, noting that the organization had worked on the issue of gender-based violence since its inception more than three decades ago. Additional fundraising will continue, she says.

"It was not difficult to raise the seed money, and I expect we will continue to be very successful in growing the fund," Oliveira says.

The grant making will kick off in the fall and start at \$50,000, significant money for small community groups, according to Burke.

### **Frontline Decision Makers**

It is by no means the first charitable fund created in response to months of public revelations about harassment and sexual violence perpetrated by prominent figures in industries including politics, entertainment, journalism, and academe. Members of the entertainment industry, for example, have helped raise more than \$20 million for the [Time's Up Legal Defense Fund](#) to pay for legal fees, particularly for low-income women especially vulnerable to harassment on the job.

However, the New York Women's Foundation fund is unusual because nonprofit leaders and activists working on the ground for years to address sexual violence, such as Burke, will decide how the fund's assets are used. A primary goal is to get the money into the hands of leaders perpetually overlooked by philanthropy, Oliveira and Burke say.

Burke uses herself as an example. A dozen years ago she was working in Selma, Ala., when she coined "#MeToo" to aid victims of sexual violence. She saw young people with nowhere to turn so she and a friend began organizing, paying for materials out of her own pocket.

Burke was already an experienced fundraising professional. She knew how to write grants and speak the language of potential supporters, yet several large foundations rejected her funding requests, she says.

In 2007, she got her first \$3,000 grant from the Third Wave Foundation. It was followed by another small grant from the Black Belt Community Foundation in Selma. Those little sums were critical in advancing the work, she says.

Now, with the new fund, philanthropy has a chance to do something similar for activists with their own creative ideas and solutions, Burke says. It is hugely important that the #MeToo movement not be limited by singular leadership or a singular idea, she adds.

"Although I think the work that we're doing is very important, I think it is cutting edge, I think it is new and innovative, it is not the only game in town," Burke says. "I think there are brilliant people on the ground in the community trying to figure this thing out every day."

To that end, the new fund at the New York Women's Foundation will be marketed and promoted in some nontraditional ways so it is "not just the same people who know about it," Burke says.

She and others making decisions about where grants will go will be looking for individuals who don't necessarily talk like the typical recipients of foundation grants. And another objective for the new fund, she says, is to ensure those recipients have access to productive professional development opportunities.

"A lot of the people on the ground who are doing this work get left out because they can't speak the language," Burke says. "And they can't speak the language because they don't have access to the spaces that teach you the language."

### **Building Support Networks**

Burke's work was catapulted into the national spotlight in October after members of the entertainment industry took up the hashtag #MeToo amid public revelations of sexual violence perpetrated by movie mogul Harvey Weinstein.

She fields frequent interview requests to comment on specific cases. While toppling powerful perpetrators is cathartic for victims, targeting individual men is not what the #MeToo movement is about, Burke says.

Through media interviews and in other settings, she works to define the movement as building a global community to support survivors of sexual violence.

These days she is rarely in the same city for longer than 36 hours. Burke speaks extensively on college and university campuses and to women's and sexual-assault prevention groups, among others. Her #MeToo team is launching a web platform later this year, and she spends a portion of her day managing that effort. She also tries to set aside time daily to work on a book she is writing.

When asked whether she is surprised that public attention on issues of sexual violence and workplace harassment has continued unabated for months, Burke says she doesn't see an end to such public revelations as victims are emboldened by others' stories.

"It takes so much. People underestimate what it takes to get the courage up to come forward. So I think the wave of media attention begets another wave because then it's like, 'Well, hey, I got to do it. I'm speaking for somebody who can't.' And all that. That is why this keeps going."