

Mass. racial equity fund awards \$2 million in first round of grants

By **Angela Yang** Globe Correspondent, Updated July 2, 2021, 3:26 p.m.



Eastern Bank president Quincy Miller (second from right) is a founder and executive member of the New Commonwealth Racial Equity and Social Justice Fund. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

Leon Smith was thrilled when he heard last year that Black and brown business leaders were creating a new fund aimed at combating systemic racism. One year later, Smith's organization has received \$150,000 from the same fund.

Smith's Boston nonprofit, Citizens for Juvenile Justice, is one of 40 organizations that received money through the first round of biannual grants from the New Commonwealth

Racial Equity and Social Justice Fund. NCF said this week it had issued a total of \$2 million in amounts of \$25,000 to \$150,000 each.

“It’s still surreal just to be chosen,” said Smith, who is the executive director of Citizens for Juvenile Justice. “The way I look at it is, they entrusted us to be one of the organizations to get out in front and lead this ongoing battle and fight to make this commonwealth a more equitable place.”

The fund selected grant recipients whose missions matched up with one or more of its core focus areas: policing and criminal justice reform; health care equity; economic empowerment; and youth education, empowerment, and civic engagement.

NCF supports organizations working to end systemic inequities throughout Massachusetts, according to executive committee member Quincy Miller, particularly those run by Black and Latino leaders because of the racial discrimination that has historically disadvantaged these groups.

The grants were distributed in amounts proportional to the size and budget of each organization — more established nonprofits were likely to receive a larger sum compared to newer ones. Miller, who is president and vice chairman of Eastern Bank, said the fund’s philanthropy also emphasizes a trust-based approach.

“Instead of asking them to twist themselves into knots to conform to a particular grant so they can get access to money, we’re more funding how they believe is the most important way to drive change,” Miller said.

The fund, formed in the wake of George Floyd’s murder last year, doled out \$1 million of emergency funding in November to nonprofits addressing urgent issues in Black and brown communities relating to COVID-19 and police brutality.

“That was our first attempt at getting funds out the door and learning from the process and deepening our understanding of trust-based philanthropy,” said Myechia Minter-Jordan, another member of NCF’s executive committee and CEO of the CareQuest

Institute for Oral Health.

Four nonprofits received \$100,000 or more in this round of funding: Citizens for Juvenile Justice, GOTVax, ACT Lawrence, and Children's Services of Roxbury.

The fund has raised \$30 million of its \$100 million opening goal. But the broader aim, executives said, is to raise enough money to sustain the fund over the long term — and perhaps indefinitely.

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