

40



ASTRAEA LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE

How many people want the word “freedom” in their mouths? I think many do. I believe an overwhelming number of people want to work for freedom. And most people who are willing to fight for freedom will do so against great odds.

Every single day—for the entirety of 40 years—someone has shown up, against a tide of impossibility, and worked in service of **Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice’s** vision for freedom. That vision declares the pathway to liberation a strategic endeavor. Each page you will turn in this book is a mile travelled, a bold step taken, a year or decade traversed in deliberate formation of community and purpose.

Today, the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice sits at the nexus of 40 years of grantmaking. We sit at the nexus of 40 years of movement-building. In 2011, when I came on board as only the second Executive Director, we examined *all* the work—every single grant made, every dollar raised and invested—and we asked ourselves what story it told. What emerged was a new articulation of a strategy long in place: grantmaking, philanthropic advocacy, capacity building and leadership development, and media and communications are the strategic truths of Astraea. Our founding mothers architected an enduring lesbian feminist philanthropic practice that radically iterates, innovates, and withstands the test of time because the fight for freedom is insistent, immediate, and demanding.

But the easier you can make the fight, the better. It is meaningful—I’d argue even necessary—to have a whisper in your ear or to be given a sign proclaiming, “You’re amazing! You deserve the freedom you’re fighting for. You are doing the right thing. You are seen and supported.”

And that's what Astraea does. Astraea is freedom’s investment plan. We fund the most brilliant and brave grassroots activists and

artists who are willing to push all of us forward. Every year, for 40 years, Astraea has grown and built our shared commitment for what we need to be free. We established the Movement Building Initiative, funding autonomous queer and trans people of color-led organizations across the U.S. at the start of the 21st century. We created the Global Arts Fund to support artists as activists, in every discipline. We are home to the Global Philanthropy Project, raising the bar on LGBTI philanthropy worldwide. We architected the LGBTI Global Development Partnership, the first ever investment of its kind by the federal government. We started CommsLabs to bring our human rights defenders and technologists together. We began Funding Queerly and the Intersex Human Rights Fund. And we house the LGBTQ Racial Justice Fund, because racial justice is and will always be an LGBTQ issue.

Since our first \$200 grant in 1980, Astraea has granted over \$36M in over 4,500 grants to 1,700+ grantee partners in 99 countries and 48 U.S. states. As a public foundation, we raised every single one of those dollars. *You* have. You have done this. Because of you, we can say our founding mothers loved freedom’s possibility into over half the world.

While we mark these milestones, let us do so with the realization that there remains a critical need to take the foundational bedrock built in these decades and use it to support future work. In order to address pressing community needs such as poverty and exclusion, to win legal and policy changes, to shift the norms and attitudes that perpetuate violence and discrimination, and to finally and unequivocally undo the structural inequities racism, misogyny, sexism, ableism, and classism require—it is necessary that activists have access to our most abundant philanthropic resources. We must be bold in our commitments.

True to our beginning, Astraea pledges to meet the urgencies of now and fortify the generations to come. Let the next 40 years continue this story of tenacity, of will, of vision, possibility, and power. Let it tell more of this story of freedom and love.

In deep solidarity,

J. Bob Alotta

L to R: Ruth Schwartz (1992 Lesbian Writers Fund poetry award recipient), Stephanie Roth (former Astraea staff), Katherine Acey, Karen Williams (former Astraea staff), and Becky Birtha (1992 Lesbian Writers Fund poetry judge). Credit: Astraea Archives



1977

Astraea is founded

Astraea is founded by a cross-class, multi-racial group of women activists to fund a women's movement that centers the leadership of lesbians and women of color. It is one of the first women's funds in the world.

Organization lore says it began at a kitchen table—but to be more specific, it began at a dinner at the kitchen table in the New York City home of Nancy Dean and Beva Eastman. In 1977, a group of women gathered with bold intention. "It was a political act," says Achebe Powell, who was in attendance. "The statistics were

coming out that showed that one-tenth of one percent of all funding was going to women's and girls' programs and we were incensed." What these founding mothers created that night would, one year later, become Astraea: A Fund for Women. Its mission was to raise money with social justice feminist values and a commitment

to inclusivity at its core.

But Powell was the only woman of color at the table. If Astraea was truly going to be multi-racial, class-inclusive, and multicultural—as envisioned—the group knew tokenism was not an option. "We were not walking the talk," says Powell. "And we said, we have to stop. We won't continue with any of the planning until we come back to this table and we're 50 percent women of color and 50 percent white women." This ratio was written into the by-laws and, in less than six weeks, they returned to that same table and the women around it were now multi-racial in truth, not just intention.

Astraea was one of a growing number of women's funds created at the time, formed to counter the dismal reality of funding for women. What made Astraea unique was its radical commitment from the beginning to centering those on the margins. Astraea's founding mothers recognized the critical leadership of lesbians and women of color in all justice movements, including anti-violence, environmental justice, workers' rights, civil rights, gay liberation, and anti-war. They also recognized the role of artists and writers in struggles for freedom and justice, and committed to funding artistic and creative expression alongside activism and organizing. Said Nancy Dean, another Astraea founding mother, "We were becoming more and more conscious of ourselves and our ability to act. And that we would have to choose the terms on which we lived and acted." ■

Astraea Foundation Bulletin

SPRING 1980

The Astraea Foundation, Inc.



1980

Announces first grants

Astraea's founders distributed the first grants, ranging from \$100 to \$1,000, to women artists and organizers in the Northeastern U.S., including aid for lesbian mothers to retain custody of their children, support for the rights of women in prison, and backing for a lesbian choir.

"Our guidelines are clear," the Astraea board said when announcing the first grants. "We aim to support the efforts of women to gain independence, skills, spiritual, physical, and financial well-being, and we are determined to extend our outreach to women of all classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations." While the first grants were for organizations based in the Northeast U.S., from its inception Astraea had a global perspective. One of the first grantees was the Azalea Collective of New York City, a literary collective that published *Azalea: A Magazine by Third World Lesbians*, featuring the works of Black, Asian, Latina, and Native American women. The \$1,000 grant permitted the organization to hold poetry readings and workshops, to house the Azalea Information and Resource Center, and to create a lending library. The quarterly periodical was actively distributed for five years and included contributors such as Audre Lorde and Sapphire. ■

“

What Astraea gave was a sense of courage, support and confidence—that we could do it too.”

— Founding mother Nancy Dean about awarding grants

ASTRAEA FOUNDATION AWARDS FIRST GRANTS

The members of the Central Board of the Astraea Foundation are proud to announce the first grants.

★ **AZALEA COLLECTIVE**
\$1000 to the Azalea Collective of New York City, a literary collective of Third World Lesbians which publishes the literary journal, *Azalea*. The grant will permit them to acquire their own space to hold poetry readings, writing and publication workshops, and to house the Azalea Information and Resource Center and its lending library.

★ **INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTER**
\$1000 to the Information Resource Center, Inc.,

backgrounds.

★ **MULANEH, MUJERES LATINO AMERICANAS DE NEW HAVEN**
\$850 granted to Mulaneh, Mujeres Latino Americanas de New Haven, Inc., a collective of Latina women organized to serve the Latinos of the Greater New Haven area. The grant is to help fund a project providing Educational Resources to Latina Women regarding employment and educational opportunities, legal rights, health needs, information concerning violence against women and the services available to them. The Collective is compiling and translating written and audio-visual materials for a resource center. It plans to use block association with other neighborhood groups to disseminate information and to create an organizing center for

1987

Katherine Acey becomes executive director

Acey leaves the board and becomes the organization's first paid staff member.

For 23 years, Katherine Acey was a critical force in transforming Astraea into a global leader in movement building, social justice philanthropy, and LGBTQI liberation. She was a board member for more than three years before becoming executive director in 1987, and viewed Astraea as an extension of her feminist commitment. "Astraea was created by a group of feminist activists in the late seventies. At that time, there were few models for establishing institutions that would provide financial support for women's organizations. These founding mothers also had the vision and courage to take risks by supporting nascent women's groups, lesbian projects, and films made by and about women," she said when she took the position. "Part of my role is to enhance this tradition by helping to expand Astraea's donor base, increase our grants, and develop related programs based on the needs of the women's

community." Under her stewardship, Astraea established the nation's first Lesbian Writers Fund, created the International Fund for Sexual Minorities, and launched the U.S. Movement Building Initiative to support people of color-led LGBTQI organizations. Acey also led Astraea to play a leadership role in philanthropic organizing, co-founding many of the funder networks that still shape the field. Today, Acey continues to forge her social justice leadership path by organizing LGBTQI elders of color, fostering dialogues on multi-generational organizing, and pushing for social justice feminism in philanthropy. ■

Katherine Acey (left) with Val Kanuha, former board chair.
Credit: Astraea archives



1990

Astraea is officially a lesbian organization

Astraea “comes out” as a lesbian organization and changes its name to Astraea: The National Lesbian Action Foundation. It is the first and only national funding organization run by and for lesbians.

One moment often lost in the retelling of the story of the powerful gathering at the kitchen table that led to Astraea: the vast disappointment in making it a women’s foundation and not a lesbian-identified one. Says founding mother Achebe Powell, “It was a compromise that was very painful for almost all of us sitting there, that we would not put the word ‘lesbian’ in it because we felt that we would not get the funding, we would not get what we needed in order to do the work.” Compounding this, not all of the founders were out in their personal and professional lives. But in 1990, a decade after distributing its first grants, Astraea “came out” as a lesbian foundation—not as a strategy for narrowing its

grantmaking to only support lesbian-led work, but as a political act to recognize the often invisible multi-racial lesbian feminist labor and leadership in all kinds of progressive movements. “Lesbians have been politically active in every movement,” then-executive director Katherine Acey said at the time. “It’s time to put ourselves first as lesbians and women.” Astraea became the first and only national foundation run for and by lesbians, a move which Acey called a “financial and political leap of faith” from which she believed Astraea would thrive. Today, Astraea continues this commitment. More than 60 percent of the organization’s total funding goes to organizations led by lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. ■



Astraea marches at the NYC Pride parade in 1991. Credit: Astraea archives

1991

Creates the Lesbian Writers Fund

The new fund gives five grants to emerging poets and fiction writers annually. At the time, it was the only national grants program for lesbian writers in the U.S.—and a formal commitment to Astraea’s founding belief in supporting art and cultural activism.

Did lesbian content discount a writer’s artistic merit? This was the question that author Sarah Schulman asked in a report for Astraea that investigated the level of foundation support for lesbian literature. The answer was both obvious and offensive: tracking money granted to writers by major organizations, the report found that literature with primarily lesbian content was being marginalized and under-funded. Astraea offered a counterbalance: the Lesbian Writers Fund. Created with a \$350,000 gift from philanthropist Joan Drury, the fund supported the work of emerging lesbian poets and fiction writers, prioritizing lesbians of color. In addition, one established writer received the Sappho Award of

Distinction, a \$5,000 grant. Grant recipients have included Audre Lorde (who was also on the judging panel the first year of the fund), Adrienne Rich (who received the Sappho award multiple times), Samiya Bashir, and Shay Youngblood. Author Dorothy Allison, who was a judge in 1992, said, “I know that telling stories is an act of resistance. The story they tell you you’re not supposed to tell is the story you need to tell. If I was not a lesbian, I would never have begun to write. I wouldn’t be alive today.” ■

Dorothy Allison, 1992 Lesbian Writers Fund judge, reads at the 100 Years of Lesbian Writing Gala in San Francisco in 2001. Credit: Astraea Archives



“Poetry is not a luxury.”
— Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

1990s

Co-founds and leads philanthropic networks

As part of its commitment to collective action and to transforming the field of philanthropy, Astraea becomes one of the founders of Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues (now Funders for LGBTQ Issues), and the Women’s Funding Network. It is also an early member of the International Network of Women’s Funds (now Prospera).

In the philanthropic world of Astraea’s earliest days, the organization held an unenviable position. “We were in the women’s community, we were in the queer community, we were in philanthropy. And in all of those communities, we were at the bottom,” says Katherine Acey. “And so it was push, push. How do we push and bring everybody with us?” Astraea’s solution was that it would push through collaboration and collective organizing. Acey sat on the founding committees to create the Women’s Funding Network, Funders for LGBTQ Issues, and, emphasizing Astraea’s commitment to global work, later served on the board of Prospera—formerly known as the International Network

of Women’s Funds. These networks served the critical function of bringing together allies in philanthropy to work together to advocate for increased funding for women’s and LGBTQI issues. Astraea often played the role of advocating for voices and issues that were inevitably marginalized—fighting for lesbian issues in women’s funding spaces, feminist issues in gay funding spaces, and racial and economic justice across the board. By doing so, the organization strove to create a philanthropic world that reflected its intersectional lens of LGBTQI liberation, racial, economic, and gender justice and one that would meet the needs of organizers on the frontlines. ■

1993

Starts activist-led grantmaking

Marking the beginning of a long tradition of activist-led and -informed grantmaking, Astraea creates its first Community Funding Panel, in which activists review grant proposals and make funding decisions.

Thirteen years into its grantmaking, Astraea saw the power of funding grassroots organizations to make progress towards justice. At the same time, however, the growing foundation knew that money was not the solution if it was not going to the right places—and that activists knew exactly where those places were. The board decided to establish a separate grant decision-making entity. It was modeled after the Funding Exchange, which, at the time, was a national network of progressive public foundations. It created the Community Funding Panel, a multi-racial group of activists who reviewed grant proposals and selected grantees. What is now a growing trend in philanthropy was, at the time, an innovative approach to decision-making. Today, activist-led grantmaking at Astraea is present through its advisory boards and in its philanthropic advocacy to create and incubate new independent funds, such as the global International Trans Fund and the regional Initiative Sankofa d’Afrique de l’Ouest, a West African LGBTQ activist-led fund. ■



Participants at Gender DynamiX's Syahlangana Camp in South Africa.
Credit: Gender DynamiX

1994

Provides support for trans activism

Astraea broadens its funding focus and begins building grantee partnerships with trans-led organizations and projects—at a time when few public or private foundations were doing so.

How, Astraea wondered in the mid 1990s, could it consider itself a feminist organization built on the idea of inclusivity if its funding did not truly reflect that? Around this time, Astraea’s community funding panels began reviewing applications and awarding funding to trans groups. One early example was a grant for the 1994 film *Drag King for a Day*. As this work continued over the years, the staff and board did what Katherine Acey called “internal soul searching and thinking” and ultimately shifted its funding guidelines to formally recognize groups led by and for trans people as a priority—groups that even now continue to receive less than one penny for every \$100 awarded by foundations. Today, this commitment is a foundational pillar for Astraea, with 50 percent of its grants going to groups working on trans rights and justice. ■



1996

Launches the first international fund for LGBTQI rights

Astraea launches the International Fund for Sexual Minorities in recognition of the need for solidarity with a growing global movement of LGBTQI people fighting for their rights around the world. It is the first initiative by a foundation in the U.S. to support LGBTQI groups outside the country.

On the eve of its 20th anniversary, Astraea had a transformation. With the launch of the International Fund for Sexual Minorities, it went from being an organization with a deep concern for the global movement for LGBTQI rights to one with a deep commitment to supporting it.

The fund was made possible through a \$440,000 gift from Ise Bosch, a German philanthropist, musician, and heiress. Bosch was introduced to Astraea by Julie Dorf, then-executive director of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, who approached Astraea to consider funding LGBTQI activism outside the U.S.

Before the introduction, Bosch had been providing funding to activists around the world for over a year, often mediated by Dorf. Bosch would wire money from her bank account directly to the person or organization. It was working in the short term—but there was no structure and seemingly no end to how much money was needed. With most U.S. women's and LGBTQI organizations not funding globally, there was a severe lack of available funding resources for the growing number of grassroots LGBTQI groups. After consulting with her board, Dorf introduced Bosch to Astraea. Says Dorf, "The work Astraea was doing resonated in a very organic way with me and I felt like we were in the trenches together."

Bosch saw the reasons for funding activism across borders as obvious, saying: "Why the international thing? It's one world. It's all connected. I chose Astraea as a lesbian-led organization to do what was then

gay-lesbian funding, because those on the margins see the bigger picture.”

For Astraea, it was a way to further realize its core belief in global justice. Until then, the organization had made a few solidarity grants in Central America and South Africa, and some of its staff and board members were involved in global human rights movements, but there was not a formal, ongoing commitment. “Ise believed in us, and there was a movement out there. And with her support, we were able to anchor it and grow from there,” said Acey about the chain of events that led to creating the fund.

During the International Fund’s first cycle, Astraea gave a total of \$59,000 to 17

groups in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Central and South America. They included Mujeres Creando in Bolivia, and KAOS GL, then one of the only LGBT organizations in Turkey.

For some of Astraea’s earliest global grantee partners, the money went to a simple, but critical, piece of equipment: the fax machine. A fax machine gave them the ability to communicate faster than letters, cheaper than long-distance phone calls, and more frequently than face-to-face meetings. “Across cultures and geographies, isolation is used as an effective, state-sponsored method to intimidate creative and resilient movements led by LGBTI activists. This aims to bolster the idea that they are alone

“ One of the greatest things funders can do is to trust the voice of the grassroots, self-led groups, to believe in their decisions and capacities, and to provide them with flexible grants so that groups have the adequate resources to fund their priorities and keep doing their crucial work. Astraea’s strength lies in its ability to consistently reflect and tweak its work to best support and nurture LGBTI organizing across the world.”

— Nevin Öztop, formerly of KAOS GL and current staff member of FRIDA: The Young Feminist Fund



World Conference Against Racism, Satellite Conference on Homophobia in Durban, South Africa, in 1991. Credit: Astraea archives

and that they are wrong, in service to the objective that LGBTI activists should be prevented from challenging hetero- and cis-normative patriarchy,” says Nevin Öztop, who was part of KAOS GL when it received funding from Astraea. “The grant—and the fax machine—connected us with our allies in the country. It connected us with a world which turned out to be much, much bigger than we had imagined, making us feel we are neither wrong nor alone. The fax machine was also used to connect with other funders, submit applications, and expand and diversify our income from various grantmakers.” Today, Kaos GL is one of the largest LGBTI groups in the region.

Soon after the fund’s launch, Astraea formed the International Fund Panel to make its grant decisions. Panels were comprised of U.S.-based activists, most in the diaspora, with lived experience and knowledge of regions where Astraea funded. “What cannot be minimized is the role of these funding panels as a core component of leadership development among the communities for whom the world is not organized to help us survive,” says Javid Syed, who was a panelist at the fund’s inception and says the training he received is still instrumental in his current work as an international grantmaker. From its first global grant of \$500, Astraea has become a leading international LGBTQI grantmaker, having now awarded nearly \$19 million internationally to more than 500 groups in 99 countries. Demonstrating what a truly long-term commitment looks like, Bosch continues to support the Fund in its 21st year. ■



2009

00s

Forms the U.S. Movement Building Initiative

Astraea launches a new initiative that provides large, flexible, multi-year grants to autonomous LGBTQI people of color-led organizations across the country. Many of these groups are now anchors of U.S. social justice movements.

Multi-year U.S. Movement Building Initiative grantee partners and Astraea staff in San Antonio in 2009. Credit: Astraea archives



June Brown of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project at Trans Day of Action, New York City, 2008. Credit: Sylvia Rivera Law Project

Southerners on New Ground (SONG) began in 1993 in Durham, North Carolina, with the clear intention of being a queer liberation organization by and for the South—and a less clear understanding of how they would achieve that goal financially. To help with funding, in 1996, SONG founding mother Mandy Carter successfully applied for an Astraea grant. Several years after that first grant, Astraea significantly increased its funding to SONG and made it multi-year. “Astraea was the first group that said, rather than doing year-to-year grants, let’s do a high end, multi-year one,” says Carter, adding that SONG used the money to pay salaries, rent, and travel expenses—in other words, to keep the lights on, freeing up the organizers to do their groundbreaking social justice work.

Today, SONG is the largest grassroots LGBTQ organization in the South. “That investment was absolutely key to everything we’ve been able to build and had everything to do with Astraea’s values, which are about investing in leadership, trusting women of color, trusting lesbians, trusting queer people, trusting working class, feminist leadership,” says SONG board member and former co-director Caitlin Breedlove.

Astraea’s ability to make that transformative multi-year grant to SONG was made possible through the U.S. Movement Building Initiative. Supported by grants from the Ford Foundation, Open Society Institute, and an anonymous donor, the Initiative provided the first dedicated infusion of significant funding for racial justice organizations within LGBTQI spaces. Its creation reflected Astraea’s founding commitment to racial justice and

to remedying funding inequities for activists of color. This commitment lives today, with 98% of the organization’s U.S. funding going to people of color-led organizations.

The Initiative was also a testament to Astraea’s belief that when you extend trust and make serious long-term commitments to organizations, they will thrive. “Significant multi-year general operating support from Astraea provided Audre Lorde Project with the ability to both build long-term infrastructure and to take strategic risks to meet the needs of our communities piloting innovative programming—all of which continues to this day,” says Kris Hayashi, former executive director of Audre Lorde Project, a center for community organizing for lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirit, trans, and gender non-conforming people, and current executive director of the Transgender Law Center. “Astraea showed real trust and belief in LGBTQ people of color leaders and communities knowing best how to advance and build our movement and communities.”

The impact of the Initiative reached well beyond SONG and Audre Lorde Project’s successes. During the time of the initiative, grantee partners nearly doubled their number of active members, and numbers of constituents reached increased more than twelve-fold. Receiving multi-year funds allowed grantees to hire and train core staff, do strategic planning, upgrade their tech systems and databases, improve physical environments, and carry out successful leadership transitions. The lessons of the Initiative continue to inform Astraea’s funding values and practices today. ■



FIERCE at the TransJustice March in New York City in 2005. Credit: FIERCE

2002

Creates the Visual Arts Fund

With the support of activist donors, Astraea creates the Lesbian Visual Arts Fund. It celebrates and promotes contemporary lesbian visual artists whose work is committed to social justice feminism and visibility.

Astraea has always believed that the movement for LGBTQI justice needs expressions of creative artistry. And so in 2002, it launched the Visual Arts Fund, distributing three grants per year to artists working in an array of media including sculpture, painting, prints, mixed media, and works on paper. Two of the grants were supported by an endowed \$200,000 gift from founding mother and artist Joan Watts. A third grant to an artist based west of the Mississippi was made possible by Skip's Sappho Fund, established at Astraea by a bequest from Skip Neal, a lesbian artist who enjoyed a successful career in museum exhibition. With grants made by panels of artists, recipients of the Fund include Chitra Ganesh, Simone Leigh, and Alma Lopez. ■



Visual Arts Fund grantee partner
Chitra Ganesh's *The Arrow*.
Credit: Chitra Ganesh

2009

Forms the Global Philanthropy Project

Astraea becomes one of the founding members of the Global Philanthropy Project, the first international cohort of LGBTQI funders. The now-18 member network works to expand philanthropic support for the human rights of LGBTQI people in the Global South and East.

By the first decade of the new millennium, LGBTQI activist groups were growing in number and momentum in every corner of the world—yet there was little to no money going to support them. This led five foundations—Astraea being the only public foundation among them—to create the the Global Philanthropy Project (GPP), which set as its goal to increase giving, knowledge, and commitment for global LGBTQI issues. In 2012, Astraea began hosting GPP and its new executive director, J. Bob Alotta, became its co-chair. “Astraea’s expansive vision of racial, economic, and queer liberation across borders and continents is a powerful home and has enabled Global Philanthropy Project to develop and flourish. Astraea has provided crucial technical and financial management as well as strategic leadership,” says current GPP director Matthew Hart. GPP is now internationally recognized as a thought leader, convener, and source of cutting-edge research, helping to shift philanthropic dollars to meet the still-outstanding need: for every US\$100 awarded by foundations, only 13 cents benefits LGBTQI communities; for every every US\$100 awarded by government and multilateral agencies, only 4 cents goes to LGBTQI communities. ■

2011

J. Bob Alotta becomes executive director

Alotta, a lifelong activist and filmmaker, becomes Astraea's new leader.

In 2011, when J. Bob Alotta became Astraea's new executive director, the organization entered a new era. Under her direction, the multigenerational institution has both maintained its founding mothers' vision while interpreting it to meet the demands and challenges of a world transformed by new global economies, organizing terrains, and political winds. "Bob Alotta is a remarkable social justice leader with the experience and vision to lead Astraea to our next level of growth," said Astraea board chair Mary Li at the time of her appointment. "Her ability to foster sustainable organizational expansion and her experience with media as a tool for change will be instrumental in widening Astraea's reach in the digital age." Since Alotta joined the organization, Astraea has launched innovative new initiatives such as CommsLabs, the Intersex Fund, and the Global Arts Fund. Astraea became the recipient of the U.S. government's first significant investment in international LGBTQI rights, while remaining fully committed to the values of philanthropic activism that drive Astraea as a public institution. The organization's budget has grown from \$2.9 to \$10 million, and its staff swelled from 14 to 26, enabling it to meet the next 40 years with strength and sustainability. ■

J. Bob Alotta at the Fueling the Frontlines Gala in Los Angeles in 2017. Credit: Dawn Kirkpatrick

2013

Establishes USAID partnership

Astraea engages with the U.S. government to shape its first significant investment in international LGBTQI rights through the creation of the LGBTI Global Development Partnership.

In 2011, the federal government took a stance it never had before: fighting for LGBTQI rights around the world. President Barack Obama announced a global strategy called the Presidential Directive on LGBT rights, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said to a United Nations assembly, "Gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights."

Soon after, the government approached Astraea to accept funding to help it with this mission. The request presented Astraea with an ideological dilemma: How does an organization that has always

expressed strong critiques of the federal government take grant money from it? Months were spent in intense discussion among staff, board members, and grantee partners, until the decision was made to form the LGBTQI Global Development Partnership. This became the first-ever relationship between the federal government and a public foundation to support international LGBTI rights, bringing together the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Astraea, and four other organizations.

Astraea's decision to enter into partnership with USAID was in

many ways a practical one. The money was going into the field, whether Astraea was involved or not, and it knew that no one was better able to ensure that grants would flow to the right places and that grantee partners would be guaranteed protection and autonomy. Indeed, many grantee partners told staff that they would never have considered being part of a U.S. government initiative, but because it was Astraea, they had trust.

In the five years of the partnership, Astraea has granted more than \$3 million to 66 groups in 12 countries. It has also produced critical research and provided leadership development and movement-building support. Organizations like Colombia's Santamaría Fundación have used grants to document, monitor, and report human rights violations against LGBT people and advocate for public policies to secure protections for trans people. With the partnership coming to an end in 2018, it has left an enduring impact on Astraea, propelling the organization to global prominence and leadership. It has also impacted the field, serving as a model for how LGBTQI organizations can leverage the resources of government agencies to create innovative programs while protecting the security and self-determination of activists. ■

2011

Articulates Astraea's pillars of work

Astraea defines the four pillars upon which the organization's vision stands: grantmaking, philanthropic advocacy, capacity building and leadership development, and media and communications.

Early in her tenure as Astraea's executive director, J. Bob Alotta gathered the staff to strategically examine Astraea's identity as a public foundation. They wrote the name and dollar amount of every grant the organization had given over the course of more than three decades onto Post-Its and covered the walls of the room. What story, Alotta wanted to know, did these grants tell—and how could this narrative propel the organization forward with intention? The process allowed Astraea to articulate the pillars upon which the organization's vision stands. "By leaning into all of the work of the past, we set our strategic course for the future," says Alotta.

The four organizational pillars are grantmaking, philanthropic advocacy, capacity building and leadership development, and media and communications. Through grantmaking, Astraea provides flexible, core support grants to grassroots LGBTQI artists and activists. Through philanthropic advocacy, it influences funders to align their resources with the needs of various movements. Capacity building enhances activists' ability to make change, build power, and sustain themselves and their work. Media and communications amplifies the voices of the people doing the most critical organizing around the world—and connects them with each other.

Astraea staff also articulated four programmatic pillars of the organization's work: human rights, arts and cultural advocacy, movement and network-building, and mobile-global, which speaks to its work to connect grantee partners across the globe.

The pillars emphasize that Astraea's mission goes further than making grants—it is about a public foundation's broader mandate to shape the field of philanthropy in a way that best serves their work, and to ensure that the organizations it supports have what they need to build power, sustainability, and resilience.

One example of how these pillars have been actualized is through Astraea's work with Colombia Diversa, an organization that works for the equal inclusion and human rights of LGBT people in Colombia. In addition to receiving funding for 12 years, Colombia Diversa has participated in multiple capacity and movement building initiatives with Astraea, including CommsLabs—where grantee partners across Latin America built with each other while deepening media, communication,

and technology skills—and the Rainbow Leaders program, which focuses on individual and organizational leadership development. Colombia Diversa has been able to leverage its funding from Astraea to access European government funds, and the group also collaborated with Astraea to educate and advocate with U.S. donors to take a more global perspective in their LGBTQI grantmaking.

Articulating the pillars gave Astraea critical knowledge that it needed for its own advancement and empowerment as it moved into a new stage of development. By defining what it was that the organization did—and how—the staff was better able to move with confidence and a clearly articulated vision to meet future challenges. "It is in the context of the pillars that we re-emerged using the language of a

public foundation in the service of a lesbian feminist vision," says Alotta. "We were restructuring and reorganizing ourselves to be true to the envelope-pushing, radical necessity that is our calling card." Alotta's entrance as only the second executive director was both an opportunity and a mandate to secure the freedom and future of the next generation. The pillars helped to shape and illuminate the organization's path. "They set strategic course, with room to be nimble and responsive to immediate political moments as well as to deploy long-game strategies to upend society's structural inequities. They assume hard labor and frontline engagement, while leaving room for being imaginative. The pillars give us touchstones and political mandates," says Alotta. ■

GRANTMAKING

PHILANTHROPIC
ADVOCACY

MEDIA &
COMMUNICATIONS

CAPACITY BUILDING
& LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT

2015 Global Arts Fund grantee partner
Batucada Feminista La Tremenda
Revoltosa in Bogotá, Colombia in 2014.
Credit: Batucada Feminista La
Tremenda Revoltosa

2013

Launches the Global Arts Fund

Astraea joins its individual arts funds to create the Global Arts Fund, which provides support to LGBTQI artists working in any discipline and using art as a tool for social transformation.

From supporting writers like Audre Lorde and Gloria E. Anzaldúa to bolstering more recent honorees such as singer songwriter Be Steadwell and arts collective East African Visual Artists, there has never been a day in Astraea's 40-year history that the organization did not see the critical role that art has in resistance. It is a core Astraea belief that art is not separate from resistance, but that it is resistance itself—a rhythmic, transformative, colorful form. "Creativity is essential to organizing," says executive director J. Bob Alotta. "Activists boldly imagine new tactics, strategies, and visions for a world we strive to bring into being."

Because of this belief, Astraea has always funded artists and activism, beginning in the first grant cycle. In 1991, it launched the Lesbian Writers Fund. Audre Lorde, who was a judge in its first year, once said, "The question of social protest and art is inseparable for me." It's a sentiment shared by Astraea. Eleven years later, the Visual Arts Fund was created to provide this same kind of financial support to other genres of artists.

Kiyan Williams, 2017 Global Arts Fund grantee partner.
Credit: Kiyan Williams



In 2013, Astraea streamlined and rearticulated its arts funding to launch the Global Arts Fund. Each year, staff identify an issue that emerged from its grantmaking to serve as that year's Global Arts Fund anchor: past themes have included migration, criminalization and militarization, and Blackness. In this way, the Global Arts Fund reflects the demands and priorities of the movements that Astraea supports and uplifts. The Fund exists to resource, showcase, and connect art by LGBTQI people and organizations globally who have limited access to funding and are using art as a tool for social justice. It funds artistic work by lesbian, trans, intersex, and gender diverse people in any country in the world and in any discipline. Decisions are made by a panel of LGBTQI artists who are deeply rooted in communities and movements.

In its first year, the Global Arts Fund awarded \$55,000 to six U.S.-based artists, and five in Latin America and China. Each of the inaugural grantees used art as a tool for exploring migration and social transformation, through poetry, music, documentary film, and art installations. In 2017, the 15 awardees—which included Nigerian artist Akwaeke Emezi and Annie Gonzaga in Brazil—interrogated Blackness, gender, and sexuality in creative, assertive, and inspiring ways. Astraea's Global Arts Fund continues to support artists working at the intersection of arts and activism because art has the power to spark courageous dialogue, catalyze action, and encourage everyone to imagine a more just world. ■

Gabriel, part of 2015 Global Arts Fund grantee partner Kawira Mwirichia's To Revolutionary Type Love project on display at the Goethe Institut in Nairobi, Kenya in 2017.
Credit: Kawira Mwirichia



India Davis, 2017 Global Arts Fund grantee partner.
Credit: Anaka Morris



It's extremely important for us to tell our stories in a culture that generally mangles or silences it."

— Alixa Garcia, 2014 Global Arts Fund recipient and member of the spoken word group Climbing Poetree

2013

Forms the LGBTQ Racial Justice Fund

Astraea becomes a collaborative partner with the LGBTQ Racial Justice Fund, which focuses on grassroots organizations leading campaigns in the U.S. South.

Sometimes it is necessary to think small to bring about change. Not small-minded, but strategically focused, in a way that recognizes and uplifts groups that need support, but are frequently overlooked. This was a founding philosophy of the LGBTQ Racial Justice Fund (RJF), which focuses on the Southeastern U.S. and is one of the only U.S. grantmaking resources guided by the intersections of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation. As the host of and a partner with RJF, Astraea is able to provide capacity-building support and funding for groups in this under-resourced region that has deep legacies of transformative multi-racial organizing. A collaborative philanthropic initiative, RJF has nine donor members. Since its creation in 2013, it has given more than \$3 million to groups working on issues including criminalization, mass incarceration, homelessness, state violence, educational inequity, and discrimination in social services. ■



Providence Youth Student Movement at Rhode Island Pride in 2015. Credit: Providence Youth Student Movement

2013

Creates Funding Queerly

Astraea partners with a group of young, queer, and trans members of Resource Generation to fund small LGBTQI community organizing groups across the U.S.

In 2012, organizer and Astraea staff member Naomi Sobel was at Resource Generation's Making Money Make Change conference, standing on a chair to make an impromptu speech during lunch. "The conference was a non-solicitation space, but I was really feeling in a deep way the fact that in a space that had so many LGBTQ-identified people, there was no conversation happening around LGBTQ politics or funding. I wanted to start that conversation," she said, explaining how she ended up on the furniture. "I said, 'If anyone wants to come talk about queer folks funding queer activism, particularly around racial justice, come meet me at dinner.' Twenty people showed up!" A year later, the group of young donors aged 40 or under formed a new giving circle, with Astraea as its host. Since its inception, Funding Queerly has distributed over \$770,000 in grants to small groups that are people of color, rural, indigenous, trans, and youth-led. Says Sobel, "These are the parts of the LGBTQI community that are the least likely to receive funding and where some of the most incredible, innovative work is happening." In working with Funding Queerly, Astraea fulfills one of its core values: to educate and encourage multiple generations of philanthropic activists to embody racial, economic, and gender justice values and practices in their giving. ■

"I'm excited to be a donor to Astraea and part of the Funding Queerly Giving Circle they support because of its history of funding the most courageous and boundary-pushing organizing in the LGBTQ community."

— Jason Franklin, Funding Queerly member and Astraea donor



The support from Astraea came at a time when we moved away from being a social service organization to a membership organization. The funding allowed us the flexibility to be responsive to the needs of our constituents who are primarily low to no income queer and trans people of color who have survived violence.”

— Li Morales, Former Development Director of Community United Against Violence

Audre Lorde Project at OUTsiderz Series facilitation training in New York City in 2017. Credit: Audre Lorde Project



2013

Elevates anti-criminalization and freedom from violence work

Underscoring its commitment to racial justice in the U.S., Astraea brings visibility to grantee partners’ innovative strategies to resist state and interpersonal violence by starting the Anti-Criminalization and Freedom From Violence cohort.

Can a body ever be free if it is being policed or if its movement is restricted by borders and discriminatory social norms? This question came to dominate much of Astraea’s thinking at the time when powerful social movements, including Black Lives Matter and UnDocuQueer, were emerging. Astraea has always believed that violence, criminalization, and policing are not isolated cases of discrimination, but symptoms of systemic and structural oppression—and that the human rights and bodily autonomy of LGBTQI people of color, migrants, and women of color have come under increasing attack. And because Astraea also believes in being responsive to activist and movement priorities, the organization increased grantmaking to groups focused

on anti-criminalization and migrant justice, particularly those led by and for queer and trans migrants, people of color, and other communities facing criminalization. One grantee partner was Community United Against Violence (CUAV), an organization that works to build the power of LGBTQ communities to transform violence and oppression. CUAV’s Former Development Director Li Morales says that funding from Astraea allowed the organization the flexibility they needed to be “responsive to the needs of constituents who are primarily low to no income queer and trans people of color who have survived violence.” And for Astraea, these partnerships are essential to best support the communities facing multiple oppressions in a changing world. ■

CommsLabs attendees and facilitators in Kenya in 2015. Credit: None On Record



2014

Creates CommsLabs

Astraea launches CommsLabs with a convening in Colombia, becoming the first funder to make a major investment in media, communications, and technology in LGBTQI activism globally.

Many believe that innovation is the providence of a few white men in Silicon Valley who are shaping the world through the internet.

This notion is, in the words of executive director J. Bob Alotta, "completely absurd."

Astraea believes that innovation is born where need is greatest: women, people of color, poor people, and LGBTQI people are often the world's greatest innovators. So in 2014, Alotta had an idea, a way to provide innovative organizers with the tools necessary to skill and scale up their activism, both digital and analog. This idea evolved into a radical, movement-building initiative called CommsLabs: Communications, Media, and Technology Labs.



Through research, networking, and regional and country-based convenings, each CommsLabs connects local LGBTQI activists, trainers, security experts, healers, academics, and technologists in an effort to address the online and offline threats facing LGBTQI communities, while also maximizing opportunities made possible by technology. The CommsLabs aim is to increase digital security, media, communications, technology and healing, self and community care skills among activists, while growing a global network of activists and technologists working for the defense of LGBTQI human rights.

“If we’re going to look at sustaining our movements, the next wave of organizing needs to happen on every plane that we’re operating on—whether it’s in an analog world or in the digital sphere,” says Alotta.

CommsLabs is not just an event; it is a process for activist, organizational, and movement sustainability that can change the ways organizers communicate and build resources. And because it is a process, CommsLabs is also dynamic and flexible. So while the focus of the first convening in Colombia was mainly technology, healing is now also a foundational component after Kenyan activists stressed its importance while planning the second convening. The initiative now includes healing, wellness, and transformative justice as central to its program out of an awareness that activists often exist in a space of trauma that needs to be addressed for movements to be sustainable.

“Liberation is not going to happen

on one front if it’s not happening on another,” says Po Kimani, a facilitator at the 2015 Lab in Kenya. “Media, security, communication, and healing is how our liberation is happening. We are aware enough of ourselves that we have a message, and we affirm that message with our own words. That the world can hear this message over and over again is how we are breaking this narrative that we don’t exist, that we are maybe people who are not people enough.”

By 2017, CommsLabs were held in Colombia, Kenya, and South Africa. Future sessions are being planned in the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, India, and the U.S. Phindi Malaza, program coordinator for the Johannesburg-based Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) attended the Lab in South Africa. She went to learn how to build a better website for FEW and to create a digital communication strategy to publicize the group’s work, create relevant messages, and attract different audiences. “For LBTI women, CommsLabs is very powerful because it can enable you to access spaces that you wouldn’t be able to access without media,” she says. “It also allows you to learn what other people are doing in other countries, what is working and what is not working.”

As effective movements are contingent on being able to find allies, communicate, and shift narratives, CommsLabs is claiming technology and communication on activists’ terms—so they can fight for justice and be safe and organized. ■

CommsLabs attendees take part in a workshop centering healing and wellness in South Africa in 2016. Credit: Lerato Maduna



Intersex Danmark, 2017.
Credit: Intersex Danmark



In a world where intersex activism has been resourced on a wing and a prayer, the significance of the Astraea Intersex Human Rights Fund can not be overstated.”

— Morgan Carpenter, Oll Australia

2015

Begins the Intersex Fund

Astraea launches the Intersex Human Rights Fund, the first of its kind, to support intersex activists working to ensure the human rights, bodily autonomy, physical integrity, and self-determination of intersex people worldwide.

Beginning in the 1990s and expanding rapidly within the last decade, intersex activists have become increasingly organized and effective in their advocacy to reject the pathologization of intersex bodies and to protect the human rights of intersex children and adults. Yet, intersex issues were—and continue to be—starkly underfunded. More than three-quarters of intersex groups have budgets of less than US\$10,000 and the majority have no paid staff. As a feminist, social justice, and LGBTQI funder, Astraea knew it needed to further its commitment to justice and liberation for all people by addressing this dearth of funding. With the support of seed donors Kobi Conaway and Andrew Owen, and a leadership gift from the Arcus Foundation, Astraea launched the Intersex Human Rights Fund to honor the resilience, creativity, and growth of visionary intersex activism and to support this international human rights movement. The Fund has now granted nearly \$675,000 to 50 intersex-led groups in 33 countries. Since its founding, Astraea has leveraged its first \$50,000 in seed funding into a total of \$1.4 million—all new money—for the intersex movement. ■

2016

Hosts the International Trans Fund

Astraea becomes the host of the International Trans Fund, an activist-led fund that seeks to mobilize sustainable resources for strong, trans-led movements and collective action. The ITF's establishment is the result of years of collaborative work between trans activists and funder allies.

Though trans issues have slowly started to appear in philanthropic agendas, the reality remains that three-fifths of trans groups receive no external funding, more than half have operating budgets of less than \$10,000, and just 1 in 3 have full-time paid staff. Against this backdrop, a group of trans activists and international donors, including Astraea, formed the International Trans Fund (ITF). The first of its kind, the ITF aims to increase the capacity of the trans movement to self-organize and advocate for trans people's rights, self-determination, and well-being. In addition to playing a role in its establishment, in 2016 Astraea became the fiscal host for the ITF, partnering

with its staff to develop its participatory grantmaking model, and capacity building, operations, and resource mobilization strategies.

"Astraea's proven track record in investing in transformative change in global LGBTQI movements was one of the main reasons that the ITF selected Astraea as our fiscal host. ITF is able to avail of forty years of grantmaking experience which has helped us develop our own processes as a new activist fund," says Broden Giambrone, ITF's director. More than two decades after Astraea began actively funding trans activism, it continues to work in partnership to eliminate the funding gap that impacts this global movement. ■



Irish Trans Student Alliance, 2017.
Credit: Irish Trans Student Alliance

“

Astraea's been there when other funders haven't—or when they wouldn't be. We've supported (and still support) the butch and femme dykes, the radical revolutionaries, the people who dare to call ourselves out proud feminists, and the activists and groups who are sometimes marginalized out of the queer movement and donor mainstream. We know that power and resources are often held by those who assimilate or who are seen as “the norm.” Part of Astraea's role is to strategically and lovingly support and bolster the lesbian and LBQ groups who sometimes sit courageously on the edges, doing the wise, necessary, and critical work to bring about change.”

— Cynthia Rothschild, LBQ activist, Astraea donor, and previous board member



No Tengo Miedo at Marcha Por La Igualdad in Peru in 2015.
Credit: No Tengo Miedo

2017

Focuses on LBQ philanthropic organizing

Astraea and peer women's fund Mama Cash launch an initiative to bring needed awareness, funding, and resources to activism led by lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women and gender non-conforming people globally.

In four decades, Astraea has both realized and exceeded the vision that was set when its founding mothers first met around that kitchen table. Beyond building an organization that brought needed money, support, and resources to women, Astraea has grown alongside movements and expanded its notion of gender justice, building partnerships with trans and intersex groups. And now, 40 years after it began, Astraea comes full circle with a new initiative to highlight and address the lack of funding for lesbian, bisexual, and queer activists. While LBQ women and gender non-conforming people are in leadership of many social justice movements, there is very little attention in philanthropy—including by LGBT rights or women's rights donors—to their specific needs or priorities. Through activist engagement, donor education, and global research, this new project will work to reverse this chronic under-resourcing of LBQ activists' visions and movement strategies. ■

No Tengo Miedo, Marcha Por La
Igualdad in Peru in 2015.
Credit: No Tengo Miedo



Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice - 40th Anniversary Publication
January 2018
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About Astraea

Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice is the only philanthropic organization working exclusively to advance LGBTQI rights around the globe. We support hundreds of brilliant and brave grantee partners in the U.S. and internationally who challenge oppression and seed social change. We work for racial, economic, social, and gender justice, because we all deserve to live our lives freely, without fear, and with profound dignity.