

Have Fun Do Good

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Funding Personal and Social Transformation: Interview with Paula Sammons, Seasons Fund

One of the founding members of the Fund, Paula Sammons, who is a Program Associate of Family Income and Assets & Leadership at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, was kind enough to tell me more about the Fund's work in the following e-interview.

Your mission statement says, "The Fund, a collaborative effort led by several private foundations, springs from a shared belief that cultivating a rich inner life is both a worthy end in itself and an overlooked pathway to heightening the impact, effectiveness, and sustainability of social change initiatives." What brought its founders to that conclusion?

Each of the founding members of the Seasons Fund can point to a life changing moment when we committed ourselves to working for justice and change. We have each had an experience that connected us with something larger than ourselves, and discovered that this awareness can be cultivated from within. The members of the Seasons' Board share the understanding that our most effective work happens when we are motivated by both of these realizations.

Change must first happen in the imagination of people before it can take root in a culture. We know that when we work for change from a place of anger and despair, instead of love and trust, it impedes the imagination, leading to less effective results. The founders know from our own experiences that we must combine our passion for justice with our commitment to inner awareness if we are going to, "be the change we wish to see in the world."

What kind of projects is the Fund supporting and how are they selected?

Seasons Fund supports work that is transformative at the personal, organizational and field-wide levels. We fund personal development work that increases organizational effectiveness and encourages strong leadership.

Groups like Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice located in Oakland, California, working on the front lines of the reproductive justice movement. And Social Justice Leadership, a group that offers tools and trainings to grassroots organizers in New York City. The Seasons Fund grantees are selected for their track record of success, their innovation with personal development technologies, and their capacity to impact their own communities and the larger field of social transformation.

Why is it important to fund projects like these at this time?

The multiple crises happening in our country today (from the economy, to immigration, to the ‘war on terror’) have spread fear, despair and isolation in our communities and in the imaginations of people. Activists are working harder than ever to improve these conditions, but are employing old models of organizing that result in burn out, ill health and disillusionment. Social change models that integrate personal and social transformation require activists to get in touch with their higher purpose and their deepest values, connecting people at the heart level. When the hearts and minds of people are engaged, their effectiveness increases, victories are won and they can not be stopped.

Can you give an example of how a person, campaign or organization's work was more effective because of the "inner" work they did before, or in conjunction with, their "outer" work?

Forest Ethics’ approach entails persuading Fortune 1000 companies to use their purchasing power and brand leverage to have a positive impact on forests for the people and wildlife that depend on them. This group has been successful at changing confrontational relationships into constructive partnerships. They are able to do this because of their commitment to an inner awareness which guides them on the personal and organizational levels. Instead of attacking their “enemies,” they seek to build alliances. In the world

of organizing, it is extremely difficult to break free of the "us verses them" dynamic. Forest Ethics has had success because of their unique approach and commitment to doing it differently.

How can people get involved in the Fund's work?

Donors can get involved by giving to the Fund and becoming a part of this growing movement in philanthropy to support transformative work.

For practitioners or activists who are in need of these skills and trainings, they can get in touch with the Fund. We can direct you to some of the leaders in the field who offer a multitude of ways that change agents can begin to bring these concepts and frameworks into their communities or organizations.

Is there anything else that you'd like readers to know about the Fund's work?

These transformative organizing models are not a luxury or something extra. History has proven, and we know today, that they are a core part of effective social movements in the United States. Approaches to change that are about cultivating self-awareness and are grounded in love are the natural immune system response to an organizing culture that is riddled with apathy, despair and burn out.

In the words of the great leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love." Dr. King speaks to what the essence of Seasons Fund is about.