



Request for Proposal (RFP) for Evaluation Partner

Issued By: Samuel Fels Fund

Contact: Shanell Ransom - info@samfels.org;

Submission Instructions

Meet & Greet: We'd like to meet you along the way, to see if there is a mutual fit.

[Sign up here for a 30-minute conversation on Wednesday, March 18](#) and come with your questions.

Proposal Deadline: Please submit your proposal via email to Shanell Ransom (info@samfels.org) no later than **5PM EST Monday, March 30, 2026**.

About the Samuel S. Fels Fund

The Samuel S. Fels Fund (Fels) is a Philadelphia-based private philanthropic foundation committed to strengthening movements, leaders, and communities working toward a more just and inclusive civic ecosystem. Our work is people-centered and grounded in the values of trust, justice, accountability, and responsiveness. As a place-based funder, Fels works in close relationship with grassroots organizations and movement leaders navigating real-time conditions of uncertainty, urgency, and change.

Fels has been investing in movement building through a cohort-based grantmaking model that combines multi-year general operating support and trust-based practices with dedicated investments in leadership development and wellness.

As this work has matured, we are seeking to deepen our understanding of **how these investments interact with one another and with the broader movement ecosystem in Philadelphia** — including where they have contributed to momentum, capacity, coordination, or resilience, and where they have encountered limits, friction, or unmet needs.

Purpose of the Engagement

Fels seeks an Evaluation and Learning Partner to help us **learn how to learn better** - as an organization and alongside our grantee partners - in ways that honor emergence,

relationality, and trust while strengthening rigor and shared understanding of impact.

This engagement is designed to support **discovery, sense-making, and shared learning** - helping Fels understand what appears to be working within and across movement-building strategies, and what conditions and supports made that possible; where efforts were less effective or harder to sustain, and why; what these patterns suggest for future grantmaking design, expectations, pivots, and partnerships; what these patterns suggest for expanding philanthropic investment (our own and others.)

By the end of the engagement, Fels will have:

- a grounded understanding of how its movement-building investments have interacted with ecosystem conditions;
- qualitative and quantitative insight into movement vitality, leadership sustainability, and collaboration in Philadelphia;
- articulated learning questions and sense-making practices to guide our next round of grantmaking;
- decision-relevant insight to inform future grantmaking and funder influence.

Insights from this work will inform Fels' next movement-building honed strategy for Movement Building Cohort 2 (MB2) and, through Fels' partnership with a separate communications partner, support thoughtful field-facing storytelling and funder influence. Fels also intends to engage other funders in the insights about what works and why it matters to invest the way we do, in order to influence their philanthropic investments and practices in Philadelphia's movement ecosystem.

Role

The selected partner will function as Fels' **Evaluation and Learning Partner**, working in close relationship with Fels staff, Board members, and grantee partners.

This role is intentionally scoped to:

- steward inquiry and learning over time,
- hold analytic and synthesis capacity on behalf of a small funder and a resource-constrained grantee ecosystem,
- surface patterns, conditions, and questions that are not immediately visible at the individual organization level, and
- support disciplined reflection without increasing burden on grantee partners or Fels staff.

Key Deliverables

- **Curated retrospective capture** (by early June 2026)
 - Documentation of Fels’ journey into movement-building grantmaking, including critical decisions, hypotheses, and assumptions that informed MB1
 - Overview of 2024 application and selection process
 - Analysis of the MB1 cohort, including key issues, values, approaches, and organizational data
 - Snapshot of Philly and movements in 2024
- **Evaluation and learning framework** (by early September 2026), including
 - A learning framework to support interpretation of MB1 and guide forward-looking movement-building strategies
 - Visual frames that enable multiple stakeholders (staff, Board, partners) to understand how we think about impact
 - Learning and evaluation questions to guide reporting, reflection, and sense-making among staff and grantee partners
 - Approaches and tools for Fels staff to regularly capture feedback, interpret dynamic shifts, and reflect on learning from grantee partners, the Philadelphia movement ecosystem, and philanthropy
- **Impact report** (by early September, 2026)
 - Case studies illustrating what MB1 investments made possible for organizations individually and collectively
 - Narrative and data on:
 - the impact of the cohort approach on movement relationships, trust, and collaboration;
 - the role of leadership development and wellness investments in organizational sustainability and effectiveness; and
 - the effects of trust-based, values-aligned grantmaking practices
- **Strategic memos:**
 - Recommendations for MB2 grantmaking process (applications, selection, key data to track) (by early June 2026)
 - Recommendations for MB2 grantmaking strategic focus (by late September, 2026)
 - Recommendations for MB2 Beyond The Grant programming (by late September, 2026)
 - Recommendations for Fels’ philanthropic case-making, particularly regarding grassroots movement-building in Philadelphia and the role of trust-based practices and investments in leadership and wellness (*by mid-November 2026*)

Learning Questions & Evaluation Scope

The learning outcomes below articulate the core domains of inquiry that the above deliverables are intended to support. These outcomes define the **core areas of inquiry** for the engagement and will be refined collaboratively early on to ensure appropriate depth, focus, and feasibility.

Outcome 1: Movement-Building Strategies in Practice

Develop a grounded understanding of how Fels' movement-building strategy has functioned in practice. This includes examining how key grantmaking decisions were made over time, how cohort-based funding shaped collaboration, alignment, or capacity among partners, and how strategies unfolded differently across organizations and issue areas.

Outcome 2: Trust-Based, Community-Centered Philanthropy

Examine how Fels' trust-based practices — including multi-year general operating support, simplified processes, and relationship-centered engagement — have influenced organizational sustainability, leadership decision-making, strategy evolution, and cross-organizational collaboration. This inquiry should surface both strengths and limits, with attention to variation across organizational and contextual realities.

Outcome 3: Leadership Development & Wellness as Movement Infrastructure

Assess how Fels' investments in leadership development and wellness (including annual wellness and leadership grants and Beyond the Grant supports) have interacted with movement work. This includes understanding how these investments contribute to leadership sustainability, organizational resilience and retention, and longer-term movement capacity.

Outcome 4: Philadelphia's Movement Ecosystem — Dynamics & Vitality

Develop a clearer picture of Philadelphia's movement ecosystem as a living system. This includes understanding how organizations are connected and coordinated, where cross-issue alignment is emerging or constrained, and what broader trends, pressures, or opportunities are shaping movement vitality in the city.

Outcome 5: Learning to Inform Future Grantmaking & Field Practice

Translate learning across the outcomes above into decision-relevant insight that informs the design of Fels' next movement-building grant cycle (MB2), expectations for learning and reflection with grantee partners, grantmaking processes that balance trust and rigor, and thoughtful engagement with peer funders.

Working Style & Partnership Expectations

We are seeking a partner who brings:

- a nimble approach to process design and partnership
- strong qualitative research and analytic skills;
- experience with movement-building, ecosystems, or complex social change efforts;
- comfort working relationally and ethically within community-rooted contexts;
- respect for power, consent, and learning without extraction;
- the ability to adapt to the rapidly change social environment and context;
- surface patterns and meaning from complexity; and
- the capacity to hold learning and synthesis without overproduction or unnecessary burden.

We are seeking an evaluation partner that can collaborate and coordinate effectively with our communications partner.

Budget

The total budget for this engagement is up to \$95,000, inclusive of all labor, subcontractors, travel, and related expenses.

Proposals should reflect thoughtful responses and demonstrate how the partner would:

- operate in a lean, high-leverage manner,
- steward learning capacity within real constraints, and
- adapt inquiry and outputs as learning evolves.

Proposal Submission Questions

We invite interested firms to submit a concise proposal responding to the questions below. We value clarity of thinking, evidence of practice, and sound judgment over polished marketing materials.

We have a strong preference for **Philadelphia-based firms**, or firms with deep experience and trusted relationships within Philadelphia's civic, nonprofit, and philanthropic ecosystems. We are especially interested in partners who see communications and storytelling as a tool for learning, sense-making, and education, not just messaging or promotion.

1. **Understanding of Fels and Movement Learning**

Please describe your understanding of Fels' role as a place-based movement funder in Philadelphia and how you approach evaluation and learning in movement and ecosystem contexts.

2. **Learning & Evaluation Approach**

Describe how you would design and evaluation approach for this engagement, including:

- how you develop and refine evaluation and learning frameworks, approaches and questions,
- how you approach ecosystem-level sense-making,
- and how you support learning without increasing burden on grantee partners.

3. **Operating Model & Capacity Stewardship**

Given the constraints of a small staff and resource-constrained movement organizations, describe how you would structure your work, prioritize inquiry, and hold synthesis and continuity over time.

4. **Team, Experience & References**

Please include:

- The primary individuals who would work on this engagement and their roles,
- Relevant experience working in Philadelphia and/or with movement or community-rooted organizations, and
- 2-3 references who can speak to your evaluation work, judgment, and relational approach.

5. **Work Samples**

You may include up to two samples that demonstrate relevant qualitative and quantitative analysis, ecosystem learning, or movement-relevant evaluation work.