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Who's Funding What & Why

Five Funders Supporting Young Men and Boys

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The recent election saw about a [15-point rightward shift](#) among young men. It's true that [most of the country shifted](#) right compared to where it was four years ago, but the [shift in young men](#) is particularly significant because it isn't solely about President-elect Donald Trump; it's part of a larger trend that has seen young men becoming [increasingly conservative](#) over the past few years.

It's difficult to point to a single reason behind this turn to the right. A number of issues are likely in play, many of which are the same struggles women and gender-expansive people face, including economic insecurities, drug and alcohol abuse, misinformation and disinformation, high cost of living and wage stagnation, as well as racism and xenophobia for young people of color. While it's not a zero-sum game, it's telling that many men — especially in the working class — have been losing ground in areas like college enrollment and economic opportunity compared with women and previous generations, as writers like Richard Reeves [have pointed out](#).

Of course, there's also the dangerous cocktail of [“manosphere”](#) influencers and communities, which overlap with far-right extremism and have led to the radicalization of young men and boys in online spaces. Additional factors include toxic messaging and [misinformation](#) from those who make their living fanning the flames of outrage and resentment, a significant [lack of mental health support](#), and a political landscape that has increasingly embraced hate-driven policy agendas.

There's a lot that philanthropy can do to address the problems young men and boys face, as well as confront the noxious alt-media landscape that's taken over predominantly online spaces. For one, funders can support efforts that address the root causes of economic insecurity, stagnant wages, housing struggles and a lack of accessible healthcare. More immediately, funders can also support programs that are geared specifically to young men and boys, as well as increasingly important media literacy and education efforts.

As Inside Philanthropy has [pointed out](#), although men control much of what happens in philanthropy, and despite the underfunding of women and girls' causes, there's very little backing for work that specifically serves struggling men and boys. While it's crucial to continue to support women and girls — and increase that support — given alarming shifts toward far-right and alt-right extremism among young men, it's important that philanthropy become more involved in support and outreach efforts there, as well. To that end, here are some funders and sector organizations already doing that work.

California Funders for Boys and Men of Color

Launched in 2014, [California Funders for Boys and Men of Color](#) is a network of foundation presidents, CEOs, executive directors and other philanthropic leaders who are interested in improving opportunities for Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander and Native American boys and young men. The network aims to bring funders together to address systemic barriers that hinder the development and success of boys and men of color by engaging in philanthropic investments, advocacy and funder solidarity. Its focus spans three main regions: the Bay Area-Northern California, Southern California and Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley. The network is working to expand its work into other regions, including the Central Coast, San Diego and the Imperial Valley, and the Inland Empire.

The network was cofounded by the Sierra Health Foundation and is managed by the Center at the Sierra Health Foundation. Other members include the Akonadi Foundation, The California Endowment, California Community Foundation, California Wellness Foundation, East Bay Community Foundation, Heising-Simons Foundation, Liberty Hill Foundation, San Francisco Community Foundation, Rosenberg Foundation and the Weingart Foundation.

Ballmer Group

[The Ballmer Group](#), the philanthropic vehicle of centibillionaire couple Steve and Connie Ballmer, works across a number of issue areas that involve and affect boys and young men, including early childhood and families, child welfare, K-12 education, and college and career readiness. The funder is set to award \$10 million between 2024 and 2029 to support the Obama Foundation's My Brother's Keeper Alliance, which works to build safe and supportive communities for boys and young men of color.

Other Ballmer grantees doing work in this space include the Bing Youth Institute, which offers mentorship and academic, emotional and social wellbeing support for Black boys; Youth Guidance's Becoming a Man program; California State University, Dominguez Hill's CSU Young Males of Color Consortium, which works to create systemic changes in higher education to improve outcomes for young men of color; The Literacy Lab's Leading Men Fellowship; Boys & Girls Clubs of America and Cities United.

Obama Foundation

One of the Obama Foundation's leading programs, the [My Brother's Keeper Alliance](#) (MBK Alliance) [seeks to address](#) the "persistent opportunity gaps boys and young men of color face" and to ensure young people are able to reach their full potential. The program began as an initiative of President Barack Obama in 2014, and has since continued its work through the foundation. It's probably safe to call the Obama Foundation's work through MBK Alliance philanthropy's highest-profile effort to directly address the problems boys and young men face. According to the Obama Foundation, research has shown that the "collective work of community leaders, members, and public and private agencies pursuing the same goals for boys and young men of color can lead to sustainable, place-based change."

The [MBK Model Communities](#) initiative works in four communities: Newark, New Jersey; Omaha, Nebraska; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Yonkers, New York. Over terms of five years, Model Communities receive coaching, evaluation support, peer-to-peer learning, technical assistance, and almost \$1 million in funding and resources.

In 2018, the MBK Community Challenge Competition also selected 19 organizations to serve as national models to expand initiatives to reduce youth violence, grow mentorship programs and improve the lives of boys and young men of color. The MBK Alliance works with partners to provide tools, resources and convening opportunities to support these and the almost 250 MBK communities that took part in the competition.

Main Street Community Foundation

One example of a local funder engaged in this work is the Main Street Community Foundation, which serves six Connecticut towns — Bristol, Burlington, Plainville, Plymouth, Southington and Wolcott. Its [Men and Boys' Fund](#) was established in 2016 and provides support across a number of issue areas, including education and mentoring, health and wellness, leadership, life skills and workforce readiness.

The fund seeks to grow resources and programs that are geared specifically for men and boys, encourage philanthropic giving among men, educate residents on the unmet needs of local men and boys, support related programs, and create positive male role models and paths to employment and self-sufficiency.

The fund has awarded more than \$78,000 in grants since 2016. Recent grantees include Bristol Family Resource Centers, The Bridge Family Center, Outside Perspectives, Environmental Learning Centers of Connecticut and Bristol Youth Lacrosse.

Melinda French Gates

Melinda French Gates is certainly not the first name that comes to mind when one hears “boys and young men,” but despite her being one of the top U.S. funders of women and girls’ causes, French Gates’ [\\$1 billion commitment earlier this year](#) included [support for the previously mentioned Richard Reeves, as well as Gary Barker](#), both of whom head up organizations that seek to address the struggles men and boys face.

French Gates’ support for Reeves, who founded the American Institute for Boys and Men, as well as for Barker, who founded Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice, is part of her \$240 million commitment giving 12 global leaders \$20 million apiece to distribute to charitable organizations of their choice — as long as the money benefits women in some way. By including Reeves and Barker, French Gates is signaling that addressing the problems facing men and boys must be part of a broader push to empower women.

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