

# CLF *FWRD*

2021-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN

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# CLF **FWRD**

As we approach our ten year anniversary, we do so with a profound sense of humility and gratitude. Humility because we know this work is hard and we don't always have all the answers, and gratitude for the many incredible supporters and organizations who believed in and trusted us along the way. With these two attributes acting as our north star, and on the heels of a year that turned our world upside down, we embarked on a journey to refine our focus and strengthen our foundation for our next chapter.

Our strategic plan, *FWRD*, is the result of that work.

We took what we've learned through our work and from the incredible partners who've accompanied us thus far, and used it to shape the values and principles that guide us.

*FWRD* is a distillation of nearly ten years of lessons as well as a clear vision for what we have yet to achieve and how we intend to achieve it. It builds on our long history of fighting alongside the most marginalized communities, centering the voices that need to be heard, and building relationships based on trust and accountability.

*FWRD* is not a track shift. It is an acceleration of our work, and the sense of urgency that propels it, on the heels of our most impactful year ever—a year in which we tripled our grantmaking to give over \$45 million to more than 60 organizations across 35 countries.

Thank you to our board members and others for generously giving their time and input to help shape this plan. Their wisdom, guidance and support continues to be invaluable.



Justine Lucas,  
Executive Director

***FWRD is not a track shift. It is an acceleration of our work and the sense of urgency that propels it.***

## **Board of Directors**

Robyn “Rihanna”

Fenty, Founder

Mai Lassiter,

President

Kawanna Brown,

Vice-President

Jay Brown

Jessie Schutt-Aine

Lukas Haynes

Monica Fenty

Tamara Larsen

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# Our Ethos

Our ethos is anchored by a legacy born in 2012 when CLF was founded by Robyn “Rihanna” Fenty. Growing up in the Caribbean, Rihanna saw first-hand the unique and disproportionate challenges that countries like Barbados and its people face, and she decided to do something about it. Her passion for justice, inclusivity and diversity—guiding principles that she calls “foundational” to who she is—formed a bedrock for CLF that has only deepened and strengthened over time. Today, as you’ll see throughout *FWRD*, these values underlie everything we do, from our work on the ground to our leadership in the boardroom. In our founder’s words, it is in every way “our bottom line.”

**“My foundation is built on inclusivity. It’s my bottom line.”**

—ROBYN “RIHANNA”  
FENTY



# Our Vision

CLF's vision is a climate-resilient, equitable world in which everyone has the opportunity to fulfill their potential, no matter where they live.

We see our vision statement as a kind of North Star—a guidepost to remind us of the future we wish to create. We believe geography should not determine a person's ability to have access to, in a continuous and sustainable way, the basic human rights and quality services we all deserve. Rights such as access to education, food and clean water, safe shelter, physical and mental healthcare, economic opportunities and democratic processes. Rights that are continuously threatened by climate change and inequitable systems. **Ultimately, the preservation and**

**advancement of these rights, particularly for marginalized communities, is why we do this work.**

Although our work is grounded in climate resilience in the Caribbean, the impact we aspire to goes far beyond the borders of the small island nations where these efforts are concentrated. By working at the local level to reshape the emergency response model—from reactive to prepared, from short-term to sustainable—we can scale models with limitless reach and replicability.

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# Our Mission

The Clara Lionel Foundation (CLF) was founded in 2012 by Robyn “Rihanna” Fenty in honor of her grandparents, Clara and Lionel Braithwaite. CLF invests in climate justice initiatives in the Caribbean & United States and helps communities prepare for and withstand natural disasters.

Over the past several years, as many burgeoning nonprofits do, we lived the experience of having our work teach us. The lessons we learned revealed to us where and how our strengths and impact were needed most. We saw the potential to refine our focus while preserving our foundation. Part of this process involved honing our mission and vision statements to reflect not just where we are, but where we are headed.



# Strategic Priorities

## Overview

2020 was as pivotal a year for CLF. The crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and momentum of the racial justice movement pushed our grantmaking to new heights. In just one year, our grantmaking increased more than ten-fold. **We committed more than \$45 million in grantmaking to over 60 organizations globally.** Throughout the year, we leveraged an additional \$7 for every dollar we invested.

**In 2020, our grant-making increased more than 10X. For every dollar we invested, we leveraged an additional \$7.**

At the same time, we doubled down on our emergency response and preparedness work in the Caribbean and achieved our first major Climate Resilience Initiative (CRI) milestones. As of October 2021, we are near completion on the initial health, shelter and communications pilots across four countries, have eight total active projects across six countries and will add a minimum of four new projects and two new countries to the portfolio this year.

## Through this work, we proved to ourselves three things:

- 1 We have an unparalleled network of relationships and donors who trust us to turn their philanthropic dollars into exponential impact;
- 2 Our small staff and committed board members are working together more effectively and efficiently than ever and, as a result, we are able to rapidly mobilize funding to immediately address pressing issues; and
- 3 By focusing our mission-driven programs, we free ourselves up to better apply our core strengths and competencies to strategic, high-impact opportunities.



But perhaps the most important lesson we learned from the shifts in how we worked in 2020 was this: **focus is as important as scale.** To achieve the greatest possible impact we committed to changing aspects of how and where we concentrate our energy and resources, including:

- ✓ **Strategically narrowing our programmatic focus**
- ✓ **Shifting our giving model** to include the purposeful solicitation of leveraged grants through partnerships alongside our grantmaking
- ✓ **Expanding our funding offering** to potential grantees to include grants plus strategic support
- ✓ **Increasing our minimum grant threshold** as well as distinguishing grantmaking levels and processes
- ✓ **Defining our approach and grantmaking principles** to keep us accountable to our priorities



# Focus Areas and Approach

To achieve maximum impact moving forward, **our mission-driven work will be concentrated across two core strategic pillars in the Caribbean and United States:**

**Our approach is uniquely tailored to address the specific needs of the local communities in which we work.**

## 1. Climate Resilience & Emergency Response

We seek to bridge the humanitarian and climate sectors in order to alleviate poverty and build resilience. At the heart of this work is our Climate Resilience Initiative—a strategic vehicle focused on investing philanthropic dollars across multiple dimensions of emergency preparedness while scaling climate change solutions across the Caribbean. By investing in preparedness and working with on-the-ground partners, we are enabling more communities to better withstand natural disasters before they hit.



## 2. Climate Justice

We believe in the power of collective action to combat racial and socio-economic disparities so that all people can thrive, no matter where they live. We support grassroots organizations fighting for systems and policy change on behalf of BIPOC populations in order to build a more equitable future for all, not just some.



## 3. Legacy

As a throughline of these core strategic pillars is a **third strategic focus: the continuation of our Legacy Projects portfolio**. The origin story of our Legacy work began in Barbados with an inaugural grant to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and has continued to take its cues from our Founder's dedication to unlocking the potential of underserved communities, particularly women and children, in her native Caribbean country and the U.S.



## Approach

Throughout the strategic planning process, we pushed ourselves to not only refine how we articulate what we do, but also how we do it. We have a proven track record in effective grantmaking backed by an approach that sets us apart. **Our approach—a.k.a. “how we work”—is uniquely tailored to address the specific needs of the local communities in which we work, while at the same time addressing challenges at the global level.** It encompasses five key dimensions:



**Community-led:** We prioritize partnerships with community-based organizations capable of scaling while working towards systemic change.



**Trust:** Through a trust-based approach to funding, we provide grants to these organizations and other strategic programs.



**Leverage:** We tap our expansive network of experts who specialize in public policy, climate justice, and other areas to maximize our impact.



**Matched giving:** We work to secure additional support and pooled funding from other organizations.



**Advocacy:** We advocate for policies and systems-change initiatives to improve the quality of life for communities across the globe.



**We feel a deep sense of responsibility to our supporters and partners who depend on us to invest their philanthropy.**

## Giving Principles

Who we support is as important to us as how we support them. We feel a deep sense of responsibility to our supporters and partners who depend on us to invest their philanthropy in community-led programs, organizations and local leaders aligned with our core values.

**Our process for selecting grantee partners includes vetting organizations to ensure that they:**

- ✓ Meet the highest compliance and oversight standards proven by third party validation
- ✓ Plan boldly and take risks
- ✓ Build strong partnerships within the communities worked in, with peer organizations and other strategic partners
- ✓ Take a humble approach that is open to learning and collaboration with others
- ✓ Work with, not on behalf of, communities
- ✓ Incorporate best practices of international development
- ✓ Have a long-term plan for program sustainability
- ✓ Support local economies
- ✓ Are serious about accountability and transparent about both successes and failures
- ✓ Actively embed climate justice into their work

# Where We Want To Go

As we approach our ten-year anniversary, we see an opportunity to have this important milestone serve as a launch point to map new pathways that will help position the foundation for impact, growth and long-term sustainability. Over the next three years, we will achieve this and continue to build the backbone of CLF by:

Going forward, we see the opportunity to map new pathways that will help position the foundation for impact, growth and long-term sustainability.

## Growing our focused grantmaking

By disbursing an additional \$10 million on an annual basis, we seek to **increase our giving by a total of 150 percent by 2024**. This ambitious growth trajectory represents a strategic shift to give larger grants backed by confidence in our ability to mobilize funding quickly and effectively.

## Building a robust organization

To achieve our goals, we will **become even more strategic in how we generate revenue** to ensure the future sustainability of our work and that of our on-the-ground partners. At the same time, we will invest in thoughtfully recruiting and onboarding diverse key hires to support our growth while maintaining our priority of keeping our team small.

## Testing new CRI models while achieving defined targets

Through our pan-Caribbean Climate Resilience Initiative, **we will continue to add new projects based on proven solutions—such as the hardening of health clinics and schools—alongside the testing of new models that yield insights to inform our work** as well as the work of others. Our goal is to increase the number of active or completed projects from seven in five countries to 18 in seven countries by 2024.

Throughout this journey we will commit to partnering with academic and government experts to ensure our work is rooted in best, evidence-based practices and dynamically measure our impact in order to share insights and lessons learned with the broader sector.





# Conclusion

We are excited about what lies ahead and are grateful to the many stakeholders who continue to accompany us as we evolve. By shifting how the world responds to climate-related disasters, and through the continuous investment in social justice, together we can ensure BIPOC communities have opportunities to thrive for generations to come.