

In a Post-Roe Era, Here's How Packard Is Funding the Fight for Reproductive Freedom

Laurie Udesky | October 04, 2022



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When the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in the Dobbs decision in late June, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's President and CEO Nancy Lindborg quickly responded on the foundation's website to decry the decision. "This is a dark day in America, marking one of the most consequential setbacks to women's rights in decades," she declared.

She also noted the decision would exacerbate the already growing divide between the affluent and the underserved. "This decision" she said, "will reinforce cycles of poverty and inequity for people across the country and have the greatest impact on people of color and those with lower incomes."

Lindborg was one of many foundation leaders who publicly opposed the Dobbs decision, but Packard is also one of only a handful of large funders that have been steadfast supporters of abortion rights. In her statement, Lindborg made clear that Packard "is unwavering" in its support of abortion access in the United States. It has awarded an additional \$14.1 million in emergency grants for reproductive health this year, in addition to its annual giving of \$12.5 million that Packard gives to reproductive health grantees in the United States annually.

Packard has been a funder of reproductive rights for more than 50 years and is explicit about its support for abortion care and eliminating the stigma of abortion. While not the largest funder of abortion rights — that would be the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, although it does so anonymously, in one of philanthropy's worst-kept secrets — Packard's steady and unabashed support is important for a cause that grantmakers have too often *shied away from* and *underfunded*.

The foundation has given over \$1 billion to the cause to date, awarding over 60 grants in 2022 and close to 120 last year, according to its grants database. Funding goes to efforts in the U.S., sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and beyond, with major grantees including NARAL, Abortion Care Network, Groundswell Fund, IPAS (see IP's recent profile here), New Orleans Abortion Fund, and the Ethiopian Public Health Association.

To best support organizations on the front lines, Packard is taking cues from its grantees, said Tamara Kreinin, Packard's director of reproductive health programs, in an email to Inside Philanthropy. "We are listening to our grantees who are at the forefront of advocating for reproductive healthcare and how we can best meet their needs."

Regional support for marginalized communities

Among Packard's grant recipients working to upend inequities around abortion access is Provide, Inc., a Massachusetts-based nonprofit started 30 years ago in Boston that works on reproductive rights and trains providers in the South and Midwest to ensure that abortion referrals empower rather than stigmatize people. The providers and social workers engage with marginalized communities that experience unintended pregnancies, including Black and brown people, the LGBTQ community, and people who have experienced domestic violence or sexual assault, are struggling with substance use, or are living with HIV, according to Executive Director Fatimah Gifford.

For the patients and clients who interact with the healthcare and social workers trained by Provide, the challenges of dealing with an unintended pregnancy are far more complex than just dealing with abortion restrictions and bans, which exist in most of the states in which they work.

"It could be someone who has to navigate a domestic violence situation or is working multiple jobs and doesn't have the income to even get basic care," Gifford said. Some cases, she said, involve people who are pregnant and "lack resources that others have, or have parents who, because of their religious views, wouldn't support them having an abortion."

Well before the Dobbs decision, Provide began offering its training virtually. "We recognized the changing environment and needs of health and social workers and wanted to offer resources in a more efficient way," said Gifford, noting that the trainings are free. Packard had given grants to Provide as early as 1997, but has awarded funding to Provide consistently since 2009, explained Gifford. With the Packard grant it received this year, Provide will continue expanding its virtual trainings across the embattled states in the South and Midwest, where it has trained more than 10,000 providers over the past decade.

To navigate the ever-changing legal landscape around abortion and mitigate any legal risks, Provide works closely with *The Lawyering Project* and *If/When/How* (also a Packard grantee), two nonprofits focusing on legal issues and litigation around reproductive health.

Tracking the attack on abortion rights

Provide also relies on the *Guttmacher Institute*, perhaps the most prominent research institute working in reproductive health policy, which, among other things, maintains an *interactive map* showing the legal and policy shifts in abortion around the country.

For the past 17 years, Packard has also provided unrestricted grants to the Guttmacher Institute, including this year, according to its Executive Vice President Jonathan Wittenberg. Guttmacher was formed in 1968 under a different name as an independent affiliate of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America; it became a separate nonprofit in 2007, according to *its website*. The 2022 Packard grant helped Guttmacher launch its *interactive map* in mid-June, before the Dobbs decision, which shows in near real time the shifting landscape of abortion restrictions and bans as well as states that protect the right to abortions.

One of Guttmacher's research areas is quantifying how many people in different countries, including in the United States, have access to abortions. Packard has also funded Guttmacher's international efforts, including its work developing ways to capture abortion data in countries where abortion is illegal.

"I think we've learned that in restrictive settings, relying on people's self-reports of abortion is very difficult. For understandable reasons, they are reluctant to share their own experiences with abortion," said Wittenberg. "But there are ways to elicit more reporting by asking about abortions obtained by their closest friends or confidants."

Trusted healthcare workers in those setting have also been instrumental in providing data about abortions. Guttmacher will be adapting some of the methods they've developed internationally to collect data in the United States in areas where abortion is now illegal, according to Wittenberg. The institute released a one-month, post-*Dobbs* policy report, and plans on releasing another at the 100-day mark.

Beyond funding its work, Wittenberg said that Packard staff have always been helpful and collaborative. "We did a very large-scale study of abortion incidents in India that was released in 2017, and that project emerged from conversations between us and Packard's staff. They really helped us lay the groundwork and connect us with stakeholders on the ground in India, making introductions, opening doors for us," said Wittenberg.

Mobilizing moderate voters

The importance of connection and opening doors also resonates with Jackie Payne, the founder and executive director of *Galvanize USA*, whose goal is to "identify, engage and move moderate women in rural, small town, and suburban America to reliably vote for progress," according to its website. The nonprofit is using Packard's reproductive health grant this year to find common ground among the politically moderate women that her organization connects with around reproductive freedom.

"Our research tells us that moderate women have pretty nuanced feelings about abortion, but that the vast majority are very clear that they want their loved ones to be treated with respect and dignity," said Payne. "And they should have the option to make the decision that's best for them without government interference."

The group, which has 92,000 members and was formed in 2018, started outreach to women in the Midwest in Michigan, Wisconsin and Iowa, and later expanded to Pennsylvania and Maine. It is now in an outward push nationally. It provides a way for its members, who live in rural, urban and suburban areas to interact with one another through its online forums.

"So many of the women come in and say, 'I can't really talk about how I feel about this in my community,'" said Payne. But the forums themselves are not political. "They're coming to us as a place where it's hopeful, solution-based, where they can talk about everything that matters to them, from how to make dinner on a budget to ways to garden to what should I do about what's happening with abortion in my state."

Payne said that well in advance of the Dobbs decision, Galvanize USA had developed ads about reproductive freedom to target moderate women in Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio, which they have been running since early May. One ad, titled "*You Can't Always Control What Life Throws at You*," built up support for women to have the freedom to make their own decisions about abortion by 15%, according to Galvanize USA Chief Communications Officer Kelly Starr. Another ad called "*Care and Dignity, We All Need Support*" increased support for Roe by 20%. The group surveyed a randomized representative sample, half of which watched the ads and half that did not watch them.

Payne points to Kansas, where voters surprised the nation by blocking efforts to remove abortion protection from the state's constitution. "I think that what we saw in Kansas was just a good example of how important it is that, if we want to defend reproductive freedom, we really have to be able to engage folks across the ideological spectrum."

Packard's Tamara Kreinin agrees.

"Bodily autonomy is a fundamental human right," she told IP. "We know that the ability to choose whether and when to have a child, to give birth safely, and to raise children in a supportive environment is essential to living a healthy, empowered life and foundational to a just and equitable society."

But, Kreinin added, "We know this effort is larger than any one foundation or individual. We need more funders to commit funding and support a range of organizations doing critical work locally and nationally. This funding will help ensure people everywhere can make their own decisions about if, when and how to have a child."

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