



# The Embrey Family Foundation Mission Without Borders

## Action:

**Mission Without Borders** was created by the Embrey Family Foundation in 2008 to “counter injustices with dire consequences to our society and its members.”

Lauren and Gayle perceived the urgency of these circumstances that were devastating the lives of women and girls. They understood that women’s lives were at stake and that there was no time to lose. They were aware that as a new and not-so-big foundation they were venturing into a complicated set of outsized challenges with both immediate and long-term characteristics. Could they really make a difference? Inspired by the possibilities...they said, “YES!”

A passionate and active search process by founders Lauren and Gayle Embrey opened partnerships with activists and leaders who could break barriers to create new solutions on human rights and women’s rights while also working patiently to build their institutions and networks.

### What was accomplished in Mission Without Borders?

- The redefinition of human trafficking and the design of new approaches to handling and preventing human trafficking in the United States. [*Polaris; Lab to Combat Human Trafficking, LeTot*]
- Effective resistance to the media-based bullying of women in or running for public office. [*Women’s Media Center/She Should Run*]
- A large-scale model for making human rights education part of university programs. [*Southern Methodist University Embrey Human Rights Program*]
- Engagement of the next generations in human rights activism. [*Amnesty International-USA; Chicken and Egg; Moxie; Pachamama*]
- Making gender lens and race equity thinking and action part of the norm in large institutions. [*Amnesty International-USA; American Indian College Fund*]
- Local and national policy advances on gender—[trafficking, violence against women, reproductive health. [*IMs Foundation; Dallas Women’s Foundation; Colorado Women’s Foundation; Women’s Funding Network*]
- The emergence of the arts as a more direct force for social change. [*Global Arts Center*]

Beyond the results that money could buy, the MWB Initiative accomplished something surprisingly significant—though less tangible—by creating an innovative and trusting space for learning, problem-solving and changing the world. **The competitive environment of most philanthropic resources often resists collaboration when it is most needed; is judgmental when it should be most forgiving; and is most decisive when it needs to be more patient with emergent thinking and action.** As artists themselves, the Embrey Foundation leaders were naturally open to a more open, intuitive and sometimes emotional process for making choices and decisions. They integrated heart and mind as a way of doing “business.” What practices created this unusual and effective philanthropic space?

Building a Different Foundation –For the success of Mission Without Borders, the Embrey Family Foundation would...

- **Spend well beyond** the required 5% annual payout to support grantees to play big and over multiple years.
- **Take calculated risks out of proportion** to their size and experience.
- **Rely on wisdom and intuition as much as strategy and design** to choose grantee partners.

- **Change the course of large and small organizations and institutions** by supporting them to redefine critical human rights issues like human trafficking, reconciliation, and the arts as a tool for social justice.
- **Reinforce a growing global consensus** on the “woman effect”, the importance of women’s equality and full participation—socially, economically and politically.
- **Stand up for racial equity** by leading a local Dallas communitywide effort to “face race” and to strengthen national and local organizations to do race work in Dallas and nationally.
- **Change individual lives and destinies by trusting and cultivating the talents** of dozens of new leaders among grantees and allies, and also among members of its own staff and board.
- **Transform the use of nearly every endowment dollar into impact-driven choices.**

### Reflections/Conclusions

It might have been more sensible to have started the Embrey Family Foundation with a small portfolio of grants and a reflective learning process prior to plunging into larger scale grantmaking. But it felt like a world of urgencies in women’s lives was calling us to get beyond whatever trepidation we ourselves had about becoming “philanthropists” and whatever cautions others were urging on us during startup. We were convinced that if we acted quickly and decisively we would have a chance to make a real difference at an important moment in time. And, as a result of the Mission Without Borders funding, amazing things happened. Projects were selected because of their potential to change women’s lives and to tilt our institutions and culture toward gender equality, human rights, and justice. We got this and much more.

- **We took on higher education and the next generation(s).**
- **We interrupted US and global sex trafficking and violence against women.**
- **We made movies!**
- **We linked human rights, gender, and race and boosted organizational capacity.**
- **We challenged the media..and the political system.**

As I write this I am aware of the courage that it has taken for all of us to do this work...the EFF staff and board, our advisors and consultants; and the hundreds of staff, board, volunteers, constituents of the grantees. We have no doubts that the work and investments had an impact. But that impact is only half the story. The work of MWB changed the Embrey Family Foundation and our future. As we worked to get more deeply into the intersection of race and gender we realized how much more is needed. In the midst of MWB we made a partnership with Race Forward that grew into our catalyzing support for Dallas Faces Race, a collaborative program with more than 300 partners. And we invested increasingly in the arts as drivers of deep social change. The arts seem to speak the language of the Embrey Family Foundation and its many friends and partners. In ever challenging times we believe that artists will be essential in leading us through the many dilemmas of seeking equality and justice in the future.

We are committed to do just that.

LAUREN EMBREY, CEO  
Embrey Family Foundation