



EVALUATION

THE AFTER-SCHOOL
INITIATIVE'S



Evaluation Brief



THE COLORADO TRUST

The Colorado Trust was established as a grantmaking foundation in 1985 with the proceeds of the sale of PSL Healthcare Corporation. Trust grantmaking initiatives address a wide range of issues, such as health promotion, supporting immigrant and refugee families, preventing suicide, early child development, after-school programs and end-of-life care. The Colorado Trust manages substantially all of its grantmaking through an initiative process that blends together several elements to bring about defined changes or improvements. Through this method of grantmaking, The Trust has found that it is able to support grantees over longer-than-usual periods of time and maximize their ability to bring about positive, sustainable change.

THE AFTER-SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Today, more than 28 million school-age children in the United States have parents who work outside the home. An estimated five to seven million — and up to as many as 15 million — “latchkey children” return to an empty home after school. Many of these children must entertain and care for themselves during the after-school hours of 3 to 6 p.m. Yet most child experts agree that leaving children to fend for themselves without adult supervision is a poor child-care choice. It has been shown that juvenile crime rates peak during the after-school hours.

The Trust’s five-year (2000-2005), \$11 million, After-School Initiative (ASI) serves children between fourth and ninth grades in 32 sites across Colorado (see map on page 7). Of these sites, 31 programs are participating in the evaluation process. All of the ASI programs promote positive youth development within the context of their youth programming.

Initiative Structure

The Trust’s After-School Initiative is designed to ensure grantees maximum opportunities for programmatic success. An initiative management team provides direction, focus and general oversight of the initiative. This partnership team, made up of three Regional Coordinating Agencies (RCAs), the evaluation firm, National Research Center, Inc.

(NRC) and The Colorado Trust, are in constant communication with each other about the initiative process. Geographically, the state is divided into three regions encompassing all 64 counties. Each RCA is responsible for providing comprehensive training and technical assistance across the spectrum of youth development activities to the grantees within their respective region. The RCAs, in partnership with after-school program staff, conduct organizational and program assessments with each grantee to determine the level, extent and depth of their technical assistance needs. The RCAs build the capacity of programs to deliver high-quality services and promote the practical application of strength-based activities (i.e., after-school activities that focus on what’s “right” about youth, not on negative factors). More specifically, the RCAs assist program staff to integrate initiative activities (called core elements) such as positive youth development, fostering active parental and youth engagement, and exploring ways to honor ethnic and cultural differences, into program curriculum and ensure that each of the initiative core elements is effectively integrated into the program philosophy and practice.

Each RCA provides written and verbal reports to The Colorado Trust at monthly partnership update meetings. These meetings provide opportunities to share with initiative staff — from the RCAs and The Trust — aspects of their work that create challenges and foster successes. In addition, NRC attends partnership meetings to provide updates on data collection, evaluation analysis, site visits and interpretation of results. Together, this team provides the management structure that monitors the initiative’s progress.

The diagram in figure 1 depicts the structure of the After-School Initiative and summarizes the roles of the stakeholders: the 32 grantees, 3 RCAs, the evaluator and The Colorado Trust. The RCAs, the evaluation firm and The Trust believe that the integration of the core elements by grantees into their after-school programs leads to better youth outcomes. The youth outcomes (listed on the right side of the diagram) and their correlation with three of the core elements — positive youth development, partnership and cultural competency — are measured in the evaluation.

STRUCTURE OF THE AFTER-SCHOOL INITIATIVE

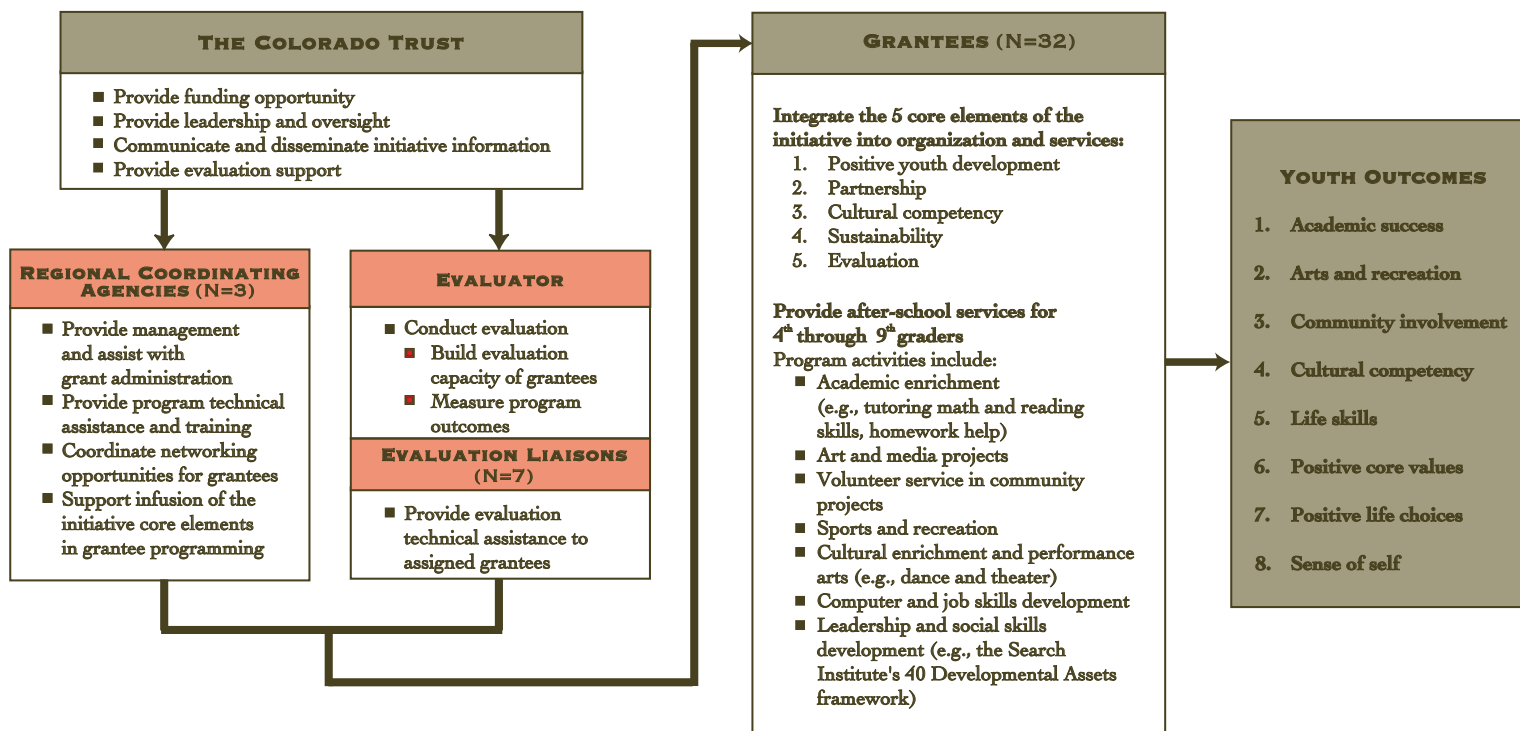


FIGURE 1: DIAGRAM OF THE AFTER-SCHOOL INITIATIVE STRUCTURE

Range of Programs

The 32 after-school sites are located in schools, churches, nonprofit organizations and youth-serving agencies throughout the state. Geographically, these programs span nearly all areas of Colorado and include many rural, urban and suburban communities. Although the primary focus of program curriculum is to encourage the best in all children, the scope of program services ranges from social and recreational skill-building, such as leadership development, to mentoring and outdoor sports activities. Other activities include academic support to improve reading, math, science, writing and computer technology skills. Many of the programs integrate various culturally based activities, including arts and crafts, storytelling, folkloric dancing and traditional customary celebrations. Across the 32 after-school programs, staff members have developed strategies to help them regularly share information with each other about the types of activities and approaches that are most effective in their programs.

Core Elements

Central to the After-School Initiative are “core elements” of successful after-school programs. These core elements include positive youth development, partnerships, cultural competency development, sustainability and evaluation. As the overarching strategy, each grantee program is committed to focusing time and attention on promoting positive youth development as the primary impetus for achieving success. After-school programs that use a positive youth development approach capitalize on the strengths and insights that emerge from young people when they are actively engaged as part of the decisionmaking process. Incorporating input from youth into the program design and activities, and promotion of positive decisionmaking skills are integral to programmatic success. The core elements for this initiative are defined as follows:

1. Positive Youth Development — A youth-centered, strength-based approach that partners adults and youth to address the developmental (physical, social, emotional) needs of all young people, enabling them to become healthy, responsible and caring individuals.

2. Partnerships — An enduring relationship that is built among stakeholders (youth, families, staff and organizations) to create, sustain or enhance after-school program services. In addition, partnerships demonstrate the dedication of new resources necessary to realize a shared vision for the community.

3. Cultural Competency Development — A process that builds the capacity of organizations and individuals to understand and value group differences (including race/ethnicity, language, gender, age, (dis)ability, socioeconomic status, geographic region, sexual orientation and religion), while creating new opportunities for the improvement of services to these diverse populations.

4. Sustainability — Sustainability ensures that locally defined after-school needs of a community are addressed over time through steady or increased funding revenues, training and retention of staff and ensuring quality.

5. Evaluation — Evaluation is a form of systematic measurement of the initiative to promote understanding and the improvement of after-school services.

THE EVALUATION

The purpose of the evaluation is to help grantees increase their ability to evaluate their own programs and to provide The Colorado Trust with information about the overall impact of its initiative. The evaluation contract for the After-School Initiative was awarded via a competitive process to NRC. NRC works closely with The Colorado Trust and the RCAs to conduct this evaluation. There two components of the evaluation — grantee and initiative-wide.

The Grantee Component

This component is designed to increase grantees' ability to understand and use evaluation results. Recognizing the time needed to successfully incorporate evaluation into program work, The Trust provides each grantee with funding equivalent to 25% of a staff person's time to work on the evaluation. Customized evaluation technical

assistance is provided to each grantee through an evaluation liaison arranged by NRC. Included in this evaluation technical assistance package is:

- Development of a program logic model that reflects the outcomes the grantee is striving to achieve
- An evaluation handbook created for the initiative that serves as a "how to" manual on conducting after-school evaluations
- Multiple trainings using the evaluation handbook
- A toolkit of survey questions from which grantees can select questions that are intended to measure outcomes for the youth and are tailored to their specific programs
- Grantee-specific assistance on how to understand, interpret and use program-specific evaluation results.

The Initiative-Wide Component

To help The Colorado Trust better understand the overall impact of its initiative, as well as to inform the field of after-school programming, the initiative-wide evaluation component aims to answer the following 4 evaluation questions:

- 1. What are the demographics of the program participants in the initiative?*
- 2. What youth outcomes are achieved by the initiative programs?*
- 3. What relationships are observed between the level of integration of core elements into an after-school program and the youth outcomes grantees intended to impact?*
- 4. Did participation in the evaluation build the capacity of grantee organizations to understand and assist program evaluation efforts?*

While some of these questions may be answered at the grantee level, the intent is to provide results on the initiative level by aggregating data from all grantee sites. The results reported in this document are from this initiative-wide component. Since question 4 is designed to be answered at the end of the initiative, results are not yet available.

Data Collection Instruments Created for This Initiative

There are three primary means for data collection in this evaluation:

Electronic Tracking of Youth—As part of the initiative, grantees are provided hardware and software necessary to operate KidTrax, an electronic software that maintains demographic information and attendance records on youth participating in the programs. Grantees who elected not to use KidTrax are tracking this information electronically via Excel.

The Toolkit—After conducting an extensive literature review, a national search of instruments used to measure assets and positive youth development, and surveys and focus groups with youth-serving programs, NRC developed *The After-School Initiative's Toolkit for Evaluating Positive Youth Development* for this initiative. The toolkit is comprised of multiple survey question sets that grantees can choose from to quantitatively measure changes in the individuals they serve. Questions are grouped into seven “domains” that reflect the areas upon which grantees believe they are having an impact. The seven domain areas are: academic success, community involvement, cultural competency, life skills, positive life choices, positive core values and sense of self. The surveys in the toolkit are intended to be administered at the end of each semester (post-only) and are not intended to measure changes over time. A copy of the toolkit can be downloaded from www.coloradotrust.org.

Grantee Agency Survey—NRC created a web-based, self-report survey that each grantee completes on an annual basis during the spring semester to measure the extent to which programs have integrated three of the five core elements into their work (positive youth development, partnerships and cultural competency). In its final year of administration, the survey will include questions on grantee capacity for evaluation.

PRELIMINARY INITIATIVE-WIDE RESULTS

Evaluation questions of The Trust's After-School Initiative along with preliminary results are listed below:

1. What are the demographics of the program participants in the initiative?

In November 2003, all 31 grantees participating in the evaluation reported demographic information (22 grantees via KidTrax and 9 via Excel, see figure 2). Data collected during the fall semester of 2003 showed that:

- More than 3,660 youth were served by the 31 ASI grantees
- About half of the youth served by ASI were female (49%) and half were male (51%)
- The majority of youth served by ASI were between 6th and 8th grades (79%) and between the ages of 11 and 14 years (81%)
- Nearly half of the youth served were Caucasian/White (47%) and 41% were Latino/Hispanic.

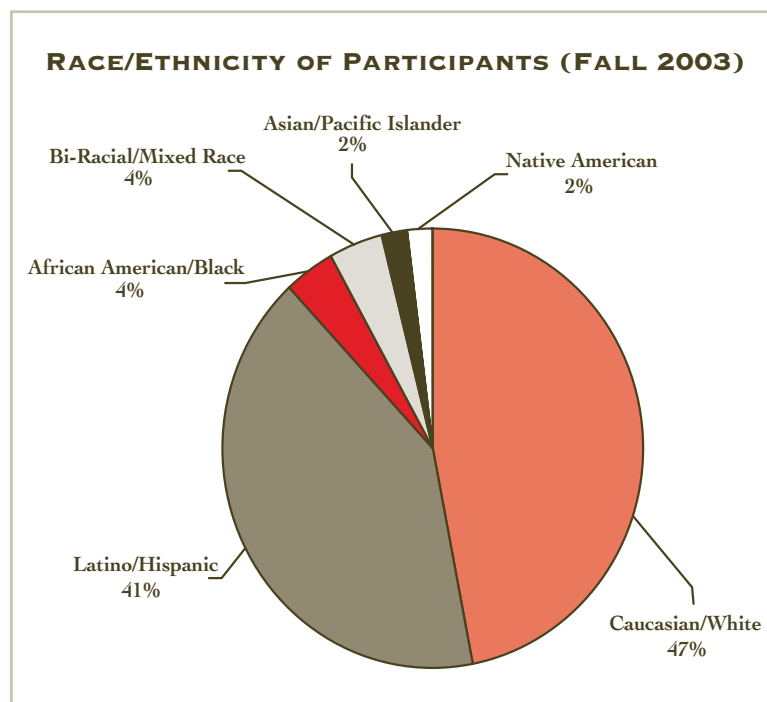


FIGURE 2: DEMOGRAPHICS OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

YOUTH REPORTS OF POSITIVE CHANGE AS A RESULT OF ATTENDANCE IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM			
Outcome domain	Average percent of youth reporting positive change as a result of participation in program	Number of participants reporting	Number of grantees (N=25) measuring outcome domain
POSITIVE LIFE CHOICES	74%	341	17
SENSE OF SELF	73%	549	22
CULTURAL COMPETENCY	68%	401	15
POSITIVE CORE VALUES	68%	337	14
LIFE SKILLS	65%	529	18
ACADEMIC SUCCESS	62%	652	24
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	52%	369	15

FIGURE 3: TABLE OF YOUTH REPORTS OF POSITIVE CHANGE

2. What youth outcomes are achieved by the initiative programs?

The table in figure 3 shows the percentage of ASI participants who reported positive changes due to the ASI programs. On average, nearly three-fourths of the youth reported that they have experienced positive changes in their lives as a result of participating in the after-school programs funded by The Colorado Trust.

In December 2003, 25 of the 31 grantees participating in the evaluation administered a youth survey uniquely tailored to their program based on the youth outcome domains they chose to measure. Although 663 ASI participants completed a survey, the number of responses to each outcome domain varies according to the focus of the grantee programs. The third column indicates the total number of participants who completed the survey questions regarding each outcome domain, while the fourth column indicates the number of grantees who chose to measure that particular outcome domain.

3. What relationships are observed between the level of integration of core elements into an after-school program and the youth outcomes grantees intended to impact?

The grantee survey data used in this analysis were from the May 2003 administration; 28 of 31 grantees completed the survey. The youth outcome results came from the December 2003

administration of the toolkit. Preliminary results show that:

- The three core elements — partnership, cultural competency and positive youth development — did not have a statistically significant relationship to youth outcomes.

In addition, the evaluation looked at the relationships between demographic data and youth outcomes:

- Younger youth (age 11 and under) and youth from lower grade levels tend to report greater change in youth outcomes.
- Ethnicity and gender did not have a statistically significant relationship to youth outcomes.

It is important to note that these are preliminary results, based on a limited sample (663 youth surveys and 28 grantee surveys). As grantees continue to build the capacity to conduct evaluations, it is expected that there will be an increase in the number of completed surveys and a chance that the results may be different. The final evaluation results will be available in spring 2006.

EVALUATION CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

This evaluation has presented numerous challenges and provides lessons for funders, after-school program staff and the field of evaluation.

- *Different stakeholders have different expectations from an evaluation.* The ASI evaluation intends to address the needs and expectations of both the grantees and The Colorado Trust. Although grantee evaluation needs vary from the evaluation needs of the funder, this evaluation uses the same instruments and analyses to meet both stakeholder groups' needs, requiring constant attention to balancing the varying needs. The compromises that have been made between the two groups' needs have resulted in some lack of satisfaction with the evaluation on the part of both groups.
- *Annual or mid-initiative reflections on the evaluation are prudent.* The Colorado Trust and NRC conducted a mid-initiative retreat. This proved to be valuable in bringing everyone back to the same vision and expectations about the evaluation, and provided an opportunity to make corrections to the evaluation process, structure and design.
- *Clear expectations and definitions from the beginning are necessary.* Funders need to clearly articulate from the beginning what is expected from the evaluation to all stakeholders, including the evaluation firm and grantees. For example, after the mid-initiative evaluation retreat, The Colorado Trust sent out communications to the grantees delineating The Trust's expectations for the grantees in terms of evaluation and connecting the funding given to grantees for evaluation activities to specific tasks. This helped to clarify the grantee responsibilities, which were not clearly articulated at the beginning of the initiative.
- *Turnover in initiative staff has to be anticipated and planned for.* Staff turnover has occurred at all levels: grantee, evaluation, evaluation liaisons and The Trust. Anticipate the possibility of turnover and ensure that all major agreements

and decisions, including documentation of definitions, purposes and expectations, are in writing to reduce the time needed to orient new staff.

- *When implementing new technology, a careful assessment of both the product, as well as the need, infrastructure and capacity of recipients must be conducted.* For some grantees, KidTrax posed so many challenges that grantees were frustrated and felt that it was not worth the time and resources they had to dedicate to the program. Thus, during the third year of the initiative, NRC implemented a simpler option of using an Excel spreadsheet to report the demographics of ASI participants for those grantees who wished to discontinue use of KidTrax. An assessment of grantee capacity for such technology at the beginning of the initiative would have aided the decisionmaking process.
- *Not every grantee or program should be included in an evaluation.* The Colorado Trust has learned through this and other initiatives that not every program or grantee is ready to be evaluated. Since this initiative began, The Trust has attempted to formally and systematically assess the evaluability of grantees and programs in new initiatives before designing an evaluation.
- *Environmental factors and pressures change with time.* Political and environmental climates change over time and can impact the focus of programs. For example, in recent years there have been increased pressures for after-school programs to focus on academic achievement. This change affects the evaluation interests of the program staff, even though the focus may be too narrow for programs that can have other valuable outcomes. It may also be unrealistic to expect to see changes in youth outcomes, such as academic success, over a relatively short period of time.

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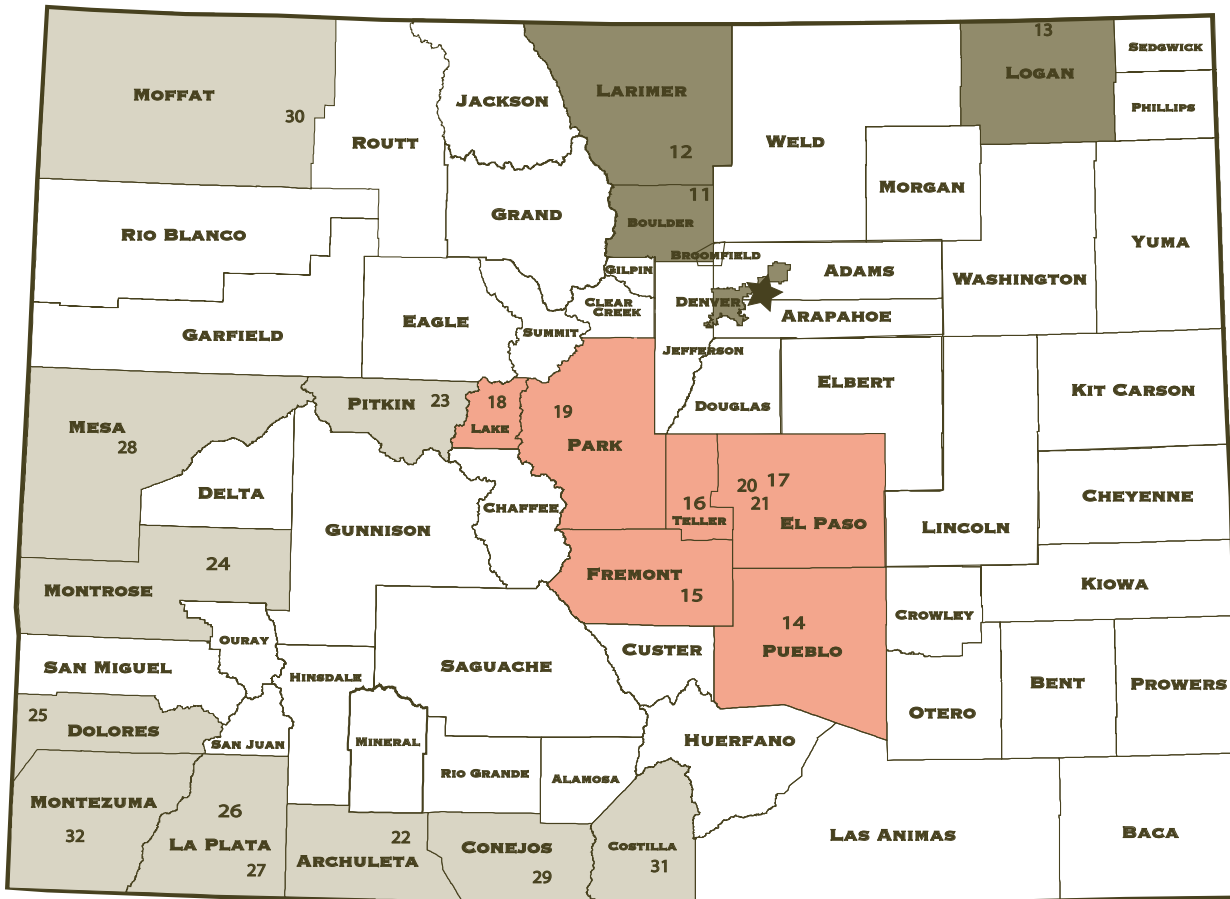
AFTER-SCHOOL INITIATIVE GRANTEE MAP

~ Regional Coordinating Agencies ~

Region 1:
Colorado Foundation for Families and Children

Region 2:
Colorado Springs Assets for Youth

Region 3:
Montrose Memorial Hospital
(Teaching Prevention, Promoting Involvement)



- Region 1 Grantees**
1. Adams 12 - Five Star Schools^o
 2. Asian Pacific Development Center^o
 3. Community Health Education Services-J'NED^o
 4. Cross Community Coalition^o
 5. Escuela Tlatelolco^o
 6. Jewish Community Center^o
 7. Metropolitan Black Church Initiative^o
 8. Mile High United Way - Horace Mann Neighborhood Center^o
 9. Mercy Housing South West^o
 10. University of Denver Bridge Project^o
 11. City of Longmont Division of Youth Services
 12. Estes Valley Recreation and Park District
 13. Plateau (Peetz) RE-5 School District
- ^o Grantees 1 through 10 are located in the Denver metropolitan area.
- Region 2 Grantees:**
14. Boys & Girls Club-Pueblo Co. and Lower Arkansas Valley
 15. Canon City Metro Parks and Recreation
 16. City of Cripple Creek Park and Recreation
 17. Colorado State University El Paso County Co-op Extension
 18. Lake County School District
 19. Park County RE-2 School District
 20. Pikes Peak Southeast -Y.M.C.A.
 21. Red Shield Community Center of the Salvation Army
- Region 3 Grantees:**
22. Archuleta Education Center
 23. Aspen Santa Fe Ballet Company
 24. Black Canyon Boys & Girls Club
 25. Dolores County (4-H) Broadcast
 26. Durango Latino Education Coalition
 27. La Plata Family Centers Coalition
 28. Mesa County DHHS - Club Mid
 29. Mi Amigo-Valle de Sol Community Center
 30. Recreational After-school Doorway Program
 31. St. Andrew Avelino Youth Family Center
 32. Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

The Colorado Trust is a grantmaking foundation dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of the people of Colorado. To learn more about The Colorado Trust and its grantmaking initiatives, go to www.coloradotrust.org.

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