



# FRESC: GOOD JOBS, STRONG COMMUNITIES

In 2014, The Colorado Trust launched the **Health Equity Advocacy (HEA) Strategy**, a multi-phased investment in building a strong and diverse field of health equity advocates to ensure equitable health outcomes for Colorado’s most vulnerable. A centerpiece of the second phase of this strategy (2015-2016) included providing financial and capacity-building support to a cohort of direct service, community organizing, and policy advocacy organizations across the state. This support was designed to strengthen individual and collective capacity to “seed” an emerging health equity advocacy field in Colorado.

The following is part of a **“Seeds of the Field”** series of profiles of each of the 17 cohort members funded in the second phase of the HEA Strategy

## Seeding a Health Equity Advocacy Field: The Story of FRESC: Good Jobs, Strong Communities

As an advocacy organization whose work is rooted in a strong recognition of the profound influence that economic factors can have on health outcomes, [FRESC: Good Jobs, Strong Communities](#) (FRESC) is a key partner in building a health equity advocacy field throughout Colorado. FRESC works toward a vision that all Coloradans have the maximum opportunity for a good quality of life, including jobs that pay livable wages, benefits that support families, housing that is affordable, and a voice in the decisions that affect them. FRESC’s mission is to build power to ensure that economic and political systems work for all Colorado residents, especially low-income people, communities of color and immigrants.

Prior work in Phase 1 of the HEA Strategy prompted FRESC to engage in deep reflection about the way in which it carried out its work. FRESC’s executive director, Felicia Griffin, shared the realization that while FRESC was engaging in good work, “in many ways, our work was transactional—one community benefits agreement, development, and policy at a time,” which ultimately did not reflect the organization’s values. Thus, FRESC entered Phase 2 with a renewed sense of vigor and commitment to “walk-our-talk,” to serve as a bridge between organizing and public policy, and to partner more intentionally with communities to build their leadership and advocacy capacity.

## FRESC’s Phase 2 Work

FRESC engaged in a tremendous amount of advocacy work over the course of Phase 2, including engaging a broad coalition of partners to educate the public about the current economic conditions working families face. In 2016, Coloradans passed a ballot measure to increase wages to \$12 an hour by 2020. Griffin notes that though this is a modest increase that still does not amount to a “living wage,” it is still “a step towards improving economic and health outcomes for hardworking Coloradans.”

Another key win was the inclusion of a local hire ordinance to ensure that low-income communities of color will have the opportunity to access the jobs that will be created as part of the contentious I-70 expansion project. FRESC also succeeded in mobilizing communities to successfully push the city of Denver to set up a city-wide permanent housing fund to address the city’s growing housing crisis.

In addition to these efforts, and true to its intentions, a key facet of FRESC’s Phase 2 work included significant investments in partnering with community members to increase their organizing and leadership capacity. In its work in the Globeville, Elyria, and Swansea neighborhoods, FRESC provided education to community members around city and state decision-making and budgeting processes, as well as how to engage in research actions. As a result, these community leaders conducted research on transit issues and attended meetings with the city to discuss their concerns, ultimately succeeding in getting improvements at six bus stops and promises from the city for three additional stops. In Westminster, FRESC created the We Organize Westminster (WOW) committee to address issues of affordable housing and displacement. The committee is made up of a



**We are doing the best we can to make sure that folks can stay stable, kids can stay in the schools that they want to be in, and that families can stay in the communities that they live in and not be pushed out. It’s all directly related to health.”**

– Felicia Griffin,  
Executive Director

diverse group of predominantly low-income people who have been directly impacted by displacement and rising housing costs. To support the committee's advocacy efforts, FRESC provided biweekly organizing and policy trainings, regular one-on-one leadership development, opportunities for community leaders to exercise their leadership skills through facilitated meetings with decision-makers and policy experts, and opportunities to testify at city council meetings and address the media as community spokespeople.




*FRESC's WOW leaders march to demand solutions to Denver's housing crisis*

In addition to its policy advocacy and community organizing efforts, FRESC's Phase 2 work included critical contributions to the HEA cohort to increase cohort members' capacity to serve as leaders in the health equity advocacy field. With support from a HEA technical assistance grant, FRESC partnered with another cohort organization—the Center for Health Progress—to enlist the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond to provide three Undoing Racism trainings for the cohort and the broader field. FRESC also engaged a racial equity consultant to provide tools and individualized support to cohort members interested in assessing their commitment to racial equity and in starting organization-level conversations around equity. Ultimately, 130 organizations participated in Undoing Racism and, given the clear demand for the training across the field, FRESC and Center for Health Progress received additional funds from the Colorado Health Foundation to hold a fourth training. There is currently a waiting list of organizations that would like to participate in future trainings, indicating that this effort tapped into a clear need and desire in the field to be better equipped with knowledge and skills to help organizations effectively address racism and its impact on the health and well-being of diverse communities.

### **Laying the Groundwork for an Emerging Field**

Reflecting on FRESC's accomplishments in Phase 2, Griffin expresses a sense of pride in their work, and in the "massive shifts" the organization has made in terms of how it does



its work. At the launch of the HEA Strategy, Griffin described FRESC as a policy advocacy organization, but over the course of Phase 2 it has transformed into more of a hybrid organization, focused on both policy advocacy and community organizing. Griffin is certain the organization is on the right path, noting:

*Our organization will continue to be a hybrid organization. Having policy expertise in health is really important—we can do this policy work all day long, but we’re constantly being asked, “Where is the community? What does the community feel?” If we really want to win on important things then we really have to organize.*

## Looking Forward

Beginning in 2017, the 17 HEA cohort members, including FRESC, are launching a new phase of work focused on further cultivating the seeds collectively planted across the state in Phase 2. Ultimately, guided by common values and empowered communities, cohort members will be aligning their change efforts to dismantle structural and racial inequities and build equitable health systems so that all Coloradans can thrive. FRESC is poised to serve as a leader in this collective endeavor.

### Highlights: FRESC: Good Jobs, Strong Communities’ Seeds of the Field

- New committee made up of diverse community members affected by and dedicated to addressing displacement and the housing crisis
- A growing body of community leaders with the knowledge and skills to organize and advocate around issues affecting their communities
- Greater involvement of community voices in key decision-making arenas
- New trainings and tools to support organizations in their efforts to understand and address racism and its impacts

