



## HEALTH EQUITY ADVOCACY STRATEGY: WHY FIELD BUILDING?

The Colorado Trust believes that all Coloradans should have fair and equal opportunities to lead healthy, productive lives. We also believe that supporting policy change efforts through advocacy is an essential strategy to address inequities and social challenges. We know that certain populations do not have fair nor equal opportunities to lead healthy lives, based on race, ethnicity, income, geography and many other factors. We know that health is more than health coverage and health care—that it is deeply affected by social, systemic and institutional dynamics. And we know that effective, efficient and inclusive advocacy and public engagement efforts can lead to positive changes in those dynamics, in turn supporting individuals and families who comprise the communities most affected by health inequities.

The Trust defines advocacy-related work to include policy advocacy, issue research, community outreach and engagement, grassroots organizing and mobilizing, leadership development and other strategies that support advancing health equity issues. We believe that organizations that might not identify as an “advocacy group” in the conventional sense still play an important role in engaging, informing or

otherwise serving affected communities and in the health equity policymaking process.

To explore and understand the different funding approaches to policy advocacy, The Trust published *Advocacy & Public Policy Grantmaking* (Beer, 2012), a report that describes three approaches to funding policy advocacy:

- **POLICY TARGET:** Achieve the passage, successful implementation, and/or maintenance of a specific policy goal, often set by the funder.
- **ADVOCACY NICHE:** Strengthen the presence or influence of a particular strategic function (such as policy analysis and research, or grassroots mobilization) within the policymaking process.
- **FIELD BUILDING:** Build the stability and long-term adaptive capacity of a field of advocacy and policy organizations that can shape and respond to a shifting policy environment.

Following this report, in 2013 The Colorado Trust asked Spark Policy Institute to survey 173 organizations in Colorado—89 of which identified themselves as serving or representing vulnerable

### GLOSSARY

#### **Advocacy-related work:**

Work that includes policy advocacy, issue research, community outreach and engagement, grassroots organizing and mobilizing, leadership development and other strategies that support advancing health equity issues.

#### **Field:**

An identifiable group of actors with a shared identity, knowledge base, vocabulary, policy and practice who are comprised of a multiplicity of organizations in relationship with each other.

populations—to assess the capacities and connections that did or did not exist between these organizations. Additionally, leaders from 30 organizations across different health-related sectors were interviewed to delve more deeply into questions about connectivity, capacity, infrastructure and other related elements of advocacy work.

Two separate fields were identified through this work: health advocacy and equity. A field is an identifiable group of actors with a shared identity, knowledge base, vocabulary, policy and practice who are comprised of a multiplicity of organizations in relationship with each other. Organizations in a field produce facts, solutions to problems, models of good practice, and messages to help people grasp the dimensions of a problem and promote desired changes.

Both fields are absolutely necessary to help advance health equity policy solutions in Colorado. Yet, while there were a few cases of organizational overlap observed, we discovered these two fields are not well-connected and have many distinct differences in their influence, capacity, infrastructure, inclusivity and credibility within diverse communities. Both fields have different strengths and weaknesses, and even some unspoken, conflicting dynamics.

However, better connecting and bringing to bear the full power and influence of these two fields would unquestionably yield better results for increasing awareness, understanding and action toward policy solutions to advance health equity. Bringing these two fields together would also leverage The Trust's role as a neutral convener and credible resource.

Thus, The Trust determined that a field-building approach to advocacy and public policy grantmaking would provide the foundation for a new health equity field, and build the stability and long-term adaptive capacity of organizations that can influence and shape an ever-changing policy landscape.

We focus on building up the collective influence and power of organizations to establish a health equity advocacy field. Our field-building approach seeks to support a diverse array of organizations to achieve long-term success by:

- Creating a shared understanding and vision around health equity
- Increasing the diversity of organizations in the health equity field, with specific attention to assuring that vulnerable populations are represented
- Increasing the capacity of organizations working on health equity issues, especially with respect to how these capacities complement one another within the field
- Supporting stronger, more intentional coordination and collaboration amongst organizations working to advance health equity solutions.

With a variety of partners, we can capitalize on critical health equity policy opportunities, so that progress on health inequities can come about more efficiently, effectively and inclusively.

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