



**THE
COLORADO
TRUST**

A Health Equity Foundation

Annual Review | 2020

Justice

A Year Unlike Any Other

APRIL 2021

MESSAGE from LEADERSHIP

On behalf of The Colorado Trust Board of Trustees and staff, we are proud to share this overview of grantmaking and other foundation activities from 2020—a year truly unlike any other in our state’s history.

Thousands of Coloradans lost their lives to COVID-19, and thousands more have yet to fully recover from debilitating symptoms and illness caused by the virus. But COVID-19 didn’t just affect our physical health; it also took an unimaginable toll on the economic and emotional well-being of communities across our state. Hundreds of thousands of Coloradans lost their jobs, as entire employment sectors and industries incurred what is likely to be lasting damage. Even as more and more of the people in our state receive one of the promising new vaccines, the hurt and pain inflicted upon them is real, and won’t disappear overnight.

Within weeks of the first confirmed coronavirus cases reaching our state, [existing injustices began to be exacerbated](#) as a result. COVID-19 cases and deaths disproportionately landed on communities of color and people with low incomes—many of whom had no choice but to continue working at jobs that put them at increased risk of contracting the virus. Longstanding inequities in our state were laid bare, impossible to ignore.

In response to needs emerging from the coronavirus pandemic, The Colorado Trust issued more than 100 grants statewide, totaling more than \$5.5 million. We committed another \$1.6 million in program-related investments focused on equitable recovery from the pandemic. Grants included support for food,

rent, utilities, hygiene items, laptops for distance learning, and other assistance. We relied on existing relationships with community members and groups across the state to help identify grantee organizations rushing to assist the people suffering the most from the pandemic’s ensuing economic and societal fallout. Those served by this funding included some of the nearly 200,000 undocumented people in Colorado, who have been forced to endure the pandemic with little to no federal relief or financial assistance. Our efforts also included a \$1 million grant to the state’s official COVID-19 relief fund.

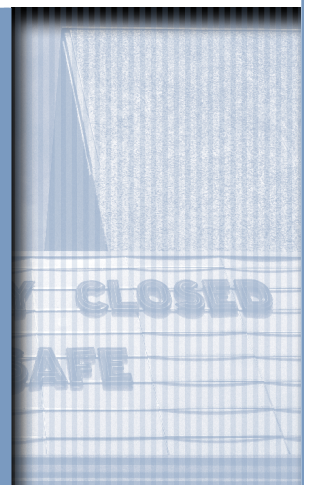
Just as Colorado was trying to control the early spread of the coronavirus, George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis on May 25. The ensuing marches and protests in support of racial justice included many that took place in Denver and other Colorado cities and towns. We are proud of the many Colorado Trust staff members that took part in them and spoke out against systemic racism. Philanthropies like ours have too often supported projects and programs that perpetuate systemic racism, and we remain committed to examining our history and learning from our mistakes going forward.

In early June, we pledged \$250,000 in general operating support towards 17 Colorado organizations advocating to end anti-Black systemic racism in policies, practices and structures. Our funding was used to help provide COVID-19 personal protective equipment, education, toolkits and organizing support for protesters; develop and implement education on systemic racism; and provide free mental health sessions that address [racial battle fatigue](#) and trauma.

Funding Strategies

Many of our ongoing funding strategies were compelled to adapt to the realities of the pandemic.

Our core grants are relational and collaborative by design; losing the ability to have in-person interactions delayed some efforts, even with the embrace of video conferencing. We effectively paused much of the



second iteration of our [Community Leaders in Health Equity](#) (CLHE) program, which relies heavily on group gatherings and shared experiences; while grantee organizations were selected, recruiting community participants was delayed.

Fortunately, 30 members of our first CLHE cohort were able to continue working with a coach as well as undertake individual project work. Their projects have included creating Spanish translation and interpretation capabilities at a school; increasing voter registration and participation; encouraging more LGBTQ+ people to participate in politics; and more. Elsewhere, our [Health Equity Learning Series](#) held one event in January 2020, featuring Dr. Miguel De La Torre of the Iliff School of Theology, before going on hiatus when the state, country and world shut down two months later.



Miguel De La Torre

Despite the myriad new challenges brought on by the pandemic, we still succeeded in initiating a significant shift in approach to the [Community Partnerships](#) strategy, refocusing it more intentionally on community organizing. Community feedback and the strategy evaluation indicated that the first five years of this community-level strategy created capacity and built power, especially at the individual level. These learnings also indicated that it was necessary to evolve the strategy into one centered on collective power building, using defined cycles of planning and action rooted in longstanding community organizing principles.

We believe these changes in the Community Partnerships strategy will result more explicitly in lasting, sustainable systemic change and improved health equity outcomes in these communities. This approach will allow The Colorado Trust to build community organizing capacity in clear, measurable and proven ways. It will allow teams of community members to see wins from their efforts throughout the process, and be able to take action on issues as they arise, as would be expected out of traditional community organizing efforts. When communities see and feel the fruits of even small labors, power is built and systems can begin to change.

The end of 2020 marked the conclusion of our seven-year Health Equity Advocacy (HEA) funding strategy, which was informed by the belief that building a strong field of advocates—rather than individual advocacy organizations operating in isolation—would lead to greater sustainability and advocates' ability to successfully respond to a changing political climate. We are immensely proud of the work these 18 grantees accomplished together, and of the [health equity advocacy field](#) they helped build and nurture.

In 2020, their work culminated in a series of events intended to bring more people into the health equity advocacy field. This included the HEA Summit Series, featuring nationally renowned speakers and discussions; virtual convenings to mend and strengthen relationships among grantees and the communities they serve; and a statewide racial equity training that was offered in English and Spanish. It's difficult to summarize the many successes of these grantees over the past seven years in a single letter, which is why we encourage you to visit the [HEA strategy page](#) on our website; you'll find numerous learning and evaluation reports available, recordings from webinars and much more.



In 2020, we launched our new advocacy funding strategy, [Building and Bridging Power](#) (BBP). As applicants and funded partners alike grappled with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we adjusted our timelines and work plans. The first six months of the strategy were spent building relationships with each BBP-funded partner, as well as responding to technical assistance needs and urgent advocacy requests.

The BBP grantees also adapted admirably and continued their work in earnest. First and foremost, these grantees all mobilized to meet the needs of their communities during the pandemic. Grassroots grantee organizations quickly learned how to organize virtually, which brought a new set of challenges but also enabled them to connect with more people, including in rural areas, and standardize online approaches that should last well beyond the end of the pandemic. Grassroots organizations, meanwhile, found their abilities limited in engaging in new outreach efforts, collecting signatures for ballot measures and educating community members on ballot issues—yet they, too, found creative solutions,

such as hosting online trainings, increasing website and social media content, and even hosting drive-thru events in person. Many of the BBP grantees' 2021 policy priorities are focused on crises exacerbated by the pandemic in 2020, including housing stability, workers' rights and immigration reform. This group has laid the foundation for productive, engaging and impactful work in 2021 and beyond.

In September 2020, the Colorado Trust-funded [Colorado Equity Compass](#) went live. This was the culmination of two years of work by The Piton Foundation's [Shift Research Lab](#) and [Change Matrix](#) to create a web-based portal to show, through data and stories, the links between social determinants of health and health equity in Colorado. Four pilot communities were selected to receive technical assistance to help them use data to tell their community's equity story. We are appreciative to everyone involved for their hard work to bring the Colorado Equity Compass to fruition, and for their continued efforts on its success.

Financials, Reports & Other Information

In our continued commitment to transparency, we publish all of our [financial information](#) online, including [audited financial statements](#) and [federal tax returns](#).

Our 2020 financial information will be available on our website in summer 2021. We also have dozens of Trust-authored and/or supported [reports and publications](#), and we regularly publish [evaluation findings](#). Our [grants database](#) is searchable, sortable and downloadable.

The story we referenced earlier, about the exacerbation of inequalities that is inherent to pandemics, was one of several dozen stories The Colorado Trust published last year about the unequal impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of Coloradans. While we've been publishing [original stories](#) on health equity issues in Colorado for five years now, the pandemic spurred us to post a record number of pieces in 2020—an average of more than a story per week—many of which were

republished in *The Colorado Sun*, *The Durango Herald*, *El Semanario* and other media outlets.

In closing, we encourage you to read [The Power of Grief](#), a one-year retrospective essay on the pandemic, written by our colleague Kristin Jones. And we ask you to join us in wishing for a better, brighter tomorrow for all Coloradans, especially those most marginalized and impacted by the last 12 months. The Colorado Trust has much work to do to help them recover, rebuild and renew their lives.




John Hopkins
2020 Chair, Board of Trustees




Ned Calonge, MD, MPH
President & CEO

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