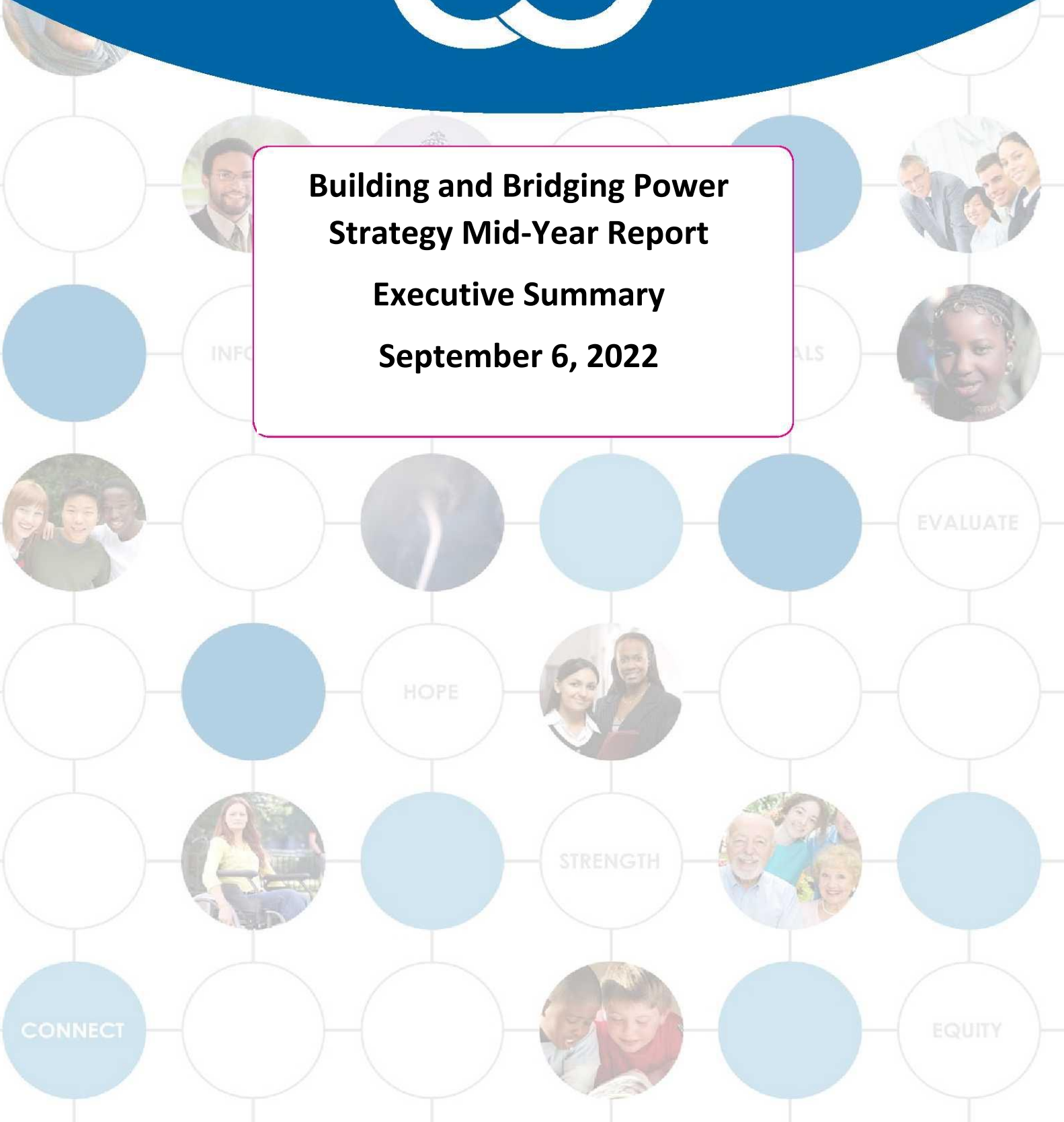




**Building and Bridging Power  
Strategy Mid-Year Report  
Executive Summary  
September 6, 2022**



## Preface

This report was commissioned by The Colorado Trust to evaluate and learn from the Building and Bridging Power strategy which supports 23 organizations across the state of Colorado. We would like to thank Felisa Gonzales (Evaluation and Learning Manager) and Johanna Ulloa (Advocacy Program Manager) for the guidance and input on the work reflected in this report. Celesté Martinez of Celestial Alegría also made several valuable insightful contributions to this report. Most of all, the Community Science team would also like to thank the grantee staff and community leaders that have contributed in many ways to the content and framing of the report as well as the reviews of data collection instruments. Their time and struggle to bring justice and equity to the community is both honored and appreciated. The Community Science team members contributing to this report are Michael Webb (deputy project director), Elisa Gonzalez, Maria Mata, Dillon Nguyen, Manal Sidi, and David Chavis (project director).

## Executive Summary

The Colorado Trust's (The Trust) Building and Bridging Power Strategy aims to build power among communities that have been historically disenfranchised in order to make systems more equitable and give these communities more influence over the policy decisions that impact them. Under this strategy, The Trust has funded 23 grantee organizations across Colorado—16 of whom are classified as 'grassroots' organizations and seven of whom are considered 'grasstops' organizations. Grassroots organizations are locally based, community-led organizations deeply embedded in organizing and service work to meet the needs of residents in their communities. In contrast, grasstops groups are state-wide policy advocacy organizations, most of whom are based in Denver.

The Community Science team has developed a multi-year, multi-method evaluation of the Building and Bridging Power Strategy. The evaluation will address the following learning questions:

- What activities support the building of community power, and under what circumstances are those activities most successful?
- How can the statewide policy infrastructure shift to better reflect community voice and their priorities?
- How does the Building and Bridging Power team negotiate power differences and community voice in its efforts to support power building and relationship development among grassroots and grasstops organizations?

The findings in this report are primarily based on three sources of information:

- Interviews conducted with leadership of all 23 Building and Bridging Power grantee organizations between December 2021 and February 2022.
- Interviews with 23 community leaders—one identified by each grantee organization—between February and April 2022. These community leaders were identified by grantee organization leadership as members of their community who could speak about the grantee's power-building work. Importantly, none of these community leaders were employees of the grantee organization.
- A capacity assessment, which grantee organization leadership completed in May 2022. The assessment queried perceptions of 48 power-building and organizational capacities through an online, self-report survey.

Key topics discussed in this report include background on the Building and Bridging Power strategy and evaluation, key grantee organization accomplishments, factors that both facilitated accomplishments and challenged progress, and lessons learned for consideration. We have identified key findings for each of these topics in bulleted form below; the headings correspond to chapters in the report. More information on each bulleted item is provided in the body of the report.

### Accomplishments: Building Power

The report begins by highlighting key grantee accomplishments across the three primary components of the pathway of change: building power, exercising power, and having power. Overall, we find that grassroots grantees and community leaders reported that a variety of strategies and activities have

proven successful in building power and developing community members. Furthermore, grasstops grantees have worked to incorporate grassroots and community voice into the policy-making process.

Key findings discussed in greater detail in the body of the report include:

- Both grassroots and grasstops grantee organizations used many models for involving community members in making their organizational decisions and setting priorities, including formal membership programs, participation on advisory committees, and regularly scheduled and *ad hoc* meetings and convenings of community members.
- Community members have been more engaged in educational, community building, or collective action initiatives organized by grantee organizations since Summer 2021.
- Community members have also participated in and/or supported grantee community building and direct service programs to address community needs over the past year.
- Community leaders reported that grantee organizations implemented effective activities to gather residents' input on organizations' work and priorities; disseminate relevant information; strengthen connections and promote collaborations; and increase awareness of the issues affecting community members.
- For grasstops grantee organizations, community input is one of multiple strategic considerations for determining what legislative priorities to undertake.

### **Accomplishments: Exercising Power**

Grassroots and grasstops organizations are critical components of the statewide policy infrastructure. The findings so far showed that the improved capacity as well as support from The Trust strengthened these organizations, thereby strengthening the statewide infrastructure ability to reflect community voice and priorities.

Key findings discussed in greater detail in the body of the report include:

- Grantee organizations established processes and allocated resources (staff time, workshops, trainings, conferences) to develop community members' leadership capacities.
- Grasstops grantee organizations were more likely to report collecting community data and informing community members on issues of concern than grassroots grantee organizations.
- Community leaders reported that grassroots grantee organizations involved community members in collective actions to exercise their power more often than grasstops organizations.
- Grantee organizations provided community members with resources to develop leadership skills and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes through the organization and partners, but diverse community members still need significantly more opportunities to learn about and participate in decision-making.

### **Accomplishments: Having Power For Health Equity**

The final stage of the Building and Bridging Power Pathway of Change is for communities to 'have power,' and even at this early stage of the evaluation we find that many grantee organizations have secured 'wins' for their communities. These wins include policy reforms addressing social determinants of health like affordable housing and increasing health care access; and assisting community members in securing positions of institutional power, including being elected to a school board. Many community

leaders report that, as a result of these wins, they have noticed increased responsiveness by powerful institutions—like city or county officials—to community concerns.

Key findings discussed in greater detail in the body of the report include:

- Both grassroots and grasstops organizations report securing policy ‘wins’ both at the local and state levels.
- Grassroots grantee organizations more often than grasstops grantee organizations reported successfully involving community members in collective action and advocacy efforts to effect policy and legislative change as well as greater accountability among elected officials and decision-makers.
- Several grantee organizations have succeeded in placing community members into positions of power.
- Community leaders reported that grantee organizations’ work led to increased responsiveness by powerful institutions to community members’ concerns; greater participation in and attention to initiatives organized by residents; and greater representation in staff and leadership of powerful institutions.
- Community leaders reported that some grantee organizations’ efforts to promote policy reforms related to health care access, law enforcement, and housing as well as to increase resources to address issues of concern to local communities could result in policy actions or wins in the future.
- In addition to its primary goal of building power for historically marginalized communities, the work of grantee organizations contributed to health equity by addressing social determinants of health for these communities.
- Beyond addressing these social determinants of health, community leaders reported that their work with the grantee organizations led to personal growth and healing and helped them overcome traumatic events.

### **Factors facilitating these accomplishments**

The next section of the report discusses factors that facilitated grantee organizations’ accomplishments, including the flexibility of Building and Bridging Power supports and the ability to customize responses to grantee organizations’ own communities. Overall, grantee organization leaders are appreciative of the flexibility of the strategy’s supports, especially the general operating funding. Additionally, grantee organizations have utilized capacity building funds to strengthen their organizing and organizational leadership capacities through attending relevant workshops and bringing in trained facilitators.

Key findings discussed in greater detail in the body of the report include:

- The flexible and multi-pronged support provided by the Building and Bridging Power strategy has been invaluable to grantee organizations’ power-building work.
- The long-term nature and lack of specific outputs and reporting requirements are especially appreciated by grassroots grantee organizations.
- The flexibility of Building and Bridging Power funding has allowed grantee organizations to customize their power-building approach to health equity issues in their communities, including their response to COVID-19.
- Grantee organizations believe several categories of capacities are most essential for community power-building, including building relationships and trust with community members; hiring and

retaining skilled organizers; understanding equity, diversity, inclusion, and power; and the ability to communicate vital information to community members.

- Grassroots grantee organizations have strategically strengthened their organizational capacity, which is essential to conducting their activities.
- Other Building and Bridging Power supports have allowed grantee organizations to strengthen their power-building and organizational capacities by attending courses on organizational leadership and bringing in trained facilitators to lead all-staff workshops on topics like equitable advocacy.
- Grassroots leaders report stronger capacities related to power building and organizing.
- Grassroots organizations rated their capacities as higher on topics related to engaging community members for power building and organizing.
- For both grassroots and grassroots groups, leaders highlighted developing organizational capacities as 'high priority' needs.
- Despite rating their capacities in these areas as relatively high, grassroots leaders also see developing power-building and organizing capacities as a 'high priority' need.

### **Factors that challenged progress**

The report then turns to discussing challenges that grantee organizations faced in their efforts to build and bridge power in their communities. While grantee organizations have secured impressive wins in their power-building and bridging work, they also faced challenges both within their organizations and externally. Additionally, they noted several areas where they felt the Building and Bridging Power strategy could work to address those challenges.

Key findings discussed in greater detail in the body of the report include:

- While grassroots grantee organizations understand the need to address longer-term health equity goals, they often found themselves focusing on more immediate community concerns caused by the pandemic and social unrest such as police violence.
- Other Trust funding strategies had unexpected impacts on some grantee organizations.
- Staff changes at The Trust raised concerns and complications for grantee organizations.
- There were few intentional connections between grassroots and many grassroots grantee organizations to strengthen their ability to address equity and power issues.
- Grantee organizations expressed mixed opinions on the helpfulness of connections fostered through the Building and Bridging Power strategy so far.
- Grantee organizations felt that they did not have many opportunities to connect and learn from each other, especially in informal settings.
- Grassroots grantee organizations felt they lacked opportunities to go further in bridging power with grassroots grantee organizations and communities.

### **Lessons learned for consideration**

Overall, our evaluation findings reveal that even in this early stage of the Building and Bridging Power strategy, both grassroots and grassroots grantee organizations have made substantial progress toward building and bridging power. Both grassroots and grassroots grantee organizations have worked with community members to build, exercise, and have power through incorporating community voice into the policy process.

Based on these findings, we highlight the following considerations for future strategy implementation:

- Continue fostering connections between grassroots and grassroots organizations.
- Promote further learning and relations across grantee organizations.
- Encourage grassroots grantee organizations to connect their day-to-day work with health equity goals.
- Identify ways for The Trust to increase their assistance to building grantee capacities related to organizational leadership, board development, and other areas of need.

This report covers the early stages of the Building and Bridging Power strategy implementation. The evaluation will continue to investigate and further learning about how the Colorado Trust can best support grantee organizations to build and bridge power in their historically disenfranchised communities and others throughout Colorado.