



**THE
COLORADO
TRUST**

A Health Equity Foundation

Building and Bridging Power to Advance Health Equity through Policy and Advocacy

Evaluation Framework – Media Funding

DEDICATED TO ACHIEVING HEALTH EQUITY FOR ALL COLORADANS

March 2023

STRATEGY OVERVIEW

The Colorado Trust (“The Trust”) recognizes that policy change is imperative to rectify health and racial inequities that have persisted for centuries. We believe that when communities have power, they will be able to contribute to policies that address the social determinants of health and reduce health inequities, thereby improving the health and well-being of their members.

The Trust’s Building and Bridging Power strategy aims to build power among communities in Colorado that have been historically disenfranchised, so that they can make systems more equitable and have more influence over the policy decisions that impact them and their health. The strategy supports the bridging of power across communities, community organizing groups, statewide policy advocacy organizations and media outlets. Specifically, the strategy funds:

- Sixteen community organizing (“grassroots”) organizations working to build power in communities across Colorado.
- Seven policy advocacy (“grasstops”) organizations working to center community voice so that those most impacted have power over decisions that affect them.
- Several journalism efforts that collectively aim to increase the capacity of the Colorado media ecosystem to draw attention to inequities and amplify the narrative power of impacted communities.

This brief summarizes the evaluation plan for the last component of the Building and Bridging Power strategy, focused on the role of journalism in advancing communities’ narrative power and narrative change. Susanna Dilliplane and Gigi Barsoum are the evaluation and learning partners for this strategy component.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY AND NARRATIVE POWER?

The Building and Bridging Power strategy aims to strengthen community and narrative power.

Community power is defined by the Equity Research Institute as “the ability of communities most impacted by structural inequities to develop, sustain, and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence decisionmakers and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability to change systems and advance health and racial equity” (Pastor et al., 2020).

Narrative power is defined by Rashad Robinson, president of Color of Change, as “the ability to change the rules and norms our society lives by” (Robinson, 2018). Narrative power brings the ability to shape public discourse, debate and imagery (Moore & Sen, 2022). It is also the “power to define, to make some subjects visible while erasing other histories” (Narrative Initiative, 2017). Narrative power can be demonstrated when communities impacted by inequities are able to influence the societal stories told about them and amplify those stories within discourse to help drive narrative change.

THE TRUST’S SUPPORT FOR LOCAL JOURNALISM

The Trust defines “narratives” as the societal stories that are rooted in shared values and common themes, that influence how people process information and make decisions. The overarching goal of the media component of the Building and Bridging Power strategy is that communities most impacted by inequities exercise narrative power over the stories told

about them, leading over time to narrative changes that center their voices and experiences and inform policy solutions. The hypothesis is that this will ultimately contribute to policy and systems changes that advance racial and economic equity.

However, this is a long-term incremental and synergistic process that does not happen with one legislative cycle. The Trust also recognizes that many other actors and efforts beyond journalism—including grassroots advocacy and grassroots organizing, which are the focus of the other two components of the Building and Bridging Power strategy—contribute to the broader process for advancing narrative and policy change.

The graphic below provides a high-level summary of how The Trust’s journalism grantmaking in the Building and Bridging Power strategy is intended to contribute to short-term and long-term outcomes as part of a broader, complex process of advancing narrative power, narrative change and policy change.



The Trust’s grantmaking activities in the Building and Bridging Power strategy aim to support local journalism that helps communities hold those in power accountable for inequities and that centers the perspectives of communities most impacted by inequities. This includes multiyear grants to five national and statewide news organizations (\$100,000-\$500,000) and six community-based news organizations (\$75,000-\$135,000) to cover the systems, policies, decisions and conditions that contribute to inequities in Colorado, and to meet the critical information needs of residents across the state. The Trust also awards smaller, annual grants (\$5,000-\$25,000) to help improve diversity, equity and inclusion in Colorado newsrooms, and funds opportunities for journalists to strengthen their capacity to report on inequities through skill-building, networking and other resources. The Trust is partnering with the [Colorado Media Project](#)—a nonpartisan philanthropic initiative with deep sector knowledge and connections in the Colorado media ecosystem—to serve as an intermediary with regranting and convening roles.

EVALUATION APPROACH AND LEARNING QUESTIONS

The overall approach of the evaluation is oriented towards learning in collaboration with The Trust and its partners. The three-year evaluation process serves as an ongoing resource to The Trust to inform both learning and strategy. The evaluation partners are also working closely with the Colorado Media Project in its intermediary role to ensure the evaluation supports learning more broadly in the Colorado media ecosystem.

Key learning questions for the media component of the Building and Bridging Power strategy include:

- To what extent and how are The Trust's grants helping to advance reporting that contributes to policymaker accountability for addressing inequities and influences the broader policymaking process?
- To what extent and how are The Trust's grants helping to advance journalism that centers the perspectives of the people most impacted by inequities? What newsroom capacities are needed to center communities in reporting? How does community-centered reporting influence the quality of coverage and the relationships between newsrooms and communities?
- To what extent and how is The Trust's journalism grantmaking strategy contributing towards a longer-term process of strengthening the narrative power of communities—particularly those most impacted by inequities—within policy discourse? Has The Trust's grantmaking strategy had any unexpected effects that facilitate or hinder the process of building communities' narrative power?

The answers to these questions will advance understanding of how journalism grantmaking can strengthen the ability of communities most impacted by inequities to advance policy solutions that address their most pressing issues.

POLICYMAKER ACCOUNTABILITY

The evaluation will examine the potential roles and mechanisms through which grantees' reporting helps hold those in power accountable. This tests some of The Trust's thinking around how media can influence policy change by, for example, drawing attention to policy and systemic issues that contribute to inequities and highlighting the policymakers who are responsible for addressing those issues. It is both a question of how newsrooms cover issues, as well as whether and how policymakers, grassroots organizers, grassroots advocates and others use the stories to advance their policy change goals.

JOURNALISM THAT CENTERS COMMUNITIES MOST IMPACTED BY INEQUITIES

The Trust seeks to learn about what it means—and what it takes—to support journalism that truly centers communities most impacted by inequities. This involves exploring both coverage characteristics and newsroom practices to understand what it looks like to center communities, and what capacities are needed to do it well. The evaluation will also probe how community-centered reporting influences the relationships between newsrooms and communities most impacted by inequities, as well as the ability of newsrooms to serve the critical information needs of these communities.

NARRATIVE POWER

The connection between journalism grantmaking and narrative power offers one of the most exciting opportunities for new learning from these grants. Concepts of power building and narrative change have gained traction in philanthropy. While recognized as a critical strategy to advance systemic change and address institutional racism, definitions of narrative change—and ideas about how to achieve it—are still a moving target. This evaluation provides an opportunity to explore multiple potential pathways through which journalism grantmaking may contribute to the process of narrative power building. Understanding these pathways involves tracing connections between how newsrooms center communities, the degree to which communities most impacted by inequities are able to influence the stories told about them, and the proliferation and amplification of those stories in policy discourse. Insights into these pathways will help clarify what's needed to support and sustain long-term processes of narrative power building.

REFERENCES

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