



**THE
COLORADO
TRUST**

A Health Equity Foundation

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

Evaluation Framework – Grassroots and Grasstops 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 first two components of the Building and Bridging Power strategy. Community Science serves as The Trust’s learning and evaluation partner for these two components.

WHAT IS POWER?

In the Building and Bridging Power funding announcement published in 2019, The Trust provided a simple definition of power: “the ability to make something happen; control, influence or authority.” The Trust quoted Rashad Robinson, who said that “power is the ability to change the rules,” and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who famously noted that “power is the ability to achieve a purpose.”

When asked, the grassroots and grasstops organizations supported through the Building and Bridging Power strategy offered similar definitions, with a few calling out the importance of the collective:

- “People. Where there are people, there’s power”
- “Achieving unity and provoking the change we need as a community or society in general”
- “Aligned interests moving policy change”
- “Organized people and organized money around shared values”

The Building and Bridging Power strategy aims to strengthen community power, 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., 2020a).”

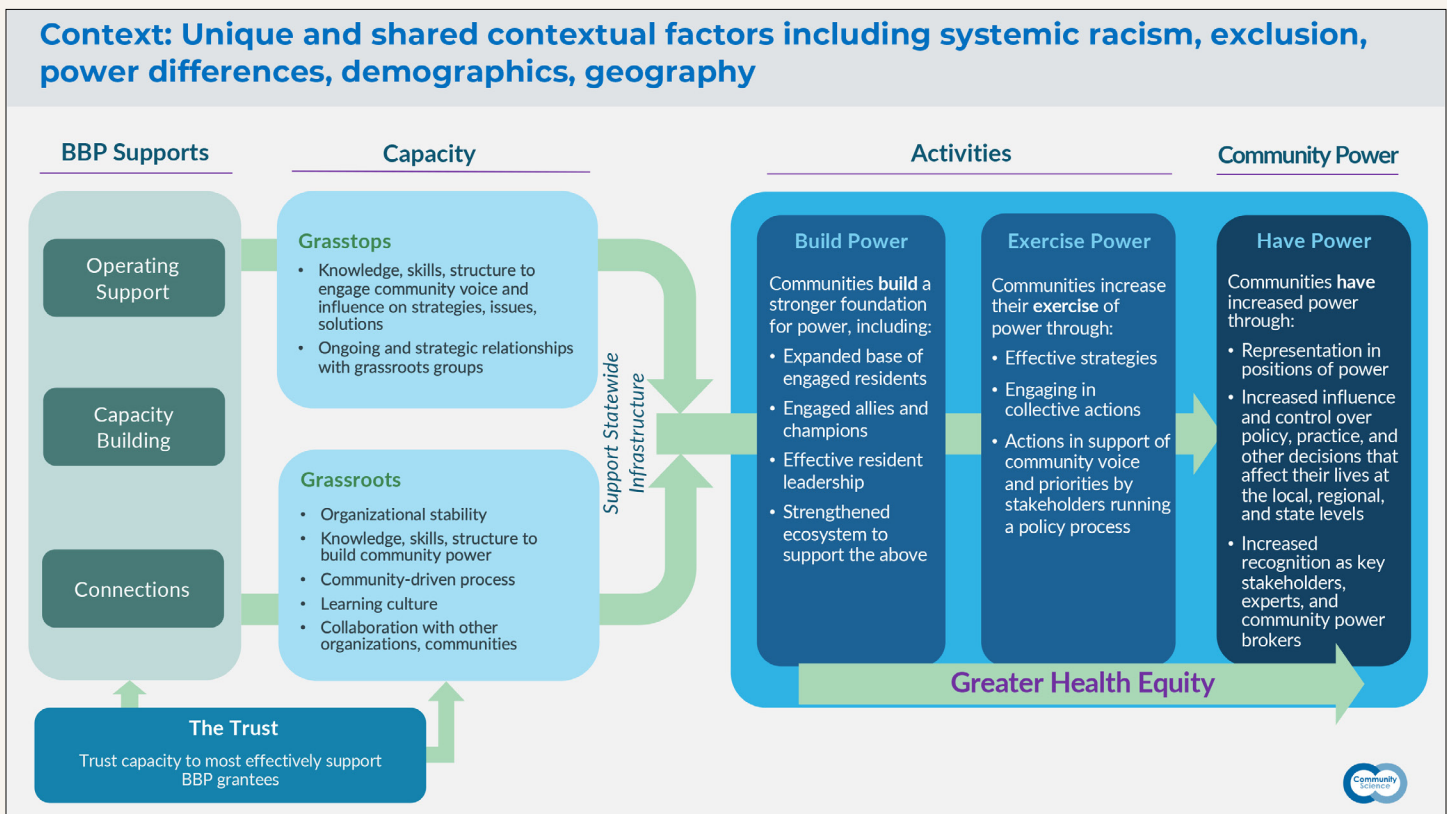
GUIDING LEARNING QUESTIONS

Evaluation and an ongoing commitment to learning are important tools that help The Trust better understand what works, adjust and improve, and strengthen our current and future grantmaking efforts. The evaluation of the community organizing and policy advocacy components of the Building and Bridging Power strategy is guided by three learning questions:

- What activities support the building of community power, and under what circumstances are these activities most successful?
- How can the statewide policy infrastructure shift to better reflect community voice and priorities?
- How does The Trust support power building and relationship development among grassroots and grassroots organizations?

The pathway of change below summarizes the outcomes and indicators that will be tracked to enhance understanding of what it takes to build and bridge power through organizing and policy advocacy. We anticipate this pathway will evolve as we learn, discover and adapt throughout the strategy.

PATHWAY OF CHANGE



CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

The evaluation aims to capture the diversity of power-building efforts and community-centered policy advocacy in different contexts across Colorado. The pathway of change acknowledges that the Building and Bridging Power grantees work in a context that is both shared and unique. Their shared context includes dynamics around systemic racism, power differences and both deliberate and unintentional marginalization of communities. Levels of opposition and support, as well as local demographics and geography, are unique to the context of each organization and help grantees assess where to dedicate resources and how likely their efforts are to be successful.

STRATEGY SUPPORTS

Building and Bridging Power grantee organizations receive \$50,000-\$90,000 per year in general operating support for 4.5 years. Additionally, all 23 organizations are eligible for up to \$23,000 per year for capacity-building funds to be used as

the organization sees fit. Finally, The Trust sponsors convenings and other gatherings to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among grantees.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Enhanced organizational capacity is essential for successful and sustainable power-building efforts. The organizations funded through the Building and Bridging Power strategy complete an annual assessment of their organizational and power-building capacities. The results serve three purposes: 1) to inform the evaluation, 2) to help organizations prioritize uses of capacity-building funds and 3) to identify collective capacity-building opportunities sponsored by The Trust.

BUILDING POWER

Building power through organizing is “essentially the process of creating politically active constituencies out of people with problems by focusing on their strengths and the solutions embedded in their experience” (Sen, 2003). Building a collective base of power is the starting point and ongoing pursuit for building and bridging power within and for traditionally disenfranchised members of communities. The evaluation will examine how communities build a strong foundation for power through leadership development and engagement of community members as well as involvement of allies and champions.

EXERCISING POWER

The power of communities needs to be exercised for there to be powerful actions that promote more equitable changes in their communities and across systems (Staples, 2004). Well-organized efforts with effective leadership and strategic relations result in initially small but increasingly impactful changes. The evaluation will assess how grantees utilize strategies, engage in collective actions and prioritize community voice in policy advocacy.

HAVING POWER

When historically disenfranchised communities build and exercise their power successfully, they can bring about the changes they seek in their communities and larger systems that will equitably improve the lives of their members (Pastor et al, 2020b). If the strategy succeeds in supporting the building of power and bridging of relationships for a stronger policy advocacy infrastructure, we expect to see more community leaders involved in advocacy, increased recognition of community members as experts, increased representation in positions of power and increased influence over the decisions that impact their lives.

ADVANCING HEALTH EQUITY

The evaluation recognizes that the community organizing (“grassroots”) and policy advocacy (“grasstops”) organizations, as well as The Trust, have a role to play in advancing health equity through policy change. We hold a commitment to sharing our findings and learnings in hopes of demonstrating why and how to incorporate best practices and invest resources in power building and bridging as a means of advancing health equity.

REFERENCES

- Pastor, M., Ito, J., Wander, M., Thomas, A.K., Moreno, C., Gonzalez, D., & Yudelevitch, E. 2020a. [Leading locally: A community power-building approach to structural change](#). Los Angeles, CA: USC Dornsife Equity Research Institute.
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- Sen, R. 2003. *Stir it up: Lessons in community organizing and advocacy* (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Staples, L. 2004. *Roots to power: A manual for grassroots organizing*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.