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# Building and Bridging Power Strategy Final Evaluation Report

November 8, 2024



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## 1. Introduction

The Colorado Trust (The Trust) implemented the Building and Bridging Power (BBP) strategy, funding more than 37 grantees. Of these, 23 were grassroots and grasstops organizations, and 14 were media grantees. This evaluation focuses on the 23 grassroots and grasstops grantees funded for four years. The strategy supported the development and capacity of organizations building power among community members across Colorado. It also aimed to intentionally bridge power between communities, community organizing (or grassroots) organizations, and grasstops policy advocacy organizations so that community voices could lead the development and implementation of policy at all levels.

A key component of the BBP strategy was *flexibility*, providing various funding to support these organizations. Types of funding included:

- General operating support;
- Capacity building assistance (up to \$23,000 annually);
- Rapid Advocacy Response (\$5,000–30,000 annually) to respond to pressing advocacy needs that arose over the course of the four years; and
- Equipment mini-grants.

### 1.1 Description of Building and Bridging Power Strategy

The BBP strategy funded grantee organizations for four years — 16 self-identified “grassroots” and seven as “grasstops”. In general, the former are locally based, community-led organizations that are deeply embedded in organizing and service work to meet the needs of residents in their communities. Many of them are led by individuals who are directly impacted by the issues central to their organization and some individuals are viewed as community leaders throughout Colorado in urban, rural, and more isolated frontier communities. In contrast, “grasstops” groups are statewide policy advocacy organizations, most of which are based in Denver. However, applicants choose their designation and may not necessarily fit clearly in one group or the other.

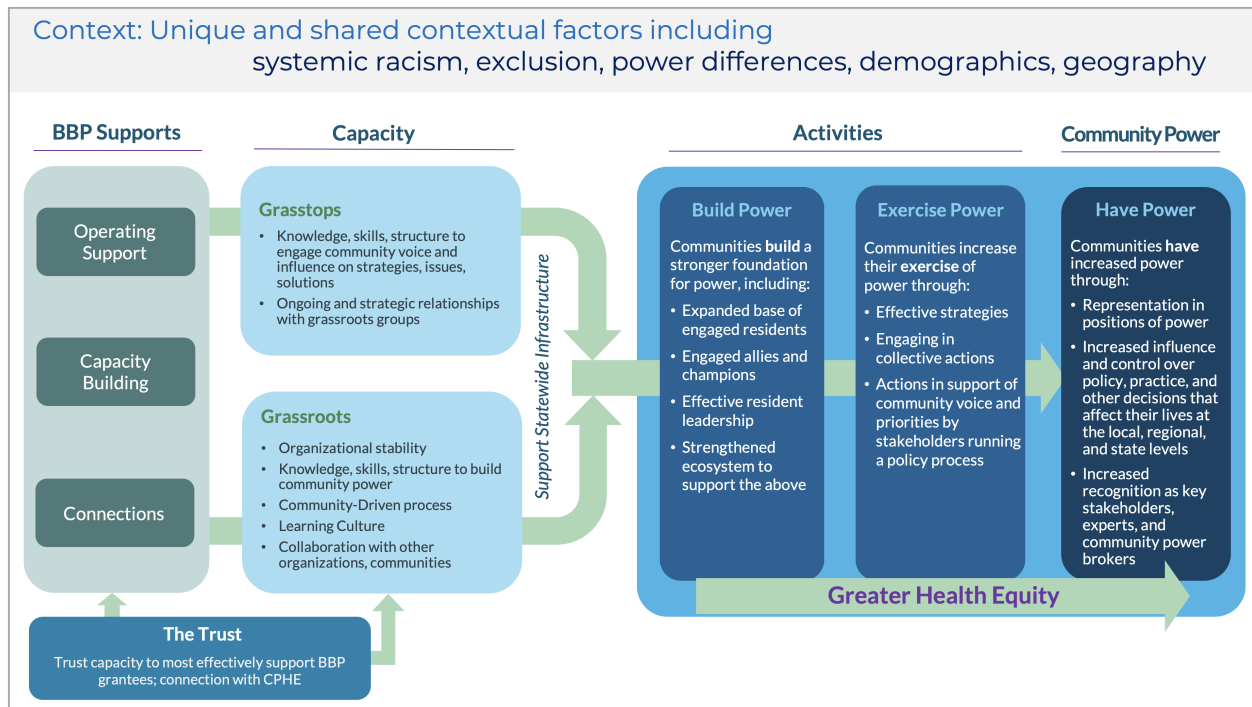
- For grassroots organizations, funding (\$30,000–90,000 per year) could be used to “organize a base of constituents and have a power building strategy.”
- For grasstops organizations, funding (up to \$75,000 per year) could be used to “develop a plan of action to shift organizational practices and policy efforts to be in service of community needs so that authentic relationships are built that enable community connections throughout the policy process.”

### 1.2 Pathway of Change

In the first year, the evaluation team reviewed a wide range of existing materials and worked with key stakeholder groups — including BBP leadership and grantee organization leadership — to develop a pathway of change that illustrated how the strategy was expected to achieve its outcomes. The pathway of change was revised as lessons were learned by the BBP team and The Trust in its thinking about its overall grantmaking strategy (see [Exhibit 1](#) for Pathway of Change).

The Trust’s BBP strategy provided several supports to further develop grantees’ capacity to build and exercise power to make needed changes in their community and other systems. This process of building and bridging power occurred within the larger context of urban, rural, and frontier communities facing diverse economic and social conditions.

## Exhibit 1: Building and Bridging Power Pathway of Change



### 1.3 Overview of the Evaluation and Learning Outcomes

The Community Science team developed a multi-year, multi-level evaluation of the BBP strategy. The overarching goal of the evaluation was to advance understanding of what is required to build:

- Power, by organizing people and resources for direct involvement in issues and decision making; and
- A durable, long-term policy infrastructure that bridges the expertise of community organizing and policy advocacy organizations with the lived experience of community members.

Beyond those broad goals, the evaluation addressed The Trust's three primary 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 priorities?
- How does the BBP team negotiate power differences and community voice in its efforts to support power building and relationship development among grassroots and grasstops organizations?

### 1.4 Evaluation Methods

This evaluation used a cross-case study design to investigate the BBP strategy in depth, by conducting site visits with grantees to gain a better understanding of the contextual factors that impacted the communities they serve. We conducted site visits in 2022 (8 visits), 2023 (10 visits), and 2024 (5 visits), resulting in 23 individual case studies. When conducting case studies, researchers could investigate a single case or multiple cases to yield a single set of cross-case conclusions drawn from commonalities across the grantees involved in the evaluation.

Cross-case study methodology incorporated both qualitative (e.g., individual and group interviews) and quantitative (e.g., capacity assessment survey) data to intentionally isolate the observed outcomes in evaluating the BBP strategy. It was not dependent on the assumption that grantees were well matched throughout the evaluation process or that the strategy was implemented the same way across communities in Colorado. Cross-case study methodology matched patterns across individual case studies to draw conclusions about the impact of the BBP strategy under different contexts.

Across the four years, Community Science conducted 277 interviews either in-person (n = 129) or virtually (n = 148) that were one-to-one (n = 225) or with a group of 2–4 individuals (n = 52). In-person interviews were on-site at each grantee’s location in October 2022 (n = 8), February 2023 (n = 4), October 2023 (n = 6), and March 2024 (n = 5). Community Science interviewed grantee leaders (executive director), grantee staff, members from the board of directors, community leaders, and external partners. Refer to Appendix 1 for count of interviews per grantee.

### 1.5 Capacity Assessment

A community power building organizational capacity self-assessment tool was developed collaboratively with grantees and the BBP team, and informed by professional and academic literature. In 2022, 2023, and 2024, the evaluation team administered an annual capacity assessment of grantees' needs to effectively organize people and resources while centering community voices and priorities. The assessment was developed in 2022 and slightly modified in 2023 based on grantee feedback. It consisted of 48 capacity areas across seven domains. Capacities were divided between “power building capacities”<sup>1</sup> and “organizational capacities”<sup>2</sup>. Refer to [Exhibit 2](#) for response rates.

**Exhibit 2: Response Rate of Capacity Assessment Per Year Per Grantee Type**

	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>Grassroots</b>	16/16	16/16	15/16
<b>Grasstops</b>	7/7	7/7	7/7
<b>Total</b>	23/23 (100%)	23/23 (100%)	22/23 (96%)
<i>Note: One 2024 capacity assessment is missing because it was not submitted.</i>			

<sup>1</sup> Power building capacities: engage for power building activities; organizing to empower its members; action and advocacy for policies and power sharing and bridging.

<sup>2</sup> Organizational capacities: engage in leadership, culture, and board development; staff development; and fundraising, media, and communication.

## 2. The Context of Bridging and Building Power Strategy

BBP grantees worked in communities with a diverse range of rural and urban communities across the state. This section describes the unique historical, cultural, political, and economic contexts that affected the organization's efforts to build power and make systemic changes.

### 2.1 Conservative Political Environment in Rural Areas

**All grantees reported that working in a conservative political environment<sup>3</sup> created substantial challenges in power building activities.** Grantees faced substantial challenges in coalition building,

*"Many people are afraid to speak out because they fear retaliation from conservative leaders or their neighbors. This fear has silenced many voices that need to be heard." – Grassroots Community Leader*

especially those advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, due to safety concerns and the threat of backlash. Additionally, interactions with political leaders in conservative environments were described as transactional, driven by immediate, pragmatic concerns rather than a long-term dedication to transformative, community-driven change. As a result, both grassroots and grassroots grantees frequently encountered significant pushback from conservative groups

and individuals, making it difficult to advance their advocacy efforts.

### 2.2 COVID-19 and the National Recognition for Greater Racial Justice and Equality

**According to all grantees, COVID-19 presented substantial challenges connecting and engaging community members, and heightened funding concerns.** All grantees reported that the transition to virtual operations, including events, meetings, and service provision, reduced their ability to recruit, retain, train, and engage community members. Additionally, COVID-19 intensified community members' food insecurity, housing instability, healthcare access issues, employment challenges, and utility payment difficulties. These challenges worsened community members' ability to engage in advocacy and policy change work and forced organizations to rethink their work and how it was responding to the community's current needs. Most of the grassroots organizations (63%) reported that COVID-19 also presented significant hurdles in resource allocation and securing funding.

**Half the grantees (57%) reported that the national recognition for greater racial justice and equality posed significant challenges in terms of heightened scrutiny, funding concerns, and internal conflict.**

*"We've had to pause some of our ongoing projects to focus on racial equity, which has disrupted our usual operations. It's been a difficult adjustment." – Grassroots Grantee Staff*

Organizations faced heightened scrutiny and pressure from supporters and critics of racial justice movements, making it difficult to navigate their roles and maintain neutrality. In response, more than half the grantees (57%) increased community meetings, forums, and listening sessions to engage their

communities in dialogue about racial justice issues. Funding priorities also shifted for all grantees as resources were reallocated to support racial justice initiatives, leaving other essential programs underfunded. Additionally, internal conflicts arose within organizations as staff and leadership grappled with how to respond, causing tension, and in some cases, staff turnover.

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<sup>3</sup> Conservative political environment: environment characterized by significant resistance to progressive policies, particularly those related to social justice, equity, and workers' rights along with traditional economic values.



## 2.3 BBP Staff Changes

As these national, state, and local changes were happening, The Trust's BBP team had almost total turnover. The original program designers made the grantee selections before exiting, and there was little background information or transition assistance for the new team. The new BBP leadership and other team members brought greater community organizing and capacity building experience to implement the BBP strategy, which was appreciated by grantee leaders. The new team was able to respond to the changing environment with greater flexibility to address the emergency needs of community members and resources for equipment, rapid action, and capacity building.

## 2.4 Building Trust Following Decision to Close Community Partnerships Strategy

In June 2022, The Trust closed the [Community Partnership for Health Equity](#) (Community Partnerships) strategy grant program a year early due to shifts in the Foundation's priorities and approach. It also focused heavily on community organizing and power building. The unexpected closure of this large and highly visible grant program was felt statewide. BBP grantee representatives expressed concerns regarding trust in The Trust's commitment to their work, the stability of their funding, and the impact anticipated on community partnerships and organizations that had close relations with BBP grantees. As a result, the BBP team took several steps to address the grantees' fragile trust, including spending more face-to-face time through site visits and board members and senior Trust grantee convenings.

# 3. Key Grantee Organization Accomplishments

## 3.1 Impact

Grantees, along with other partners, were able to have a significant impact on state and local policies because of having built and bridged power, including the following<sup>4</sup>:

- 16 state policy changes leading to:
  - 5.7 million families and children impacted<sup>5</sup>.
  - \$145,282,333 to implement these state policies.
- Seven local policy changes that will lead to:
  - 4,696 families and children impacted.
  - \$4,637,000 to implement these local policies.

The evaluation findings reveal that both grassroots and grassroots organizations made substantial progress toward building and bridging power. This includes key grantee accomplishments that impact families and children, as well as additional funding to support local and state causes. As a result of grantee advocacy efforts for state policies changes, they were allocated an estimated \$145,282,333, with some policies that affect all Coloradans (estimated 5.7 million), which increased financial support to retain and create mobile home parks, expanded healthcare insurance coverage for low-income and pregnant people, and increased paid family and medical leave for up to 12 weeks for qualified individuals. Additionally, they advocated for local policy changes and were allocated approximately \$4,637,000, and estimated to affect 4,696 families, to provide legal representations for immigration matters, establish a permanent bus service for a rural community, and increase affordable housing.

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<sup>4</sup> The Community Science team could not identify the amount of funding and people affected for all state and local legislation. Sources included grantees, publicly available records, and contact with state legislators.

<sup>5</sup> SB21-131, Proposition GG, HB22-1289, and SB23-058 are estimated to affect all Coloradans (5.7 million).

### 3.2 Having Power

When community members have power, they have the collective ability to influence policy, practices, and programs that impact them. This includes ensuring that members from historically excluded communities are included in the decision making process. Twenty grantees (87%) contributed to getting 16 state policies passed in Colorado. These policies — estimated to impact over 1 million families and children — include increased access to obtaining a driver's license or state ID for undocumented people and increased eligibility for free lunch for public school students. About a third of the grantees (35%) contributed to getting seven local policies passed. These changes are estimated to impact more than 4,500 families and children, and include enhanced safety and accessibility for support services for LGBTQ+ youth and increased access to affordable housing units to meet the demands in rural areas. See [Exhibit 3](#) and [Exhibit 4](#) for all policy wins.

*Most grassroots (88%) and grasstops (86%) contributed in some capacity to getting 16 state policies passed from 2021– 2024.*

**Exhibit 3: State Policy Wins in Colorado**

State Policy	
<b>HB22-1414: Healthy Schools Meals for All Public Schools</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – \$100,700,000</li> <li>• # of people affected – 352,656</li> </ul>	<b>SB21-131: Data Privacy Reform Bill</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – \$150,000</li> <li>• # of people affected – All Coloradan's (5.7 million)</li> </ul>
<b>HB22-1287: Protection for Mobile Home Park Residents</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – \$116,293</li> <li>• # of people affected – More than 1,000 families</li> </ul>	<b>Proposition GG: Information on Colorado Income Tax Changes Would Be More Prominently Displayed</b> <b>SB21-131: Data Privacy Reform Bill</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 partner</li> <li>• Funds allocated – \$1,400,000</li> <li>• # of people affected – All Coloradan's (5.7 million)</li> </ul>
<b>SB22-160 Loan Program Resident-Owned Communities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – \$35,000,000</li> <li>• # of people affected – More than 1,000 families</li> </ul>	<b>HB23-1007: The Higher Education Crisis and Suicide Prevention Bill</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – No data</li> <li>• # of people affected – 400,000 students</li> </ul>
<b>HB23-1257: Water Quality in Mobile Home Parks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – \$3,740,768</li> <li>• # of people affected – 100,000 residents</li> </ul>	<b>HB22-1289: Pass the Cover All Coloradans Bill</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – \$1,154,000</li> <li>• # of people affected – All Coloradans (5.7 million)</li> </ul>
<b>Proposition 118: Colorado Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – No data</li> <li>• # of people affected – 2,600,000 workers</li> </ul>	<b>HB22-1031: Consumer Right to Repair Powered Wheelchairs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 partner</li> <li>• Funds allocated – No data</li> <li>• # of people affected – No data</li> </ul>
<b>SB-251: Driver's License to All Coloradans</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – \$364,804</li> <li>• # of people affected – 2,600,000 individuals</li> </ul>	<b>HB24-1312: State Income Tax Credit for Careworkers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – \$1,400,000</li> <li>• # of people affected – 89,073 individuals</li> </ul>
<b>SB24-053: Racial Equity Study</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – \$500,000</li> </ul>	<b>SB23-058: Job Application Fairness Act</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 partner</li> <li>• Funds allocated – \$56,468</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of people affected – No data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of people affected – All Coloradan’s (5.7 million)</li> </ul>
OmniSalud: Program that provides undocumented Coloradans with affordable health insurance plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – No data</li> <li>• # of people affected – No data</li> </ul>	HB21-1194: Legal Defense Fund Bill <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 partners</li> <li>• Funds allocated – \$700,000</li> <li>• # of people affected – 570,300 individuals</li> </ul>

#### Exhibit 4: Local Policy Wins in Colorado

Local Policy	
Ordinance 64 Fort Collins Immigrant Legal Defense Fund <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funds allocated - \$150,000</li> </ul>	Measure 2A: Increase Leadville’s Lodging Tax by 3 Percent to Go Toward Affordable Housing Initiatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funds allocated - \$200,000</li> </ul>
La Escuelita Education Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funds allocated - \$155,000</li> </ul>	Add Bus Stop to the Underserved Mobile Home Community in Summit County <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funds allocated - \$132,000</li> </ul>
Colorado Springs Hillside Hub (Community Farm) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funds allocated - \$2,800,000</li> </ul>	Launch of YAS! Club (Your Authentic Self) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funds allocated – No data</li> </ul>
Ballot 6A: Support the Fraser River Valley Housing Partnership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funds allocated – \$1,200,000</li> </ul>	

### 3.3 What Did Grantees Do to Build and Exercise Power?

Building collective power through recruitment and mobilization, especially among historically excluded community members, is the key to building and bridging power within and for these groups. The following findings describe grantees’ activities and strategies to build their base power for future actions.

#### Engagement and Mobilization

**Most grantees (70%) reported that they needed to directly engage with the community to disseminate information related to policy, elections, and other local initiatives.** Direct engagement with community members, such as canvassing, allowed grantees to meet residents where they were to provide useful information about resident rights, services, ballot measures, and policy. In addition, community forums and conversations provided space for community members to share their concerns, fears, and feedback, which the grantee used to inform their policy and program priorities. For example, Lake County Build a Generation hosted quarterly conversations with residents to discuss policy, social issues and community impacts. Although grassroots and grasstops organizations facilitated similar activities, they differed in their rationale for the specific location. Grassroots organizations tended to engage members in the community surrounding the area in which they were located. Grasstops organizations used data, such as voter registration rates, to decide which communities to engage.

**Most grantees (52%) used new methods to minimize barriers to engagement in advocacy work in their communities.** Grantees made accommodations, such as hosting evening meetings and providing virtual

*"They do a lot to bring community member's voices to be forefront. They've done a good job at making sure the meetings can accommodate community members. So, instead of doing it during working hours, we are doing it after hours." – Grassroots Grantee Board Member Staff*

attendance options, to accommodate different work schedules and facilitate higher participation rates. Grantees also provided stipends, transportation, food, and childcare for meeting attendees to address additional barriers to participation community members were facing. This ensured community members were

informed of the activities and had the opportunity to participate in advocacy work.

**Most grantee (52%) leveraged existing rapport and community relations to expand their reach, relying on referrals and word of mouth to build their base and motivate community members to engage in organizing work.** Some grantee leadership and staff were well-known throughout the community, which made it easier for them to gain community support for advocacy work among their social networks, including existing relationships with different groups. These relationships allowed them a wider recruitment reach. For example, leadership at Hispanic Affairs Project (HAP), Citizen's Project, Mountain Dreamers, and Relevant Word Ministries bolstered volunteer recruitment through existing connections with community members and a shared vision of positive community impact.

### Community Leadership Development

**A third of the grantees (39%) provided training for community members to build their capacity to advocate for issues in their neighborhoods.** Grantees, such as Western Colorado Alliance, PCFA, and

*"The organization helps immigrants like myself. They train them around knowing their rights. We are working right now on how better to structure these trainings and how we can use them as a way to keep the community informed." – Grassroots Grantee Community Leader*

GCRHN, facilitated training to inform community members about policy and build their capacity to become advocacy leaders in their communities. Most grassroots organizations focused on leadership and organizing goals, such as effective meeting facilitation, understanding power dynamics, and community organizing. This included trainings on equity related topics, such

as language justice and anti-racist organizing strategies. Some grassroots organizations (e.g., TCHN, CFI) hosted training focused on topics related to specific ballot measures, such as suicide prevention and immigration (Question Persuade Refer trainings) and Know Your Neighbor campaign.

### Personal Growth and Healing

**Grantees (52%) created safe spaces for members of the community by practicing language justice and cultural responsiveness to motivate them to engage in advocacy activities.** Grantees

created safe spaces for staff, volunteers, and community leaders by communicating effectively at a common level of understanding, providing language translation and interpretation services, and being receptive to feedback. Safe spaces

*"My English isn't good, so I was having a hard time with the school and the hospital. No one understands me. Within this organization, I feel comfortable. They listen to what I have to say. I am treated as an equal. I used to feel shame to ask a question, now I am more confident. The organization has helped me communicate with the community at large." – Grassroots Grantees Community*

allowed grantees (e.g., Colorado Alliance, TCHN, COPA, CFI) to engage in difficult conversations about microaggressions and other inequities that occurred in their advocacy work. Staff and volunteers felt valued by grantee leadership because they were treated as equals and could contribute to the decision making process.

### Developing Allies and Champions

**Some grantees (43%) used existing relationships and partnerships with other community organizations to implement programming and activities, connect residents to services, and amplify support to improve engagement.** Grantees

reported that they partnered with community-based organizations, schools, unions, and local county commissioners to carry out programming (e.g., school-based mentorship) and expand their reach. They also connected grantees to other

decision making leaders, putting them in a better position to further advocate for policy and community changes. Relationships with legislative allies helped amplify grantee (e.g., Mountain Dreamers) policy priorities and support with town councils and transit advisory boards.

*"I want to bring in people who you might not think of as tax policy experts. [We are] looking at people who maybe have social work degree not an economics degree to bring them in and develop them to be experts." – Grasstops Grantees Leader*

### Exercising Power

**All grantees engaged with community-based organizations, county organizations, political leaders, and law enforcement to highlight community needs and increase accountability.** Grantees facilitated

storytelling opportunities where community members shared their personal stories in public forums, press conferences, and legislative meetings and worked closely with city councils and state representatives to use data to increase leaders' accountability and put pressure on leaders to act on community demands. This included forming coalitions with other groups to amplify their message and increase visibility, engaging in policy advocacy (state and federal) to bring attention to community needs, and

leveraging their influence to gain support from broader networks and decision makers.

*"We also are working with Promotoras (Protect Food Services). We are interested in food equity. We have learned Lamar is a food desert and there is not a lot of access to fresh produce. We were able to offer a space for their organization to connect with agricultural workers. We had 150 people participate and all were given gift cards for food. They did not need to travel." – Grassroots Grantee External Partner*

**Most grantees (91%) formed, maintained, and mobilized committees and special interest groups to address community-defined needs.** Grassroots organizations (88%) formed new committees and special

*"...the Solid Rock CDC is a Southeast Colorado Springs Food Advisory Committee ... to include school districts, nonprofits, government authorities, and things like that, that are collaborating to activate vacant land in Colorado Springs to increase urban fresh food production." – Grassroots Grantee Leader*

interest groups to address specific community needs. For example, the East Colfax Community Collective created the Colorado Homes for All and Renters Roundtable Coalitions to advance just and equitable housing solutions in Colorado. Grasstops organizations (100%) also formed committees to tackle issues, such as policy advisory, state health equity, and Latino advocacy. For example, the Colorado Center on

Law and Policy led the Colorado Skills2Compete Coalition, Health Advocates Alliance (HAA), and new Colorado Public Interest Litigation Coalition. Grantees (91%) also reported that empowering community members to take leadership roles on these committees ensured they remained responsive to the community's evolving needs.

**Most grantees (83%) developed communication tools and facilitated opportunities to increase collective actions and promote policy advocacy amongst community members.** Grassroots

*"The series of articles published around the housing needs assessment. We played a big role in knocking on doors to get those answers, we knocked on almost 300 doors. After the article published, we started getting more volunteers and from all over neighboring towns." – Grassroots Grantee External Partner*

organizations (86%) developed social media posts, flyers, and pamphlets, to facilitate community engagement in collective action and policy advocacy. For example, Alianza NORCO hired a specialist to develop communication strategies and enhance outreach efforts through door-to-door canvassing. Relevant World Ministries focused on door-to-door canvassing, distributing flyers as part of its strategy to engage with the community and encourage

involvement in policy advocacy initiatives. Grasstops organizations (71%) used digital tools to coordinate opportunities to drive collective action and influence policy.

**Half of the grantees (57%) organized and participated in collective actions such as protesting, striking, and rallying, to create accountability for leaders.** However, grasstops and grassroots organizations

differed in how they engaged communities. The latter primarily used protests (38%) and strikes (6%). For example, Partnership for Community Action reported that it led and participated in a protest at a local library to prevent LGBTQ+ books from being banned. The Colorado People's Alliance supported and engaged in a hunger strike with Juntos Colorado to advocate for a path for citizenship. All grasstops organizations engaged in rallies in the community. For example, Citizen's Project organized a rally geared toward combating racism and discrimination, and the Bell Policy hosted a rally aimed at capping property tax increases to make housing more affordable and accessible.

*"We organized a large protest against ... 44 luxury condos that sell for \$700,000 each, right across the street from the most significant concentration of low-income residents that we have ... It ended up being 200 people turned out and it was one of the most diverse representations I've ever seen." – Grassroots Grantee External Partner*

### 3.4 Capacity Building

The capacity assessment was analyzed by removing all missing data, summing all remaining values, and then dividing the sum by the total number of respondents who provided data. The average power building capacity and organizational capacity cohort (grassroots and grasstops) ratings were compared to see change between 2023 and 2024 (2022 data were not comparable due to changes requested to the metrics). Overall, the power building and organizational capacity increased for all organizations from 2023 to 2024. However, grassroots organizations reported no change in their capacity for action and advocacy in 2024. See Appendix A and Appendix B for change in ratings from 2023 to 2024.

### 3.5 Connecting BBP Strategy Accomplishments to Health Equity

For a health equity foundation, it is important to demonstrate how this work affects social determinants of health (SDOH). Specifically, grantees reported that their work affected the following SDOH: 1)

neighborhood and built environment; 2) racism and discrimination; 3) healthcare access and quality; 4) education access and quality; 5) economic stability; 6) social and community context including racism; 7) safe housing and neighborhoods; and 8) access to nutritious foods.

***Grantees contributed to legislative wins and changes in community conditions across various areas related to SDOH.*** Grantees supported initiatives and legislations to decrease racism and discrimination for Coloradans related to the CDC's social determinants of health.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, grantees (35%) reported contributing to legislative wins and changes in neighborhood and built environments, such as advancing legislation for improved water quality at mobile home parks, securing city council support for local affordable housing projects, establishing Ballot 6A to impose a 0.2% property tax for affordable housing, and SB22-160 to develop a revolving loan and grant program to help mobile homeowners purchase in their community, and advocating to build a permanent bus stop in Swan Meadow Neighborhood to increase access to bus services. Grantees (26%) reported that they focused on racism and discrimination by establishing local and statewide legal defense clinics for undocumented immigrants, enacting the Job Application Fairness Act to prevent age and education discrimination when applying for a job, supporting SB-251 (which gives all Colorado residents, regardless of immigration status the opportunity to obtain a driver's license or state ID), and establishing the Black Coloradan Racial Equity Study commission to determine if state policies and practice contribute to discrimination. Additionally, grantees (22%) reported that they contributed to legislative wins and changes in healthcare access and quality by advocating for OmniSalud: Health Insurance for undocumented individuals, establishing HB22-1031 requiring manufacturers of powered wheelchairs to provide service at fair prices and HB23-1007 mandating that all public institutions print suicide crisis prevention hotline information on student ID cards, and expanding healthcare insurance coverage to all low-income children and pregnant people.

Grantees collaborated with other organizations on the following SDOH:

- Neighborhood and built environment – 8 partners
- Racism and discrimination – 6 partners
- Healthcare access and quality – 5 partners
- Education access and quality – 4 partners
- Economic stability – 3 partners
- Social and community context including racism – 3 partners
- Safe housing and neighborhoods – 2 partners
- Access to nutritious foods – 2 partners

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<sup>7</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). Social determinants of health. <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/index.htm>

## 4. How The Trust Facilitated These Accomplishments

***The security provided by the multi-year general operating funds enabled all grantees to pursue long-term goals for sustainability.*** All grantees stated that the financial flexibility and sustainability of funds

*"The unrestricted nature of the funding enabled us to scale up our programs and increase our outreach, which had a tangible impact on the communities we serve." – Grasstops Grantee Staff*

contributed to a heightened sense of confidence in the continuation of their work. This included unrestricted funds to innovate and adapt their strategies to meet the evolving needs of the communities they serve. The general operating funds provided stability to support internal

restructuring efforts, with several grantees (17%) shifting to co-executive director models, leading to more efficient operations and expanded capacity to serve their communities. For example, Compañeros was able to implement a co-directorship model that created a single advocacy and outreach director position that contributed to expanding its services. For some smaller grassroots organizations (44%), such as Lamar Unidos, the general operating funds made their work possible; they stated that without BBP funds, they would not have been able to keep their doors open, let alone become recognized statewide.

***All grantees reported that capacity building funds had a transformative effect, leading to improved strategic planning, enhanced staff capabilities, and better technology and infrastructure.*** For all grantees, the funds were instrumental in staff training and development. One grantee emphasized that the funds enabled them to enhance staff skills in leadership, advocacy, and community organizing, which empowered them to take on more significant roles within the organization. Capacity building funds were also directed toward technology and infrastructure improvements, including upgrading data management systems, enhancing communication tools, and improving physical infrastructure. This led to more streamlined operations, better service delivery, and strategic planning processes for grassroots (84%) organizations. For grasstops organizations (100%), advocacy strategies were enhanced, including conceptualizing how to build stronger coalitions with other organizations.

***All grantees reported that The Trust played a pivotal role in facilitating relationships among grantees involved in the BBP initiative.*** According to all grantees, The Trust offered networking opportunities

*"The convenings were crucial in bringing us together to coordinate our efforts on common goals. This collective action made our advocacy work much more powerful." – Grassroots Grantee Leader*

across a variety of platforms and events to facilitate connecting, sharing of experiences, and building relationships with other organizations. However, most grantees (63%) reported barriers to engaging in The Trust's relationship building activities due to resource constraints, such as

limited funding and staffing. This hindered their ability to participate in networking events. Geographical barriers also played a role, particularly for grassroots organizations (63%) in remote areas. They often found it difficult to connect with other grantees due to the distance and travel required. Grasstops organizations (43%) faced a recurring issue with aligning priorities with grassroots organizations and the difficulties managing the power dynamics that arose.



## 5. Remaining Factors That Challenge Continued Progress to Build and Bridge Power

Although grantees secured wins in their power building and bridging work, the work is not over, nor are the barriers they encountered overcome. The following section details the challenges that grantees will continue to face in their efforts to build and bridge power in their communities.

**All grantees continued to face bureaucratic hurdles across systems that were exacerbated by the conservative political environment, limiting their progress toward meeting their community's needs.**

Grantees reported that they continued to face systemic challenges, such as overcoming bureaucratic hurdles (e.g., paperwork), navigating intricate processes involving multiple people or departments, policies that change without communication, and constant shifting of service delivery systems (e.g., health and mental health). Grantees reported facing issues with education, health, criminal justice, immigration, and housing systems. For example, the grantees that worked to pass OmniSalud reported that registration events were unsuccessful because changes to service delivery were made by political leaders and not communicated effectively to the community. Thus, organizations faced opposition from political leaders, community members, or other stakeholders who resist change, making it difficult to move forward with initiatives that could benefit marginalized populations.

*"So, it's really hard to see elected officials get caught up in minutiae when we have children living in vehicles or elderly living in houses falling apart. Five or six families living in a two-bedroom house. But also keeping coalition members engaged when we've been at this for so long. – Grassroots Grantee Community Leader*

**Most grantees (83%) reported that they continued to have funding challenges, which limited their ability to sustain and expand their work.** Many grantees reported they are stretched thin, with many team members taking on multiple responsibilities. This forced them to reduce their capacity and focus on fewer campaigns at the expense of other potentially impactful projects. Furthermore, startup projects, especially in rural areas and reservations, continued to face significant funding hurdles, reducing the improvement of deep-seated disparities (e.g., housing, education, food, health) in communities with high levels of need. For example, HAP encountered issues to secure funding for a tribal land site reservation project aimed at rebuilding indigenous power and land ownership. These funding limitations hindered grantees' ability to respond comprehensively to community needs.

**Most grantees (78%) reported significant language barriers, particularly for those serving linguistically diverse communities.** According to grantees, non-English speakers continued to struggle to engage in advocacy and policy change work. For example, some were unable to fully understand or participate in advocacy related to language barriers, which limited their ability to advocate for themselves and engage in collective action. These language barriers undermined the communities' shift to provide direct services to engage in power building work. As a result, grantees reported that it was a challenge to

*"There are still many spaces where language justice is not practiced. Personally, I'm not fluent in English, although I can understand it more than I can speak it and try to get by as best as I can. [Grantee staff] also understands a lot, but it is hard for her to speak it. And we were discussing how being able to participate in our language has been very important for us." – Grassroots Grantee Community Leader*

identify and advocate for community needs and priorities. Overall, the impact of grantees' work was reduced as they struggled to engage, represent, and empower all community members effectively.

***All grassroots organizations continued to face significant staffing, time, and resource (e.g., materials needed to operate) limitations as they grappled with increasing demand from community members.***

Demand for services, time, and resources increased because of the negative effects of COVID-19; expanded reputation and visibility of the organizations; and natural growth of community needs. As a result, grantees reported that they continued to face organizational strain, including deviation from their mission, overwhelmed staff, and bottlenecks in decision making. For example, the American Friends Service

*"We are forced to prioritize some services over others because we simply don't have the resources to do everything, even though the need is there." – Grassroots Grantee Leader*

Committee grew its community base and built a good rapport with community members and organizations. However, with only one-part-time paid staff, they are not able to accommodate the increased workload of referrals, provide one-to-one services, or follow up in a timely fashion. These challenges highlight the complexity of managing growth while maintaining grassroots organizations' missions and effectiveness. Without careful planning and resource management, the increased demand for services can pose significant barriers to long-term success.

***All grassroots organizations continued to face significant challenges in fostering and maintaining the informational and collaborative gap between high-level policy work and community impact.*** Although, these grantees collaborated closely with legislators, organizational leaders, and the community, they were struggling to create consistent and timely channels of communication among all parties. Additionally, navigating the complex and ever-changing policy landscape necessitated constant adaptation and made it difficult to consistently focus on long-term goals, hindering the effectiveness of advocacy work. Furthermore, the complexity and slow pace of policy changes created barriers in navigating the landscape and ensuring that organizational strategic priorities were aligned with broader policy goals.

## 6. Lessons Learned

### 6.1 Lessons Learned by Grantees and Community Leaders

Grantee representatives shared the following lessons that they learned with us:

- Grantees must intentionally cultivate trust with communities and other grantees from the start.
- Organizations must allow for the high level of effort, time, and investment that is needed to build community power.
- It is important to share the collective goals and expectations among grassroots and grassroots organizations to work together effectively.
- Prioritizing where to place the greatest efforts is important so organizations don't spread themselves too thin.

### 6.2 Lessons Learned by the BBP Team

Members of the BBP team and The Trust leadership shared the following lessons they learned during our group and individual interviews.

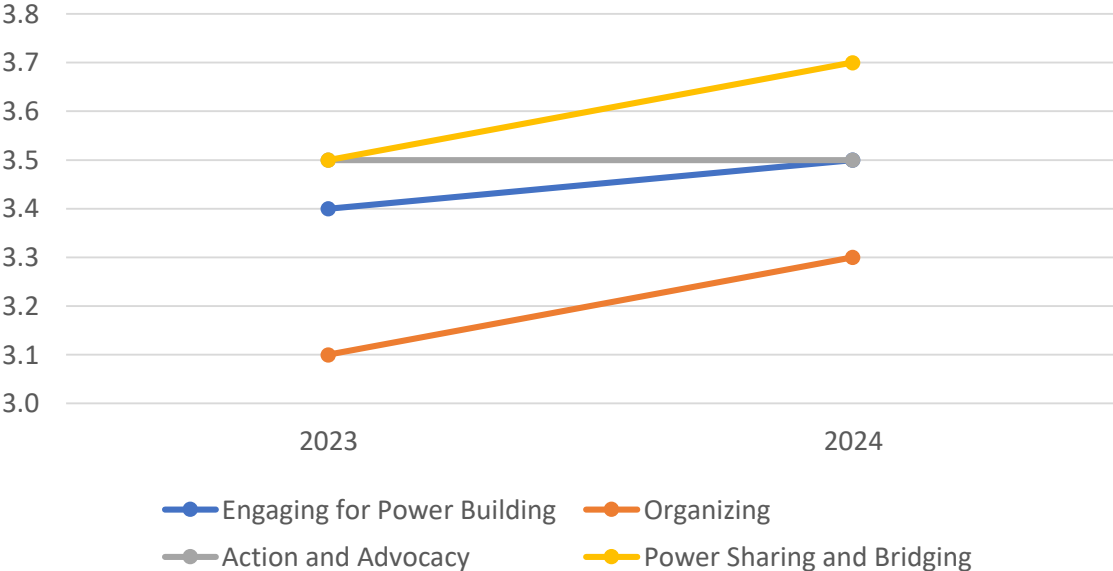
- Grantees are affected by decisions regarding this strategy and The Trust's other grantmaking strategies within the state.
- Grassroots grantees need flexibility and support to respond to community needs and crises (e.g., pandemics, ICE raids, natural disasters) that may delay their systems change work.
- The timing of communications and grantee convenings must be more strategic, especially when planning in-person activities, to account for grantee availability.
- The Trust should clearly identify and communicate the priority policy areas it wishes to invest in at the beginning of grantmaking strategies.
- Early engagement of other funders is essential.
- The Trust must leverage its relationships among grantees, staff, board members, and powerful allies within the state to facilitate community engagement and power building activities.

## 7. Conclusion

This extensive four-year evaluation of the BBP program found that, particularly under the previously described context, it successfully built greater community power among members of historically disenfranchised groups and enhanced the capacity of the organizations that serve them. First and foremost, it contributed to the impact on state and local systems that resulted from the work of grantees and others. Grantees reported growth in their power or influence over their communities, greater participation by community members, and greater capacity to operate in an often chaotic and adversative environment. A few grantees were not as successful as others primarily due to a lack of base-level capacity and that community power building was not as central to their mission or operations. These issues should be considered in future grantmaking for this type of initiative. Finally, The Trust learned how to improve its support of community power building initiatives by emphasizing systemic changes that will lead to more health equity for all people living in Colorado.

**Appendix A:**  
**Change in Power Building Capacity**  
**Rating from 2023 to 2024**

Appendix A. Engaging for Power Building Capacity: Average Cohort Rating



**Appendix B:**  
**Change in Organizational Capacity**  
**Rating from 2023 to 2024**



## Appendix B. Engaging for Organizational Capacity: Average Cohort Rating

