



A BCT PARTNERS COMPANY

Building and Bridging Power Strategy Final Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

The Colorado Trust's (The Trust) Building and Bridging Power (BBP) strategy aimed to build power among communities that have been historically disenfranchised to make systems more equitable and give these communities more influence over the policy decisions that impact them. Under this four-year strategy, The Trust funded 23 grantee organizations across Colorado — 16 of which were classified as 'grassroots' and seven of which are considered 'grasstops.' Grassroots groups 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 statewide policy advocacy organizations, most of which are based in Denver.

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.

The Impact of Having Greater Power

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 following¹:

- 16 state policy changes leading to:
 - 5.7 million families and children impacted².
 - \$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.

What Did Grantees Do to Build and Exercise Power

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.
- Most grantees (52%) had to use new methods to minimize barriers to engagement in advocacy work in their communities.
- Most grantees (52%) leveraged their 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 community organizing.

¹ 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.

² SB21-131, Proposition GG, HB22-1289, and SB23-058 are estimated to affect all Coloradans (5.7 million).

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.

Personal Growth and Healing

- Half the grantees (52%) created safe spaces by practicing language justice and cultural responsiveness to motivate community members to engage in advocacy activities.

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.

Exercising Power

- All grantees engaged with community-based organizations, county organizations, political leaders, and law enforcement to highlight community needs and increase accountability.
- Most grantees (91%) formed, maintained, and mobilized committees and special interest groups to address community-defined needs.
- Most grantees (83%) developed communication tools and facilitated opportunities to increase collective actions and promote policy advocacy amongst community members.
- Half the grantees (57%) organized and participated in collective actions such as protesting, striking, and rallying, to create accountability for leaders.

Connecting BBP Strategy Accomplishments to Health Equity

Grantees contributed to legislative wins and changes in community conditions across various areas related to the social determinants of health, particularly:

- Neighborhood and built environment;
- Racism and discrimination;
- Healthcare access and quality;
- Education access and quality;
- Economic stability;
- Social and community context including racism;
- Safe housing and neighborhoods; and
- Access to nutritious foods.

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 reported that capacity building funds had a transformative effect, leading to improved strategic planning, enhanced staff capabilities, and better technology and infrastructure.
- All grantees reported that The Trust was pivotal in facilitating relationships among grantees involved in the BBP initiative.

Remaining Factors that Challenge Continued Progress to BBP

- All grantees continued to face bureaucratic hurdles across systems exacerbated by the conservative political environment limiting their progress toward meeting community needs.
- Most grantees (83%) reported continued funding challenges, which limited their ability to sustain and expand their work.
- Most grantees (78%) reported significant language barriers, particularly for those serving linguistically diverse communities.
- All grassroots organizations faced significant staffing, time, and resource (e.g., materials needed to operate) limitations as they grappled with increasing demand from community members.
- All grassroots organizations faced significant challenges in fostering and maintaining the informational and collaborative gap between high-level policy work and community impact.

Lessons Learned

By Grantees

- 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 needed to build community power.
- It is important to share collective goals and expectations among grassroots and grassroots organizations to work together effectively.
- Prioritizing focus issues and where to place the greatest efforts is important so organizations don't spread themselves too thin.

By BBP Team

- Grantees are affected by decisions regarding this strategy and The Trust's other grantmaking strategies within the state.
- Grassroots grantees need the 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.

Conclusion

This extensive four-year evaluation of the BBP strategy 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 significant impact on state and local systems that resulted from grantees and others. Grantees also 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 less successful than 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.