



2022

# Learning Report



The Denver Foundation





Françoise Mbabazi, founder of MySkinGlobal, a grantee of The Denver Foundation's Strengthening Neighborhoods program.

# Our Learning Framework

With the launch of the strategic framework in 2021, The Denver Foundation embraced being a learning organization, emphasizing a focus on using data and evidence to inform our decision-making and our work.

In 2022, we developed our learning framework. This framework outlines our “theory of philanthropy” — our collected hypotheses about how our work as a community foundation moves us forward toward our vision. The framework also outlines the types of data and evidence that will help us better understand if our hypotheses are playing out.

To develop our learning framework, we relied on the input from numerous community partners, peer foundations, and our team to clearly articulate our beliefs about the changes we hope to see. This input helped us understand if we were impacting the following three areas:



## OUR WHY

Moving the needle toward *our vision*: A Metro Denver that is racially equitable in its leadership, prosperity, and culture.



## OUR HOW

Showing up in alignment with *our purpose*: We will be a proactive, collaborative, and resolute leader.



## OUR WHAT

Creating an organization that moves *our business model and operations* in alignment with our vision, mission, values, and purpose of The Denver Foundation.

# Our approach to engaged learning is grounded in *five* guiding principles:

## We begin with the end in mind.

Our strategic framework leads our work and tells us what we are striving toward as an organization. Using our vision and our purpose as “the end,” we worked backward to break down the types and sources of information that would help us understand our progress and opportunities.

## We are testing hypotheses about our work and our contributions.

Our learning framework maps our best guesses about how the work we are doing will contribute to the world we are hoping to create (If we do ABC, then XYZ). This approach allows us to reflect on whether the decisions we make and actions we take are moving us toward our goals. We do not collect data for monitoring; we collect data to understand, reflect, and adapt, as appropriate.

## We apply an equity lens.

The learning framework moves the organization from a place of “attribution” to “contribution.” It allows us to reflect on the contributions we, as a community foundation, are making and moves us away from taking credit for the work that our nonprofit partners are accomplishing. The framework further expands notions of validity, objectivity, and rigor,<sup>1</sup> recognizing that some of the richest and most insightful information comes from subjective experiences and qualitative feedback.

## We are intentional with the data we gather.

By understanding our broader aims as an organization, the learning framework allows us to think critically about the types of data we need to collect so that each piece of evidence we gather is relevant to testing the hypotheses about our work. This process enables us to know why we are asking certain information and how we will use it to guide our decision-making.

## We are comprehensive in our approach to learning.

We learn not just about the “impacts” of our work, we also look inward across the whole of the organization to understand how the complexities of our work — from the grants we provide and the funds we steward, to the systems and processes we put in place — contribute to moving the needle toward our north star.



*Prodigy Ventures, a grantee and recipient of a program-related investment from the foundations impact investing program.*

## In short, learning is a mindset, and our framework maps how we take in information and how we digest it. Learning is embedded in our work.

In the spirit of being a learning organization, we offer our first-ever learning report — an opportunity for us to share with you some of the data and evidence we’ve collected and analyzed over the past year. This report will help us to understand our progress toward our vision and strategic goals, as well as identify future opportunities. Our intention is to be transparent in highlighting successes while also acknowledging areas of opportunity as we reflect on the data and feedback received in 2022.

Thank you to all our partners who provided their input and feedback on the development of our learning framework. Our work is stronger because of you.



Photo provided by Mile High Youth Corps, a Community Grants Program and Climate Equity Fund grantee.

# Our 2022 Learning Report

Our learning framework includes almost 300 indicators outlining the data we collect, the source of that data, and the timing of that data collection. The following includes some key highlights of what we’ve learned over the past year.

In 2022 we launched our learning framework, which resulted in the creation and revamp of several tools and feedback mechanisms. Many of which these are referenced in this report, including:

- Learning discussions and focus groups with fundholders, nonprofits, professional advisors, and community leaders
- Applicant survey
- Professional advisor survey
- Event surveys
- Committee volunteer survey
- Audience survey administered by **Teal Media** in anticipation of our 100th anniversary
- Fundholder/donor survey administered by **The Center for Effective Philanthropy**
- Revised competitive funding applications and final reports (Grantees who received 2022 funding will be submitting a final report in 2023. Data collected through our new final reports will be included in our 2023 Learning Report.)

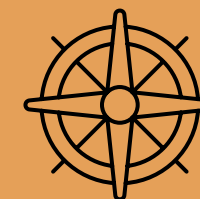
2,300  
STAKEHOLDERS  
ENGAGED

Through these methods, we heard from more than 2,300 stakeholders in 2022. This data and feedback informed our organizational learning over the past year.

In the following report, in alignment with our learning framework, you will see learnings related to “our why” (our vision), “our how” (our purpose), and “our what” (our internal work). Each page will begin with our hope — the change we aim to achieve if we are contributing to our vision, showing up how we hope to, and supporting our broader goals through our business model and systems And throughout, we highlight some examples of success, as well as opportunities for our own reflection and learning.



Photo provided by Work Options,  
a Community Grants Program and  
Transforming Safety grantee.



## OUR WHY

# Our Vision

Grounded in our vision, the following section explores some of our hopes, impacts, and learnings for outcomes related to:

*Racial equity in leadership*

*Racial equity in prosperity*

*Racial equity in culture*



# More racially equitable in its leadership

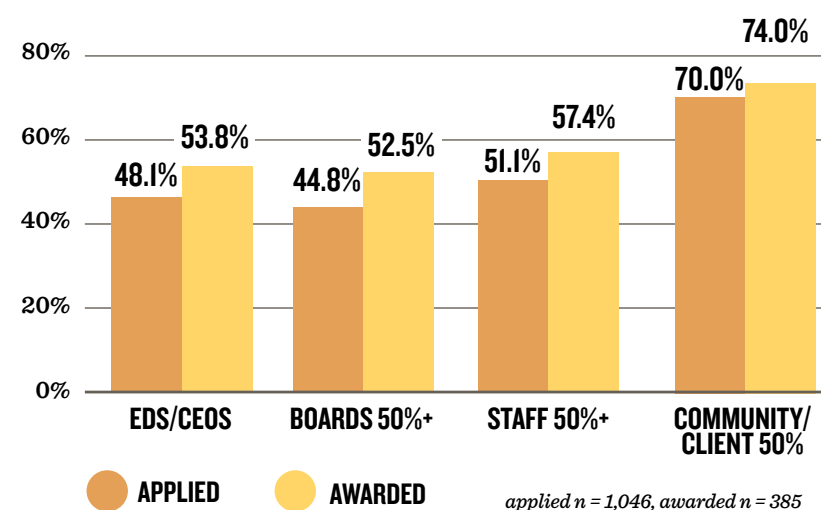
## THE HOPE

We hope to see nonprofit leadership reflecting the racial and ethnic diversity of the communities being served.

We believe one indicator that our work is contributing to a more racially equitable Denver is the extent to which the racial or ethnic diversity of nonprofit leadership reflects the communities our grantees serve. Our 2022 data suggest that across all nonprofits applying to at least one competitive funding opportunity at The Denver Foundation, roughly 48% are led by a CEO or executive director (ED) who identifies as Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC).<sup>\*</sup> When asked to estimate the approximate percentage of their clients or community served that identified as BIPOC, 70% of those organizations reported that at least half of those they served identified as BIPOC.

Our data also show that organizations with white leaders are more likely to serve fewer clients who identify as BIPOC. Organizations with BIPOC-identifying leaders report serving more clients who identify as BIPOC. This difference is statistically significant.

More than half of 2022 grantees report a CEO or ED who identifies as BIPOC, and a board and staff of at least half BIPOC individuals.<sup>2</sup>

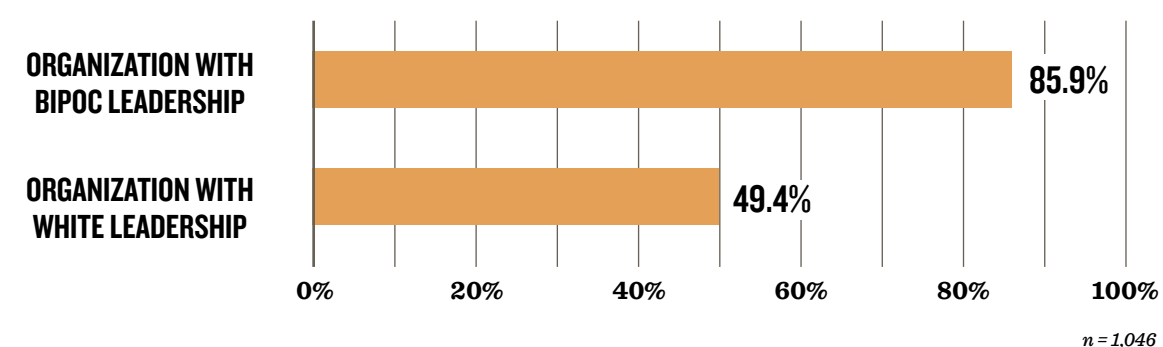


PlatteForum connects creative youth to paid internships in the arts. The organization has received multiple community and donor-advised grants through the years. In 2020, the foundation partnered with PlatteForum to establish the Judy Anderson Founders Award Fund, a nonprofit endowed fund that supports the organization's investment and fundraising goals.

“The majority of team and staff live and work in the community and are affected by health inequities. We are dismantling the historic system that requires an organization to ‘ask the community’— we are the community working together to build for ourselves. Our community is involved at every step of programming.”

– 2022 RECIPIENT OF COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM AND CARE FUND

Organizations led by a CEO or ED identifying as BIPOC tend to serve clients or communities that, on average, include more BIPOC individuals.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>\*</sup> For the purposes of this report, we use the term BIPOC to stand for Black, Indigenous, and people of color. We understand that this term may be polarizing. According to AP Stylebook, some “see [this phrase] as more inclusive by distinguishing the experiences of Black and Indigenous people, but others see as less inclusive by diminishing the experiences of everyone else.” Because we used BIPOC during our data collection, we also use BIPOC in this report. We will also describe individuals and organizations by the term they prefer to best reflect their race or ethnicity.



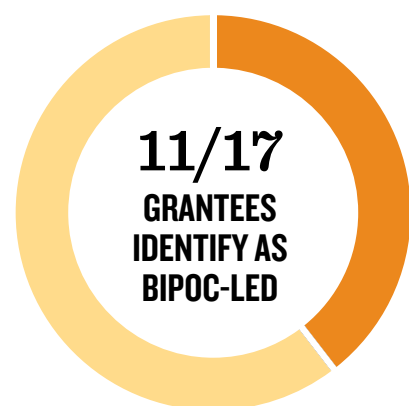
# More racially equitable in its leadership

## THE HOPE

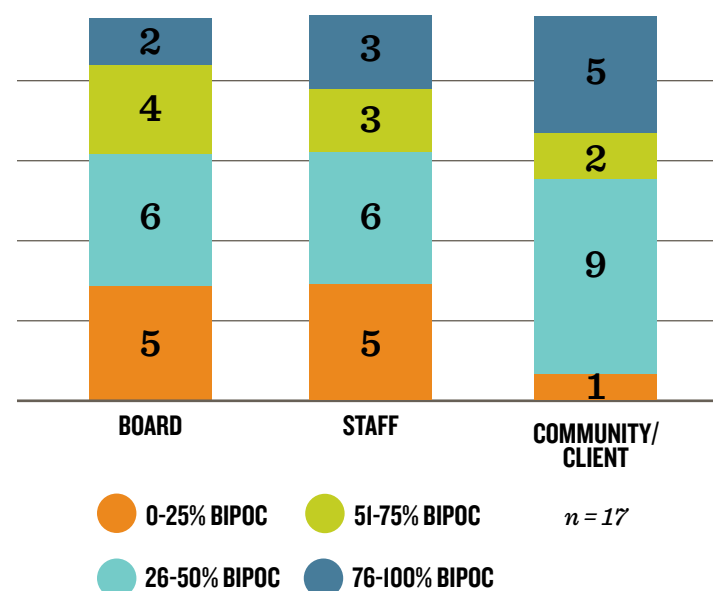
We hope to see more advocacy efforts led by BIPOC leaders.

We believe one way we can contribute to a more racially equitable Denver is to do our part to support advocacy organizations that are led by leaders who identify as BIPOC. In 2022, The Denver Foundation provided funding to advocacy organizations through our Civic Fabric Fund grantmaking. We granted almost \$400,000 total to 17 organizations focused on voter outreach and engagement or local and state-level policy work. Of those that received funding, 11 organizations reported that their leader identified as BIPOC. Those organizations serve communities where an average of 57% of community members identify as BIPOC.<sup>2</sup>

More than half of 2022 Civic Fabric grantees have a leader who identifies as BIPOC.

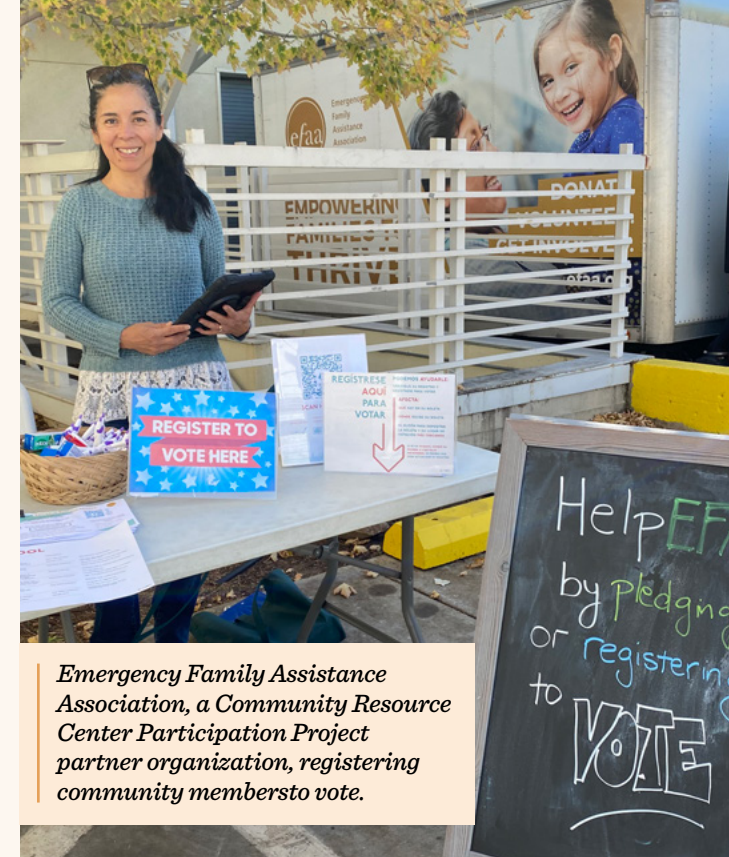


Of those 17 grantee organizations, 6 report that more than half of their boards and staff identify as BIPOC.



## IN PRACTICE

As a Civic Fabric Voter Engagement grantee, **Community Resource Center's** (CRC) Participation Project partnered with direct-service nonprofits to bring nonpartisan voter engagement to more than 14,000 individuals through voter education, registration, pledges to vote, and Get Out The Vote (GOTV) activities.



Some of the outputs of their work include:

8,755

GOTV contacts

364

phone bank contacts

2,319

text bank contacts

5,974

targeted GOTV emails

98

in-person ballot measure presentations

118

people trained on rules and laws of voter registration, nonpartisanship, statewide ballot measures, and community engagement tactics

CRC engaged voters in

37

counties

working with

32

nonprofit partners

at

98

locations



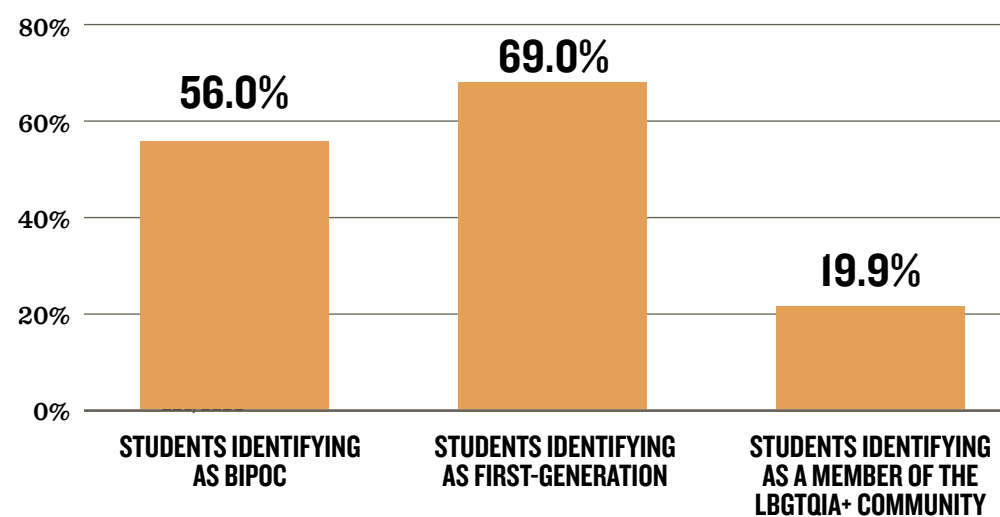
# More racially equitable in its leadership

## OUR HOPE

We hope that, as the leaders of tomorrow, the students receiving scholarships administered by The Denver Foundation will support those facing some of the largest barriers.

A key component of our work at The Denver Foundation is stewarding and managing nearly 80 scholarship funds—each as unique as our donors and each with different areas of focus. Through administering and awarding these scholarships, we hope to contribute to greater equity in leadership by supporting diverse, and often under-resourced students. Data from scholarships awarded and administered by the foundation in 2022 show that we are contributing to greater access among students identifying as BIPOC, first-generation, or members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

More than half of awarded scholarships went to students who identify as BIPOC.<sup>3</sup>



n = 561

## OUR LEARNING

### The Denver Foundation Community Scholarship

We know we can do more to continue to support this population. That's why we created **The Denver Foundation Community Scholarship** to support students of color in pursuing higher education. In 2023, the inaugural year of the Community Scholarship, we will award 20 scholarships totaling \$100,000.



## OUR LEARNING

### Reisher Scholarship expansion

The Denver Foundation and the Reisher Family Foundation are bringing the **Reisher Scholars Program** to Fort Lewis College. As the eighth partner in the program, Fort Lewis College will expand the reach of the program to the southwest region of the state, offering promising undergraduate students the opportunity to finish their degrees without incurring additional student debt. Fort Lewis College has 45% Indigenous students and representing 185 tribal villages.



ABOVE Reisher scholars Demi Stoinski and Edwige Sewavi at University of Colorado Colorado Springs  
BELOW Katherine Latona, Reisher scholar



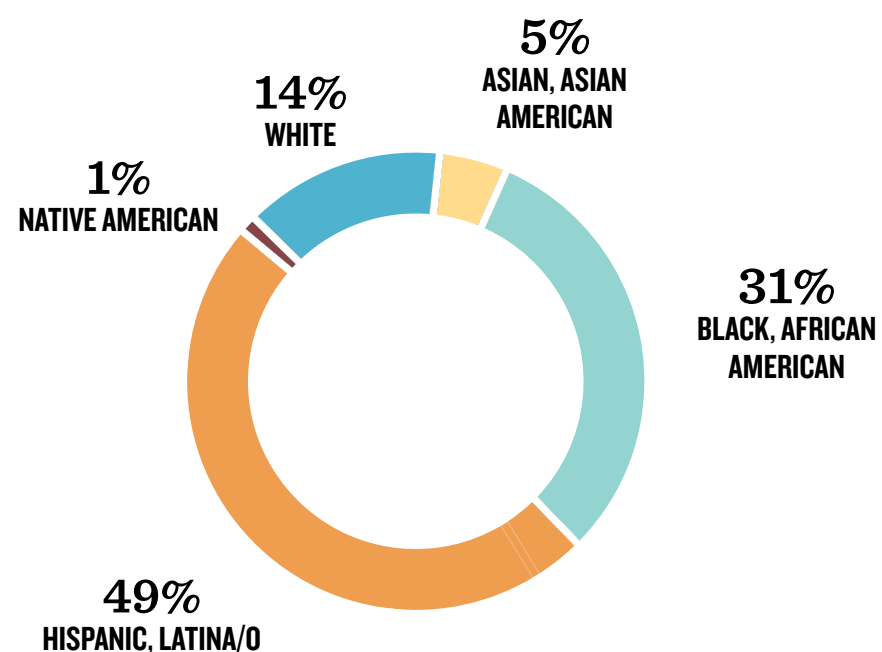
# More racially equitable in its leadership

## OUR HOPE

We hope to see an increased capacity of resident leaders and grassroots work.

We believe that communities have many strengths and assets, including their people, institutions, and public resources, and that this means residents often have the best insights into how to improve their neighborhoods. Our work through the [Strengthening Neighborhoods program](#) is intended to provide these resident leaders with financial support, so they can reach the best outcomes with and for their communities — particularly communities where people earn less than the area median income and in communities of color. Ultimately, the belief is that through initial support, these resident-led efforts will become stronger and more capable of leading the work most needed in their communities.

86% of money allocated (\$296,745) from Strengthening Neighborhoods in 2022 went to BIPOC leaders, consistent with 2021.



“The funding from Strengthening Neighborhoods has helped us in so many ways over the years. It’s helped us keep our Promotoras program going strong.”

— OLGA GONZALEZ, CULTIVANDO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The first-ever Strengthening Neighborhoods grant helped launch a new organization called Commerce City Community Enterprise, now Cultivando. The purpose of CCCE/Cultivando is to help residents marshal the assets and relationships already present in their community — to take action on issues important to them.



Mario Flores (center), former Strengthening Neighborhoods staff, with his wife, Maria (left) and Community Language Cooperative Founder Indira Guzman at the Strengthening Neighborhoods 25th anniversary event on September 10, 2022.



Groundwork Denver is a Community Grants Program grantee that received general operating funding.

# More racially equitable in its prosperity

## OUR HOPE

We hope that nonprofits have access to general operating funding so that they can best determine the most effective and impactful use of dollars.

We believe that a prosperous community includes stable and sustainable nonprofit organizations, which is why The Denver Foundation has prioritized offering general operating grants, when possible. In 2022, across all applications for competitive funds<sup>2</sup> (n = 1,046), 66.3% requested general operating funding, and of those that were funded (n = 385), 59.5% received funding for general operating (as opposed to project- or program-specific funding).<sup>4</sup>

We awarded twice as much money to general operating funding requests compared to project- or program-specific funding requests through competitive funding in 2022.

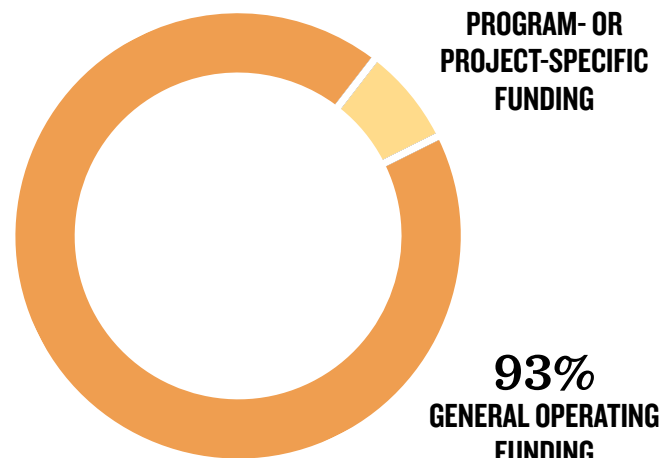
Among the 110 awardees of the 2022 Community Grants Program, 102 (93%) received general operating funding.

**\$7,214,200**

**GENERAL OPERATING TOTAL**  
(average award: \$31,503)

**\$3,526,515**

**PROGRAM/PROJECT TOTAL**  
(average award: \$23,049)



“We work in a fast-paced and collaborative environment, in which opportunities and challenges are constantly emerging. We are extremely grateful for the opportunity to apply for CGP (Community Grants Program) funding once a year, and for the increased size of your responsive grants and their focus on general operating support.”

– RESPONDENT TO APPLICANT SURVEY



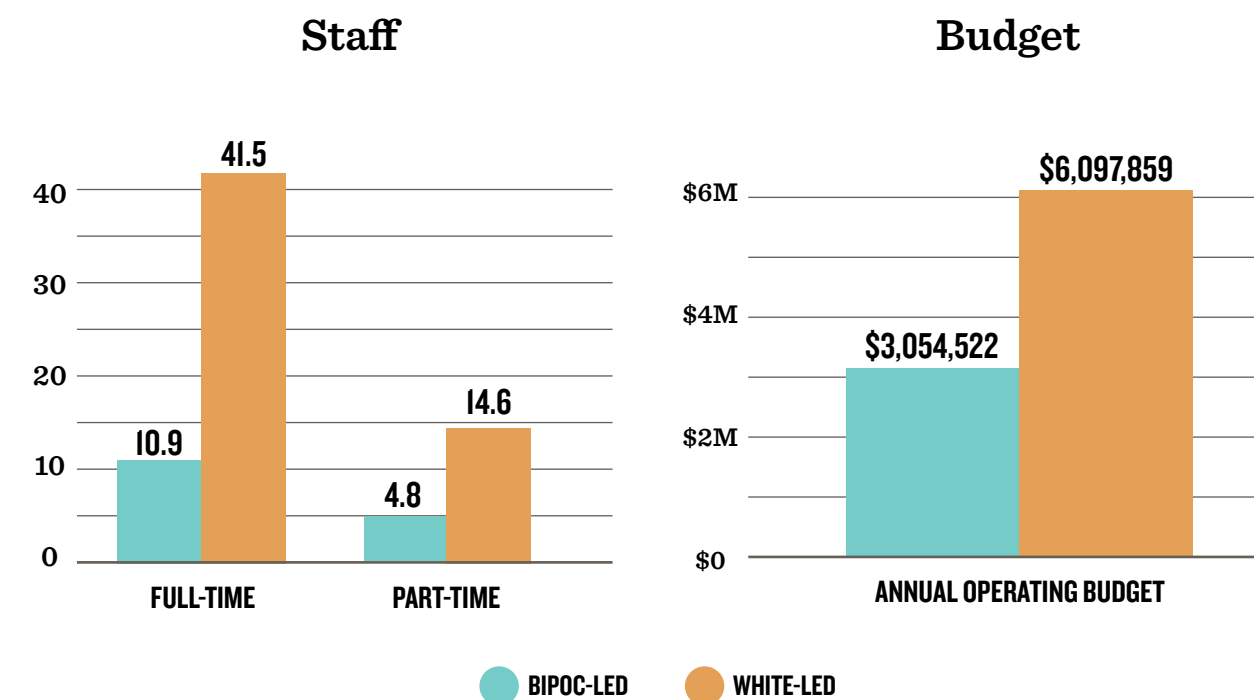
# More racially equitable in its prosperity

## OUR HOPE

We hope that all nonprofits have the resources and capacity to do their work.

We believe that regardless of race or ethnicity of organizational leadership, nonprofits should have the capacity required to be well-positioned to do their work. However, 2022 data from the **Nonprofit Finance Fund** show that white-led nonprofits receive substantially more unrestricted, federal, and corporate funding. These disparities are also reflected in the data we received from organizations applying for competitive funding in 2022,<sup>2</sup> suggesting that we can do more to address this persistent gap.

Organizations run by BIPOC leaders have, on average, significantly smaller staff and budget sizes — compared to organizations that have a leader who identifies as white.



*Yessica X. Holquin, executive director of the Center for Community Wealth Building and Jay Whisenton, owner of Feeding the Multitudes Catering*

## OUR LEARNING

During 2022 learning conversations with fundholders, participants were asked to describe what racial equity seems to mean for The Denver Foundation. They were also asked to reflect on how their giving had been informed by a racial equity lens.

Feedback revealed that racial equity influenced fundholders in three ways:

- Encouragement of more general operating support in personal giving
- Increased recognition for the need to support leaders who identify as BIPOC
- Understanding the need to examine nonprofit leadership composition when making funding decisions

Based on this feedback, we know that sharing these ways with all our fundholders will be an important part of our work moving forward.



# More racially equitable in its prosperity

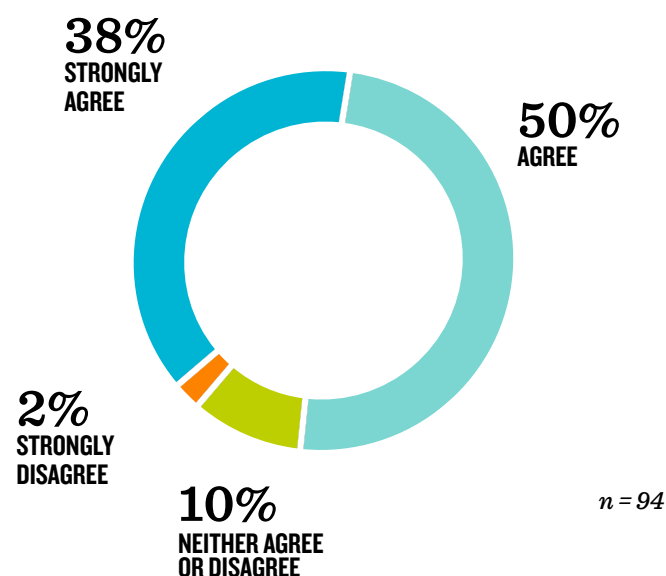
## THE HOPE

We hope that through our work, our stakeholders will feel more connected to each other.

In 2022, we heard from both fundholders and nonprofit partners that one of the key roles The Denver Foundation plays in the community is creating spaces for and helping to build and strengthen connections. Furthermore, 2022 focus group participants emphasized the unique position that The Denver Foundation fills in its ability to create connections within and across diverse stakeholder groups.

In fact, nonprofits see The Denver Foundation as a connector filling three main functions. The foundation is well-positioned to: 1) Create and foster strategic connections across various stakeholder groups (e.g., between nonprofits and other entities and individuals, such as donors, government partners, elected officials, other nonprofits, and school districts); 2) Foster collaboration between organizations, particularly smaller nonprofits, to leverage each other's resources and complement each other's strengths; 3) Help build relationships among those with common interests.<sup>5</sup>

Our events contribute to increased feelings of connection among our attendees.<sup>6</sup>



## OUR LEARNING

In response to 2022 feedback, we planned two nonprofit donor salons in 2023. This is an opportunity for donors and nonprofits to connect on a specific issue (e.g., economic opportunity, education) to learn from each other and identify ways each can engage to support Metro Denver. You can find videos of the nonprofits highlighted at our inaugural event on our [YouTube channel](#).

## OUR LEARNING

Our newly created [Asian American and Pacific Islander \(AAPI\) Circle](#) spent time learning from other giving circles to inform their approach.

“Learning from the success of other giving circles at the foundation has helped our new circle consider how we make a bigger impact in the community. We learned so much from the LatinasGive! experiences in grantmaking, in setting up their circle, and we are excited to announce our first round of grantmaking in 2023.”

– AAPI GIVING CIRCLE MEMBER



2022 Bike Tour stop at East Colfax Community Collective.



# More racially equitable in its prosperity

## OUR HOPE

We hope our work contributes to prosperity through the support of policies that promote better outcomes for BIPOC communities.

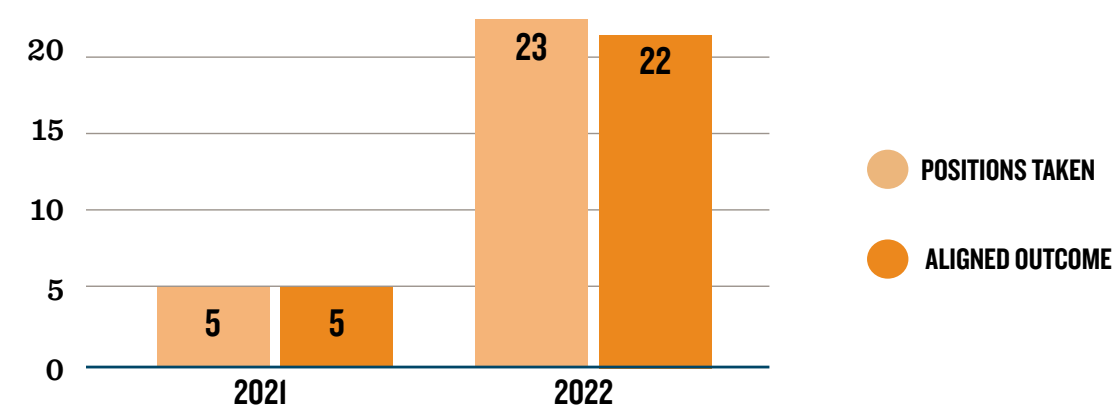
True change happens at the systemic level, which is why advocacy and policy change is so crucial to making our communities better. The Denver Foundation has always led on issues important to our community. We believe we have a responsibility to take bold steps to advance racial equity and drive meaningful systemic change to improve our communities. Our policy positions are informed by the foundation's assessment of each policy proposal, conversations with stakeholders, and our [policy principles](#), which we developed based on feedback from nonprofit organizations, donors, past grantees, fundholders, and community members.

In 2022, the foundation took a position on [15 local and state policy proposals](#) and [eight Denver ballot measures](#). All 15 policy proposal outcomes were in alignment with The Denver Foundation's position (13 bills were approved and two policies are moving forward). Seven of the eight ballot measures resulted in outcomes in alignment with our position, and one did not (seven were endorsed and passed; one was opposed but passed).



**LEFT** Rep. Jennifer Bacon meets with community members during Latino/a Advocacy Day.  
**RIGHT** 17th Annual Latino/a Advocacy Day at the Capitol, March 21, 2023.

We are developing a strong presence in the policy and advocacy community.



## IN PRACTICE

We used the tools in the policy framework to deepen relationships and show up for nonprofit partners and lawmakers in the ways that were needed to advance policy proposals in alignment with our strategic priorities. One of the positions The Denver Foundation took in 2022 was in support of [House Bill 22-1287](#), Protections for Mobile Home Park Residents. The Denver Foundation built and deepened relationships with grantees and bill sponsors ([Together Colorado](#), [9 to 5 Colorado](#), [Community Economic Defense Project](#), [Colorado Poverty Law Project](#)), and provided lobbying support during the legislative process.





# More racially equitable in its prosperity

## OUR HOPE

We hope resources coming out of The Denver Foundation are directed toward the five priority areas highlighted in our strategic framework.

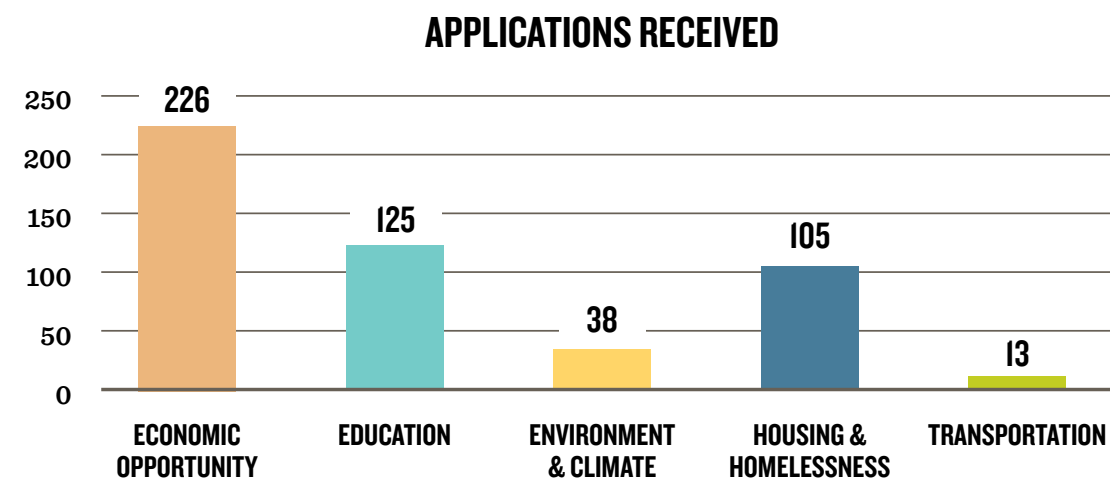
The five priority areas in our strategic framework are areas of need and opportunity identified by our stakeholders through an extensive feedback-gathering and planning process. The five areas are economic opportunity, education, environment and climate, housing and homelessness, and transportation. We also prioritized our civic fabric work — supporting public policy and advocacy, community organizing and coalition building, and tools to support democracy in action. While nonprofit recipients of our 2022 **Community Grants Program** (CGP) are working in all five areas, we also were able to recognize, based on the number of applicants, where there may be gaps in the number of organizations working within a specific area, or opportunities to increase outreach and awareness in our priority areas.

Additionally, as part of our role as a community foundation, The Denver Foundation is working to build awareness, understanding, and, ultimately, support among our stakeholders for these prioritized areas. By doing so, we aim to increase resources directed to these priority areas and contribute to the movement toward greater racial equity in prosperity. In 2022, all organizations receiving grants through the foundation (through discretionary funding, donor giving, competitive funding, etc.) were categorized based on the organizations' National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) codes. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) uses these codes to specify a tax-exempt organization's purpose. Roughly 27% of total grants made and 32% of dollars awarded through those grants were directed to organizations whose primary NTEE code aligns with one of our priority areas, a slight increase from 2021.



*Benny Samuels, executive director of Aya Foundation, a Community Grants Program grantee*

Substantially more applicants to CGP that identify working to address economic opportunity, particularly compared to those working within environment and climate, and transportation.<sup>7</sup>





# More racially equitable in its prosperity

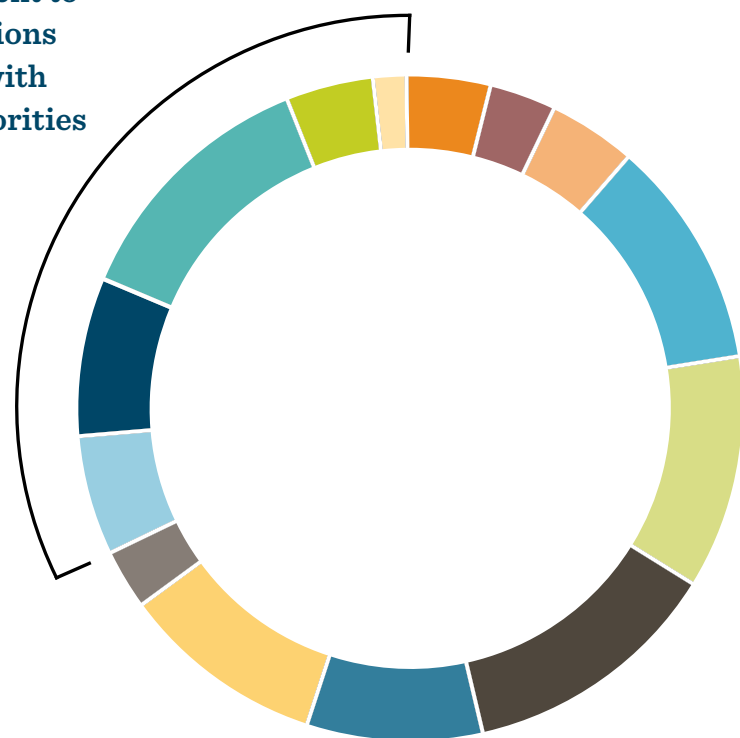
## OUR HOPE (CONTINUED)

We hope resources coming out of The Denver Foundation are directed toward the five priority areas highlighted in our strategic framework.

Of the \$116M total 2022 grants awarded, 32% (\$37M) went to organizations aligned with The Denver Foundation's strategic priority areas.

32%

of grants went to  
organizations  
aligned with  
funding priorities



- 6% CIVIC FABRIC
- 8% ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
- 13% EDUCATION
- 4% ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE
- 1% HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS
- 0% TRANSPORTATION
- 4% YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
- 3% ARTS, CULTURE, HUMANITIES
- 4% FOOD & NUTRITION
- 11% HEALTH & MENTAL HEALTH
- 11% HIGHER EDUCATION
- 13% HUMAN SERVICES
- 9% OTHER
- 10% PHILANTHROPY & GRANTMAKING
- 3% RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

## OUR LEARNING

In 2022, The Denver Foundation embarked on a process to consider the ways in which we can encourage alignment of the assets entrusted to the foundation with the priority areas identified by our stakeholders and our vision of a more racially equitable Metro Denver. We believe we can work to align assets with our mission by:

- Developing and using consistent messaging around our work, while also effectively showcasing and celebrating examples of donors and grantees who work in these priority areas.
- Educating donors through conversations, sharing learnings, and facilitating events on:
  - All giving vehicles at The Denver Foundation
  - Our programs and discretionary grantmaking
  - Best practices in grantmaking
  - Our priority areas and community issues
  - Why we care about racial equity
- Approaching conversations as opportunities for mutual learning and dialogue.
- Encouraging our stakeholders to consider applications of racial equity and consideration of values-aligned organizations.
- Looking for opportunities to align our investments in our investment pools with our mission. We do this through investing in diverse-owned and -led firms, and through thematic investing in line with our five priority areas.

This is ongoing work, and we look forward to continuing to learn what works and what doesn't in partnership with our stakeholders.



Photo provided by Work Options, a Community Grants Program and Transforming Safety grantee.



# More racially equitable in its culture

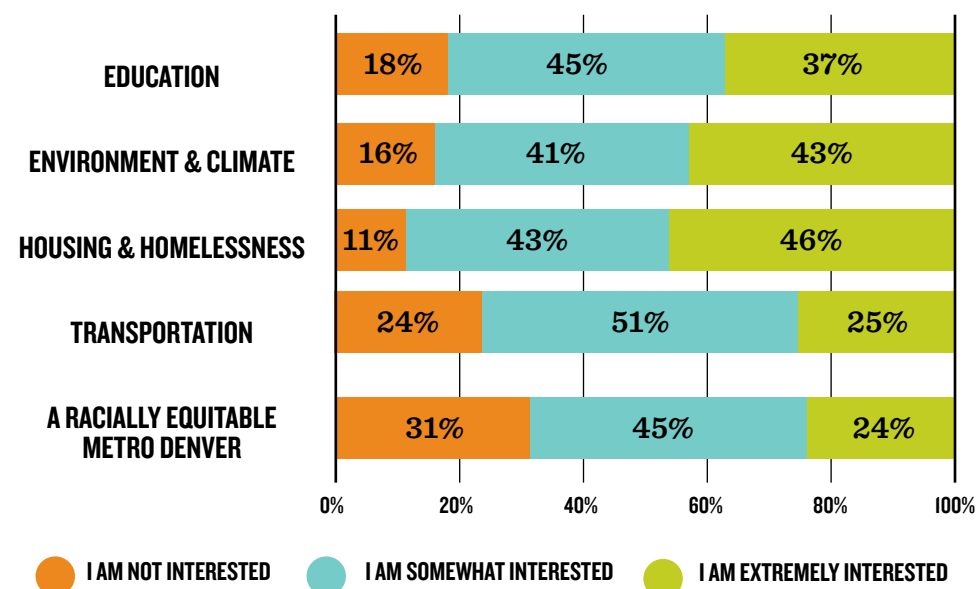
## OUR HOPE

We hope residents will understand the strengths and opportunities within their community.

One of the ways The Denver Foundation can be most impactful in our work is to ensure that our stakeholders understand and are interested in some of the most pressing challenges facing our community. A key component of this effort is to offer educational opportunities to our donors and fundholders so they can learn more about racial equity and the priorities in our strategic framework.

In 2022, we surveyed our donors and fundholders to better understand their reported understanding and interest in The Denver Foundation's priority areas. Feedback reveals that about 70% are interested in our explicit focus on a racially equitable Denver. There is even higher interest in our priority areas, particularly housing and homelessness.

At least 75% of our donors and fundholders are interested in learning more about or engaging in each of our priority areas.<sup>8</sup>



n = 146

## OUR LEARNING

Building on our tradition of connecting fundholders to issues that matter most to the community, The Denver Foundation created Leading & Learning, a series of in-depth discussions for donors and fundholders on important issues.

In 2022, our topics included:

- February 17: Focus on Environment & Climate
- March 31: Focus on Economic Opportunity
- October 20: Racial Equity in Philanthropy

In 2023, we have exciting topics, informed by feedback, to help fundholders with their philanthropy:

- February 22: Focus on Scholarships and Higher Education
- June: Focus on Family Philanthropy
- September: Focus on Housing





# More racially equitable in its culture

## OUR HOPE

We hope a racially equitable culture will recognize systemic inequities and seek to repair them.

Giving circles and affinity groups help democratize philanthropy, welcoming people of all giving levels to the power of giving. Giving circles and affinity groups at The Denver Foundation support the community through the 5 T's: time, talent, treasure, testimony, and social ties. Their collective efforts have resulted in the investment of hundreds of thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours. Furthermore, as evidenced by the following two examples, our giving circles and affinity groups have been on the forefront of recognizing systemic inequities and seeking to repair them.

In 2022, **Reparations Circle Denver**, a new giving circle at The Denver Foundation, was formed. It partnered with **Denver Black Reparations Council** to launch a new grant program with awards going to organizations that work to build economic strength, generational wealth acquisition, and financial literacy; preserve, provide access to, and expand Black history, culture, knowledge, and awareness; enhance mental and physical health access and increase public health education; and conduct many other activities that support Black residents of Metro Denver. The awards were made following a community-informed process led by the Denver Black Reparations Council, with funding from the Reparations Circle Denver. Awarded grantees reported serving predominantly BIPOC communities, with grantees saying from 68% to 90% of the communities they serve identify as BIPOC.

Additionally, the Deane Early Learning Equity Grant was also launched in 2022, with a specific aim to address systemic barriers within early learning environments for Colorado children from birth to 8 years old who are BIPOC. The awarded grantees reported serving a student population ranging from 62% to 90% BIPOC.

# 8

Black-led nonprofits received a total of **\$77,000** through the Denver Reparations Fund during its 1st cycle of funding.

## IN PRACTICE

Lotte Lieb Dula counts herself among a growing number of Americans of European descent who recognize that their wealth can be traced back to the history of chattel slavery in the U.S., at the expense of Black Americans. After discovering that her ancestors had enslaved hundreds of people, she pledged to dedicate her life to advocating — and raising money — for reparations.

With **Reparations Circle Denver**, she and other members seek to build a community of contributors and a pool of funds dedicated to the strengthening, creation, or re-establishment of institutions, religions, languages, and traditions within and beyond Metro Denver's Black community.



Reparations Fund grantee, Community Outreach Service Center. Pictured (left to right) Marcus Weaver, deputy director; Raymond Johnson, peer navigator; LaShawn Marshall, case manager; Harold Fields, Denver Black Reparations Council

“As donors who care deeply about equitable education outcomes, we wanted to create a grantmaking opportunity that would address this issue for Colorado’s earliest learners. While we learned how hard it is to make grants that impact systemic change when immediate needs in early childhood are so great, we were proud of the inaugural grants made from our fund. We hope to continue to push in future years for this fund to address systemic racial inequities in early childhood.”

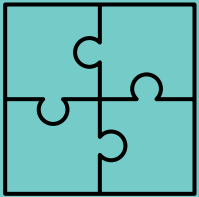
– KATE DEANE AND MEG DEANE FRANKO, DONORS AND FAMILY MEMBERS OF DEANE FAMILY FUND

# 3

recipients received **\$100,000 per year for 3 years (totaling \$900,000)** through the Deane Early Learning Equity Grant.



Carlos Valverde, Southwest regional director of the Working Families Party, and Yessica X. Holguin, executive director of the Center for Community Wealth Building, at the Strengthening Neighborhoods 25th anniversary event on September 10, 2022.



**OUR HOW**

# Our Purpose

Grounded in our purpose, the following section explores some of our hopes, impacts, and learnings for outcomes related to:

*Our proactiveness*

*Our collaboration*

*Our leadership*



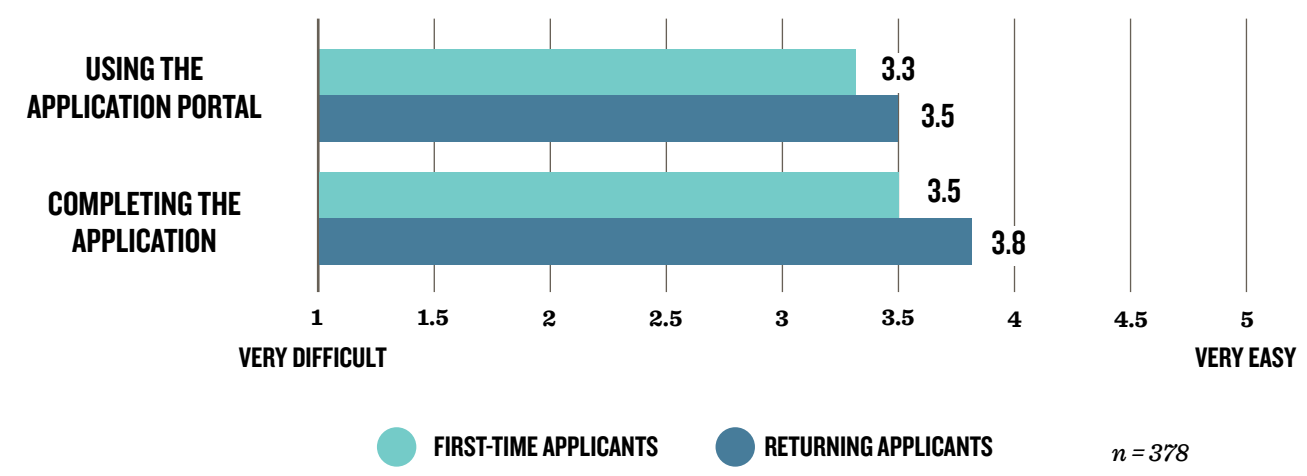
# We will be proactive

## OUR HOPE

### We hope to increase access to the resources that we steward.

If The Denver Foundation is being proactive in increasing access to funds, then the total number of grantees will increase, and those accessing our resources for the first time will be able to do so efficiently and effectively. In 2022, **2,392 unique organizations** received funding across all foundation granting (e.g., DAF, competitive funds, etc.), and staff at The Denver Foundation reported conducting **295 forms of outreach (meetings, calls, emails)** to prospective grantee organizations. Additionally, feedback received via our biannual applicant survey suggested that first-time grantees tend to view the application process to be just as easy and streamlined as returning applicants.

**First-time applicants report statistically similar experiences with navigating and using the portal, and completing the application, when compared to returning applicants. They rated the portal and the application as moderately easy to use and complete.<sup>9</sup>**



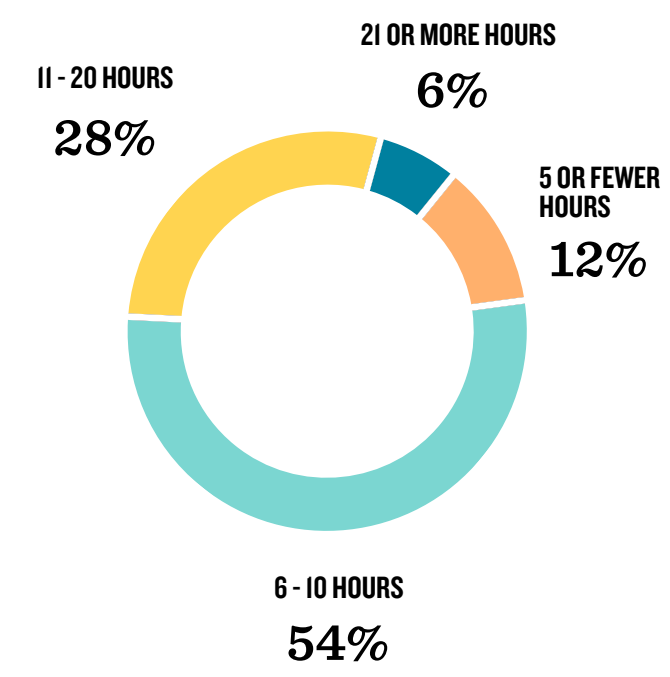
## OUR LEARNING

In 2022, The Denver Foundation embarked on a process to revise and standardize its base application and final report used across several funding opportunities. These revisions were intended to streamline and simplify the information asked of our nonprofit partners, focusing on the information and data most relevant to: 1) making a funding decision, and 2) our learning framework goals. In addition to these revisions, the foundation is also consistently and proactively seeking feedback on these tools from our nonprofit partners — updating and modifying based on this feedback where possible.

Photo provided by The Park People, a Climate Equity Fund and Community Grants Program grantee.



**The majority of 2022 CGP applicants reported it took them between 6-10 hours to complete the application.<sup>9</sup>**



“This application is short and to the point, which I appreciate because it saves time, which, for a small organization, is critical.”  
— RESPONDENT ON APPLICANT SURVEY

“The character counts were extremely limiting. This was our first time applying for funding from TDF, at least in recent history, and it is very challenging to describe what we do and the need for our services in 1,250 characters, which is what most questions allowed for.”  
— RESPONDENT ON APPLICANT SURVEY



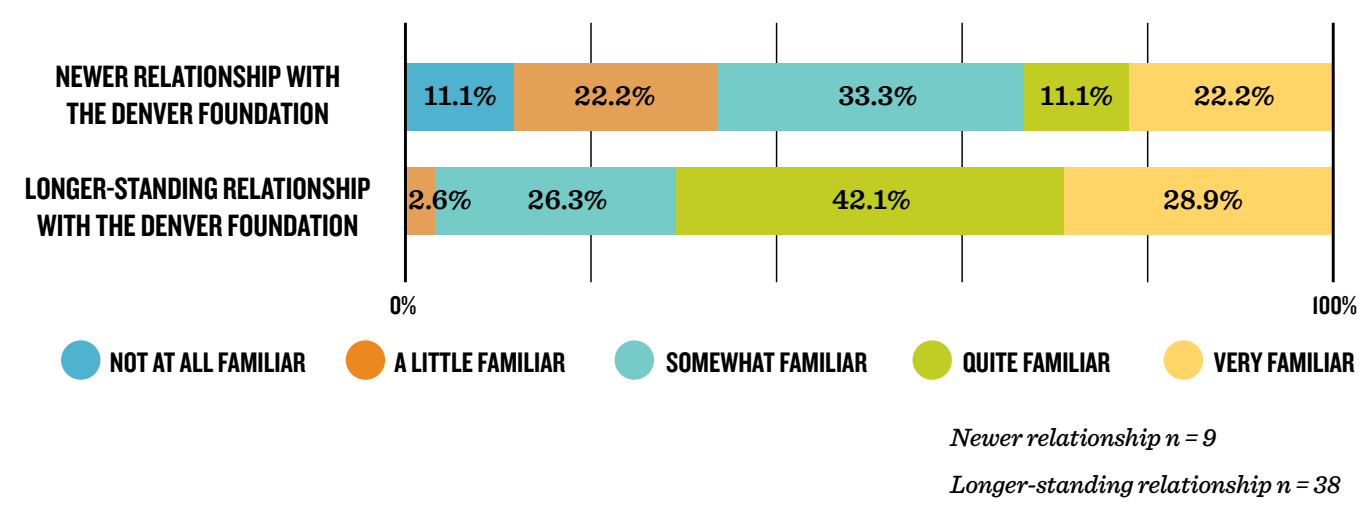
# We will be proactive

## OUR HOPE

We hope many of our stakeholder groups will feel comfortable and confident when discussing a community foundation, including professional advisors.

Professional advisors, including financial advisors and estate attorneys, are critical allies in our work, helping to introduce and foster connections between their clients and The Denver Foundation. We aim to be proactive in equipping them to feel confident and comfortable in discussing community foundations with their clients. Through the launch of our first professional advisor survey in 2022, we were able to gain a better understanding of general comfort and confidence among the professional advisors in our network. Feedback reveals that there may be opportunities to increase overall confidence in describing a community foundation, particularly among those that are newer in their relationship with The Denver Foundation.<sup>10</sup>

**Professional advisors with a newer relationship with The Denver Foundation are significantly less familiar with the work of a community foundation.**



*Desta Asfaw, partner at Holland & Hart and Professional Advisors Council member, at the professional advisors fall workshop, October 27, 2022.*

## OUR LEARNING

For more than 40 years, The Denver Foundation has partnered with its Professional Advisors Council (PAC) as a strategic tool and sounding board to improve our relationship with the professional advisor community in Denver. The PAC is composed of eight men and 17 women.

Based on feedback received in 2022, the PAC will be expanding its reach in 2023 to communities surrounding Central Denver. The PAC is also working to collaborate on educational collateral and thought pieces to share with its networks. PAC members will also help push The Denver Foundation value proposition, so we are top of mind in the community when people are thinking about charity. We also heard strongly that advisors tend to look to us to highlight different nonprofits and community priorities, and to help guide their clients on these decisions. In 2023, we will be connecting the PAC with nonprofit grantees and agency fund clients by hosting select quarterly meetings at their organizations. We will also plan to provide more transparency with this audience into how we engage in policy.



# We will be proactive

## OUR HOPE

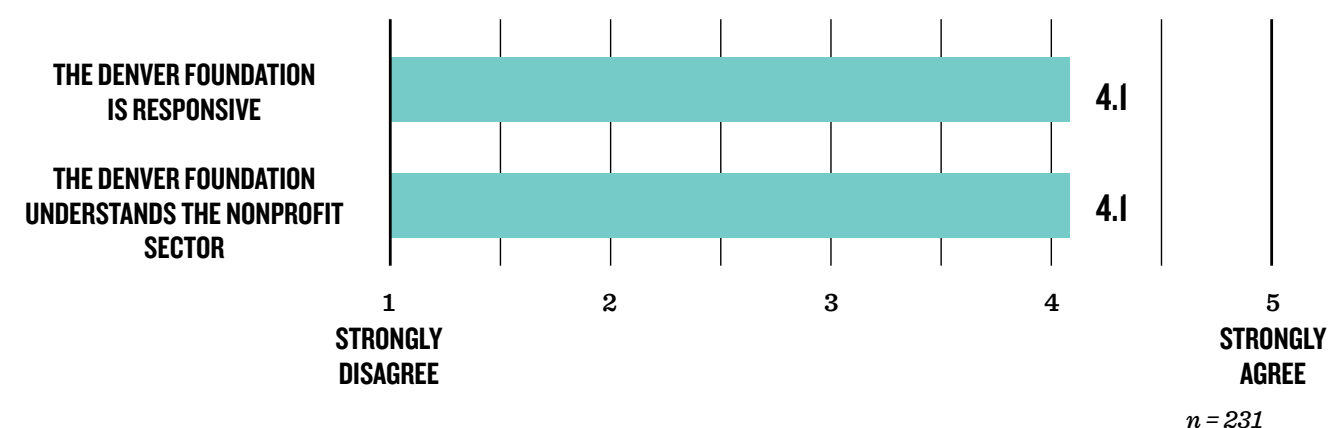
We hope to be effective listeners, allowing us to be responsive to emergent needs.

To be proactive, we believe we need to first listen to understand, allowing us to react and respond quickly. Responses gathered from key audiences at The Denver Foundation reveal that, while we have a good understanding of the nonprofit sector and are generally responsive, we have work to do around our active listening and being open to ideas and feedback.

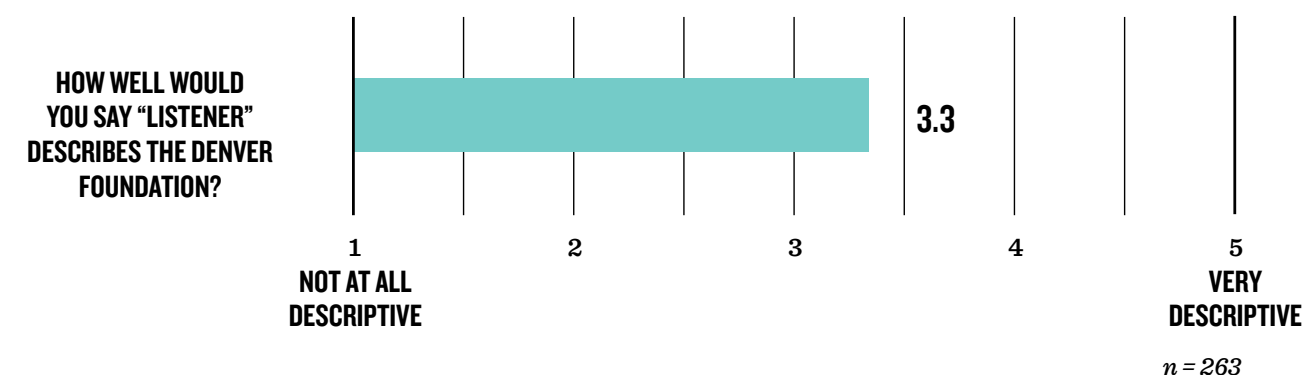


Andrea Shultz, senior engaged philanthropy officer, speaks with fundholders at the annual investment luncheon, August 23, 2022.

Nonprofits tend to view The Denver Foundation as responsive, and as having a good understanding of the sector.<sup>9</sup>



However, feedback from a broader group of stakeholders (including former grantees, fundholders, civic leaders, community members, and professional advisors) tend to rate our listening less positively.<sup>11</sup>



## IN PRACTICE

In early December 2022, the City of Denver held an emergency press conference to discuss the recent arrival of hundreds of migrants from the southern U.S. border. Acting quickly, the foundation worked with **Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs** to determine immediate needs of these newcomers. The foundation then quickly activated dollars in our **Critical Needs Fund** to make an emergency grant to the **Colorado Hosting Asylum Network** to help provide shelter and housing to these newcomers during some of the coldest days of the year. Throughout the end of 2022 and into 2023, the foundation continues to engage and deliver grants to support basic and immediate needs for this new community of migrants in Denver on these decisions.



# We will be a resolute leader

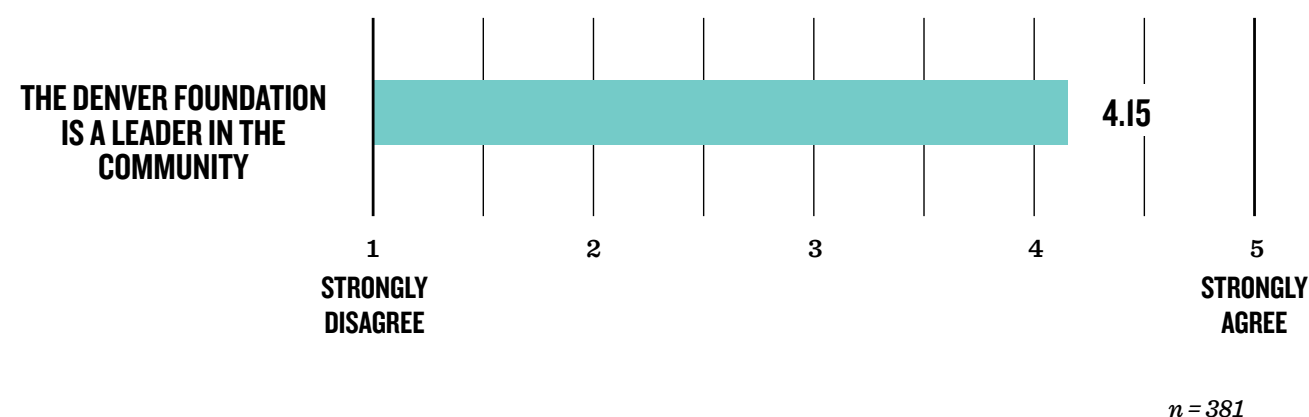
## OUR HOPE

### We hope to be viewed as a leader in the community.

In order to be most impactful in driving the change we hope to see in the community, we must be willing to lead, when and where appropriate. Our recent work under the guidance of our current strategic framework has allowed us to lead in new spaces (e.g., advocacy and policy, engaged learning) and double down in the areas we’ve always been a leader (e.g., grantmaking). We’re proud that local and national peer foundations have recently come to us to learn from our experiences, speaking to our leadership in the space.

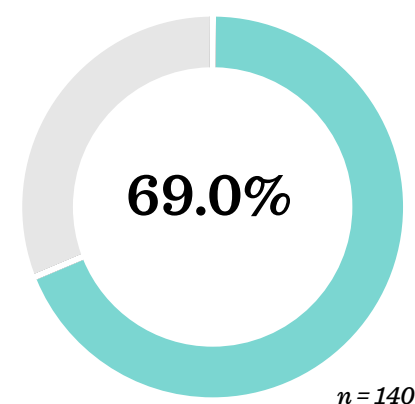
While we’ve had successes, we know we still have much to learn. We will always strive to be aware of when it is appropriate for us to lead, and when it is more appropriate for us to support other leaders in our community.

#### Nonprofits generally view The Denver Foundation as a leader in the community.<sup>9</sup>



#### There is an opportunity to improve donor and fundholder satisfaction with our leadership in the community.<sup>8</sup>

##### PROPORTION OF DONORS SATISFIED WITH THE DENVER FOUNDATION'S LEADERSHIP IN THE COMMUNITY



## IN PRACTICE

The Denver Foundation participated in **Denver's first social impact bond** in 2016, which demonstrated that when people experiencing homelessness were offered housing, most took it and stayed over the long term. Leveraging these successes, 2023 gave us the opportunity to bring along our donors, our impact investing committee, the Colorado Health Access Fund, and partner foundations to support the Denver Housing to Health project, another social impact bond project. This multi-million-dollar, pay-for-success project breaks the community-to-jail cycle by increasing housing stability and decreasing jail time among individuals experiencing homelessness who are high users of the city's resources.



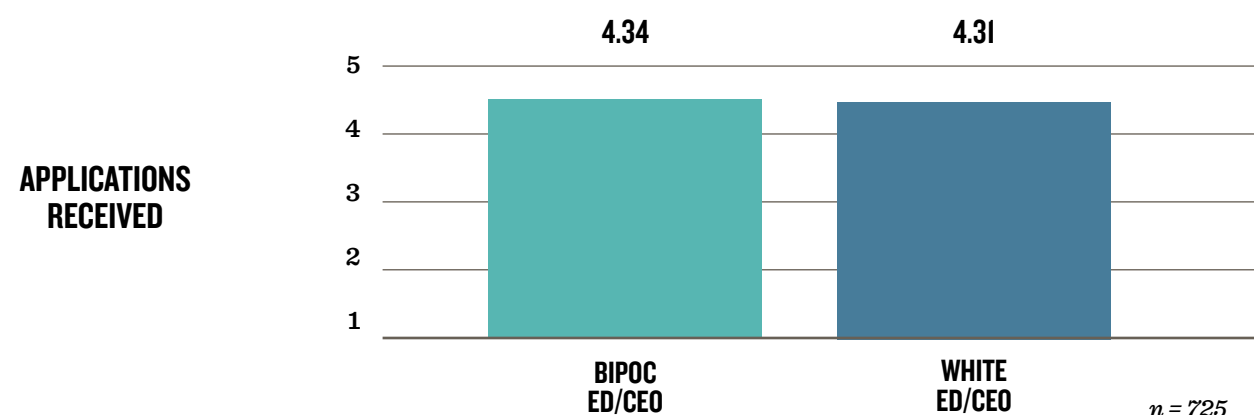
# We will be a resolute leader

## OUR HOPE

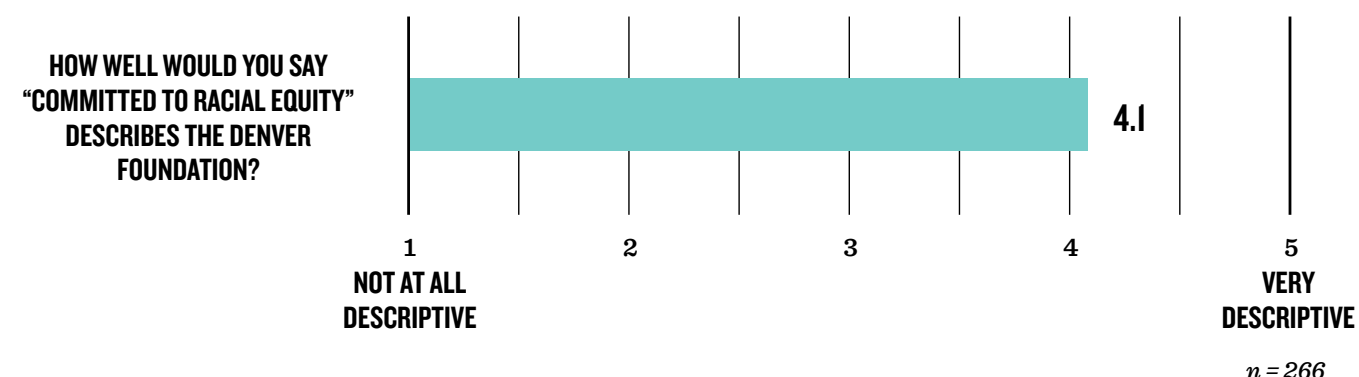
We hope our stakeholders understand and appreciate our explicit focus on racial equity.

Feedback from a broad range of stakeholders suggests that, generally, The Denver Foundation is viewed as being committed to racial equity. One way we have seen progress in how racial equity shows up in our work is through the scoring of our competitive funds. We have made efforts to reduce implicit bias among staff and volunteers who score applications for our competitive funds. After receiving implicit bias training, we saw no significant differences on average scores for awarded applications based on the race or ethnicity of the organization's leader. Despite this work, internally and with close partners, we have opportunities to further clarify among our donors and fundholders why we have explicitly highlighted racial equity in our vision.

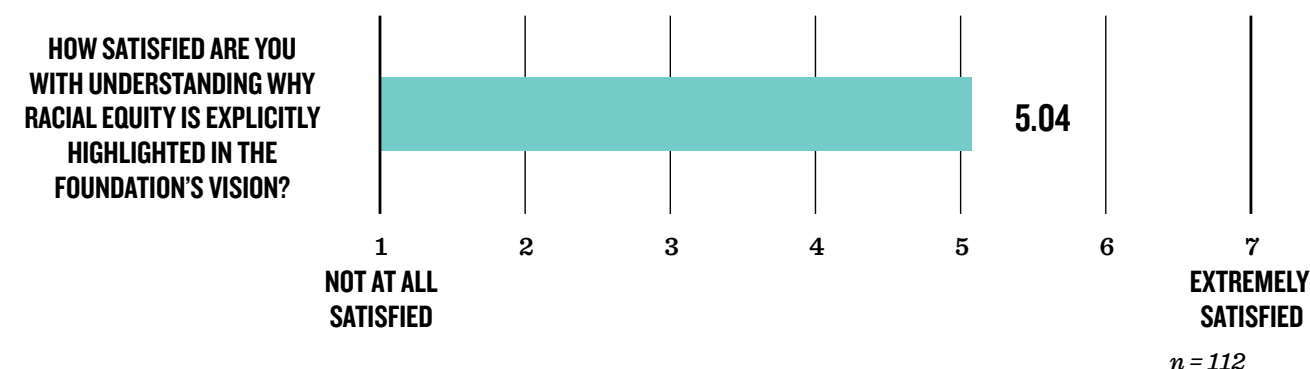
The average ratings of applications for proposed work are statistically the same regardless of the race/ethnicity of the submitting organization's ED/CEO.<sup>12</sup>



We are generally viewed as committed to racial equity.<sup>11</sup>



Yet our donors and fundholders are not fully satisfied with their understanding of why racial equity is included in our work.<sup>8</sup>



## OUR LEARNING

In an effort to better prepare our staff to have meaningful dialogue with stakeholders, we trained all staff on how to gain a deeper understanding of how biases show up in the grant review process, specifically focusing on racial equity and other intersectional lenses. By training staff, who then train volunteers and work with donors, we work to reduce bias in our scholarship and grantmaking processes. In 2023, we are more explicitly including education and awareness-building around implicit bias for our volunteer committee members.



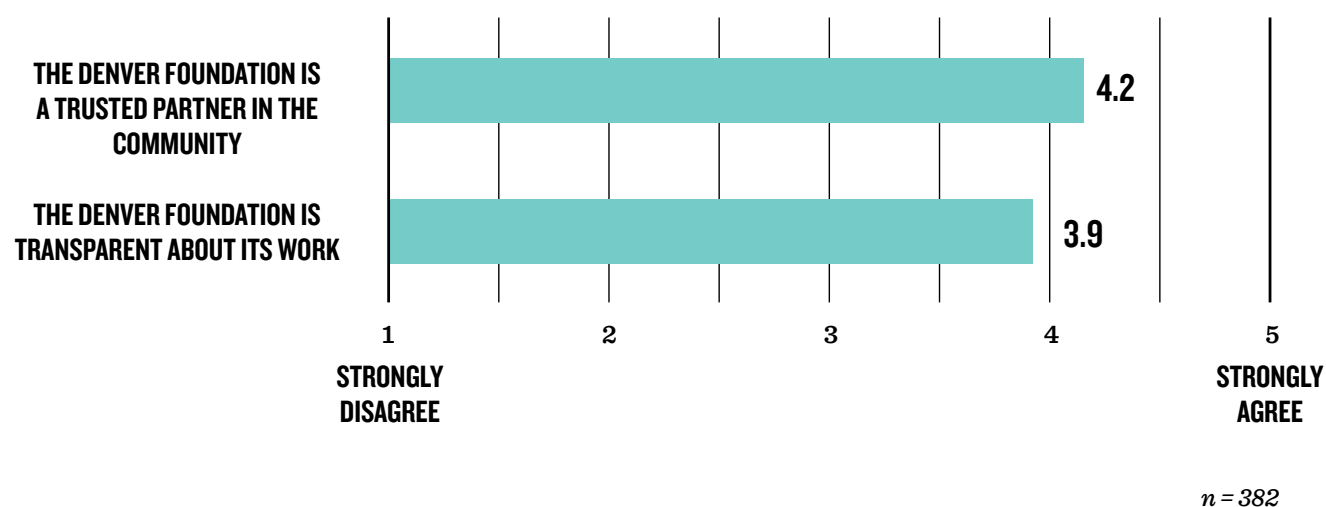
# We will be collaborative

## OUR HOPE

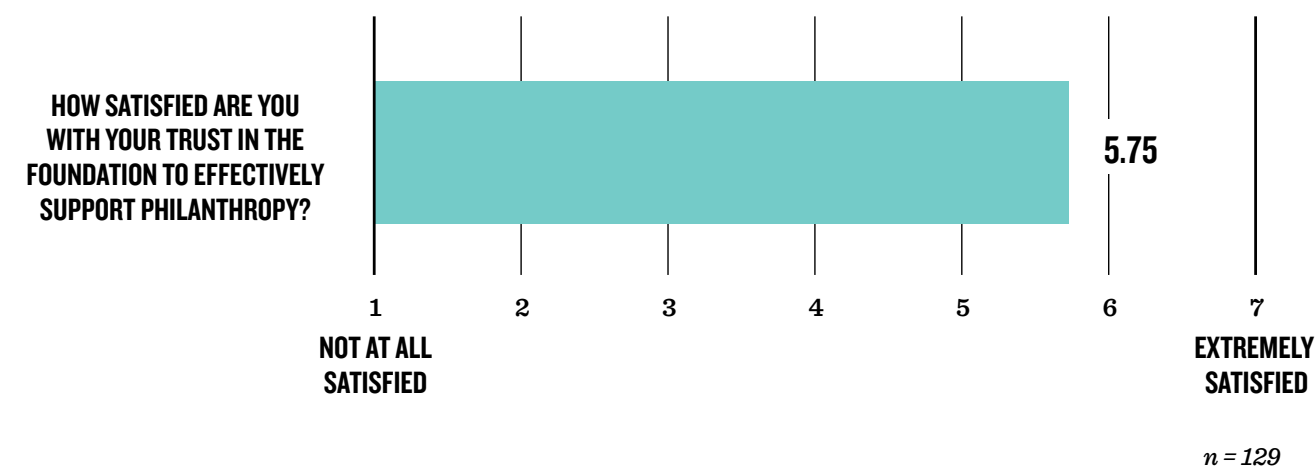
### We hope to be a transparent and trusted partner.

We believe our best work is accomplished in collaboration with the community and across the broad range of all our stakeholders: donors and fundholders, nonprofits, professional advisors, and community members. To be that strong collaborator, we must also be transparent and trusted by those stakeholders. When we asked our donors and fundholders and our nonprofit partners about their perceptions of us, feedback suggests that we are a trusted partner, but there is an opportunity to be more transparent about our work.

**Nonprofits view us as a trusted partner, yet we can always work to be more transparent.<sup>9</sup>**

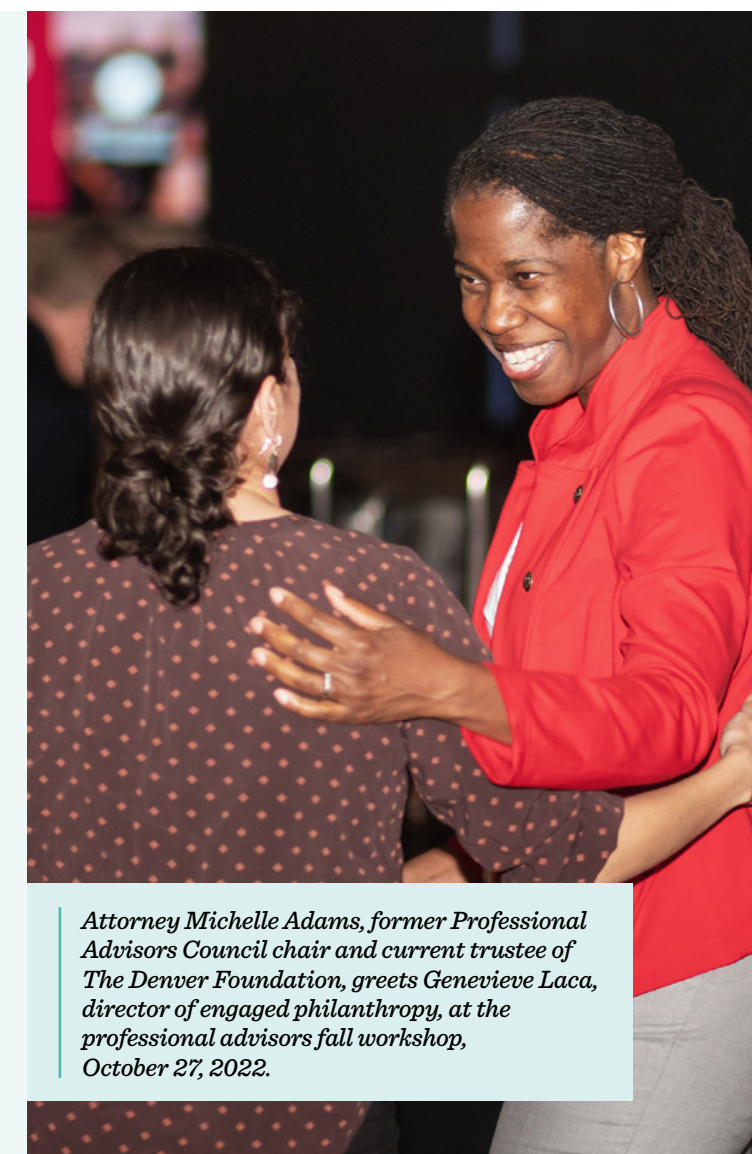


**Our donors and fundholders are fairly satisfied with their trust in us to effectively support their philanthropy.<sup>8</sup>**



## OUR LEARNING

In 2022, we heard consistent feedback about our need to be more transparent in our work and better showcase the contributions we are making in the community. Now that the first full year for our engaged learning and aligned data collection effort is under our belt, we are focused on being more communicative in 2023 through regular reporting, including this report and a series of smaller reports that we plan to roll out throughout the year. In this report and others, we aim to be explicit about where we are making progress and where we still have more work to do.



*Attorney Michelle Adams, former Professional Advisors Council chair and current trustee of The Denver Foundation, greets Genevieve Laca, director of engaged philanthropy, at the professional advisors fall workshop, October 27, 2022.*



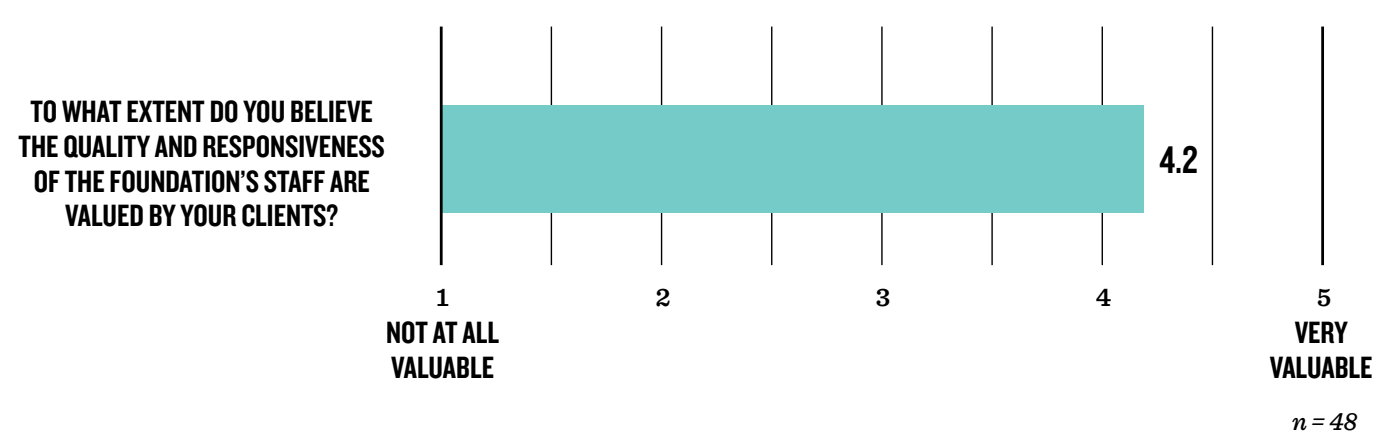
# We will be collaborative

## OUR HOPE

### We hope our staff will be our greatest asset.

To effectively collaborate, we believe that our team must work to ensure they have quality and meaningful interactions with all our stakeholders. When we asked our professional advisors,<sup>10</sup> donors and fundholders, and our nonprofit partners to provide feedback on our staff, all tended to share that the team is one of our greatest assets as an organization. That said, we always strive to be better, particularly by prioritizing more regular outreach with our stakeholders and by establishing consistent points of contact at the foundation.

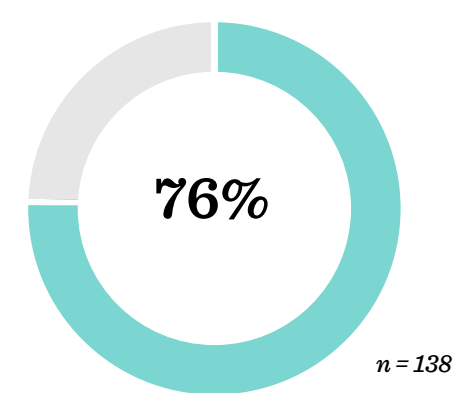
The quality and responsiveness of the team is valuable.<sup>10</sup>



“The Denver Foundation staff was really helpful in the aftermath of declining our application and helping us to better understand where we weren’t quite hitting what they were looking for. With our long-standing partnership, I was glad to hear that we should apply again.” — **RESPONDENT TO APPLICANT SURVEY**

The majority of donors are satisfied with the quality of staff.<sup>8</sup>

PROPORTION OF DONORS SATISFIED WITH THE DENVER FOUNDATION'S STAFF



“I feel like The Denver Foundation reaches out to our organization once a year for a site visit, and those usually go well and they seem to listen and understand, but that’s usually all I hear. I don’t have a go-to program officer, and when we’ve had one in the past, they haven’t been very responsive.”

— **RESPONDENT TO APPLICANT SURVEY**

## OUR LEARNING

We know our staff is one of our greatest assets. And we know people want a dedicated and reliable point of contact. We are working to determine the best strategies and methods to use so we can better meet the needs of our thousands of donors, grantees, and community partners.



The Denver Foundation staff volunteers at the Strengthening Neighborhoods 25th anniversary event on September 10, 2022.

Annual investment luncheon,  
August 23, 2022.



**OUR WHAT**

# Systems and Processes

Grounded in our organizational and operational goals, the following section explores our hopes, impacts, and learnings for outcomes related to our business model and our systems and tools.



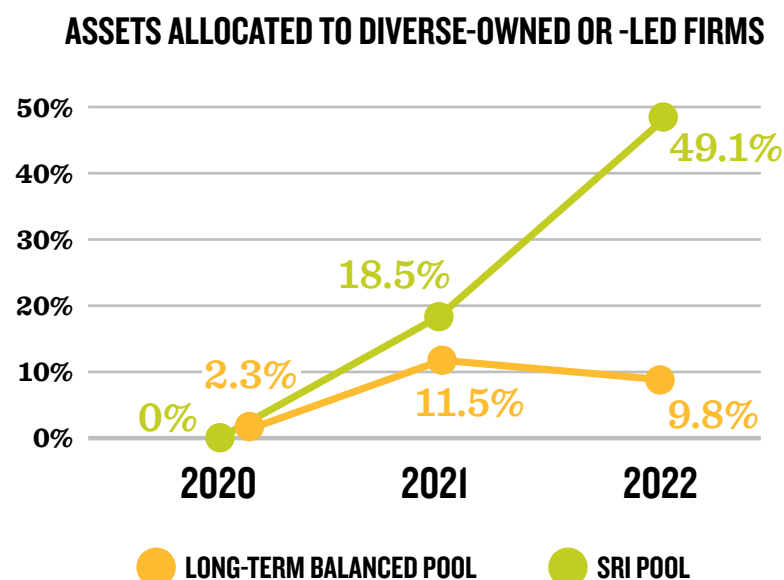
# Our business model

## OUR HOPE

We hope our business model will be in alignment with our strategic goals and our values.

The Denver Foundation offers multiple platforms for the long-term investment of more than \$1.1 billion in assets, governed under the leadership of our investment committee. Using a diversified approach, we work to support our donors' and fundholders' goals for these charitable assets. Our **current internal investment pools** are the Long-Term Balanced (LTB) Pool, Sustainable and Responsible Investment (SRI) Pool, and Index Pool. The Long-Term Balanced Pool presents a diversified investment approach across multiple asset classes, including a substantial weighting to private capital. The SRI Pool presents a long-term diversified investment approach across multiple asset classes, with a focus on aligning investments to the mission and values of The Denver Foundation. This approach includes considering ESG (Environmental/Social/Governance) risks and opportunities, targeting diverse-led and -owned firms, and investing in thematic, mission-aligned investments. At the end of 2022, The Denver Foundation made the decision to move the entire balance of our discretionary endowment funds to the SRI Pool, our most mission-aligned pool.

22% of our total assets are invested in firms owned or led by people of color or women.



“The Sustainable and Responsible Investment Pool provides donors with a chance to align their gifts with their intent. It ensures that the things I value are also reflected in the places I choose to support. It also creates a tremendous social impact and a much greater benefit to the community as a whole.”

—DONOR AND FORMER TRUSTEE



Fundholders Judy Joseph, Mark Greenberg, and Sandra Roberts-Taylor at the annual investment luncheon, August 23, 2022.



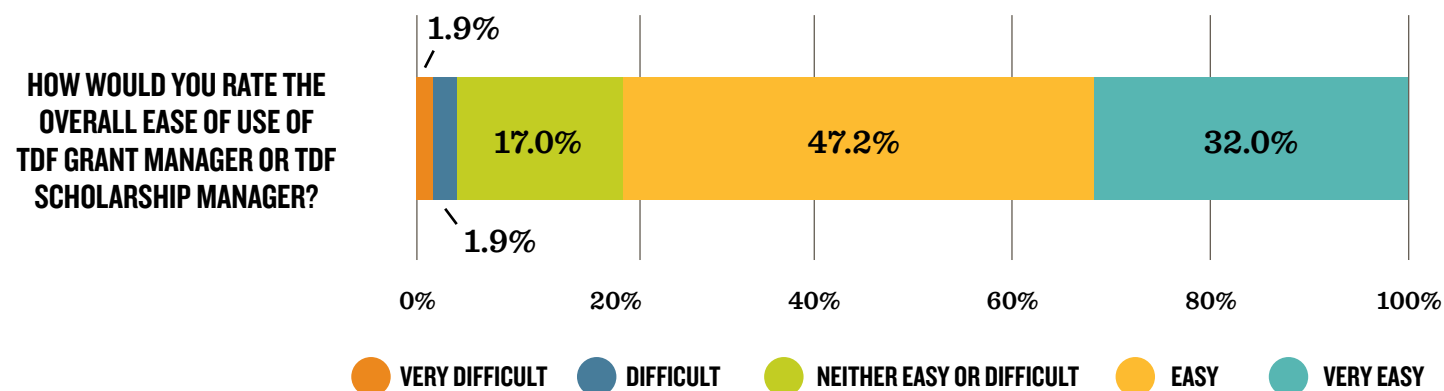
# Our systems and tools

## OUR HOPE

We hope that our systems enhance user experience and engagement.

The Denver Foundation launched its new **TDF Fund Manager portal** in November 2021, and the **TDF Grant Manager portal** and **TDF Scholarship Manager portal** in January 2022. Along with efficiently recommending grants, TDF Fund Manager gives donors access to their current balance, recent fund statements, and a historic record of contributions to and grants from their fund. The TDF Grant Manager gives nonprofits access to a listing of open funding opportunities and any funding requests currently in progress, still requiring action, or awaiting a decision. The TDF Scholarship Manager gives students access to a listing of open scholarship opportunities and any applications currently in progress, still requiring action, or awaiting a decision. This transition was partly the result of feedback regarding the complexity of our previous systems.

There has been a high adoption rate of TDF Grant Manager and TDF Scholarship Manager, and our committee volunteers find the systems relatively easy to navigate.<sup>13</sup>



n = 53

1,231

organizations have logged in since the launch of TDF Grant Manager

2,643

students have created accounts in TDF Scholarship Manager

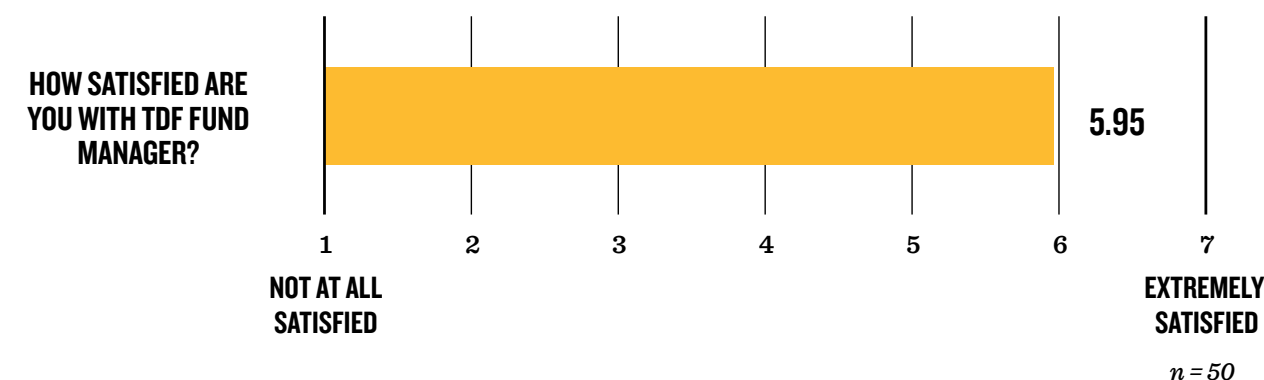


Fundholders at the annual investment luncheon, August 23, 2022.

799

fundholders created accounts since the launch of TDF Fund Manager, (approximately 53% of eligible donors and fundholders)

While donors and fundholders are satisfied with the TDF Fund Manager, we have work to do with adoption.<sup>8</sup>



## OUR LEARNING

With the transition to our new platforms in 2021 and 2022, our team has been able to improve efficiency and functionality for our stakeholders in a number of ways, including those interacting with TDF Fund, Grant, or Scholarship Managers. We have also been streamlining and improving the capability of our Help Desk. Since we began tracking in 2022, the Help Desk has had approximately 200 touchpoints with people reaching out in search of support from The Denver Foundation. In 2023, we look to continuing to modify our Help Desk features to be in alignment with the needs of our stakeholders.

As we do so, please feel free to reach out to [help@denverfoundation.org](mailto:help@denverfoundation.org), or call 303.300.1790 and ask to speak with a member of the Help Desk with any questions.



# Looking Ahead

As the first year with our learning framework in place, 2022 provided several opportunities for intentional feedback and data gathering. We've been able to also reflect on this feedback, our work, and the impact we are seeing in the community. We are proud of what we have accomplished together. We look forward to 2023 with excitement for what we will continue to learn and achieve as an organization in close partnership with all of our stakeholders.

The revision and launch of several new tools in 2022 allowed us to better understand some of the ways in which we are moving the needle toward our vision, showing up in our purpose, and developing internal practices that support our broader goals. It also highlights opportunities for evolution. As we move forward in 2023, we will now be able to collect data and feedback to compare changes over time. Through the deployment and use of our revised final reports, we will also be able to better understand the successes achieved and challenges faced by our nonprofit partners.

In the spirit of being a learning organization, we also anticipate modifying and adapting our learning framework, while continuing to build and strengthen our internal practice around learning. Becoming a learning organization is an ongoing journey, not a clearly defined destination.

We would like to thank everyone who has been a part of this process — from those who took the time to complete one of our surveys or participate in a focus group to the organizations that submitted applications and final reports. While not an exhaustive list, we give thanks to our donors and fundholders, nonprofit partners, civic and community leaders, volunteers, professional advisors, community members, Teal Media, The Center for Effective Philanthropy, our investment consultant NEPC, and The Denver Foundation board and staff — you are all contributing to our aim of being a learning organization.

**We invite you to reach out to Dr. Jill Iman, director of engaged learning, at [jiman@denverfoundation.org](mailto:jiman@denverfoundation.org), if you have any questions about this report or our learning framework.**





# Endnotes

**1** [equitableeval.org](https://equitableeval.org).

**2** Data are pulled from the applications submitted by any organization (n = 1,046) applying to one of the 24 competitive funding opportunities in 2022: Black Resilience in Colorado (BRIC; two cycles), Bowen Family Performing Arts Fund, Care Fund, City and County of Denver Nonprofit Technical Assistance, Civic Fabric (State and Local Policy, and Voter Engagement), Climate Equity Fund, Colorado Health Access Fund, Community Grants Program (two cycles), Comprecare Fund, Deane Early Learning Equity Grant, Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund, Denver Reparations Fund, Environmental Affinity Group Fund, Gorham McGee Early Learning Fund, Greenwood Fund, Lauren Townsend Memorial Wildlife Fund, Limited Legal Fellowship Program, Lowe Fund, Renewable Energy Trust, Rollie R. Kelley Family Foundation, Technical Assistance Fund at The Denver Foundation, Transforming Safety, White Rose Foundation Grants Program.

**3** Includes data on awarded scholarships provided through nominated (n = 26), competitive (n = 120), and the Fall 2022 Reisher scholarship (n = 415) for recipient for race/ethnicity and first-generation status (total n = 561); LGBTQIA+ identity is only for students responding via the nominated or competitive process. Student data were included only if they positively identified their race/ethnicity, first-generation status, and/or LGBTQIA+ identity (i.e., excludes those that did not respond or indicated that they preferred not to answer).

**4** General Operating can be used flexibly to fund any part of an organization’s operations or work. Program/Project support must be used for expenses directly relating to the program or project for which an organization applies.

**5** Ten staff representing seven nonprofit partners participated in a learning conversation hosted by The Denver Foundation in spring 2022.

**6** Following our events, we ask participants to complete a short event survey (either paper or online). Those participating in either an event focusing on connection (response n = 37) or in a bike tour convening (response n = 57), responded to items assessing their feelings of connectedness following the event.

**7** Applicants to the Community Grants Program were asked to self-identify which, if any, of our five priority areas they work in (could select all that apply; applicant n = 401).

**8** The Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) administered its Donor Perception Survey in summer 2022. The survey was sent to 663 donors and fundholders, and 146 responded (response rate 22%). For this particular question, “economic opportunity” was mistakenly excluded as one of our core priority areas.

**9** In 2022, the foundation launched a biannual feedback survey that is sent to all individuals who completed an application to one of the competitive funding opportunities open in the previous six months (response n = 477).

**10** Our first professional advisor survey was launched in fall 2022 (response n = 80).

**11** Teal Media launched an audience survey in 2022 to gather input from current and former grantees, current and former donors, professional advisors, community members, and government or civic leaders (response n = 269).

**12** The foundation calculated 725 average ratings for the competitive funding opportunities that use a numeric rubric in helping to make funding decisions (1 = not at all and 5 = to a great extent; average score range 1.67-5.0).

**13** In 2022, the foundation launched an annual feedback survey sent to all volunteer committee members (response n = 59).



The Denver Foundation

[denverfoundation.org](http://denverfoundation.org)