



The Denver Foundation

Opening All Doors



2021 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK





Opening All Doors

2021 Strategic
Framework



The Denver Foundation

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Opening Doors to the Future

Not long after I arrived in Denver in October 2019, I was on my bike, cycling through neighborhoods and meeting with all kinds of people along the way. It was fall, a beautiful time in Colorado. I was struck by the friendly, helpful way so many people opened doors to me: Community organizers invited me to their office in Westwood. Concerned neighbors in Globeville hosted me for breakfast at their local library. In Montbello, I talked with a diverse coalition of residents eager to share their vision for northeast Denver.

The bike tour was more than a way to get to know my new city. It was the first step in building The Denver Foundation's new Strategic Framework. Before we could develop a vision for the Foundation's next chapter, I needed to learn about the hopes of people in this community, as well as the harder things they face.

Though the pandemic cut the bike tour short, The Denver Foundation continued listening to the community. As we moved the outreach online, we heard from generous people who long to amplify their impact through engagement as well as giving; others welcomed new tools to build a charitable legacy. Long-time partners of the Foundation encouraged us to catalyze systemic change and lead on issues that matter most. Many reminded us of the critical importance of continuing our 25-year learning journey around racial equity.

We heard about areas where we can improve, too. Nonprofits, for example, urged us to make it easier for them to do their work. Some told us of times when the doors to the Foundation felt closed to them. This feedback fortified our resolve to break from outmoded practices of traditional philanthropy while remaining firmly rooted in our values. Our experiences last year, when we mobilized more philanthropic dollars than ever to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, showed us it is possible to be nimble, agile, responsive, and centered on community.

Most of all, what we heard in all of these conversations was a collective desire to co-create the future of Metro Denver and to build connections between the diverse, hard-working, visionary, resourceful people The Denver Foundation exists to serve, from donors to resident leaders. As one person put it: "I dream of a strong community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive." That's a dream we share.



All of that listening and learning culminated in this new Strategic Framework, which I'm delighted to share. As you'll see, from our investment decisions to our grantmaking, our staffing to our advocacy, everything we do under this new plan will be in service of community impact. This plan is a guide, not a rulebook, and I'll say up front that we don't have all the answers. We invite you to be part of our journey as we implement, experiment, assess, and adjust as needed.

On behalf of everyone at The Denver Foundation, thank you for your engagement with our work. If you took the time to share your hopes for the future of this community, you played an essential role in shaping this Strategic Framework. Please know that as we launch this new chapter, we'll be listening. Our doors will remain, always, open.

Onward,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Soto".

Javier Alberto Soto, President and CEO







The Denver
Foundation

OUR VISION

A Metro Denver that is racially equitable in its leadership, prosperity, and culture.

OUR MISSION

We inspire people and mobilize resources to strengthen our community.

OUR PURPOSE

We will be a proactive, collaborative, and resolute leader in reducing racial disparities.

OUR VALUES

We are deeply rooted in the principles of Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity, and racial equity guides and connects all of our work.

We are a catalytic leader that engages critical issues and accelerates systems change.

We maintain trusting, collaborative relationships with our partners, people from every segment of our community.

We strengthen our civic fabric by elevating the voices and perspectives of community members.

How the Strategic Framework Was Developed

Work on The Denver Foundation's new Strategic Framework began in November 2019 under the leadership of newly appointed President and CEO Javier Alberto Soto. The first step was to listen. Through anonymous surveys, small focus groups, and in-person and online sessions, we invited nonprofit organizations, donors, past grantees, fundholders, professional advisors, and community members to tell us what issues were of most concern to them. We wanted to hear their hopes and dreams for the future of Metro Denver, and what obstacles stood in the way. We asked them about their experiences with The Denver Foundation: what we do well, and where we can improve.

1,250

**SOURCES OF
DIRECT INPUT**

The 1,250 points of primary feedback we collected were supplemented by 7,300 points of secondary feedback, using original data from partners who had recently collected similar perception information about the Denver Metro area. Our staff also engaged in intensive research to identify relevant data.

7,300

**SOURCES OF
SECONDARY INPUT**

In January 2020, The Denver Foundation hired the national firm Ekstrom Alley Clontz & Associates to develop the next steps in the plan. The firm worked closely with a Strategic Framework Guiding Committee made up of five members of the Board of Trustees and six staff members representing all Denver Foundation departments.

EAC guided The Denver Foundation's staff and Board of Trustees through explorations of our vision and values, including the importance and meaning of racial equity. The examinations were deep, covering everything from the Foundation's philosophy of community leadership to its business model. With support from EAC and staff, the Board of Trustees adjusted and prioritized guiding principles for each area, as well as high-level strategies.

The Denver Foundation began implementing the Strategic Framework in late 2020.



What the Strategic Framework Does

This new Strategic Framework is designed to be the guiding light for The Denver Foundation over the next decade. Rather than a static road map, it is a flexible, living document that will evolve over the next 10 years in response to changing community needs.

As its core, the Framework affirms The Denver Foundation's commitment to centering racial equity and prioritizing community leadership, inside and outside the organization.

This Framework presents a commitment to bringing together donors and nonprofits and facilitating meaningful interactions across those constituencies. It establishes The Denver Foundation as a core Metro Denver leader that takes a proactive position on public policy and uses data to support decision-making in the region.

Under this framework, The Denver Foundation's full range of assets is directed toward the mission to create excellence in all parts of the Foundation's work.

At 8:45 am on a sunny Saturday morning in February 2020, two young boys waited eagerly outside the Ford-Warren Branch Library at 28th and High. When the library opened at 9 o'clock, staff members greeted the boys as they rushed inside to grab books and sit down in front of a computer.

Like The Denver Foundation, the library has deep roots. The original Warren Library was the first public library in Denver when it opened in 1913. Located in the Whittier neighborhood, the library is named for Bishop Henry White Warren and Dr. Justina L. Ford, the region's first Black woman doctor.

In the library's meeting room, The Denver Foundation invited community members to share thoughts, hopes, concerns, and visions for the future of Metro Denver. They reflected neighborhood demographics: A mix of longtime community members of color, newer homeowners who are active in registered neighborhood organizations, and people who work at nonprofits located in or near Whittier.

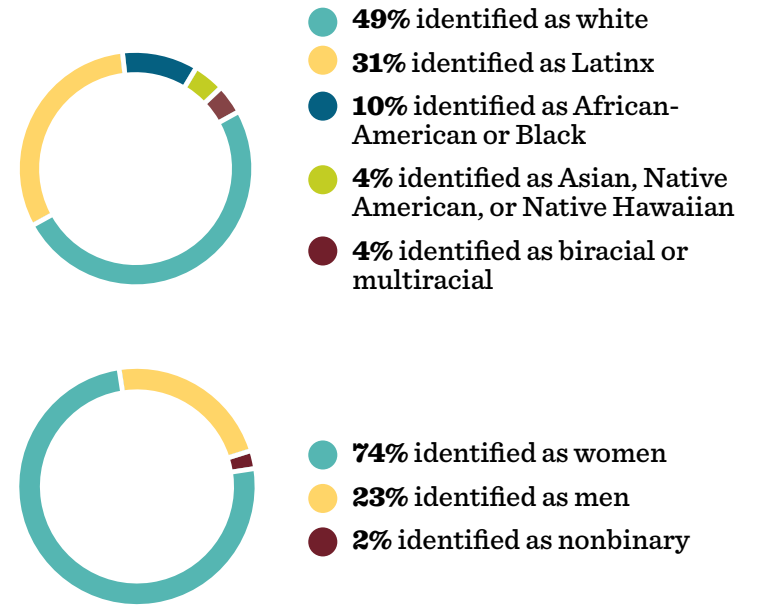
The conversations that day sounded much like the conversations the Foundation heard during dozens of community input sessions held across Metro Denver between February and May 2020. In libraries, community centers, office buildings and, later, when the pandemic hit, on Zoom, we asked: How can the region better share prosperity? How do we honor the history, identity, and heritage of our

neighborhoods? How will we take care of our elders if they cannot afford to stay in their homes? How can we support liveable wages and small businesses? In the midst of so much change, when do we intervene and when do we innovate? How can community members share their experience and expertise to inform the distribution of philanthropic resources?

The intensive listening campaign was the first step in building The Denver Foundation's new Strategic Framework. Over nine months, we collected 1,250 sources of direct input and 7,300 sources of secondary input from partner organizations including the Denver Public Library, Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition, and Prosper Colorado.

Opening Doors to Listen

OF THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO HELPED SHAPE THIS STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK:



WE ASKED

How can The Denver Foundation best respond to the challenges faced by our community?

WE HEARD

Simplify the grantmaking process

Remain focused on racial equity

Support nonprofits embedded in communities

Engage in policy work to accelerate systems change

Create links between donors and nonprofits to catalyze change



WE ASKED

What is your greatest hope for Metro Denver over the next decade?

“We are a community connected, resilient, and actively pursuing a better life circumstance for everyone. That’s my dream for Denver.”

WE HEARD

“My hope for Denver is for equal economic opportunity for community members of all races, incomes, and citizenship status.”

“I dream of a strong community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive!”

Opening Doors to Community Impact



Led by our expert team and guided by deep roots in the community, The new Impact Group will serve as a bridge, a connector, and a hub of leadership and action on issues that have an impact on our community.

ENGAGED PHILANTHROPY

With a commitment to unmatched service, The Impact Group will help generous people meet their charitable goals and create connections between donors and the nonprofit community.

COMMUNITY-LED GRANTMAKING

The Impact Group will respond to the needs the community brings forward, listening to concerns, priorities, and solutions from the nonprofit community and those it serves.

PUBLIC POLICY & RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

As an organization that learns as we lead, we will bring people together to understand issues that will shape the future of Metro Denver. We will listen as a first step to building platforms for both ongoing, engaged learning and public policy, and we will share what we learn to inform decision-making and best practices.



WHAT'S NEW?
The Impact Group

Integrated philanthropy
 A bridge between donors and nonprofits
 Accelerate change via policy and advocacy

Opening Doors to Generosity

For more than 95 years, The Denver Foundation has partnered with donors at every stage of the philanthropic journey. We seek and value partnerships with a wide variety of donors, from those making their first-ever gifts to donor-advised fundholders and those building legacies over generations.

As the most experienced community foundation in the Rocky Mountain Region, we will continue to offer an unmatched level of service that allows generous individuals to meet their charitable goals. Our deep roots in the community give us a unique ability to understand community needs — and help generous people have a positive impact.

Through increased opportunities for learning and engagement with other philanthropists, we will amplify impact among donor-advised fundholders. We will bring donors of all kinds together with nonprofit leaders to build solutions.

Under the new Strategic Framework, donors will feel our commitment to service expand with new staff and new tools for research, family philanthropy, estate planning, complex asset management, and much more. Whether you're looking to open a donor-advised or scholarship fund, join an affinity group with like-minded donors, or invest in wide-ranging community impact through The Fund for Denver, The Denver Foundation is honored to be your partner in philanthropy.



WHAT'S NEW?

Engaged Philanthropy

Expanded staffing in support of donor services and charitable planning

Improved tools for fund management in development

New opportunities to connect donors, nonprofits, and community leaders to co-create collaborative change



WE ASKED

How can we best support your philanthropic journey?

“We choose to include a family fund at Foundation in our estate because we know that the Foundation’s expertise will support the next generation of our family to be engaged and strategic givers.”

“Part of the beauty of being involved with a donor-advised fund at The Denver Foundation is they have such a view of what’s going on in the community, where the needs are the greatest, and where the impact will be the greatest. Their advice and counsel are invaluable.”

ENGAGED PHILANTHROPY

Opening Doors to Philanthropists of Color

The Denver Foundation's vision of a racially equitable future for Metro Denver includes an equitable, inclusive, and diverse network of philanthropists from Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Building on our 25-year learning journey, we recognize the deep traditions of philanthropy among BIPOC people in Metro Denver – and we are committed to lifting, strengthening, and deepening those traditions through our new Strategic Framework.

The Denver Foundation embraces a broad definition of what it means to be a “philanthropist,” valuing gifts of Time, Talent, Testimony, and Social Ties alongside gifts of Treasure. From giving circles and affinity groups, scholarships and donor-advised funds, we offer products and philanthropic tools that foster emerging and establishing philanthropy among BIPOC communities.



WHAT'S NEW?

Lifting Up All Philanthropy

Expanding network of giving circles and affinity groups for BIPOC donors

Opportunities to engage on issues identified by the community as priorities

Connections to organizations led by and serving BIPOC communities





WE ASKED

Why is collective giving important?

“What I love about LatinasGive! is we can pool our money together and have a greater impact than we would have individually. We get to find out about these grassroots organizations in the community that are helping people like me. We ask our members to give whatever combination of treasure, time, talent, and testimony. We can really see the impact we make.”

“I attended a meeting hosted at The Denver Foundation about disrupting traditional notions of philanthropy, and talking about the different ways the Black community has traditionally engaged in philanthropy, even though we haven’t used that name or that title. I joined the group shortly after that meeting and have been going ever since. I have enjoyed getting to work with this group of amazing African American men.”

ENGAGED PHILANTHROPY

Opening Doors to Community-Led Grantmaking

The Denver Foundation's Community Grants Program is supported through The Fund for Denver, our permanent endowment, built by the generosity of generations of donors. In our new Strategic Framework, we will invest in nonprofit partners working in the areas identified by the community as priorities.



In our grantmaking, we will prioritize constituent-led organizations and the voices of those they serve, with an emphasis on those led by and serving BIPOC communities. And we will make it easier for nonprofit organizations to focus on their work through a streamlined process, ongoing technical assistance, and, in many cases, increased average grant amounts and multiyear grants.

The Community Grants Program is just one way that The Denver Foundation and our donors support nonprofit organizations across Metro Denver. Organizations whose missions fall outside of our priority areas may receive funding through a range of other funds including Field of Interest Funds, special project funds, and donor-advised funds. The Denver Foundation is committed to building bridges between our community of donors and nonprofits of all kinds.

Priority Areas

IDENTIFIED BY THE COMMUNITY
CENTERED IN RACIAL EQUITY



CIVIC FABRIC

- Public policy and advocacy
- Community organizing and coalition building
- Tools to support democracy in action



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

- Community wealth building
- Workforce development



EDUCATION

- K-12 reforms prioritizing racial equity
- School funding



ENVIRONMENT/CLIMATE

- Energy efficiency and renewable energy
- Air quality



HOUSING

- Affordable housing
- Homelessness



TRANSPORTATION

- Public transit accessibility and affordability



WE ASKED

How can we be a better philanthropic partner?

“Take a strong position on climate change. Support activism by BIPOC, not just by white-led organizations. BIPOC are most impacted and most often sidelined.”

“A job, healthcare, and access to basic needs require affordable and accessible transit.”

“We need real systems-level solutions and advocacy, at the grassroots and in the legislature.”

WHAT'S NEW?

Community-Led Grantmaking

Emphasis on BIPOC- and constituent-led organizations

Streamlined grant application and reporting process

Priority areas identified by the community

Potential for larger grants over multiple years



Founded in 1996, Strengthening Neighborhoods is centered on the belief that residents have the best insight into how to improve life in their communities. Through this program, The Denver Foundation has long supported policy and advocacy work at the grassroots through community organizing, coalition building, and leadership development. This experience will inform our work as we look to the community for guidance and partnership around issues that matter most.

ENGAGED PHILANTHROPY

Opening Doors to Civic Engagement

Since our founding in 1925, The Denver Foundation has led on issues of importance to our community. Today, at a pivotal point in history, we believe we have a responsibility to take bold steps to advance racial equity and drive meaningful change at a deep systemic level. Our community believes we have this responsibility, too.

As we embrace Civic Engagement as a central element of our work, we will listen as a first step to building platforms for both ongoing engaged learning and public policy.



WE ASKED

How can The Denver Foundation best catalyze change?

“We need a trusted convener to play a role in elevating values and racial equity.”

“The Denver Foundation should pursue policies that create systems change.”

“We should find more ways to influence government policy and inform elected officials and the public.”

WHAT'S NEW

Public Policy & Research and Evaluation

Staff dedicated to developing policy positions and platforms

Opportunities for learning and engagement

Building on tradition of community organizing

Business Model & Operational Excellence

Our goal for The Strategic Framework is both simple and all-encompassing: We will move all aspects of our business model into alignment with the mission, vision, values, and purpose of The Denver Foundation. This means advancing our goals around equity, inclusion, and diversity in our investment philosophy and approach to fund management. It means building on our legacy of endowment growth in new ways, such as investing \$40 million from The Fund for Denver into a Socially Responsible Investment pool, as we did in 2020. It means partnering with impact investors on leading-edge projects that benefit communities.

It also means we sharpen our internal focus to generate external results. We want every person who interacts with The Denver Foundation to have an exceptional experience. Our new Strategic Framework will influence every decision we make, including how we hire, reward performance, manage, and lead. We'll look for ways to build excellence in every aspect of culture, staff development, software, and systems.

WHAT'S NEW

Revenue goals tied to community impact goals

New investment management tools

New staffing, structure, commitment to culture

“Right now, we’re in the middle of an evolving donor movement.

Whether driven by trends, women, youth, or diversity, donors want to align their dollars with their values. They are thinking about bigger-picture goals, not only returns. As a values-driven organization, The Denver Foundation knows it’s never been more important to align the Foundation’s portfolio with its mission. The Foundation is at the intersection of important social and community initiatives, and it knows where the needs of the community are.”

— Kristine Pelletier, NEPC, LLC, The Denver Foundation’s new investment consulting partner. After a rigorous search, The Denver Foundation chose NEPC as a partner in part due to its commitment to advancing racial equity through its innovative and inclusive approaches to investment management.



Acknowledgements

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Ekstrom Alley Clontz & Associates

Our deepest thanks to everyone who responded to a survey, hosted or attended a community input session, shared data and insights to inform our decision-making, and articulated dreams and aspirations for Metro Denver as well as The Denver Foundation itself. You made this new framework possible.

About the Cover

The architectural imagery used on the cover and throughout this publication comes from the floorplan of Casa Grande, The Denver Foundation’s new home. Built in 1929, the building is located in the Sherman/Grant Historic District in Denver’s Capitol Hill neighborhood. We look forward to opening the doors of Casa Grande to the community.



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