



GREATER TOGETHER COMMUNITY FUNDS

Year Two Summary Report • Executive Summary • December 2021

This report reflects on the second year of implementation of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's Greater Together Community Funds (GTCF) program. As stated on the Hartford Foundation's website, "The purpose of the Greater Together Community Funds is to support the community in taking ownership around the needs in their towns, encourage broad and inclusive civic engagement and anchor the Hartford Foundation in each town." This report explores the ways in which the Hartford Foundation and the 29 communities in its service area are meeting these three goals.

The questions that we explore in this report are parallel to the questions explored in our Year One report, completed in October of 2020. We found that these questions continued to track well with the evaluation work we have been doing, even as our evaluation shifted from engaging primarily with Hartford Foundation staff toward making direct contact with Selection Committee (SC) and Advisory Committee (AC) members. A brief summary of our findings in each area follows.

HOW DOES THE HARTFORD FOUNDATION DEFINE SUCCESS FOR THIS PROGRAM? HOW DO COMMUNITIES DEFINE SUCCESS?

In Year Two of implementation, there continues to be a tension between the results-related success of making grant recommendations and the process-related success of encouraging broad and inclusive civic engagement in the grantmaking process. Both of these goals are important to the Hartford Foundation, but they can work in opposition to each other; the fastest process for getting grants out the door is the process that draws upon the expertise of those who already hold positions of power within their community.

During Year Two, we observed this tension in conversations with the Hartford Foundation staff as well as within community-based GTCF committees. While the Hartford Foundation is not pressuring communities to make grant recommendations quickly, and in some cases is encouraging communities to slow down and look closely at their processes, community members still sometimes seem to be focused on moving quickly to their goal of recommending grants. However, Advisory Committees have also mentioned other measures of success, such as working together, incorporating different viewpoints, and making a positive impact on their community. They also raised questions about how to measure success in reaching and supporting organizations that are not already known to them and in the wider community.

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND COMMUNITY UPTAKE ALIGNED WITH THE HARTFORD FOUNDATION'S IMPLEMENTATION PLAN? *(Taking ownership around the needs of the towns, encouraging broad and inclusive civic engagement)*

As of September 2021, all 29 communities in the Hartford Foundation service area are progressing along the path laid out by the Foundation:

- Two communities are developing Selection Committees.
- One community has an active Selection Committee and is working on a process for naming people to the Advisory Committee.
- Twelve communities have Advisory Committees that are working toward their initial grant recommendations.
- Fourteen communities have made their first grant recommendations and are continuing with their Advisory Committee work.

The facilitators of this process include the hard work and dedication of the committee members who comprise the Selection Committees and the Advisory Committees, the support of the Hartford Foundation, and the motivating factor of making positive contributions to the communities.

However, overall progress has been slower than was originally expected by the Hartford Foundation. The COVID-19 pandemic played a role in this slowdown, halting community progress entirely at a time when many communities were beginning to convene their committees. However, many communities recovered quickly and began (with help from the Hartford Foundation) to hold remote meetings and to plan processes that allowed for the lack of in-person community gatherings. We even heard from some committee members that the GTCF program offered a way to continue to connect with other community members during a time of intense isolation, with a focus on positive change.

We believe that progress towards creating inclusive and participatory processes took longer than the Hartford Foundation anticipated, and in some respects, appeared to slow progress towards grantmaking. Foregrounding the work of inclusion within processes and relationships, and not just outcomes, is a different way of doing business than many people – within the Hartford Foundation and in the communities it serves – are accustomed to. This work has included slowing down the process to focus on internal issues of representation and inclusion, allowing diverse perspectives to inform their grantmaking processes, and thinking about ways in which their processes will be conducive to supporting successful grant applications from organizations that have not historically been awarded funding.

In addition, some committees have been affected by member turnover, absenteeism, and internal dynamics. These issues can sometimes result in a significant slowdown of the work.

HOW ARE COMMUNITIES RESPONDING TO THE GREATER TOGETHER COMMUNITY FUND INITIATIVE? (*Anchoring the Hartford Foundation in the towns*)

As described above, communities are working steadily toward making funding recommendations, and many of them have already done so and are beginning to plan a second round of grants.

Selection and Advisory Committee members are generally very positive about the GTCF work, and grateful to the Hartford Foundation for giving them the opportunity to contribute to their communities. They expressed appreciation for each others' hard work, and also pride in their communities as they learned about the many ways in which nonprofit organizations were serving others in need.

We found that Advisory Committee members were more likely than Selection Committee members to experience some challenging feelings about the GTCF process, possibly because their work is more lengthy and involved than that of the Selection Committees, and possibly because the Advisory Committees are more diverse than was typical of the Selection Committees. While the AC members often expressed positive feelings about the GTCF work, they also sometimes expressed frustration about the slow pace of the process, the support they are getting from the Hartford Foundation, and the lack of communication among committee members.

However, we have found that committee members are willing to engage in conversations with each other that address these challenging feelings, and we have seen examples of these feelings being aired and addressed, leaving committee members once again feeling positive about the process. Advisory Committee members also expressed generally positive feelings about the Hartford Foundation, their relationships with each other, and their understanding of their communities.

HOW IS THE HARTFORD FOUNDATION SUPPORTING THE GTCF PROCESS? ARE THERE ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS THAT COMMUNITIES NEED? (*Anchoring the Hartford Foundation in the towns*)

The Hartford Foundation continues to provide substantial support to the GTCF process. Community Fund team members attend nearly every Selection Committee and Advisory Committee meeting, providing support around initial organizing, giving advice and suggestions about moving forward through issues that arise, and facilitating connections with the grants management department at the Hartford Foundation in order to complete the grantmaking process.

The Hartford Foundation also provides support to GTCF behind the scenes, including weekly internal meetings to discuss GTCF progress, toolkits that provide information and templates to guide the process, and support from the Director of Strategic Learning and Evaluation, the Communications Department, and the Grants Administration Department. The Hartford Foundation is also planning a series of trainings about inclusive processes, for committee members as well as the CF team, in fall 2021.

Committee members are generally pleased with the supports that the Hartford Foundation is providing to them, but identified some areas where they would like additional support. These included support with outreach to communities, more up-front information about the process as a whole, more information about what is needed to finalize grant recommendations, and more support with using Google Drive. An additional, significant concern is with sustainability of the GTCF after the initial \$50,000 is allocated. Communities are hoping for additional funds, and/or help with fundraising to continue the work.

HOW WILL THE FOUNDATION AND COMMUNITIES ADDRESS THE INHERENT POWER IMBALANCES BETWEEN FUNDER AND GRANTEE? *(Encouraging broad and inclusive civic engagement)*

The Hartford Foundation has continued to model a cooperative and inclusive approach to the GTCF project, with Community Funds team members being sensitive to the importance of allowing communities to control their processes as much as possible.

The CF team also supports communities with issues and concerns, but does not try to impose solutions on the communities. Selection and Advisory committee members with whom we have spoken have indicated that they view their relationship with their CF liaison as positive and productive. Some have also noted that they appreciate that the Hartford Foundation has provided tools and resources but encouraged communities to use them in ways that work for them, rather than mandate their use at a particular time or in a certain way.

There has been only one community in which we are aware of resistance to the Hartford Foundation's expectations for the GTCF; the Foundation is continuing to work with this community to resolve these issues.

HOW DOES THE EVALUATION TEAM PARTNER IN BUILDING SHARED POWER WITH COMMUNITY AND FOUNDATION STAKEHOLDERS?

As evaluators, we do not see ourselves as objective observers; we are aware that we bring our own biases to this work. We have been seeking to be transparent with Advisory Committees about how information is gathered, stored, and shared with the Hartford Foundation, and we have allowed communities the ability to review information prior to our sharing it with the Hartford Foundation or in this report.

We have also sought to engage Advisory Committee members in conversations about the outcomes they are interested in learning more about, and how we can work together to answer these questions. During Year Two, this took place during Advisory Committee meetings in Deep Dive communities; we are exploring establishing an Evaluation Advisory Committee made up of interested Advisory Committee members to help guide our evaluation work in Year Three.

MOVING GTCF FORWARD, AND NEW AREAS FOR EXPLORATION

While the GTCF has been largely successful so far, Year Three will bring two significant inflection points to the process. It is during this year that some Advisory Committees will allocate the last of the initial \$50,000 provided to their towns, leaving them with only a small return on the endowed funds unless they do substantial fundraising. Also, the terms of many Advisory Committee members will expire, making it necessary for committees to recruit new members. These are two inflection points which could cause some GTCF Advisory Committees to either disband, or substantially slow down their work.

It is vitally important for the ongoing success of GTCF that the Hartford Foundation support communities in recruiting new Advisory Committee members, and in accessing additional funding after their original funding is depleted.

Lack of attention to these issues risks losing the hard work and good will that have been built up in the communities through the GTCF process. Our report provides specific recommendations for meeting these challenges, and also lists questions that we hope to address during the third and final year of our evaluation.