



Greater Together Community Funds

3rd Quarter 2025 Town Hall



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Agenda for our Time Together:

- I. Welcome**
- II. The Evolution of Greater Together Community Funds Program**
- III. Aligning GTCF grantmaking with Community Impact principles and values**
- IV. Program Updates & Announcements**
- V. Closing/Next Steps**



Let's Warm Up the Chat!

Share a fall activity or event in
your town that you'd
recommend.



The Evolution of Greater Together Community Funds



Icebreaker: Favorite Local Fall Activity

- St. Peter's Pumpkin Fest
- Connecticut Trolley Museum. Pumpkin patch for kids.
- Rails to the Dark Side for the older populations
- Food Truck Festival
- Walking to enjoy the crisp fall
- Applefest
- Somers- Fairs
- Corn Maze (South Windsor)
- Lost Acres Orchard in Granby - Apple picking and they have a small cafe and an awesome bakery! A little Vermont feel!
- Somers - Scarecrow Festival
- Walk in the falling leaves
- Walk in Bushnell Park
- Apple picking at Bushy Hill Orchards in Granby
- Fall Fest
- Apple Fest weekend of October 17
- Granby Artist Association Open Studio this weekend
- Pumpkin patch at the trolley museum
- Pumpkin Fest is THIS WEEKEND - Rte 85 in Hebron

Local Favorite Breakfast Location

- Country Diner in Enfield
- Pastrami on Wry - Center Street, Manchester
- Isaac's in Bloomfield
- Country Diner in Enfield
- Pastrami on Wry
- Julien's in Granby
- Mitchells in Rocky Hill
- Breakaway Bistro in Avon
- Shady Glen Manchester
- Aroma bistro in Wethersfield
- Sally and Bobs West Hartford
- Harvest Café
- The Flour Girl in Hebron & Tallwood Golf
- Angry Egg in Manchester
- Little Oak Cafe in Canton
- Gina Marie's in Hebron
- Chez Ben in Manchester for poutine
- Blue House Bagel in Canton
- Shop Two Coffee in Marlborough
- Simsbury - Harvest Café
- Sally and Bobs West Hartford

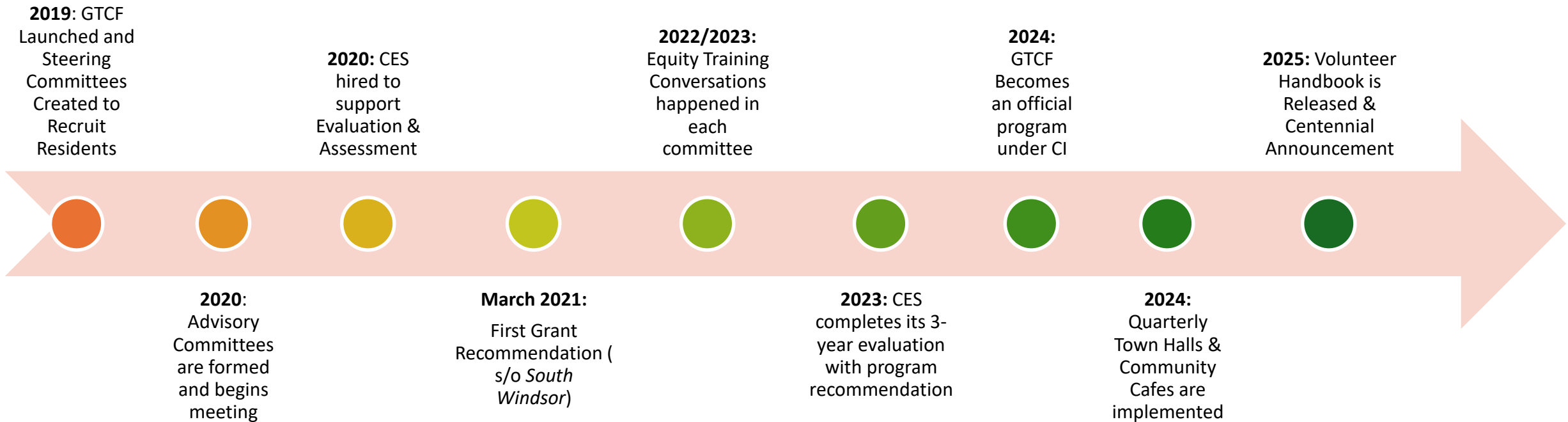
In 2019, the Hartford Foundation launched the Greater Together Community Funds to:

1. Support communities taking **ownership around the needs** of their towns,
2. Encourage broad and inclusive **civic engagement**, and
3. **Anchor** the Foundation in each town.



Greater Together Community Funds

In **2019**, the Hartford Foundation launched the Greater Together Community Funds to: **1.)** Support communities taking ownership around the needs of their towns, **2.)** encourage broad and inclusive civic engagement, and **3.)** anchor the Foundation in each town.



Greater Together Community Funds Today!



29 towns
have established
GTCF committees



700+ Volunteers
Engaged since
beginning of the
program. **228 currently**



872 grants
have been made
through this
process



\$3.44M
has been awarded in
Community Funds
grants



48% of grantees
are new to the
Foundation

****Non-audited numbers – as of
September 9, 2025**

Continuous Program-wide enhancements for 2026 & Beyond...

Centralized Volunteer Management to Support Volunteer Experience – Update GTCF Volunteer Handbook, offer more guidance and tools

Feedback loops & Input Surveys – accessing the volunteer experience for continuous improvements

Capacity Building of Committees and Leadership Development of volunteers – continuous learning opportunities & convenings

Coordinated Grantmaking and Learning – developing reciprocal learning relationship to inform our strategies around needs.



Community Impact & GTCF

Aligning GTCF grantmaking with Community Impact Principles & Values

Kate Szczerbacki, Director of Learning, Evaluation, and Capacity Building

What We Hope You Walk Away with Today

- Better sense of the Community Impact, including how the Community Funds program is a part of the department
- Greater understanding of some of the guiding principles of CI's approach – including the importance of listening to nonprofits and using feedback to improve processes
- Examples of getting and using nonprofit feedback
- Clearer picture of how ongoing CI process improvement involves Community Funds



Community Impact Department Composition



HFPG Mission:

Putting **philanthropy** into action to create **lasting solutions** that result in **vibrant communities** within the Greater Hartford region.

Our Strategic Commitment:

Dismantle Structural Racism

- **Shifting power:** change makeup of who benefits from opportunity (program, service, experience, funding) and who makes decisions about practice, policy and allocation of resources
- **Building power (policy and practice):** support and lead efforts to change organizational and systemic policies and practice to advance racial and ethnic equity
- **Influencing attitudes and beliefs:** support and lead awareness, education, training and movement building to address individual, organizational and systemic bias



Advance Equitable Economic and Social Mobility

Focusing on strategies that will make progress in outcome areas:

- Increase number of Hartford residents living in **thriving neighborhoods**
- Improve **physical and mental health** of residents
- Increase quality **employment and educational opportunities**
- Increase **civic and resident engagement**
- Expand **equity and inclusion in the arts and culture**

*Concepts, definitions, and implementation are informed by learning with grantees and broader community.

Grantmaking Outcome Areas are portfolios of grants aligned with:

Mission: Putting philanthropy into action to **create lasting solutions that result in vibrant communities** within the Greater Hartford region

Strategic Commitment: Dismantling structural racism and advancing equitable social and economic mobility

Arts and Culture:

Arts organizations and programming that are more reflective of and relevant to the interests of all residents and expanded collaboration among artists and arts organizations

Basic Human Needs:

increased food security, reduced homelessness, greater uptake of physical and mental health supports

Civic and Resident Engagement:

Greater ability among residents to influence government, increased civic trust, better supported community organizing, and strengthened collaboration for social change

Employment Opportunities:

increased employment in quality jobs, increased high school completion, and increased persistence and completion of post-secondary degrees and credentialing programs

Thriving Neighborhoods:

preservation and new development of neighborhood assets, increased connectedness in neighborhoods, increased number of residents living in stable housing, increased number of stable, resident-owned small businesses

Community Leadership:

exploratory strategies, transformative and power-shifting work, preparedness and responsiveness for time-critical need or opportunity



How Do the Community Funds Fit into CI?

Each town fund and volunteer is a partner in implementing the Hartford Foundation's impact in their town and the Greater Hartford Region

Other parts of CI are learning from the Community Funds Program grantmaking

- Power-sharing and responsiveness in grantmaking – participatory grantmaking is an innovative practice
- New organizations, programs and approaches being introduced to the Foundation
- Broad interest in using community data and knowledge in better understanding town/resident needs and assets

Guiding Principles in Community Impact:

Trust-based Philanthropy Principles

Do the Homework:

Funders should take the lead in learning about nonprofits — not the other way around. **Don't make grantees jump through hoops** just to get in the door.

Keep It Simple:

Minimize paperwork and focus on what we need to know. **Streamlined applications and reports** mean grantees can spend more time on their mission.

Be Open and Responsive:

Share clearly, listen actively, and communicate with transparency. Trust grows when funders are **honest, timely, and power-aware**.

Listen and Act on Feedback:

Grantees and communities know what's working. Regular feedback helps funders improve and keeps strategies **grounded in real-world experience**.

Go Beyond the Check:

Support doesn't stop at funding. The Foundation through the Nonprofit Support Program (NSP), capacity building grants, and other programs helps **strengthen leadership, operations, and organizational resilience**.

Provide Flexible, Long-Term Support: Change takes time.

Through its annual grantmaking, the Foundation offers many organizations multi-year, unrestricted funding (e.g. core operating support) so nonprofits can plan ahead, adapt, and sustain their work and outcomes.



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Guiding Principles in Community Impact: Equitable Evaluation & Learning

Learning Should Advance Equity

- **Evaluation and learning are not neutral.** How learning is produced and used should help move us toward a more just world not just measure results.
- Foundations aren't just the audience; **we're part of what's being evaluated.**

Learning Processes Should be Equitable: If we value equity, our learning practices must be **inclusive of community perspectives:**

- Grantees are not just recipients of funding – **they're experts.**
- Grantees and communities should help shape what's asked, how it's measured, and how learning is used.

Go Beyond “Did It Work? Or What was the Impact?” We must ask deeper questions:

- *Who did it work for?*
- *What systems or histories shaped this?*
- *How do our own practices help or hinder change?*

Learning and evaluation should help funders, grantees, and communities evolve. Drawn from the [Equitable Evaluation Framework](#)





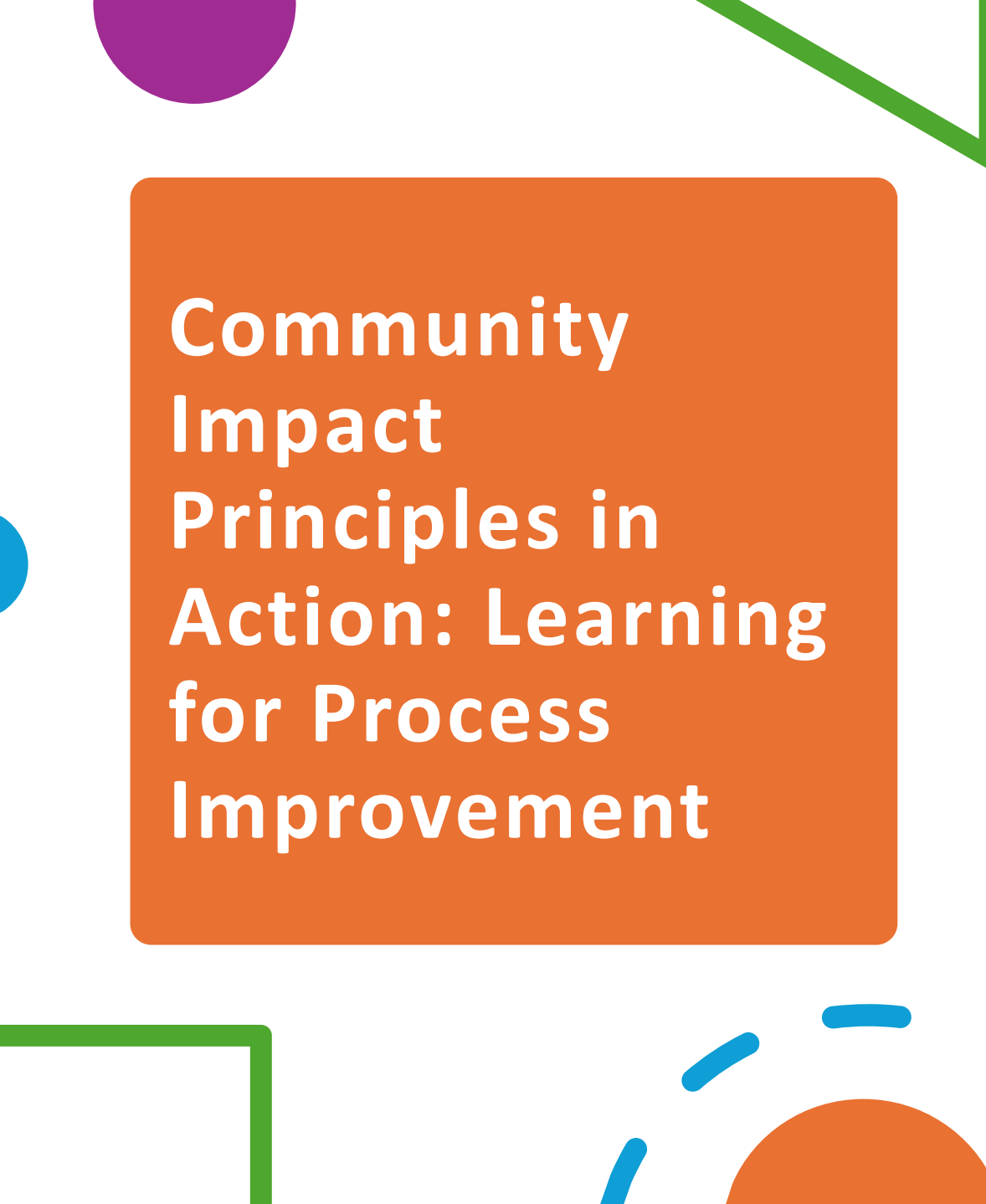
Community Impact Principles in Action: Learning for Process Improvement

It is *essential* to improve processes and adapt tools: What worked at one time, will not always work over the longer-term

A cross-functional **Grants Process Team** was created in 2021 to redesign our grants process from “soup to nuts” with the goal of ensuring that our process is inclusive, accessible, and functional for both staff and grantees.

Guiding Goals and Principles:

1. Community need at the center of all grant decisions
 2. Processes reflect our grantees as trusted partners with a goal to center learning that moves their work forward
 3. Minimize administrative burden for grantees and the Foundation
 4. Process is accessible and inclusive for grantees
 5. Fully utilize our technology platform
- 



Community Impact Principles in Action: Learning for Process Improvement

Incorporated Staff and Grantee Perspectives:

- Staff focus groups and interviews
- Review of organizational artifacts, best practices from the field (e.g. emails, notes, reports, papers)
- Grantee survey (~150 respondents)
- Redesigned application question review by CI staff, a cross-section grantees (16 orgs), and a DEI consultant

Some of what we put into action :

- Entire grant process resides in grants management platform (GLM)
- Internal data fields/coding allowing for enhanced data analysis
- Standardized questions and language across application processes
- Ability to submit a grant inquiry via the website
- Revised application questions that are standardized across applications, written in more accessible and culturally relevant language
- Application resources (e.g. outcomes guidance document, sample budget form)
- Reduced burden to provide information (e.g. eliminate double-barreled questions, no board chair signature, org info pulled from org profile)
- Grant-specific, grantee-developed outcomes and measurements instead of standard reporting form

Community Principles in Action: Learning from Nonprofit Partners



Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) Grantee Perception Study

- In 2024, surveyed 298 grantees with an open grant in the last 12-18 months
- Received 173 responses (58% response rate)
- [CEP Survey Results](#) available, with comparison to peers and our own 2017 results
- Next: Continue to integrate results (e.g.

Post-Application Survey

- Collected anonymous, voluntary survey data from May 2023 to April 2024
- Received 71 responses (~20% completion rate)
- Produced [Grants Process Feedback and Action Summary](#)
- Re-designed and relaunched in August 2025
- Next: Continued analysis of ongoing responses to guide improvements and new resources

Three-Year Grants Portfolio Lookback Analysis

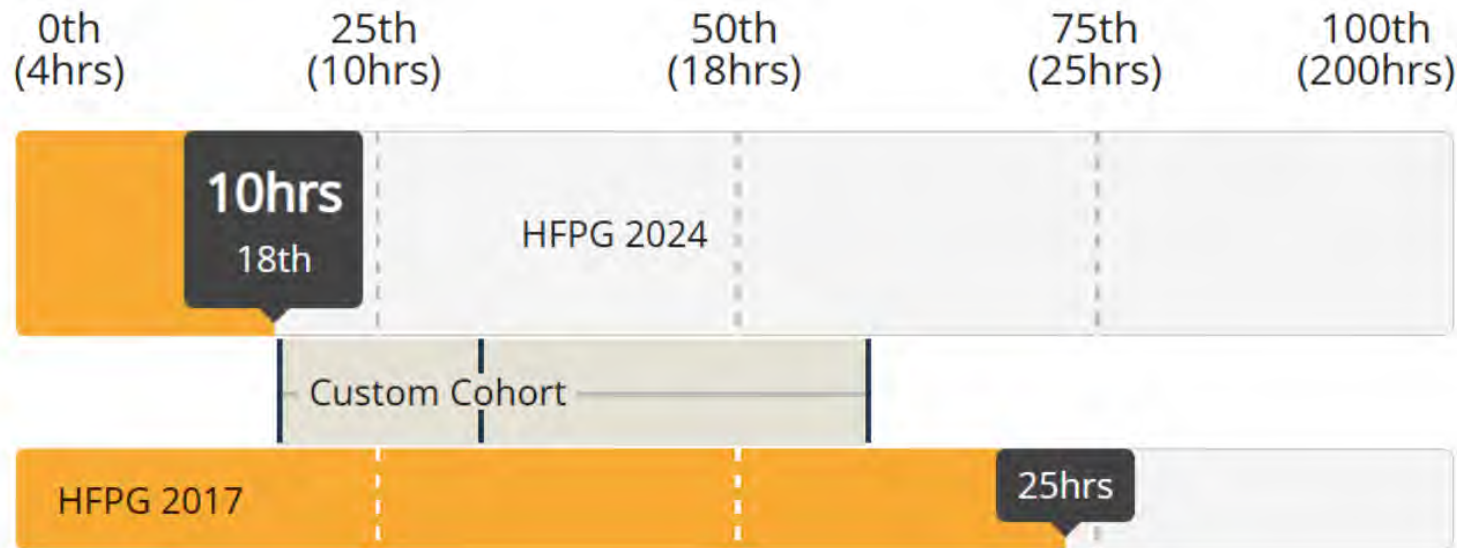
- Reviewed all Foundation-directed (non-donor-advised) grants from 2021-2023 for trends in grant type, size, period cross-referenced with grantee information (e.g. annual operating budget, leadership demographics)
- Included 1,223 grants across 488 unique organizations
- Next: Analysis of Foundation grantmaking portfolio to be conducted and published annually

Grantee Reporting and Conversations with Partners

- Trends and themes emerging from grantee reporting
- Suggestions and concerns arising from officers' conversations with grantees and other partners
- Next: Incorporation of ideas into Grants Process Team reviews, outcome area strategy, and other CI work

Application Experience

Median Hours Spent on Proposal Process



- “The Hartford Foundation’s processes are clear and well-organized, ensuring that everyone involved understands the steps required for application, funding, and program implementation.”

- - CEP Grantee Perception Study Survey respondent

Learning for Process Improvement in Community Funds

What does this mean for GTCF?

1. Templates and processes we developed provided committees at the launch are now outdated and inconsistent with CI practices and the broader field
2. Community Funds can benefit from data collected and improvements made elsewhere in Community Impact
 - Grant processes supported by GLM platform
 - More detailed and compiled grants data
 - Standard, staff- and grantee-reviewed application questions
 - Outcomes-focused, grantee-developed reporting
 - CF applicants can receive and respond to post-application survey
3. Greater co-learning and adaptation across CI

Highlights

- **Community Funds are an integral part of Community Impact** at the Hartford Foundation
- Community Impact is **guided by trust-based, equitable principles that help us be responsive to community** – including the perspectives and experiences of our nonprofit partners
- Trust and equity guidelines call on us to not only **get feedback from these partners, but to act on this information** for improved processes and impact
- **We're not striving for perfection; we're striving for excellence** – and we're fortunate to have Community Funds volunteers on that journey





Question & Answer

Any questions on Community Impact?



GTCF Grantmaking Update

Assessing Application Questions and Getting your reflections.

Juhi Vajpayee Gawli, Learning & Evaluation Officer

Reflecting Back

- **Grantmaking Pause** – November 16th - March 31st
- **Community Funds Grantmaking added to Grant Lifecycle Manager** – The Community Funds program is being added to the existing Hartford Foundation grantmaking portal.
- **What's happened so far:**
 - o Analysis of committee application questions
 - o Reflections survey
 - o Individual overview of potential 2026 process with committee chairs

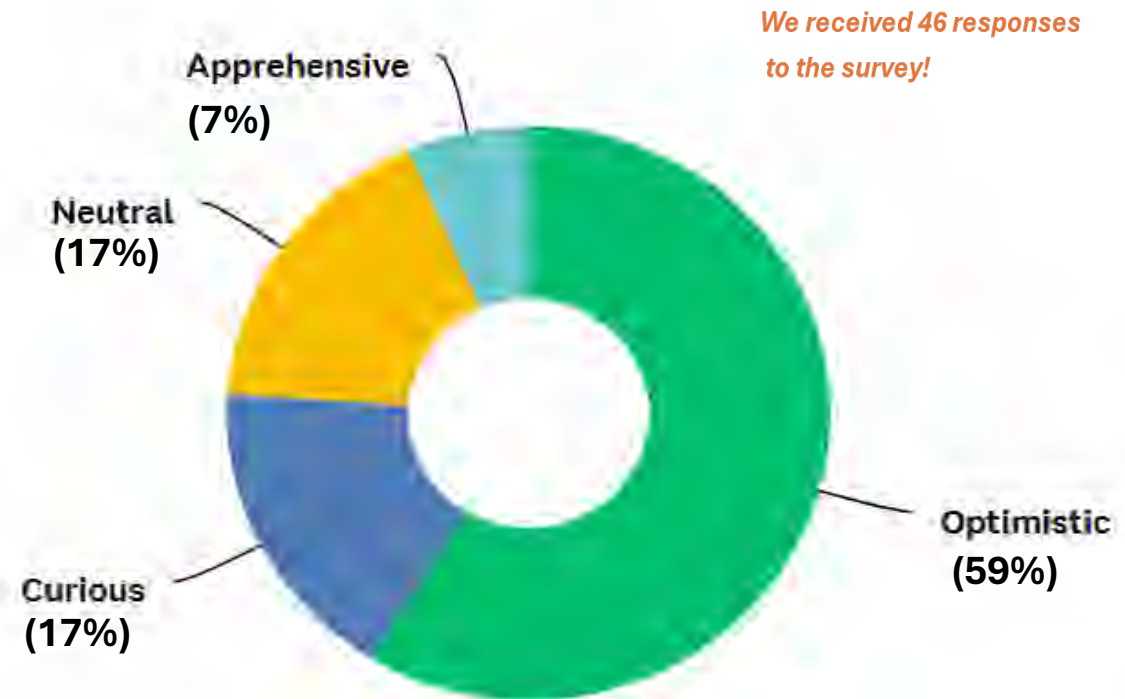


Some takeaways from the short reflection survey

Most volunteers who responded to the survey are **optimistic and believe this will be a helpful and positive shift in their grantmaking process** (59%).

Some expressed curiosity and see the potential with the new process but have more questions on how it would be implemented (17%).

Some volunteers (7%) highlighted apprehension and feeling uneasy on how the new process would impact current aspects of their grantmaking approach.



Responses to Feelings Towards the Common Grant Application Process

Guidance Needs: Where Committees Want More Support & Clarity

**Foundation's
grantmaking practices
& priorities
(43%)**

**Evaluating
community needs
(43%)**

**Post award
follow-up, reporting
& learning
(37%)**

**Application review
and rubric use for
funding decisions
(35%)**

**Application process &
format
(30%)**

Other guidance needs lifted by volunteers were around nonprofit status and due diligence (28%), equity practices and considerations in grantmaking (26%), and setting funding priorities (24%)

Open Feedback

On clarity, alignment and additional guidance

- More guidance and clarity on Community Funds' role, alignment with HFPG priorities, and the new streamlined process.
- Requests for additional tools, templates, and resources for GTCF grantmaking.
- Guidance on due diligence and financial review components of grantmaking (e.g., budgets, nonprofit status, etc.)

On flexibility in application and decision-making

- Need for flexibility in application questions, rubric and funding decision making to reflect varied community needs across towns.
- Some interest in deeper dives into other committees' rubrics, application processes, and town-specific priorities.

On supporting grantees

- Ways to promote grantees' work better.
- Concerns over overburdening applicants with too many questions (or long application process).

Bonus: Some Positive Reflections!

Some volunteers voiced excitement about the upcoming changes, collaborative approach and information shared.



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GTCT Grantmaking Update

More about what the process will look like in 2026.

Grantmaking Roles: Committee vs. Foundation Roles



The Committee's Role: To provide recommendations for funding based on insight and knowledge of community needs.

What that looks like:

- Assessing community needs
- Developing a RFP to respond to community needs and assessing proposals received
- Conducting community outreach



The Foundation's Role: To administer an equitable grantmaking process for nonprofit community partners to support community needs.

What that looks like:

- Common application for community funds
- Due diligence for eligibility
- Training and support to committees
- Facilitating payment to nonprofits

2026 GTCF Grantmaking Process:

What is not changing?

- Committee decision making power for recommendations
- Committee's ability to support and build relationships with applicants and their communities

What is changing?

- Streamlined administrative processes for all
- Simplified workflow leading to shorter turn around for approvals
- Due diligence for eligibility completed by the Foundation prior to committee review
- Simpler process navigation for nonprofits

Committees continues to have Decision-making over:

- RFP Priorities & Amounts
- Grantmaking Timeline
- Marketing & Outreach
- Who & How Much to Fund
- Community Events

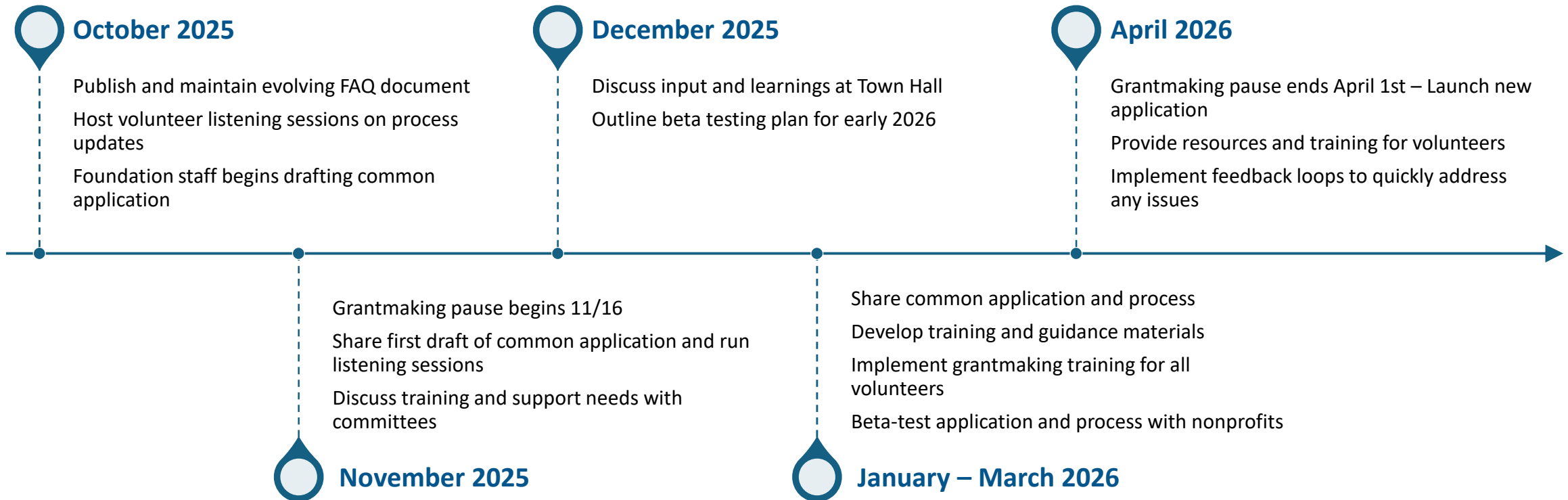


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GTCF Grantmaking Update Timeline





GTCF Program Updates & Announcements

Looking Forward to the Remainder of 2025 and 2026!

Save The Date: Our First-Ever GTCF Volunteer Summit!

When:

Saturday, February 28th, 2026
9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

*Inclement weather date:
Saturday, March 7th*

Where:

Goodwin University
1 Riverside Dr. East Hartford, CT

Volunteer Input Gathering:
October 2025



Still to come in 2025



**Volunteer
Summit Input**

Coming soon...



**Sharing Draft
Common
Application**

November 2025



**Grantmaking
pause begins**

November 15th



**Hartford
Foundation Gala**

December 5th



**GTCF
Town Hall**

December 9th



**2026 Goal
Setting and
Work Planning**

December –
March 26



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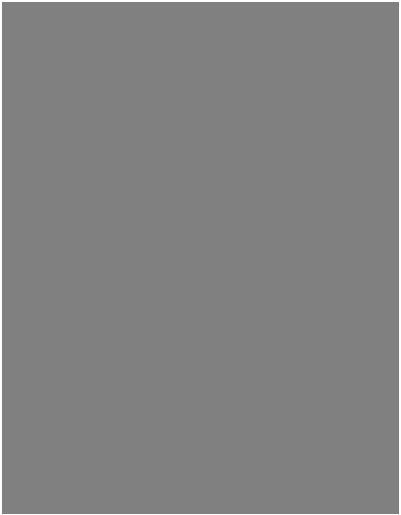
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Sneak Peek into Q1 2026

- **Updates to the Volunteer Handbook & 2026 Volunteer Agreements**
January 2026
- **2026 Workplans: Volunteer Recruitment & Grant Cycles**
December 2025 – March 2026
- **Beta Testing the New Grantmaking Process**
February 2026
- **2026 Volunteer Summit**
February 27





THANK YOU!

For Questions and Feedback, contact your GTCF Liaison:

- Melissa Marsh at MMMarsh@hfpg.org
- Tasheenah Brown at TBrown@hfpg.org