

A high-angle photograph of a child with brown hair in a ponytail, wearing a light blue shirt, playing with colorful geometric toys on a red tarp. The toys include a large structure made of translucent plastic rods and connectors, several large colored balls (orange, yellow, green, blue), and a blue geometric shape. The child's hands are visible, interacting with the toys.

# Early INSIGHTS

## 2022-2023 Grants Analysis



December 10, 2025



# ABOUT THE ENDOWMENT

The Endowment's mission is to improve the health, education, safety, and economic opportunity of every person in New Hanover County. The Endowment was established from the sale of the county-owned New Hanover Regional Medical Center to Novant Health in 2020. The initial fund has grown from nearly \$1.3 billion to more than \$1.7 billion, allowing The Endowment to award millions in grants to our community every year, in perpetuity.



**Education**



**Social and Health  
Equity**



**Community  
Safety**



**Community  
Development**

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## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

### Key Goals

Summarize activities and outcomes for grants awarded in 2022 and 2023 and closed by the end of 2023



What was done?



Which strategic pillars were touched?



What services were supported?



Who benefitted? Were the grants used as expected?



What outcomes did the grants support?

### Data and Methods

Review qualitative grantee reports and analyze grantee-reported activities, outcomes, and feedback.

### Limitations

This analysis draws from information shared by grantees in their final reports. While the level of detail varied across organizations, the findings offer valuable insights into progress and areas for continued learning by us.





Dear New Hanover County Community, Friends, and Partners,

Five years ago, the New Hanover Community Endowment was created through the sale of New Hanover Regional Medical Center to Novant Health, Inc. The proceeds of that transaction seeded the Endowment, establishing a permanent resource to strengthen and sustain our community. In 2022, our operations began with a bold vision to invest in the strength, resilience, and well-being of New Hanover County. We set out with open minds and an unwavering commitment to the long-term flourishing of our county and region.

In these five years, our Board of Directors and staff, supported by our Community Advisory Council, have laid a strong foundation, both figuratively and literally. From building infrastructure and staffing, to shaping strategy, to awarding our first grants, we have worked deliberately to create a stable, responsive, and values-driven institution. Guided by our founding documents, we have navigated evolving community needs, while keeping our focus firmly on impact and service.

This report reflects on our opening chapter: it highlights insights from our 2022 and 2023 grants, showing their reach and impact. 2024 grants are not yet reporting, but we look forward to continuing to share outcomes and the difference our investments will make in advancing our mission, to improve the health, education, safety and economic opportunity of every person in new Hanover County.

As we look ahead with hope, focus, and determination, our next chapter is about deepening impact, strengthening relationships, and sustaining the work for the long term.

We hope you enjoy reading this report and, like us, see the potential in all that is unfolding across our community. Thanks to our grantees, partners, staff, board, Community Advisory Council, and neighbors, we move forward grounded in purpose, inspired by the promise of what we can achieve together.

With gratitude and resolve,



**Sophie Dagenais,**  
Interim President  
and CEO



**Shannon Winslow,**  
*Board Chair*

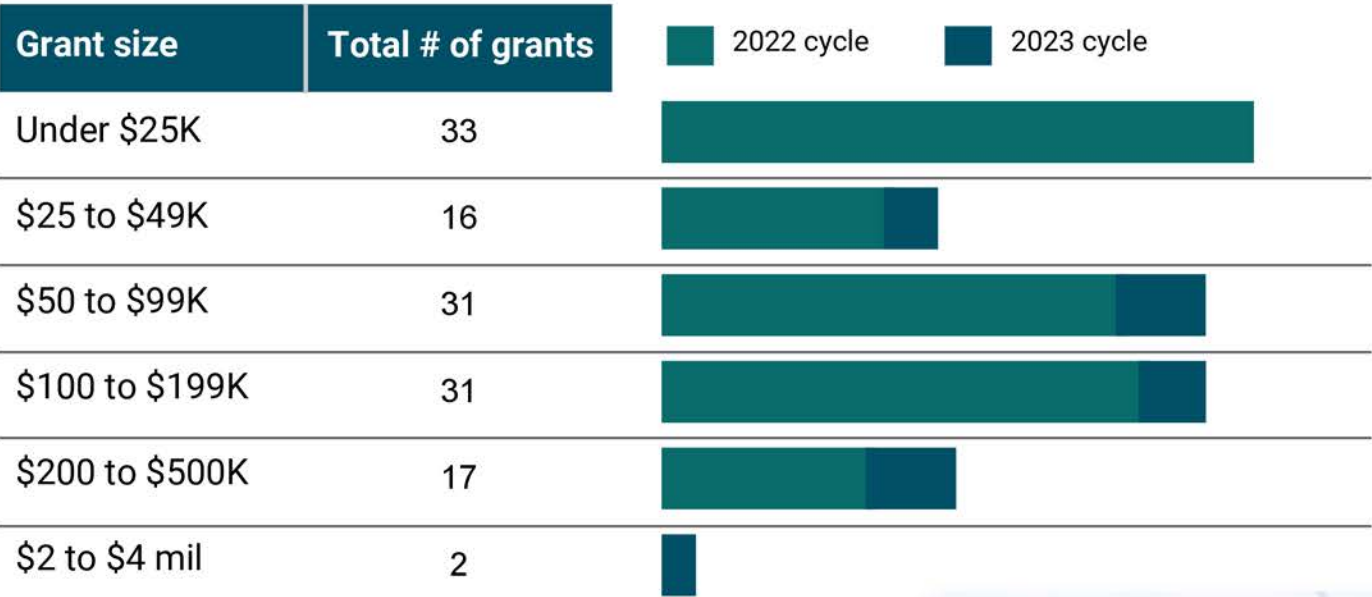


# GRANTS INCLUDED IN ANALYSIS

This analysis includes only The Endowment grants that were awarded in 2022-2023 and fully spent by the end of 2023. Specifically, in 2022 and 2023, The Endowment awarded 144 grants totaling \$64.2. This report does not include our 2023 multi-year grants.

Grants in analysis	2022 cycle	2023 cycle	Total
Number	111 grants	19 grants	130 grants
Amount	\$9.3 mil	\$8.5 mil	\$17.8 mil

The majority of grants analyzed were under \$100,000, with smaller awards in 2022 and larger awards in 2023.



## CROSS CUTTING REACH

Grants were often cross-cutting in the activities they supported, their target outcomes, and the strategic pillar of the Endowment they touched. For example:

- A grant can be used for capital improvements and also to support program costs
- A grant can target housing safety and stability for low-income homeowners, while also addressing health issues that arise from unsafe housing.

Many of the grants supported different types of activities and advanced outcomes across multiple pillars.





# GRANT PURPOSES:

Grants were used for four key purposes: programs and services; equipment purchases; construction and capital improvement; and capacity-building initiatives.

A majority of the grants supported program and service costs, with staffing as the largest area of program support. Construction and capital improvements accounted for some of the biggest grants, including \$2 million for the MedNorth Health Center and \$4 million to YMCA of Southeastern North Carolina.

## 100

### PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Costs of providing direct services, including:

- Staffing
- Materials, tools,
- Outreach, marketing
- Financial assistance for participants (e.g., scholarships, stipends, bus passes)

## 37

### CAPITAL EQUIPMENT PURCHASE

Large-scale equipment, including:

- Vehicles
- HVAC systems
- Refrigerators
- Computers

## 21

### CONSTRUCTION, CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT

New construction or renovation of facilities and infrastructure

## 22

### OTHER CAPACITY- BUILDING

Wide variety of supports for building organizational or community capacity, including:

- Strategic planning
- Resource mapping
- Needs assessments or other research
- Tech platform or software upgrade



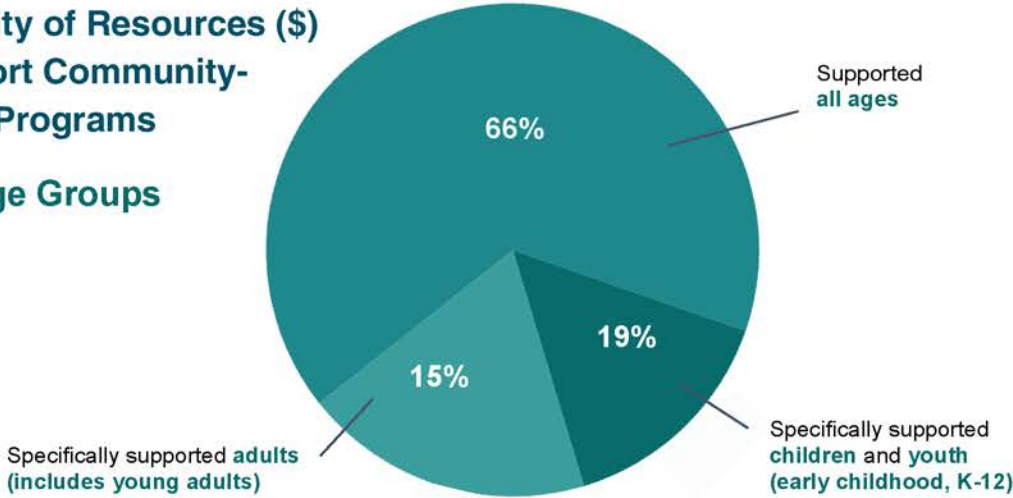
# EARLY RETURNS:

Grants supported outcomes for grantee organizations, the individuals and families they served, and the community as a whole.

Grantee Organizations	Individuals, Families, Children	Community
Enhanced infrastructure: facilities, equipment, technology, operations	Increased access to healthcare services and health resources	Enhanced community infrastructure
Enhanced staff capacity and talent pool	Increased access to nutritious food	Increased safety and preparedness
Increased partnerships and collaborations	Increased access to affordable and stable housing	Strengthened workforce
Increased service capacity and reach	Increased access to skill-building and enrichment opportunities	Increased community integration, inclusion and connectedness
Increased community awareness and engagement		



Majority of Resources (\$) Support Community-Wide Programs By Age Groups



58% of grants
Supported outcomes in one pillar
42% of grants
Supported outcomes in multiple pillars





## IMPACT BY STRATEGIC PILLAR

# Social & Health Equity

**80** Grants  
Awarded  
in 2022-2023

The Social & Health Equity pillar received the highest number of grants, with 80 grants dedicated to improving health outcomes and fostering an inclusive community.

### Grants Supported:

- Enhanced access to healthcare, including preventive care, chronic disease management, mental health services, and dental support.
- Programs to alleviate food insecurity through mobile pantries and distribution initiatives.
- Support for people with disabilities and programs focused on inclusion.
- Workforce development initiatives and water safety programs.



**45** Grants expanded access to vital healthcare services for underserved populations.



**20** Grants addressed hunger, leading to improved food access for individuals and families.





## FEAST DOWN EAST: FROM SEED TO TUMMY

For nearly two decades, **Feast Down East** has been building a stronger, healthier food system in Southeastern North Carolina. What began in 2006 UNC Wilmington sociology professor Leslie Hossfeld has grown into a dynamic nonprofit that now supports 57 local farms, brings fresh produce to neighborhoods, businesses, and nonprofits across three counties, and ensures families have access to real food that nourishes both body and community.

The Endowment's funding has been transformational. By covering two-thirds of the organization's Mobile Market staff and supporting core administrative positions, as well as a portion of Mobile Market operating costs, the grant has strengthened sustainability in an area where nonprofits often struggle. "Staff are the heartbeat of our program," said Jordyn Appel-Hughes, Executive Director. "People return to the Mobile Market because they know and trust the staff. That trust is everything."

The impact is clear. Feast Down East's Food RX program, which once processed less than \$100 a month in prescription food vouchers, now sees thousands of dollars circulating through its markets each month. Combined with "double-up" benefits that match SNAP dollars, customers can stretch their grocery budgets further while accessing fresh, local produce and proteins. One shopper put it simply: because of the program, she could buy healthy food and still pay her electric bill.

The Mobile Market itself has flourished, operating at 17 regular sites and hosting up to four pop-up markets each month. Many of its volunteers are seniors, some serving as community food ambassadors who spread the word, post schedules on bulletin boards, and remind neighbors when the market rolls into their community. That grassroots energy has helped the program achieve a 65–75% customer return rate, a loyalty measure any retailer would envy.

Beyond feeding families, The Endowment's investment has allowed Feast Down East to strengthen its reach through partnerships with more than 20 local nonprofits, including Kids Making It, the Harrelson Center, Catholic Charities, and Communities in Schools. It has also made space for long-term planning: a new Development Director, supported by the grant, is working with leadership to chart a sustainability vision that ensures the organization will thrive beyond 2027.

As the organization approaches its 20th anniversary, staff reflect with pride on what they call "closing the food system loop, from seed to tummy." Thanks to steady support, they can now focus not only on today's harvest, but on ensuring that generations to come will continue to have access to food that is fresh and local.

**"Feast Down East closes the food system loop, from seed to tummy. With The Endowment's support, we're not just feeding families today, we're building a sustainable food future."**

Jordyn Appel-Hughes, Executive Director

Discover more grantee stories at [theendowment.org](https://theendowment.org)





## IMPACT BY STRATEGIC PILLAR

# Education

**56** Grants  
Awarded  
in 2022-2023

A total of 56 grants were awarded under the Education pillar to create a world-class public education system and equip children and adults with the tools for success.

### Grants Supported:

- Academic and extracurricular activities.
- Programs for developmental and social-emotional growth.
- Postsecondary education and career readiness initiatives.
- Early childhood development programs.



**56** Grants fostered skill-building and educational advancement, including academic support and career readiness programs.



**33** Grants focused on early childhood access, facility upgrades, and education service delivery for children and youth





## SMART START: BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS FOR FAMILIES

**Smart Start** is helping families and young children in New Hanover County thrive. In 2022, a \$120,000 grant from The Endowment, funded a plan to provide more support for friends, family, and neighbor caregivers and improve early childhood services. Building on that work, a 2023 grant of \$659,000 put the plan into action by expanding the long-standing Circle of Parents program and launching Kaleidoscope Play & Learn, a flexible, evidence-based playgroup where parents and children can grow together. Both programs help caregivers feel confident in supporting children's early learning and development.

The playgroups quickly became more than simple gatherings. They evolved into welcoming spaces where children could explore at their own pace and parents could build confidence in their parenting journey. One mother of a two-year-old worried her child's behavior was unusual—until she saw other toddlers doing the same thing. With gentle guidance from facilitators, she was reassured: “This is what two-year-olds do.”

The program's drop-in model removes the stigma and pressure often associated with traditional parenting classes. Parents can attend when it fits their schedules, often bringing their children to different library sites across the county. This casual approach broadens access without asking families to label themselves as needing help. As Executive Director Jane Morrow shared, “Parents are getting their needs met without the burden of commitment.”

The numbers highlight the program's reach. Dozens of families attend sessions at local libraries, Smart Start's office, and now the MLK Center. Some come regularly; others visit only once. Yet each interaction spreads knowledge, reduces isolation, and fosters connection. In one case, two families who met during the program later discovered they were back-door neighbors—forming friendships that extended well beyond the playroom.

The Endowment's investment also enabled Smart Start to add staff, strengthen community partnerships, and reimagine early childhood services. Collaborations with the public library system, Novant Health, and local schools continue to expand the program's impact.

Looking ahead, Smart Start is focused on sustainability. The success of Kaleidoscope Play & Learn shows the community's need for accessible, welcoming spaces where families can thrive. The organization is already integrating its work into a broader network of partnerships, ensuring that the lessons learned and relationships built continue to support families for years to come.





# IMPACT BY STRATEGIC PILLAR

## *Community Development*

**40** Grants  
Awarded  
in 2022-2023

The Endowment supported 40 grants in Community Development, focusing on building strong, resilient neighborhoods and economic opportunities.

**Grants Supported:**

- Housing services that increased access, quality, and safety (e.g., new units, rapid rehousing, home repair).
- Cross-sector partnerships and entrepreneurial support.
- Workforce development initiatives and business development.
- Improvements to infrastructure and community assets.



**20** Grants supported the creation of affordable, safe, and stable housing.



**20** Grants enhanced community infrastructure with assets like clinics, green spaces, and shelters.





## STEPUP WILMINGTON: BUILDING CAREERS, COMMUNITY, AND CONFIDENCE

For more than two decades, **StepUp Wilmington** has walked alongside community members in their pursuit of stable, dignified employment. What began as a small workforce initiative has grown into a comprehensive support network, where participants are not just trained for jobs, they are guided into careers, community, and confidence.

StepUp's impact is measurable and meaningful. In a single year, the organization helped place over 180 individuals into jobs, with average wages approaching \$17 an hour—more than double the state minimum. Many positions offer pathways for advancement, supported by partnerships with Cape Fear Community College and specialized training providers offering certifications in IT, forklift operations, peer support, and CDL licensing. One recent participant, after completing StepUp's five-day Jobs Week workshops, secured a \$90,000 IT position at UNC. "He rang the bell in our office, and the whole staff gathered to celebrate," the team recalled. "That moment was pure joy."

StepUp's mission extends beyond immediate employment. Staff remain intentionally connected to graduates for at least a year, providing mentorship in networking, workplace culture, and career advancement. This ongoing support helps individuals not only secure jobs, but thrive in them.

**"When people can support themselves,  
they regain their dignity."**

Teresa Wolf, Executive Director

The impact is deeply personal. One woman overcoming substance abuse and domestic violence rebuilt her life through StepUp and now serves her community as part of a local health organization. Another participant, once homeless, has become a homeowner with a perfect credit score after a decade of stable employment. As Teresa Wolf, Executive Director, notes, "When people can support themselves, they regain their dignity."

That dignity is reinforced by a network of more than 60 community partners, including the Domestic Violence Shelter, the Harrelson Center, local restaurants, and Live Oak Bank. Partners provide resources ranging from safe housing and professional clothing to laptops, ensuring candidates experience respect and belonging at every step.

The numbers tell a compelling story: roughly 75–80% of participants secure employment, and over the years, StepUp has placed more than 2,000 individuals, touching an estimated 20,000 lives when families and communities are counted. For those reentering society after incarceration, StepUp offers a lifeline, recognizing that steady employment is the strongest predictor of avoiding recidivism.

As workforce needs evolve, StepUp Wilmington is preparing to scale further, expanding tech training partnerships and deepening its role as a trusted community hub. "What people need most is love and hope—and a good job to build on both," said Teresa Wolf.

Discover more grantee stories at [theendowment.org](https://theendowment.org)





## IMPACT BY STRATEGIC PILLAR

# Community Safety

**22** Grants  
Awarded  
in 2022-2023

**22 grants, aimed to create a safer community and promote emergency preparedness.**

### Grants Supported:

- Emergency preparedness and disaster response programs.
- Reentry services for individuals transitioning back into the community.
- Workforce development programs.



**22** Grants provided essential vehicles and resources for service delivery and disaster response.



**22** Grants strengthened the community's capacity to prepare for and respond to emergencies.





## VOYAGE: BUILDING PATHWAYS FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

**Voyage** is helping youth and families across New Hanover County succeed by providing mentorship, education, and life skills. In 2022, a \$100,000 grant from The Endowment supported Voyage's summer employment program, giving students opportunities to gain work experience, mentorship, and critical life skills under the organization's mission of "connecting youth with pathways to success." In 2023, a \$112,000 grant helped Voyage expand student and family case management services in schools and afterschool community centers, adding four community health workers to support low-income students' academic progress, personal growth, and basic needs.

When changes in in-school funding threatened the stability of mentorship for about 100 students, Voyage maintained four key positions—thanks to timely support from The Endowment. "It was a saving grace," said Genna Wirth, Executive Director, reflecting on how these roles kept students connected to positive adult role models.

Today, Voyage's community health workers and resource coordinators support students at five New Hanover County schools, working with teachers to address challenges, provide tutoring, and strengthen social-emotional learning.

### The results are measurable:

- 70% of students improved by at least one letter grade
- 60% improved by two or more
- 15% increase in attendance
- 23% drop in behavior referrals

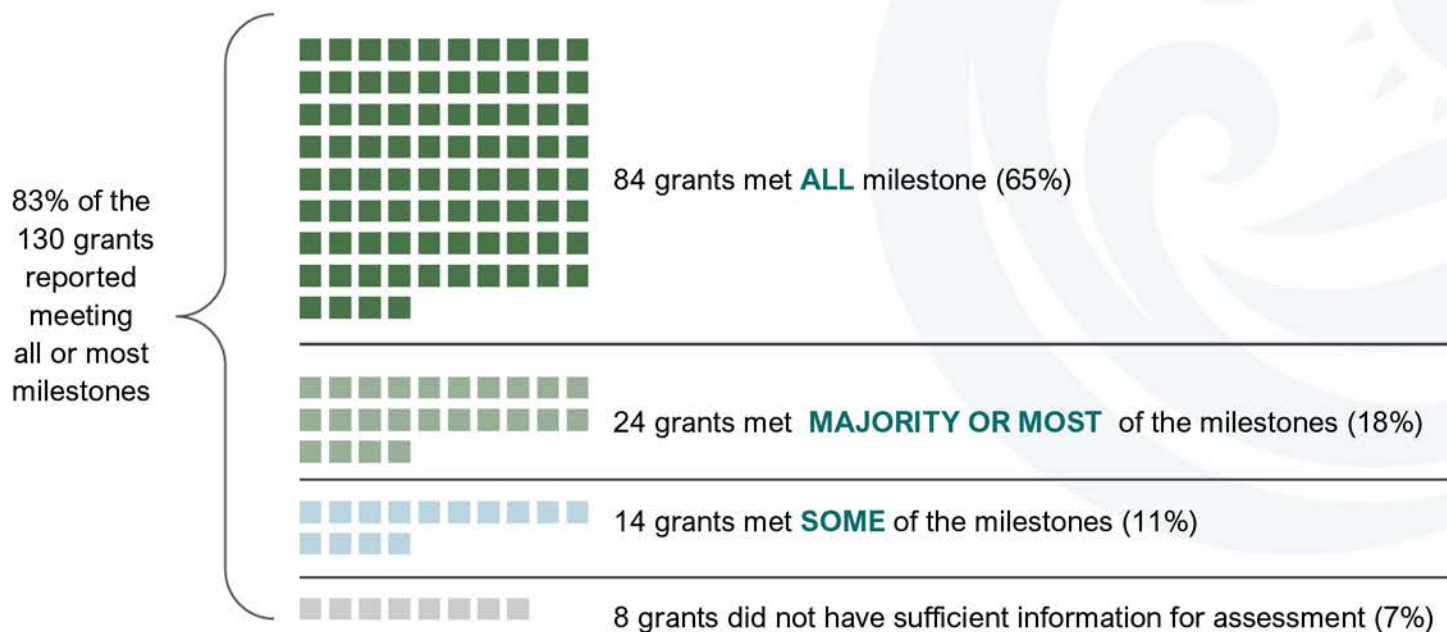
Students like Zion illustrate the impact of Voyage's programs—raising his math grade from failing to a B through consistent mentorship. Many students also participate in after-school programs with DREAMS, Young Scientist Academy, National Honor Society students, and local artists, and later join Voyage's summer employment program, gaining paychecks, mentorship, and career skills. "It's more than a paycheck," Genna explained. "It's about mentorship, financial literacy, and long-term planning."

The program's long-term impact is also clear in the stories of Shamaya and Heavyn. Shamaya, a former summer jobs participant, earned a Voyage scholarship, graduated with a degree in social work, and is now pursuing her master's at USC. Heavyn, another alum, has been nominated for the National Leadership Society at Fayetteville State University, continuing the cycle of achievement and civic engagement fostered by Voyage.

From classroom successes to college achievements, Voyage is cultivating a continuum of growth. The Endowment's funding has supported their work, helping ensure these programs and opportunities continue to empower students and families to navigate school, work, and life with confidence.



# GRANT MILESTONES



## LESSONS LEARNED

- 65% of grants met all planned milestones, 18% met most or the majority of milestones, 11% met some milestones, and 7% could not be fully assessed due to incomplete data.
- Most grantees reported strong achievement of their objectives; successes were driven by strong staff capacity, clear plans, and flexible support that allowed for timely adaptation to emerging challenges.
- Adaptability was critical: about a quarter of grants required changes to timelines, partnerships, or program goals as grantees responded to community feedback or unexpected hurdles.
- Projects falling short of all milestones often faced barriers such as staffing and retention struggles, inflation, vendor or supply chain delays, administrative or permitting complications, and difficulties in engaging target populations.
- Grants enabled essential capacity-building, capital improvements, and expanded services. This led to sustainable increases in organizational effectiveness and service reach.
- The most significant outcomes included stronger collaborations, improved access to health care, education, food, housing, workforce opportunities, and greater inclusion of vulnerable groups, illustrating the broad impact across strategic pillars.
- Grantees valued The Endowment's flexibility and trust, which facilitated adaptation, responsiveness, and helped leverage additional sources of funding.
- For future improvement, grantees highlighted the need for multi-year sustainable funding, consistent and direct communication, transparent decision-making, and more capacity support.
- Additional grantee suggestions included earlier proposal guidelines, facilitating collaborative applications, incentivizing sustainability planning, promoting peer learning, and increasing technical assistance for administrative processes.





# VISION FORWARD

*The insights gathered through community conversations, grantee engagement, and monitoring of our early investments, have directly informed The Endowment's strategic refresh as we look toward 2026 and beyond.*

This report analyzes 2022 and 2023 grants made in alignment with The Endowment's first strategic plan, providing insights into their reach, impact and lessons learned. While the 2024 grants are still reporting, we look forward to continuing to track and share the outcomes of all our grants in future updates.

Looking ahead, The Endowment's vision for grantmaking remains rooted in community voices, informed by data, and driven by impact. Grants will continue to align with The Endowment's four core strategic pillars of Education, Social and Health Equity, Community Development, and Community Safety, with an emphasis on scalable solutions and innovative program models.

Future investments will prioritize projects that demonstrate long-term benefits. Strengthening collaboration, enhancing local infrastructure, and supporting leadership development within grantee organizations will be key goals in the next phase our work.

Ultimately, by strengthening partnerships and advancing systemic change, The Endowment's grantmaking aims to build a vibrant, healthy, and resilient community where opportunity and well-being are accessible to all. This work is guided by our refreshed 2025 strategic plan, which sets the direction for 2026–2030. Please visit our website to learn more about the plan.



**Learn more about  
The Endowment's  
vision forward by  
visiting  
[theendowment.org](https://theendowment.org)**





