

2025

CENTER FOR HIGH IMPACT PHILANTHROPY

# HIGH IMPACT GIVING TOOLKIT

HOW TO PRACTICE HIGH IMPACT PHILANTHROPY

FOUR PHILANTHROPIC PLAYS

EMERGING TOPICS IN PHILANTHROPY

NONPROFITS MAKING A DIFFERENCE



The Center for  
High Impact Philanthropy  
School of Social Policy & Practice  
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA



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# WELCOME

## TO OUR 2025 HIGH IMPACT PHILANTHROPY TOOLKIT

Each year, with the support of our funders and partners, our team publishes this PDF guide and its companion website, which together comprise our annual toolkit. The toolkit takes our and our colleagues' best work and translates it into practical guidance for anyone interested in practicing high impact philanthropy — whether you have \$10 or \$1 billion.

In this guide, you'll find:

- ❖ Our guidance on How to Practice High Impact Philanthropy
- ❖ The Four Philanthropic Plays — i.e., the main ways philanthropy creates positive change

- ❖ A new Emerging Topics section highlighting three tools that can help funders achieve greater impact, no matter the cause or community a funder cares about: Collective Giving, Guaranteed Income, and News & Civic Information.
- ❖ Profiles of 12 nonprofits sourced from our partners at The GreenLight Fund, Ivory Innovations, The Barry & Marie Lipman Family Prize, and The Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation. Our team has independently analyzed each as an exemplar of how philanthropy achieves greater impact.

As always, we hope our toolkit helps you translate your generosity and good intentions into greater social impact.

**Katherina M. Rosqueta**  
Founding Executive Director



### FIND MORE ONLINE

On the 2025 High Impact Giving Toolkit website, you'll find additional resources to help you achieve greater social impact:

- More details on each nonprofit exemplar, including lessons learned from their work and additional nonprofits that are using similar practices and that have also been recently vetted by our team
- Updated guidance on effective crisis grantmaking, which is critical given the increase in natural and human-made disasters
- Additional guidance on practicing high impact philanthropy and finding and researching nonprofits in many issue areas

Visit <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/giving-toolkit/>

# how to practice **HIGH IMPACT** philanthropy

Whether you have \$10 or \$1 billion dollars, no one wants to practice “low impact” philanthropy. But what does high impact philanthropy mean?

**High impact philanthropy is the practice of intentionally using private, philanthropic resources to serve the public good. In other words, it’s philanthropy for social impact.**

Not all gifts and grants are intended to maximize social impact. For example, you may round up your bill at checkout to donate to a store’s charity, sponsor a friend participating in a race that benefits causes she cares about, or give to your church or temple as part of your obligation as a member. These acts are part of many donors’ “philanthropic portfolio.”

High impact philanthropy is the part of your portfolio where you ask, “How can I do more good in the world?” It involves the following:

## 1. FOCUS ON SOCIAL IMPACT

To practice high impact philanthropy, you first need to choose what good in the world you want to create. That goal could be feeding the hungry, ensuring all kids learn, reducing poverty, improving the lives of women and girls, or any number of other worthy causes. Personal experiences often lead donors to commit to a particular community or cause. It is fine to let your heart choose the goal. Once you are clear about the goal, your head can help you find the programs and organizations that are well-positioned to reach that goal.



Visit **Resources for Identifying More Impact Opportunities** to find research databases and guides.

## 2. USE THE BEST AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

Intuition alone won’t get you to social impact. For every cause, there is experience, knowledge, and information that can help you avoid re-inventing the wheel, or paying for the same mistakes others have already made. Evidence is information that helps you understand the nature of the problem you’re trying to solve, how promising a nonprofit’s overall approach is, and whether the conditions are ripe for success. Evidence comes from three sources: research, informed opinion, and the field (e.g., beneficiary and practitioner perspectives). When evidence from all three sources points in the same direction, you’ve found a great opportunity for impact.



The **guidance and resources on our site** can help you leverage the **best available evidence** across a range of causes and nonprofits.

### 3. LINK IMPACT AND COST (“BANG FOR BUCK”)

No one has an unlimited budget. To create greater social impact, you'll need to consider how far your money can go. Nonprofit overhead ratios won't help. That common metric simply compares what a nonprofit spends in one accounting category to what it spends in another category. When you practice high impact philanthropy, you want to understand what a nonprofit can achieve given everything it spends. That's “bang for buck” thinking, where the “bang” is the social impact, and the “buck” is the money spent to achieve that impact.

There are many ways to link impact and cost. You could take results (e.g., number of participants earning a living wage, tons of CO2 emissions averted) and compare those results to the money required to achieve those results. You could also compare costs to societal benefits, like when \$1 spent on a home visitation program yields \$5 in societal benefits from lower social welfare costs and increased tax revenue because participating children are healthier and stay in school longer. When you start thinking this way, you'll gain a more realistic understanding of what it takes to create social impact, and you'll recognize opportunities where your money might go even further.



**Link considerations of cost and impact to understand where the best “bang for buck” lies.**

### 4. ASSESS, LEARN, & IMPROVE

Philanthropy is not a perfect science. The issues that donors tackle are among the toughest society faces. You'll make mistakes, and your donation may not achieve what you hoped. But the more you assess, learn, and apply what you learn, the more you'll improve, and the more social impact you'll achieve. Connecting with other funders can often accelerate learning; alumni of our High Impact Philanthropy Academy report that the network they gained has been one of the biggest benefits. Your local community foundation, giving circles, the due diligence of staffed foundations, funder membership groups, and public resources like those on our website can all be sources of people and information to learn from and with.



**Learn about the cycle for learning, assessing, and improving your philanthropy.**

High impact philanthropy is not about how much you give, but how well you give. By focusing on social impact, using the best available evidence, thinking “bang for buck,” and learning as you give, your generosity and good intentions can result in social impact year-round and in the years to come.



### High Impact Philanthropy Academy

Unlock the power of philanthropy with High Impact Philanthropy Academy, a certificate program for individual donors, professional grantmakers, and other philanthropic leaders seeking greater impact. Learn more and apply at: <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/academy/>

# FOUR PHILANTHROPIC PLAYS

## how philanthropy can help

Philanthropic support takes many forms. It can fund nonprofit programs that provide services directly to those in need; increase the capacity of systems so that multiple programs and organizations are more effective and efficient; support policy and advocacy initiatives that change the environment in which nonprofits work; and fund research & innovation with the potential for game-changing progress.

Across the many social impact areas our team has analyzed, philanthropic support typically falls into one or more of these four categories. Like financial investment asset classes, these categories often reflect different levels of risk, timeframes for results, and social impact returns. An understanding of the risks and rewards of each play enables funders to choose philanthropic opportunities that align with their current tolerance for ambiguity and risk, need for control and attribution, and patience for intended results.

### Definitions and examples

#### WHAT ARE THE FOUR PHILANTHROPIC PLAYS?



##### **DIRECT SERVICES**

Direct services provide products or services directly to individuals. Examples include food pantries, homeless shelters, and tutoring programs.



##### **POLICY/ADVOCACY**

Policy and/or advocacy raise awareness and increase knowledge to influence public opinion, public policy and/or legislation. Examples include advocating for clean energy policies and reforming the criminal justice system.



##### **SYSTEM CAPACITY BUILDING**

System capacity building strengthens the ability of multiple organizations and individuals to better address a need. For example, training pediatricians to screen for mental health issues during routine wellness visits helps strengthen our system for addressing mental health.



##### **RESEARCH/INNOVATION**

Research and innovation advances new knowledge and develops new solutions. Examples include development of vaccines and renewable energy technology.

## Risks and Rewards

### WHAT ARE THE RISKS, REWARDS, AND TRADEOFFS?

#### Comparing the Four Philanthropic Plays

Philanthropic Play	Timeframe for results	Risk/Reward Profile	Tradeoffs
<b>Direct Services</b>	0-5 years	Lower risk since generally less complex; often addresses immediate need.	Outcomes can be easier to measure due to an identifiable recipient but don't change the underlying conditions that produce the need.
<b>System Capacity Building</b>	1-5+ years	Higher investment risk and increased uncertainty due to greater complexity, such as multiple stakeholders with potentially competing interests. Has potential for greater scale of impact than direct services.	Progress can be harder to measure and difficult to attribute to any one funder's work.
<b>Policy/Advocacy</b>	1-10+ years	Higher investment risk and increased uncertainty, including reputational and political risk. Has potential for greater scale and sustainability.	Subject to changing political and cultural shifts, but leveraging resources of other sectors (e.g., progress is harder to measure for government and business) can lead to more sustainable change.
<b>Research/Innovation</b>	5-10+ years	Highest investment risk and uncertainty. Money and time may be spent learning only what doesn't work. Can be transformative, in some cases eliminating need.	Breakthroughs are rare but can be game changing.

Learn about how we chose these Emerging Topics and find more resources at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/giving-toolkit/>

# COLLECTIVE GIVING

## By giving together, donors pool impact and influence

Collective giving — the pooling of financial resources and information with shared decision-making for social impact — has existed throughout history, ranging from 18th-century mutual aid societies, to present-day crowdfunding for community initiatives and giving circles focused on women’s health.[1] In all its forms, collective giving provides donors with unique opportunities for engagement, education, and community-building.

In recent years, the number of documented collective giving groups has exploded, with participation and total monetary donations increasing by 140% between 2017 and 2023, in part thanks to giving ecosystem groups like Philanthropy Together and Grapevine. During this period, nearly 4,000 groups raised \$3.1 billion in funds. Similar growth is expected to continue over the next five years.[2]

If you are a donor interested in impact, collective giving can be a way to learn more about causes and grantmaking, reduce risks in giving, address power inequities in traditional philanthropy, and deepen connections in your community. This philanthropic tool can be deployed alongside and in coordination with other forms of grantmaking.

### HOW THIS TOOL HELPS

**Collective giving can offer a more democratized form of philanthropy.** While traditional philanthropy has long been “top-heavy,” the power imbalance has grown in recent years. In the U.S., high-net-worth donors are giving even more while overall participation in giving has declined precipitously due to a decrease in giving by “everyday” donors.[3] This means the influence of wealthy donors on the activities of nonprofits has increased. Collective giving groups allow everyday donors to have more decision-making power in pursuing impact. By pooling funds, these groups can amplify the influence of people often absent from grantmaking discussions. This makes collective giving particularly attractive for those focused on equity, specific communities, and particular places.[4]

**Giving together provides a good way to learn about grantmaking.** Collective giving creates environments for meaningful dialogue and collaborative learning. As participants try new ways of selecting and forming relationships with grantees, they can apply these lessons to their other philanthropic efforts.

Collective giving often exposes donors to new organizations, social change leaders they wouldn’t otherwise meet, and new aspects of complex causes. Together, group members can develop subject-matter expertise, explore participatory or trust-based grantmaking, and find new resources. Some collective giving vehicles intentionally connect donors with different backgrounds and lived experiences, enriching the learning potential and opportunity for new relationships.

**Collective giving, especially giving circles, often acts as a seed funder of grassroots nonprofits.** By pooling funds with others, capital goes further, and grantees, often local, community-based organizations, can receive larger gifts. Grantees need only report to and communicate with one entity, streamlining their fundraising and donor stewardship efforts and freeing up more time for programmatic work.

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Getting involved in collective giving can be as easy as contributing to a pooled fund focused on a particular cause or as involved as a giving circle where you both make grantmaking decisions and raise additional funds for a cause you care about.

**Join a collective giving group.** Collective giving vehicles, like giving circles, vary dramatically in size and focus. Social investor and High Impact Philanthropy Academy alumna Danisha Patel notes, “Every giving circle has its own ethos,” and as such, its mission should align with your giving priorities. You can use tools like Philanthropy Together and Grapevine’s Global Giving Circle Directory to find a collective giving group that matches your interests and goals.

**Form a collective giving group.** You can start a group with a friend, organize a diverse circle of community members, create a collective giving circle to engage multiple generations of your family, or develop a global network of like-minded funders. Facilitating and managing collective decision-making takes work, so seek out training, tools, coaching, and online infrastructure from organizations like Philanthropy Together, Philanos, and the Jewish Federations of North America’s philanthropy idea generator, Amplifier.

**Support collective giving in communities you want to impact.** Collective giving groups are generally organized around shared decision-making. As with traditional philanthropy, however, those who benefit from grants are frequently left out of discussions about how money should be allocated.

For Teo and Emily Valdés, High Impact Philanthropy Academy alumni whose giving has largely focused on the U.S. South, self-conscious questioning is crucial, particularly in addressing power dynamics: “How can we share the power?” One answer is to fund organizations like community foundations, collaborative funds, and other giving groups close to the intended beneficiaries. The groups can then regrant the funds using their own specialized expertise, lived experience, and local knowledge.

**Use what you learn to inform other giving.** Most people who participate in collective giving groups also give in other capacities, whether through individual donations or foundations. Collective giving can be a way to learn about particular interest areas and develop new philanthropic approaches or practices that can be applied in other grantmaking decisions.

An advantage to operating as a group is better access to knowledge from experts. Regarding one of her own groups, Patel reflects, “People are open to meet us and teach us about what is going on... They are receptive to us as a community.” Specialized knowledge shared with a group can be used to inform your individual philanthropy.

**Explore pooled funds, particularly in times of crisis or when exploring a new cause area.** Pooled funds can be a great way to get to know the landscape and complexities of a new space. Bridgespan has a database of collaborative funds, as does the Gates Foundation. GlobalGiving has a collection of funds focused on crises.



## RESOURCES

**Philanthropy Together:** This global initiative strengthens and expands collective giving by supporting giving circles to create greater impact in their communities. <https://philanthropytogether.org/>

**Global Giving:** This organization organizes pooled funds to respond to disasters around the world, partnering with thousands of locally led organizations who know their communities’ needs best. <https://www.globalgiving.org>

**Find more resources and learn more about collective giving at** <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit/resources/>

**Contributors:** Sara Lomelin, CEO of Philanthropy Together; Victoria Vrana, CEO of GlobalGiving.



# GUARANTEED INCOME

## **This tool for increasing financial stability gives families the opportunity to thrive**

Learn about how we chose these Emerging Topics and find more resources at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/giving-toolkit/>

Income volatility — rapid and unpredictable changes in monthly income — affects most U.S. households living in poverty, forcing low-income individuals to choose between paying for basic needs like housing and utility bills or health-related expenses like medications. For children, this financial instability prevents access to healthy foods, stable shelter, and other resources needed to thrive.[5]

Guaranteed income (GI) — recurring, unconditional cash transfers — can smooth income volatility, promote economic stability, and improve health and wellbeing for children and families.

Today's guaranteed income efforts build off the evidence from the expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) of 2021, which cut the child poverty rate nearly in half in a single year.[6] Like guaranteed income, the CTC provided recurring, monthly cash payments to millions of households to smooth income volatility, reaching more than 80% of U.S. children. When the CTC expansion expired, child poverty soared again, with rates more than doubling from 2021 to 2022.[7]

### **HOW THIS TOOL HELPS**

For those living in poverty, guaranteed income (GI) reduces income volatility by supplementing other programs, services, and employment that fluctuate month-to-month. In this way, GI recipients do not have to choose between meeting basic needs, paying unexpected expenses, and making health-promoting choices for themselves and their children.

For example, the Bridge Project's focus on eradicating childhood poverty led its founder, High Impact Philanthropy Academy alumna Holly Fogle, to begin funding direct cash for families during the COVID-19 pandemic. While families all needed to buy diapers, formula, and healthy food, they also had unexpected expenses crop up, like needing to buy tires to get to work or a computer so their older children could participate in school. Says Fogle, "They were all making different decisions about how to spend the money, but they knew what decision was right for their family." Launched in 2021, the Bridge Project is now one of the largest funders of guaranteed income in the United States.

Direct cash helps families meet their ever-changing needs. Emerging evidence from the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Guaranteed Income Research (CGIR) suggests that GI leads to improved financial health and stability, which in turn supports better housing quality, enhanced employment opportunities and choices, increased parental time with children, and even decreased intimate partner violence.[8]

CGIR co-founder Amy Castro says, "Although we still have much to learn, these findings are part of the largest database on unconditional cash in the world and move us one step closer towards evidence-based policymaking on cash."

### **HOW PHILANTHROPY CAN HELP**

By design, government-provided social services programs restrict how families can use program support. By funding guaranteed income, philanthropy can help families meet their needs more directly and efficiently. Here are ways philanthropy can help:

**Fund guaranteed income (GI) to increase healthcare access and treatment.** Serious health problems, such as a diagnosis of cancer, are one of the biggest predictors of financial insecurity and bankruptcy. One study found that medical bills account for 40% of personal bankruptcies.[9]

Anneliese Barron, executive director of One Family Foundation, describes the situation that low-income cancer patients face: “We all know how expensive it is to treat cancer even with health insurance — there are copayments, deductibles, medications, and loss of income due to time off work. Because of these costs, up to 30% of cancer patients delay or skip their cancer treatments altogether.”

Her organization is funding a CGIR study on cash as a medical intervention to allow patients to focus on their health without an additional layer of financial stress. CGIR researcher Meredith Doherty says, “Financial well-being and health are intrinsically linked.”

**Add guaranteed income to your other funding efforts, especially for place-based and population-specific strategies.** When combined with other programs, unconditional cash can create new opportunities for recipients and their children through better health and educational outcomes.[10] For example, in addition to providing intensive coaching to caregivers to support childhood wellbeing, the Malawi-based nonprofit Yamba Malawi also provides unrestricted direct cash transfers of \$20 a month to

caregivers for the first year of the program. Yamba Malawi has found that caregivers use these payments to address immediate needs like food and medical bills. Read more at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/yamba-malawi/>.

**Advance related research and innovation to support policymaking.** As guaranteed income emerges as one of the most effective tools for reducing poverty, funding can create more support for its use among policymakers and the general population. For example, Penn’s Center for Guaranteed Income Research is evaluating the impact of GI in a cross-site study with roughly 19,000 participants enrolled in treatment and control groups. GI recipients will together receive over \$111 million in direct cash payments by the end of the full study. In addition to benefiting the recipients, CGIR will house guaranteed income study data, providing scholars across disciplines and from around the world access to CGIR’s data for evidence-based policymaking.

Many longstanding government program policies have not yet been updated to reflect guaranteed income. In particular, IRS rules on direct cash transfer programs mean that beneficiaries who receive payments may risk losing the government benefits, like Medicaid, Pell Grants and Social Security Disability Income, that the guaranteed income was meant to supplement. Funding efforts to formulate or improve policy is another way philanthropy can help.[11]



## RESOURCES

**Guaranteed Income: A Primer for Funders:** CHIP partnered with Asset Funders Network, Economic Security Project, and Springboard to Opportunity to develop a primer for funders on guaranteed income and related cash-based policies. Access the free Guaranteed Income primer at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/poverty-alleviation/>

**Center for Guaranteed Income Research (CGIR):** CGIR conducts applied cash-transfer studies and pilot designs that add to the empirical scholarship on cash, economic mobility, poverty, and narrative change. The Center is the evaluation partner for more than 35 GI pilots, including the Bridge Project — the country’s first and largest direct cash transfer program for babies and mothers — and the Guaranteed Income Financial Treatment Trial, funded by the One Family Foundation to provide cash payments to adults with cancer. <https://www.penncgir.org>

Find more resources and learn more about guaranteed income and direct cash transfers at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit/resources/>

**Contributors:** Amy Baker Castro, PhD, and Allison Thompson, MSS, PhD., Center for Guaranteed Income Research



# NEWS & CIVIC INFORMATION

## Funding news strengthens society and increases impact in many other issue areas

Learn about how we chose these Emerging Topics and find more resources at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/giving-toolkit/>

Civic information — reliable information that people need to make decisions affecting their community [12] — is the backbone of a democratic society. High-quality, relevant local news and information help people understand what’s happening in their communities, connect them with neighbors, raise awareness about critical issues, and help advance solutions to their problems.[13]

Yet, in recent years, declining advertising revenues, shifting audience attention, and increasing media consolidation have led to a decline in the number of journalists and the closure of thousands of local news outlets in the U.S. and worldwide.[14] In the United States, many people can no longer access basic information about their communities. [15] Studies show that rural communities, low-income communities, and communities of color are particularly vulnerable,[16] though the disappearance of civic information affects everyone.

No matter what cause or community you care about, ensuring the availability of relevant, timely, and reliable news and information can amplify your impact. That’s because high-quality civic information raises awareness of issues, furthers understanding of problems, highlights promising solutions, and helps mobilize stakeholders to act collectively to improve the places where they live.

### HOW THIS TOOL HELPS

**High-quality news and information advances causes.** Trustworthy information, reliable data, and common understanding are fundamental to addressing pressing social issues. For example, if you support nonprofits working on the environment or public health, supporting news outlets and reliable grassroots information sources covering those topics can accelerate your impact.[17] As part of its environment program, the Walton Family Foundation funds environmental journalists covering the changing climate. These newsrooms provide readers with essential information about how climate change transforms the landscapes they call home.

For place-based funders, supporting civic information in your community can raise awareness about issues

specific to your region and give voice to underserved constituencies uniquely affected by those issues.[18]

Rachel Silverstein, executive director of Miami Waterkeeper, recently told funders at the 2024 Knight Media Forum, “People in the community are sometimes more trusted voices than even established news outlets these days.” Her organization funds storytelling and information to build on their following and share information with the public in real-time.

**Civic information encourages collective responses to challenges facing communities.** A recent report defined civic information as enabling people to “respond to collective needs by enhancing local coordination, problem-solving, systems of public accountability, and connectedness.”[19] As Kylee Mitchell Well, executive director of Southeast Michigan

for the Ballmer Group, said at the 2024 Knight Media Forum, “We are a very diverse region; we are a very segregated region. And the way that we can unify is to tell those diverse stories. And that’s what media does.”

Civic information empowers those in the government, nonprofit, and corporate sectors to respond to social challenges. “Missing in Chicago,” for example, is a seven-part investigative series that examines how Chicago police have mishandled missing person cases, revealing a disproportionate impact on Black women and girls. The investigation, which was a collaboration between Chicago-based nonprofit newsrooms City Bureau and Invisible Institute, contributed to tangible policy changes. Within six months of publication, the series prompted the Chicago Inspector General’s office to conduct an official review of police accountability systems that led the City Council to file a resolution calling for a citywide task force on missing women.[20]

## HOW PHILANTHROPY CAN HELP

**Support high-quality civic information that aligns with your priorities.** Funders can support local news outlets that meet critical information needs and cover topics relevant to their giving priorities. The Institute for Nonprofit News (INN) Network includes 450 nonprofit, nonpartisan outlets across the country. Each member newsroom meets professional journalism standards for editorial independence and donor transparency.[21] Nonprofit news organizations within the INN Network serve communities from hyperlocal to global and cover a range of topics, including climate, education, and criminal justice.

**Join collective giving efforts supporting news and information.** Whether you’re a longtime or first-time funder in the news and civic information space, there are plenty of opportunities to maximize your impact through collective giving. Press Forward, for example, is a five-year initiative representing a diverse coalition of local and national funders supporting local news and civic information causes. They have three primary mechanisms for their collective grantmaking: a national pooled fund, aligned funding efforts, and local chapters in nearly two dozen states nationwide.[22] The annual NewsMatch fundraising campaign offers another opportunity for collective giving — donors can contribute to the national matching pool, donate directly to your news outlet of choice, or leverage your gift for an additional match. Learn more about NewsMatch and opportunities for funders at <https://newsmatch.inn.org/>.

**Fund efforts to map the changing landscape of news sources and gaps.** Funders can support research that maps local news landscapes across the country, assesses audiences’ information needs, and informs future investments. The Joyce Foundation and the McKnight Foundation recently supported The Pivot Fund’s efforts to map news ecosystems in the Great Lakes region.[23] Tim Murphy, program officer at the McKnight Foundation, says the research efforts will also inform the foundation’s giving priorities. Funders, industry groups, and experts can use the insights generated from mapping the current ecosystem to inform where philanthropic support is most urgently needed.



## RESOURCES

**Media Impact Funders:** This network connects funders who support media and journalism initiatives to address social issues and foster informed communities. <https://mediainpactfunders.org/>

**We the People: A Philanthropic Guide to Strengthening Democracy:** This toolkit from CHIP includes guidance on how funders can reinvigorate local media to strengthen society. <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/democracy/local-media/>

**Find more resources and learn more about funding news and information at** <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit/resources/>

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# NONPROFITS MAKING AN IMPACT

## HOW TO USE THESE EXEMPLARS

On the next pages, we profile 12 nonprofits, each providing an example of how philanthropy can achieve greater social impact. Each profile describes what the organization does, evidence for its impact and cost-effectiveness, and how philanthropy can help. You may choose to support one of the featured exemplars, apply their model to organizations you support, or use their work to identify others in your area doing similar work.

 **We've identified several of the featured programs as pilots, which means they are newer programs or organizations intending to expand beyond their initial site.**

Visit each profile on our website to find related nonprofits and lessons to apply to your own giving. You'll also find more resources for finding and researching nonprofits on your own. <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/giving-toolkit/>.

## OUR ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS

The nonprofit exemplars included in this toolkit were sourced from our organizational partners, who each have different areas of expertise and have a systematic approach to identifying philanthropic opportunities that include the principles of high impact philanthropy.

 **The GreenLight Fund** is a national nonprofit that partners with communities to create opportunities for individuals and families to move out of poverty. It facilitates a community-driven process that matches local needs not met by existing programs to organizations with track records of success elsewhere. <https://greenlightfund.org/>

  **Ivory Innovations** is a nonprofit whose mission is to catalyze innovation in housing affordability in the U.S. Established in 2017, the organization was created in response to the escalating challenges within the housing industry. Fueled by a commitment to address these issues, Ivory Innovations devotes its time, talent, and resources to champion innovation and provide unwavering support to companies striving to alleviate the housing affordability crisis. <https://ivoryinnovations.org/>



**The Barry & Marie Lipman Family Prize** is an annual global prize that celebrates leadership and innovation in the social sector with an emphasis on impact and transferability of practices. Administered by the Wharton School on behalf of the University of Pennsylvania, the Prize is committed to resourcing and connecting change-makers to bring innovative ideas to new places and problems around the world. <https://lipmanfamilyprize.wharton.upenn.edu/>



**The Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation** is a mission-driven grantmaking foundation that seeks innovative, sustainable solutions for human and environmental challenges. The foundation works as an engine of change in both policy and practice in Texas, supporting high-impact projects and practices at the nexus of environmental protection, social equity, and economic vibrancy. <https://cgmf.org/>

# Blueprint Schools Network

Close the achievement gap with frequent, small-group math tutoring

## Why it's needed

Students who complete an Advanced Algebra or Calculus course in high school are three times more likely to graduate from college.[24] Still, only 26% of incoming U.S. high school students are proficient in mathematics, with proficiency rates dropping to 13% among students from low-income backgrounds.[25]

Blueprint Schools Network (Blueprint) closes the achievement gap in low-performing schools by providing free, customized, small-group tutoring in math as part of a student's regular day.

## What it does

Founded in 2010 by a former teacher, Blueprint operates in 100 schools in Colorado, California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington, D.C, largely in urban areas. Its flagship Math Fellows Program provides intensive in-school tutoring in a small-group setting to students from second through twelfth grades.

Blueprint Math Fellows are college graduates who serve as part of the AmeriCorps program, a government program that connects Americans with paid service opportunities. The summer before starting their positions, Fellows undergo rigorous training on the math curriculum and strategies for teaching, managing classrooms, and building relationships with students.

In addition to their regular math class, students meet in a small-group (4:1) setting during the school day with a Math Fellows tutor. Each session begins with a 5-minute warmup and review, then mental math drills. The main portion of the session focuses on problem-solving student questions and reinforcing the content in their math class. Sessions end with a brief, ungraded assessment to check for student mastery of the daily lesson.

Fellows track their students' progress through weekly indicators that measure mindset and content mastery, metrics that predict whether students are on track to graduate from middle or high school. Fellows also coordinate with teachers to ensure that students who are behind receive extra instruction and attention to get them on track.

Each school also has a Math Fellows Coordinator who oversees the program, supervises Math Fellows, and provides instructional coaching. Coordinators work with school leadership and teachers to monitor student progress, align lessons with classroom content, and implement strategies that research has shown to drive student achievement in highly effective schools.

In addition to its school-based tutoring, Blueprint builds the capacity of school districts by consulting on optimal school schedules, including exploring extending the school day and year, and helping recruit and select effective teachers and leadership.

Since Blueprint's founding, the organization's math tutoring program has reached more than 33,000 students nationwide, and more than 1,250 individuals have been trained as Math Fellows.



## How effective it is

An assessment of the Blueprint model by the research firm Mathematica found that on average, participants' end-of-year scores on a math skills assessment administered throughout the school year were significantly higher than their nonparticipant peers.[26]

According to Blueprint's assessments, students gain two months of proficiency for every month in the program and outperform peers in comparable programs on math skills assessments. For example, students from St. Louis public schools participating in Blueprint's programs achieved a 48.9% higher average score on a math assessment after one academic year of the program than students receiving tutoring from another tutoring company.

Blueprint administers three student perception surveys to assess math confidence and student engagement. After a year of the program, 9 out of 10 students surveyed nationally reported feeling more confident in math and that the work they did would help them succeed in their math class the following year.

## How philanthropy can help

Blueprint Schools Network receives 96% of its funding from philanthropic sources and the remainder from government grants, primarily through partnerships with AmeriCorps and Teach for America. Additional philanthropic support will help Blueprint reach more students from low-income communities by recruiting additional Math Fellows and expanding to more sites. Learn more: <https://blueprintschools.org/>

**"I'm really thankful that my math fellow has helped me during hard math times. I didn't like math before but then I realized that math is a challenge that I can face without giving up."**

— Blueprint Student

Find more nonprofits applying similar models at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit-nonprofits/>

# Build UP Community School

Prepare students for lucrative careers in the trades while addressing blight



## Why it's needed

In the United States, training for a trade can result in a six-figure salary with less debt than a traditional four-year degree program. Despite the potentially lucrative nature of the profession, there are one million fewer skilled tradespeople in the country than there were in 2007, and the number of workers is not enough to meet current demand.[27]

Build UP Community School, a small, nonprofit workforce development school for low-income youth in Birmingham, Alabama, trains students for careers in construction, plumbing, manufacturing, and more.

## What it does

Founded in 2018, Build UP is a private, nonprofit high school in Titusville, a neighborhood in Birmingham, with an innovative model that offers a 6-year career-focused curriculum for students to learn skilled trades. Students combine academic learning with hands-on experience.

Through their studies, all students in the program pursue a trade such as construction, electrical, plumbing, masonry, and automotive technology. Students take free dual-enrollment courses with local community college partners and earn certifications in their chosen fields, helping them to obtain highly paid roles after graduation.

Supervised by mentors in their chosen trade, students rehab homes in disinvested neighborhoods in Birmingham that nonprofit partners are developing into affordable housing. The program also works on homes that are donations from those in the area who would otherwise demolish the house on their lot when building a new home.

Students receive a monthly stipend for their work, and some Build UP students and their families occupy the renovated homes. Build UP staff assess family housing needs and students' school performance to determine the priority for selecting students to move into the homes. Chosen families then pay the same amount for their new leases as they paid for their old homes but for significantly better and safer housing.

After completing their high school degrees, Build UP students enter the workforce, pursue higher education or further trades credentials, or start their own businesses while receiving mentorship. After two years, students exit the program and are eligible to buy one of the homes that Build UP has renovated with a low-interest mortgage and built-in equity.

Thus far, Build UP's 81 students have completed 30 renovation projects in their community.

## How effective it is

Before graduating, 90% of Build UP's students have earned industry-recognized credentials, making them attractive employees to employers in their chosen industries. Build UP's recent high school graduates are apprentices working at small trade-focused businesses and/or in college or trade school.

Research shows that participating in high school career and technical education programs has positive effects on several outcomes. Students who do not attend college following graduation but who participated in such training are more likely to be employed after high school than their peers. [28] These students earn higher wages on average throughout the first seven years after graduation, particularly in the construction, transportation, manufacturing, and technology sectors.[29]

In addition to benefiting the students and their families, Build UP benefits the larger community by reducing urban blight and increasing property values. A comparable program focused on reducing blight in a Memphis neighborhood restored 18 houses, resulting in a \$6 million gain in real estate value, increased annual taxes of \$112,000, and a 12 percent return on investment.[30]

## How philanthropy can help

Build UP receives about 25% of its funding from philanthropic sources, with the remaining 75% from earned revenue from its properties and government support. Additional philanthropic support would allow the organization to enroll more students and/or open new locations. Learn more: <https://www.BuildUP.work/>

**"I am getting rid of the blight in my neighborhood. I see it as an opportunity."**

— Khristian Billingsley, Build UP Community School student

Find more nonprofits applying similar models at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit-nonprofits/>

# Cure Violence Global

Prevent violence through a public health approach

## Why it's needed

The latest United Nations global study estimated 458,000 intentional homicides worldwide, a higher number than conflict-related and terrorist killings combined.[31]

Cure Violence Global (CVG) treats violence as a public health issue. It focuses on prevention by intervening early and training community members to mediate conflicts before they escalate into deadly violence.

## What it does

Founded in 2000 by an epidemiologist, Cure Violence Global is rooted in the science that shows that violence behaves like an epidemic, spreading through exposure and social networks. By interrupting transmission, CVG aims to reduce violence in affected communities. The organization has supported partners implementing the approach in 26 U.S. cities and 18 countries in Latin America and Africa. The organization primarily serves young men aged 16 to 24 in low-income neighborhoods with high crime rates, as these individuals are at the highest risk of engaging in violence.[32]

CVG hires staff with similar life experiences to those it serves. It provides these outreach workers with extensive education and training in mediation, persuasion, and behavior change. To maintain trust with the populations they serve, staff do not work directly with law enforcement, who are often distrusted.

CVG assigns staff to a catchment area in their community. Within that catchment area, CVG staff identify ongoing potentially lethal conflicts, monitor recent arrests and prison releases, maintain a caseload of the highest-risk individuals, and engage with block captains, tenant councils, and neighborhood associations.

When a shooting or other violent incident occurs, staff use their connections and training to work with victims and their friends and families, tempering emotions to prevent retaliation. CVG staff will follow up as long as needed, sometimes for months, to ensure a conflict does not become violent. Over time, CVG's work shifts community norms on the acceptability of violence.

## How effective it is

Cure Violence Global's work has been independently evaluated at multiple sites worldwide.

An evaluation of its Port of Spain, Trinidad site showed that the violent crime rate in the treatment area where violence interrupters were working was 45.1% lower than in the comparison area one year after the site's launch.[33]



In a catchment in East New York, gun injury rates decreased by 50% one year after CVG's launch in the area, while a similar area where CVG was not working experienced just a 5% decline. That evaluation also found that young men living in the CVG catchment decreased support for the use of violence in serious disputes by 33%.[34]

In Chicago, a survey of those who had contact with CVG staff showed that 59% of staff stopped a conflict in the community, and 60% talked someone out of using a gun. 100% of those who had contact with staff agreed that CVG could change minds about shootings, and 99% reported that the program positively impacted their lives [35]

Given the extraordinarily high cost of gun violence, an evaluation by Johns Hopkins University estimates \$7.20 to \$19.20 in economic benefits for every \$1 invested in CVG programs.[36]

## How philanthropy can help

Cure Violence Global receives about a fifth of its funding from philanthropic support and the rest from local government contracts and federal grants. Additional philanthropic support will enable the organization to train more violence interrupters and support local partners in additional cities and countries. Learn more: <https://cvg.org/>

**"I was a kid that you would often find on the street corners thinking about doing some bad stuff. But since Cure Violence arrived, my life has shifted drastically. I've become a role model for other kids in my community."**

— Juan Oney in Cali, Colombia

Find more nonprofits applying similar models at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit-nonprofits/>

# EcoRise

## Equip students to tackle real-world environmental challenges

### Why it's needed

Although today's young people will bear the brunt of a warming climate, most students have little knowledge of environmental issues. 95% of primary and secondary teachers believe that teaching environmental sustainability is important, but fewer than 30% feel they have the necessary tools to teach it.[37]

EcoRise integrates environmental education and project-based learning into K-12 curricula, equipping students with the skills to implement solutions to real-world environmental challenges and pursue related careers following graduation.

### What it does

Founded in 2008 in Austin, Texas, EcoRise distributes its sustainability curriculum and trains teachers to teach it across the United States and in 54 other countries.

EcoRise's Sustainable Intelligence Program gives teachers more than 200 free lessons designed for K-12 students on themes like water, waste, food, energy, and air. Lessons align with relevant education standards like Common Core. EcoRise also provides professional development training for teachers to ensure the quality of the curriculum's delivery.

Students participating in the Sustainable Intelligence Program use the organization's Eco-Audit tools to evaluate their schools' environmental impact and identify solutions that make their schools more sustainable. Students then receive microgrants from EcoRise to fund their projects. Past projects have included upcycling used crayons and paper to reduce waste and constructing an outdoor shaded learning area to mitigate the effects of heat islands.

EcoRise also has a curriculum for high school students that focuses on preparing them for careers in environmental sustainability. The curriculum trains students to earn the Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) Green Associate credential, a highly sought-after professional certification.

To advance knowledge of environmental sustainability broadly across the United States, EcoRise launched Gen:Thrive, an interactive tool that maps environmental education programs across the country and the likelihood of climate disasters and environmental hazards. The tool helps policymakers and those in the nonprofit sector identify which areas are most vulnerable to environmental harm but lack relevant education. The tool also allows those looking for environmental education to find programs in their area.

### How effective it is

In the 2023-24 academic year, 9,469 teachers across the United States and in 54 other countries integrated EcoRise's Sustainability Innovations (SI) Curriculum into their classrooms, reaching 530,264 students through hands-on environmental sustainability lessons.



EcoRise's student-led projects have reduced 5,223 tons of carbon and saved schools \$362,053 annually in resource costs, such as electricity bills. Since 2015, these projects have diverted approximately 7 million pounds of waste, produced over 56,000 pounds of food, saved over 2,200,000 gallons of water, saved over 43,900,000 kilowatt-hours of energy, and improved 1.6 million square feet of green space.[38]

92.5% of teachers say using EcoRise's tools has brought new energy to their teaching practice; 89.2% report that EcoRise provided new ways to address their school's academic goals; and 86.6% say EcoRise programs had a large or moderate impact on their students' environmental literacy and knowledge of sustainability issues.

90.9% of students who participate in the green careers program agree or strongly agree that they are more interested in pursuing a green career path and 81.8% agree or strongly agree that they are better prepared to enter the workforce in general.

### How Philanthropy Can Help

EcoRise receives 55% of its funding from philanthropic contributions and grants and 42% from schools that pay for program services like their green careers curriculum. The remainder of its annual funding comes from investment income. Increased philanthropic support will allow EcoRise to expand its programs to other geographies and to support more student-led projects. Learn more: <https://www.ecorise.org/>

**"I will remember it for the rest of my life. I can design a solution to a problem. They say when you learn things well, you will never forget, and I will never forget what I learned in EcoRise."**

— EcoRise student

**Find more nonprofits applying similar models at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit-nonprofits/>**

# Food 4 Education

Address chronic malnutrition through a smarter school meal program

## Why it's needed

Worldwide, 1 in 5 children are chronically malnourished, putting them at greater risk of dying from common infections and experiencing stunted growth and cognitive impairments that hinder academic performance.[39]

In Kenya, where chronic undernutrition impacts one in four children[40], Food 4 Education (F4E) addresses chronic undernutrition and poor educational outcomes by providing nutritious, affordable, and locally sourced meals to students at their schools.

## What it does

Based in Nairobi, Kenya, Food 4 Education (F4E) provides daily meals to 436,000 children across nine counties. Each meal meets 60% to 70% of the recommended caloric dietary intake for children, twice the portion size of the average program of this type. To ensure meals meet nutritional needs, each meal has a high protein-to-carbohydrate ratio and incorporates staple foods that children enjoy.

F4E's model integrates centralized kitchens, technology-driven meal distribution, and community engagement to reduce chronic malnutrition while strengthening their communities.

Unlike similar programs where each school produces meals in its own kitchen, F4E uses centralized kitchens that then distribute meals to schools. These kitchens use eco-friendly practices, like recycling bottles and paper and passing organic waste to farms for composting.[41] These practices lead to just a 1% food wastage rate. That's a fraction of the average wastage rate of 5% in the global food service industry and 31% in the U.S.[42]. The organization buys food in large quantities to take advantage of costs at scale, storing reserves centrally.[43] By purchasing directly from small farms, F4E provides a stable and reliable market for their produce with fair prices.[44]

F4E's Tap2Eat system uses physical wristbands linked to a student account, which track meals for all students and contain funds from families who contribute payments. Students tap their wristbands to collect lunches, streamlining mealtime and allowing F4E to better track and forecast meal distribution.

Community members staff F4E kitchens, increasing local buy-in for the program while providing well-paying jobs. Its 4,201 employees, 79% of whom are women, earn 2.5 to 5 times the typical wage of that position in Kenya. Students' families contribute about 15 cents per meal, less than half the average that they would otherwise pay. For those who cannot pay, F4E fully subsidizes the cost of meals. F4E treats families as customers, encouraging feedback on the program so that F4E can continually improve.



## How effective it is

In 2023, Food for Education's program led to a 27% increase in enrollment in early development centers and a 12% to 37% increase in enrollment in public primary partner schools, with 100% of students meeting minimum dietary diversity and nutrition goals.[45]

School feeding models that provide students with low-cost meals have been proven to address child malnutrition and improve educational outcomes. A review of studies of the model in sub-Saharan Africa shows a positive correlation between school feeding programs and educational outcomes, including attendance rates, enrollment, and academic performance.[46]

The World Food Programme's review of school feeding programs showed significant reductions in malnutrition and anemia among children receiving school meals. Their analysis also found that programs in Kenya generate returns of up to \$9 for every \$1 invested due to the jobs the programs create, as well as the pivotal role school feeding programs play in building a healthy, educated population.[47]

## How philanthropy can help

Philanthropy covers approximately 65% of Food 4 Education's costs. Local government covers most of the rest, with meal fees paid by parents covering a small percentage. Additional philanthropic support will enable the organization to scale its operations and expand its model to other African countries by 2030. Learn more:

<https://food4education.org/>

**"If it wasn't for the program, my grandchildren would have suffered from nutritional diseases... when we have no food at home, they will at least have school lunch."**

— Nganga Mungai, a grandparent

Find more nonprofits applying similar models at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit-nonprofits/>

# Housing Connector

Reduce homelessness by connecting individuals with affordable vacant rentals

## Why it's needed

In the United States, 650,000 people were homeless in 2023.[48] That same year, 3.2 million rental housing units were vacant.[49] One reason rental units remain vacant is that nearly 90% of landlords screen out those with previous evictions, low credit scores, and criminal backgrounds, leaving large swaths of the population unable to access housing.[50]

Housing Connector uses a tech-powered platform to connect landlords with individuals in need of housing while reducing risk to property owners and providing case management for renters.

## What it does

Founded in 2019 and based in Seattle, Washington, Housing Connector operates in Denver, Colorado, Portland, Oregon, Dallas, Texas, and across Washington State.

Housing Connector collaborates with Zillow, a popular real estate listing platform, for its housing marketplace. Community Partners (nonprofits, case managers, and service providers focused on housing) and people experiencing housing insecurity use the tech marketplace to find available rental units whose owners or property managers (called Property Partners) have agreed to reduce their screening criteria.

Community Partners and future residents filter properties to view only properties that residents would be eligible for, expediting the time to move in.

To ensure stability in a resident's new home, Housing Connector attaches a "risk mitigation package" to each lease, comprised of a guarantee of three months of rent payments, \$5,000 in damages, and two years of support services for residents. Community Partners also provide ongoing case management for their clients during at least the first year of residency. Housing Connector trains all case managers to use the organization's Zillow platform and enroll clients in their services.

Additionally, Housing Connector works with local governments to provide housing for homeless populations. In Denver, the organization works with the city government to help people living in encampments find housing that the city subsidizes for up to a year. Housing Connector helps the city identify available housing units, process payments, and connect participants with case managers.



## How effective it is

Since its inception in 2019, Housing Connector has connected more than 8,300 residents to housing. Of these, 27% have disabilities, 18% have criminal histories, 7% are veterans, and 53% belong to households with children.

99.4% of residents have avoided eviction outcomes to date, despite their higher risk of housing insecurity. For example, in Dallas, Texas, Housing Connector's eviction rate is 0% compared to the city's 8% eviction rate.[51]

Housing Connector's approach aligns with the Housing First model, which connects those at risk of or experiencing homelessness to housing without preconditions, such as sobriety, treatment, or service participation requirements. Studies have consistently shown the model improves long-term housing, mental and physical health, and child wellbeing outcomes.[52]

It costs an average of \$504 annually for Housing Connector to keep one person housed. This cost is significantly lower than the average cost of a temporary family shelter bed in the United States, which is more than \$17,700 a year.[53]

## How philanthropy can help

Housing Connector receives about 70% of its funds from government support and 30% from philanthropic support. Further philanthropic support will help Housing Connector develop new products and solutions to scale its operations and connect more people to housing. Learn more: <https://www.housingconnector.com/>

**"The last two years I was homeless... To hear the words that I was approved, I was elated. The future looks very promising. Jobs lined up, stable home. There is hope."**

— Chauncey Williamson, a tenant

Find more nonprofits applying similar models at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit-nonprofits/>

# Impact Justice: The Homecoming Project



**Prevent recidivism and homelessness by connecting those formerly incarcerated with stable housing**

## Why it's needed

Formerly incarcerated individuals are ten times more likely to experience homelessness compared to the general population. [54] Without stable housing, the risk of recidivism increases significantly: periods of homelessness more than double the risk of reconviction and prison admission.[55]

Impact Justice's The Homecoming Project connects individuals who were in custody for 10 or more years — the population with the highest rate of homelessness among formerly incarcerated people [56] — with stable housing. As a result, individuals gain the stability needed to move on and contribute to society, while governments save the hundreds of thousands of dollars associated with traditional transitional housing and recidivism.

## What it does

In Alameda, Contra Costa, and Los Angeles counties in California, the Homecoming Project, a program of the criminal justice reform nonprofit Impact Justice, pairs formerly incarcerated individuals with homeowners willing to host them for six months in exchange for extra income.

The Homecoming Project works with probation and parole officers and correctional counselors to recruit and screen participants for the program. Participants and hosts are matched based on detailed assessments and mutual interviews.

Host families receive \$45 per day, or about \$1,350 a month, from the organization and are trained in conflict resolution and trauma-informed care. The Homecoming Project recruits a diverse range of people to be hosts, emphasizing those connected to incarceration who are more likely to understand participants' struggles. Many hosts are low- to moderate-income, meaning the extra income from hosting can help them stay in their homes amid rising housing costs.

Throughout the program, participants work with a community navigator who provides resources and support with reentry after incarceration, like connections to employment. They also have access to free courses, workshops, and peer support groups designed to help people navigate common challenges associated with reentry, like learning new technology and navigating new and old relationships.

Since its inception in 2018, over 140 formerly incarcerated individuals have been matched with hosts. Impact Justice is working to scale the program to house higher numbers of participants in 2025.

## How effective it is

100% of participants have left the program with stable housing of their own, and 95% have secured employment or enrolled in job training or education programs since the program began.[57] The program reports a 0% recidivism rate among its participants since the program's inception, compared to the average recidivism rate among those incarcerated for ten or more years in California of 18%.[58]

Over half the Homecoming Project's hosts sign up to host a new participant after their first participant graduates from the six-month program. Some hosts even go on to set up long-term rental arrangements with participants once their formal participation in the Homecoming Project ends.

The cost to house an individual for six months through the program is \$20,000, including host stipends, participant support services, and administrative costs. In comparison, traditional transitional housing programs cost approximately \$15,000 for just one month, or \$90,000 for the same six-month duration as the Homecoming Project, not including any support services.[59]

## How philanthropy can help

Impact Justice, the organization that runs the Homecoming Project, receives 85% of its funding from government grants, with the remainder from philanthropic donations. Additional philanthropic support will help the organization recruit and train more hosts and scale the program. With sufficient funding, the project aims to expand its operations to other regions within California and eventually across the United States. Learn more:

<https://impactjustice.org/>

**"Being incarcerated for so much time, this is what I laid in bed wishing for, that I would change my life so that I can be healthy and whole and in society again."**

— Phillippe Kelly, a participant

Find more nonprofits applying similar models at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit-nonprofits/>

# Mali Health Organizing Project

Prevent maternal and child deaths by improving local healthcare and women's financial status

## Why it's needed

Mali faces one of the highest maternal mortality ratios globally at 325 deaths per 100,000 live births. The under-5 mortality rate is also alarmingly high, with nearly 94 out of 1,000 children dying before their 5th birthday.[60]

By increasing access to healthcare services, health education, and financial stability, the Mali Health Organizing Project reduces preventable deaths and improves the health and life prospects of mothers and their children.

## What it does

Founded in 2006, the Mali Health Organizing Project (Mali Health) improves the health and finances of women and their children in peri-urban communities, areas immediately adjacent to cities, through four activities: deploying community health workers, creating savings groups and business cooperatives for women, hosting community events, and improving the quality of care provided by community health centers.

Unlike in Mali's rural areas, peri-urban communities do not have community health workers (CHWs) as part of their government-run health systems. Mali Health provides training and pay to existing volunteer workers and trains new workers to serve these communities. CHWs visit families to monitor health, ensure completion of routine primary care, provide preventive health information, and refer patients to health centers.

Mali Health helps women overcome financial barriers to healthcare by organizing savings groups and supporting women's business cooperatives. Savings groups are comprised of 15 to 20 members who contribute weekly and allow members to borrow from the shared pool of funds to pay for healthcare expenses or small income-generating activities. The average weekly contribution is around 100 to 200 FCFA, about 25 cents USD, collectively accumulating to about \$227 annually.

Starting in 2018, Mali Health began supporting women in creating cooperatives that produce and sell health-promoting products, like soap and peanut butter. Thus far, Mali Health has supported 549 women in forming 13 cooperatives. The organization also conducts annual health fairs, offering free health consultations and screening families for eligibility for services.

Finally, to improve the quality of healthcare wherever patients receive it, Mali Health works with community health centers using data and feedback collected from patients, primarily mothers, to improve the clinical quality of healthcare delivery, patient experience, and center management.



## How effective it is

Mali Health has had zero maternal and child deaths among the families CHWs serve over the past 10 years, compared to the country's maternal mortality rate of 325 deaths per 100,000 live births a year and under-five mortality rate of 94 deaths per 1,000 children.[61]

100% of mothers receiving care from Mali Health attend all prenatal and postnatal care visits and 100% give birth at health centers rather than at home, ensuring that they receive adequate care.

Additionally, 100% of the children enrolled in community health programs receive vaccinations on time, five times the national average. Diarrheal disease incidence was 0.56% in the program in 2023, while the national rate was 17%.[62]

The cooperative program has raised participants' income from an average of \$18 a month prior to participation to \$51 a month after one year, \$65 after two years, \$95 a month after three years, and \$131 a month after five years. As a result of the organization's savings programs, 94% of women have funds to pay for healthcare when needed.

The total 2023 cost of the community health worker program was only \$116,200. This provided healthcare to 1,795 children and pregnant women and resulted in 54,596 CHW home visits.

## How philanthropy can help

Philanthropy covers 87% of The Mali Health Organizing Project costs, with the rest from government partnerships. More philanthropic support will enable Mali Health to expand its programs to more women and their families in Mali. Learn more: <https://malihealth.org/>

**"Before today, I never knew about cervical cancer, but after speaking with the midwives and community health workers, I understand the importance of being screened for this disease."**

— Mme. Outtara, community member

Find more nonprofits applying similar models at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit-nonprofits/>



# Rural Homes Project

Strengthen communities by building affordable housing for essential workers

## Why it's needed

Buying a home is out of reach for most Americans.[63] Essential workers, such as teachers, nurses, and firefighters, are particularly affected by the affordable housing crisis, as their income is too high for subsidized housing but too low to afford the average home in the communities in which they work [64]

A lack of affordable housing in the communities essential workers serve forces workers into long commutes or causes them to leave the community altogether, exacerbating workforce shortages in critical sectors.[65]

In rural Colorado, an area with a severe housing affordability crisis, the Rural Homes Project makes homes affordable for essential workers through innovative financing, construction, and community development practices.

## What it does

Founded in 2021, the Rural Homes Project builds and sells homes to residents who aren't eligible for traditional, subsidized affordable housing but make far less than what is needed to buy from the existing housing stock. Currently in a pilot phase, Rural Homes uses a combination of low-cost financing, land donations, and modular building processes to build affordable, deed-restricted homes.

The organization partners with philanthropic funders and local government entities, like school districts and counties, to secure donated land for development. It then uses low-interest program-related investments from philanthropic organizations as construction loans to build new homes. To help buyers, Rural Homes works with a local bank to provide below-market rate mortgages and connects buyers with up to \$32,500 in down-payment assistance from state and local philanthropic programs.

Once homes are sold, the revenue generated replenishes the fund, which finances the next round of construction in another community.

Rural Homes uses a cost-effective, time-efficient modular home construction process, incorporating energy-efficient features like solar panels that reduce long-term costs for homeowners and ensure the homes are environmentally friendly.

All Rural Homes units are deed-restricted, meaning that all future owners of the homes meet Rural Homes' eligibility requirements, and the homes stay affordable for years to come.



## How effective it is

Since 2021, Rural Homes Project has built 38 homes in two communities and is in the final stages of building 21 homes in another. Homes range from \$225,000 to \$410,000, half the price of the average home in the area.[66]

In the town of Norwood, which had a population of only 536 people in 2022, the new houses built by the Rural Homes Project created a 6% increase in total property tax revenue, which the town plans to use to improve its water infrastructure. [67] The Rural Homes Project estimates that their Norwood and Ridgway projects have generated about \$6,400,000 each in economic impact for the surrounding communities through construction jobs and sourcing materials from local businesses. [68]

Communities experience many positive effects from ensuring essential workers stay in their communities long-term. Longer teacher tenure at schools leads to increased student performance, and longer nurse tenure in hospital units results in higher-quality patient care.[69]

## How philanthropy can help

Typically, philanthropic support in the form of program-related investments is matched by the state government to create construction loan funds. Project-specific grants and other philanthropy allow Rural Homes Project to acquire land and fund subsidies for homebuyers. Additional support would allow the organization to expand its operations across more rural areas of Colorado. Learn more: <https://www.ruralhomes.co/>

**“There’s been a rolling train of mental health people who come here, work for two years and leave when they realize they can’t afford to be here. This allows me to give a long-term commitment to the kids in that community.”**

— Jennie Thomas, school mental health counselor

# Seacology

**Safeguard the livelihoods and food sources of residents by protecting island ecosystems**

## Why it's needed

Around the world, climate change and rapid modernization leave islands more prone to disasters and their inhabitants more at risk of losing their homes, livelihoods, and food sources. [70] In addition, while islands constitute only about 5% of the Earth's land area, they are home to 40% of the world's critically endangered species.[71]

Seacology protects island ecosystems through conservation projects that benefit both the local island community and their surrounding natural environment.

## What it does

Founded in 1991, Seacology collaborates with local communities to establish and protect marine and terrestrial areas, dedicating its efforts to conservation and sustainable development. The organization does this by funding high priority community projects like schools, clinics, and clean water systems in exchange for conservation commitments, ensuring biodiversity while improving island residents' quality of life.

Seacology has funded 432 projects in 70 countries. Approximately half of these projects address environmental concerns, such as ecotourism infrastructure or solar panels, while the other half focuses on socio-economic outcomes, like community halls or health centers.

For example, in Long Tanid, a remote village in Borneo, Seacology facilitated installing a micro-hydroelectric system to provide sustainable energy in exchange for safeguarding approximately 1,400 acres of forest. Similarly, on Sibuyan Island in the Philippines, Seacology supported the conservation of a 2,471-acre forest in return for funding solar lighting that now enables children to study after dark.

Seacology identifies 25 to 30 projects each year and partners with a local NGO or community association willing to collaborate on its implementation and evaluation. With project agreements typically spanning 10 years or more, Seacology builds strong relationships with local islanders and can conduct additional projects addressing various environmental issues. For example, Seacology initiated its work in Palawan, Philippines in 2003 by establishing a coral reef protected area and has since influenced fishing policies in the region in 2021.

To promote current and past projects and to fundraise for future efforts, Seacology offers donors ecotourism opportunities to the different island communities it collaborates with. By joining these trips, travelers not only financially contribute to environmental preservation work but also gain insight into local cultures and ecosystems and learn about responsible tourism practices.



## How effective it is

Seacology has successfully protected 658,892 acres of terrestrial island habitat and 800,303 acres of marine island habitat, making islands more resilient to disasters and improving their inhabitants' economic and food security.

Due to the diverse nature of its over 400 developmental projects, the environmental and community benefits of each individual project are unique to the island community it serves.

For example, recognizing the vital role of mangroves in sequestering carbon and protecting populated areas from extreme weather events, Seacology partnered with the Sri Lankan government to launch the Sri Lanka Mangrove Conservation Project in 2015. That project protects all 21,782 acres of mangrove forests with 7,900 women and youth trained in their conservation.

Because mangrove roots provide a habitat for shrimp and other fish, preserving the mangroves also positively affects the millions of people who depend on shrimp and fish farming for their livelihoods and food security.

## How philanthropy can help

Seacology earns approximately 77% of its funds from philanthropic sources and the remainder from its expeditions and investments. Additional philanthropic support will help the organization expand its ongoing project portfolio. Learn more: <https://www.seacology.org/>

**“Mangroves are good for us because they help prawns grow. This project is empowering women in this community. I’m proud of what I’ve done.”**

— Jeewanthi Perera, a local volunteer in conserving Sri Lankan mangroves

Find more nonprofits applying similar models at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit-nonprofits/>

# Simprints

Ensure aid reaches those who need it most through secure, practical biometric tools

## Why it's needed

Global humanitarian organizations have always had difficulty providing health and humanitarian aid to intended beneficiaries due to the widespread lack of formal identification.[72]

According to the World Bank, 850 million people globally lack a formal ID, most of whom live in low and lower-middle income economies in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.[73] Without reliable ID, tracking outcomes and delivering follow-up care are difficult.

Simprints provides biometric identification tools so that organizations can reach those who need aid most, particularly those in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

## What it does

While many governments and organizations issue physical identification cards, these can be lost or damaged, particularly when transient populations use them.[74] Simprints has helped aid organizations and governments in 17 countries integrate biometric identification technology into their projects to provide more reliable identification.

Simprints works with client organizations, including BRAC, the world's largest non-governmental organization, and the Federal Ministry of Health Ethiopia, to identify the right biometric measure — face, fingerprint, or both — given the client's needs and technological capabilities.

Frontline aid workers tested Simprints' proprietary Vero Scanner for over 700 hours to ensure it stood up for use in extreme heat and no electricity. The scanner is small, portable, dust-proof, and waterproof. It's usable both online and offline and powered by a rechargeable Lithium-ion battery.

The organization's face biometrics method uses a standard smartphone camera to guide the user through a simple image capture. This contactless method is particularly useful for frontline workers treating infectious diseases. The fingerprint and face scanners are connected wirelessly to an app that matches a person's biometric information with their record.

Simprints provides a three-day training course for frontline workers. Client organizations also have a direct line to the organization to ask technical questions and troubleshoot.

Simprints engages with beneficiary communities about privacy and security, translating privacy and consent notices into local languages. The organization has implemented strong privacy protocols because of the sensitive nature of biometric data. Images are deleted from mobile devices automatically and sent to secure cloud storage. Biometric data is encrypted end-to-end, and instead of attaching full names to biometric data, Simprints uses randomly generated Globally Unique Identifiers (GUIDs).



## How effective it is

As of 2024, client organizations have used Simprints to serve 3 million beneficiaries. In 2023, 80% or more of frontline workers who used Simprints' technology reported it was easy to use.

Simprints client organizations are more effective as a result. For example, BRAC found that in its maternal health efforts in Bangladesh, 37.4% of women in the Simprints cohort achieved the World Health Organization-recommended eight antenatal care (ANC) visits, compared to 13.1% in the control group — an improvement of 185%. Studies show that achieving a minimum of eight ANC visits can reduce perinatal deaths by 43% to 68%.[75]

Cohesu, a grassroots NGO in Kenya that worked with Simprints, was able to reduce their in-school work times from 1-2 days to under 4 hours because of Simprints' technology.

Similarly, Simprints' work with the Ethiopia Federal Ministry of Health enabled health workers to identify clients 2.7 times faster than a digital ID search and 8 times faster than a manual name search while reducing data discrepancies from 39% to less than 5%.

## How philanthropy can help

About 60% of Simprints' funding comes from its contracts with partners, with the rest from philanthropy. Additional philanthropic support will enable Simprints to better assess their impact while enabling the organization to provide more support for its open-source software. Learn more: <https://www.simprints.com/>

**"After evaluating my eyelid, the eye doctor swiftly found my records and entered the information on his phone. ... all of the patients were satisfied because there was no longer any lengthy period after waiting."**

— A patient using Simprints at a health center

Find more nonprofits applying similar models at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit-nonprofits/>

# West Street Recovery

Accelerate communities' recovery from natural disasters and improve disaster resilience

## Why it's needed

As natural disasters become more frequent, communities often face the impact of another disaster before fully recovering from the previous one, leaving them more vulnerable to adverse financial and health outcomes.[76]

In the United States, repeated natural disasters have disproportionately impacted low-income communities in areas like Northeast Houston, Texas, where storm frequency and disinvestment mean many homes are often in disrepair, even before a disaster hits[77] (Learn more at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/disasters/>).

West Street Recovery provides direct support to help people recover from a disaster while advocating for systemic changes that make the area more resilient to future disasters.

## What it does

Founded after Hurricane Harvey in 2017, West Street Recovery (WSR) began as a collective of volunteers providing immediate relief to storm-ravaged Northeast Houston neighborhoods that larger aid organizations were slow to reach. To help resolve long-term problems, the organization now combines immediate relief with grassroots organizing.

WSR provides those who can't afford home repairs with funding and expertise in disaster resilience construction, like freeze-resistant piping, elevating outlets, and installing tile flooring that won't mold.

WSR trains community members to complete repairs and build skills that will be useful in future recovery efforts. For more specialized tasks, the organization contracts firms owned by Northeast Houston residents, often survivors of disasters themselves, to ensure that recovery efforts economically benefit those most affected by disasters.

To increase preparedness, WSR distributes supplies for households to have in case of emergency. They also distribute generators and have recently created a "hub house system" that equips neighborhood leaders with solar panels and batteries, rescue equipment, and basic medical supplies to distribute to their communities in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

WSR is committed to ensuring that those most affected by disasters, often marginalized communities, are not just recipients of aid but active participants in shaping solutions. WSR's work has built relationships with community members, leading over 400 volunteers to work with the organization on advocacy. The organization has formed the Northeast Action Collective (NAC), a grassroots group that has led campaigns to increase the city's drainage spending by millions of dollars to reduce the risk of flooding.



WSR also publishes reports on topics like barriers to disaster recovery from the perspective of residents of Northeast Houston, strategies to improve disaster resilience, and the danger of flooding from natural disasters and every day rain events in Northeast Houston.

## How effective it is

West Street Recovery (WSR) has repaired over 350 homes, providing critical support to families severely affected by disasters. Following Hurricane Harvey, WSR repaired 28 homes from the studs up, ensuring that these structures were restored and equipped to withstand future disasters.

In 2023 alone, WSR invested \$400,000 into the local housing stock, benefiting 50 homes and restoring water access to 32 families who did not have insurance or were not eligible for government aid. In 2024, WSR completed over \$700k of work, replaced over 25 roofs, and helped over 150 families apply for FEMA aid and insurance.

WSR's advocacy work has also secured significant policy wins, including winning \$28 million between 2023 and 2024 in the city's budget for drainage improvements and the reversal of a 22-year-old ordinance that had perpetuated unequal infrastructure provision in Northeast Houston.

## How philanthropy can help

WSR relies entirely on philanthropic support to sustain its operations. Additional philanthropic support will enable WSR to expand its advocacy work, repair more homes, and improve disaster resiliency in Northeast Houston. Learn more: <https://www.weststreetrecovery.org/>

**"In my neighborhood, there's a lot of seniors with no central air or central heat. I was able to give them heaters and water, and it felt good to be in a position to lend a helping hand."**

— Neandra Boyd, a resident and volunteer from East Sunnyside

Find more nonprofits applying similar models at <https://www.impact.upenn.edu/toolkit-nonprofits/>

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