

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN POLICY COHORT 2023 SUMMARY REPORT

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This Community-Driven Policy (CDP) pilot project was advanced by Sister Carmen Community Center (SCCC), Emergency Family Assistance Association (EFAA), Colorado Center on Law and Policy (CCLP), and Community Resource Center (CRC) after initial brainstorming and planning sessions that took place in 2022. The project was meant to further explore community-driven policy concepts in practice with community members and document learnings along the way. This project was funded through The Colorado Trust's Building and Bridging Power (BBP) grant with funds received by CCLP.



The BBP was a 3-year grant designed to support the work of organizing people in communities experiencing the most inequities, and building policy infrastructure with and between grassroots and grass tops organizations.



PARTICIPANT SELECTION

SCCC and EFAA identified interested individuals from their communities either through their participation in the Family Leadership Training Institute (FLTI) program, or participants who had indicated interest in working on public policy priorities via a participant survey. Two information sessions were held, one at SCCC and one at EFAA, for interested individuals to learn more about this pilot project. At these information sessions, potential participants were asked to fill out an [application](#) to participate in the project. This application consisted of questions about passions, skill sets, and availability. Once applications were collected, SCCC, EFAA, CCLP, and CRC met to complete the participant selection process. In this process, we considered the participant's availability, diversity of perspective, passion, enthusiasm for the group, and the impact of known personalities on the group dynamic.

Ultimately, ten individuals were selected to participate representing a wide diversity of backgrounds. Five of them were native Spanish speakers, two were native English speakers, and the rest were of Arabic, Chinese, or Thai backgrounds. A few of them knew each other from participation in previous activities at one of the local organizations, but most were unacquainted prior to the first meeting.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN POLICY COHORT 2023 SUMMARY REPORT

PROJECT GOAL:

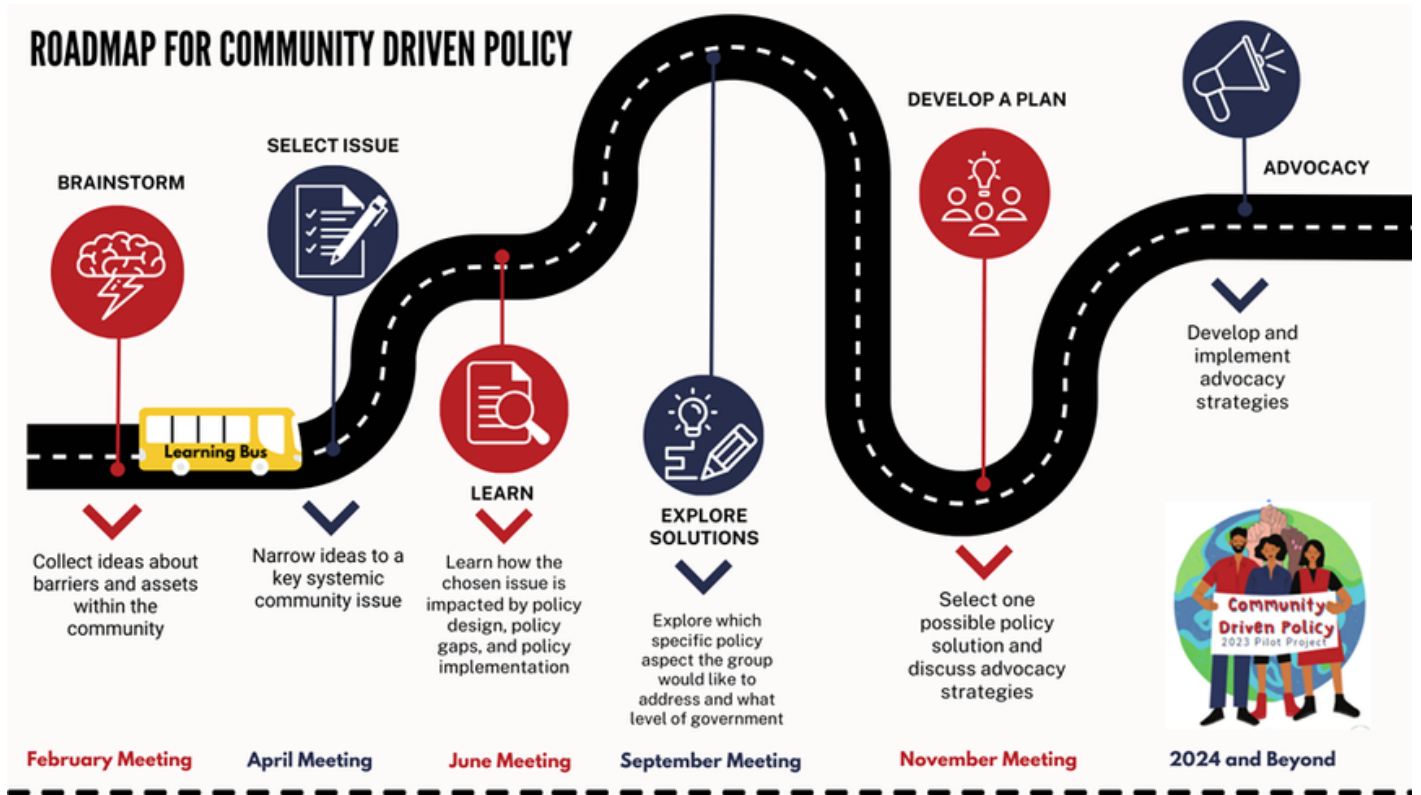
To explore how to engage community members to help shape the policy making and advocacy space.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

To identify a key community issue and explore and/or create policy solutions at the local or state level that are centered in community priorities.



To help meet our goal and objective over the course of five group meeting, we created the following road map to guide our process:



MEETING STRUCTURE:

All meetings were held at SCCC over lunchtime from 11:30am-2:30pm with childcare, lunch, and \$100 gift cards to local stores provided to all participants at each meeting. All meetings included live, simultaneous English/Spanish interpretation and all materials were provided in both English and Spanish for in-person participants. Interpretation was not provided for the few cases where people joined remotely via Zoom. SCCC, EFAA, CCLP, and CRC served as the main meeting coordinators and facilitators, although participants were asked to step into more leadership and facilitation roles in meetings 3-5.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN POLICY COHORT 2023 SUMMARY REPORT

PROJECT OUTCOMES:

Overall, this pilot project was very successful in engaging participants in a participatory learning process, identifying learnings to bring to future similar projects, and producing a final project that the group is excited to continue working on in 2024. Ultimately, the group chose to focus on the broad topic of renters rights, and narrowed in on a specific project around creating better access to information about renters rights through the creation of a multilingual website resource hub. This project will continue to be advanced in 2024 by the 10 community members with support from SCCC, EFAA, CCLP, and CRC plus additional funds to assist with project expenses but not provide stipends for the participants, who will henceforth be volunteering.



PROJECT IMPACT:

To better understand the impact of this project on the ten community participants, they were asked to complete a brief survey on their experience in the cohort and key takeaways.

When asked what they gained from this project, community participants ranked gaining a sense of teamwork, making friends with people from different backgrounds from their own, being listened to and respected, and feeling stronger to try new things as the greatest benefits. The community participants found that having written materials available in both English and Spanish and having language interpretation during the meetings were the most helpful resources provided by the project to reduce the barriers for participation. Looking forward and beyond this project, 67% of participants have an idea and plan for using the skills they gained from this project to tackle other community issues. The participants plan to use the skills they learned to identify problems and advocate for their community, learn how to make a change to city and county laws, and work together with people from different backgrounds to promote change. When looking at their plan to advocate for communities, the majority of members plan to start at the local level. Overall, the participants found the most value in the meetings that focused on issue identification within communities and hearing directly from individuals who are working to change the issues affecting renters.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN POLICY COHORT 2023 SUMMARY REPORT

In addition to the overall project outcomes, there were many specific outcomes of this project for the participating organizations. This project highlighted the time and resources that go into planning and facilitating meetings with multiple organizations and individuals helping to guide the process. Ultimately, the investment pays off because collective leadership and sharing power with community members led to more effective and meaningful outcomes.

Emergency Family Assistance Association (EFAA): Participating in this pilot project helped EFAA expand its incipient work of engaging participants in the public policy process. EFAA was able to leverage the knowledge and connections of statewide policy organizations with the trust relationships EFAA has with participants as a direct service organization to elevate the voices of our participants. Developing these collaborative processes gave EFAA a process blueprint for how to meaningfully incorporate participants' voices into this and future policy projects. It also helped develop a coordinated approach and strategy with our closest local partner, SCCC, to expand our joint policy work throughout Boulder County (e.g. currently working together on local minimum wage increase and participant feedback on mobile home park legislation).

Sister Carmen Community Center (SCCC): The CDP pilot validated Sister Carmen Community Center's belief that involving participants with lived expertise in the early stages of addressing issues or implementing systemic changes is crucial. This approach requires dedication of time, energy, and resources. The pilot revealed that investing time in building alliances among organizations and participants leads to more informed and innovative outcomes, highlighting the value of a diverse coalition.

Colorado Center on Law and Policy (CCLP): This project helped CCLP understand the power in working with organizations that already have trusted relationships with community members. The project underscored the time and resources needed to work directly with community members, which current policy systems do not always allow for. Policy organizations or those with relationships with "powerful players" need to act as a bridge for the community. As a policy organization, CCLP realizes that the community has the solutions, or at least possible means to a solution, but they need a seat at the table to contribute to these types of conversations. Community engagement must be an ongoing effort, and maintaining trusting relationships is a continuous process that takes time.

Community Resource Center (CRC): As a capacity building organization, CRC learned how powerful it can be to bring different types of organizations together with community members to collectively work to solve systemic issues. This has been a long-term goal, but takes dedicated time, resources, and funding to bring all of these groups together. A key learning was that by working with a small number of organizations, each organization was able to be more deeply involved compared to larger networks. These types of collaborative projects help facilitate relationship building between direct service and policy organizations that will continue to benefit those organizations well into the future. CRC is excited to take lessons learned through this project and apply them to our advocacy capacity building work with other nonprofits across Colorado.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN POLICY COHORT 2023 SUMMARY REPORT

LESSONS LEARNED:

One of the main goals of this pilot project was to document lessons learned to inform future similar projects. Below are lessons we learned through the process that feel important to carry forward in our work and that might be useful to other organizations planning similar projects.

PROJECT LEARNINGS:

Organizational Coordination:

- Organizations that wish to invest in creating relationships with community members and with policy organizations need to invest time to show up and build personal relationships with the groups and individuals involved with service providers.
- These kinds of projects are a heavy lift on the organizations as opposed to other projects and require significant staff time, so it is important that all stakeholders are ready to invest the time required.
- It is best to have a designated staff person from each participating organization who is committed to advancing the project.
- It is important for the leadership of participating organizations to know in advance approximately how much staff time is likely to be required and to approve involvement on that basis.

Scope of Project:

- It is easier for participants to try to change policies/regulations at the local level rather than through state institutions, but even locally it can be very difficult for people to accomplish modifications when they have limited time and knowledge of the mechanisms of government.
- We started this project thinking that participants might actually help to write specific policy language, but we learned that it is unrealistic to expect them to have the knowledge base and skills to do so if they are approaching a topic without previous exposure. In such cases, a more accessible role may be to convey their concerns about specific issues and their suggestions for change to organizations focused on policy, who can try to implement them. If, however, such a project worked with an existing group of participants who already had some knowledge of existing policies and how they might be modified, it might be more appropriate to suggest that participants could partner with a policy organization in creating change.



COMMUNITY-DRIVEN POLICY COHORT 2023 SUMMARY REPORT

PROJECT LEARNINGS CONTINUED:

Group Dynamics & Consensus Building

- One goal of this work was to let community members play more of a leadership role in the policy process. In order to build leadership skills and confidence, it would be best to slowly transition leadership of the meetings over to community members throughout the project rather than waiting until the last few meetings to bring them into this role.
- At the first group meeting, participants were asked to identify “assets and barriers” within the community that might help or hinder community projects. Because these are somewhat abstract concepts, in the future it would be important to simplify the way these concepts are presented and continue to return to them in subsequent meetings.
- A lot of time was used in this project bringing the group together and coming to a consensus around a particular topic area (renters rights). For future projects, time and energy could be saved if we started by identifying a group of individuals already mobilized around a particular topic and then supporting them in formulating a specific project and moving it forward.

Logistics

- When working with community groups, it is important to keep in mind differences in literacy levels among the group and not rely solely on written comments and feedback. It may be appropriate to explore other ways of incorporating feedback in a more inclusive way.
- Ensure that interpretation is dynamic to adjust to conversations that are flipping back and forth between languages.
- Commit to fully in-person meetings or fully commit to hybrid meetings and invest in a virtual interpreter in addition to the in-person interpreters.
- Plan from the start on using gift cards, not cash, to thank/reward participants, due to their concern about triggering a negative “cliff effect” on their benefits.
- Provide coffee and snacks at meetings in addition to the main meal.



COMMUNITY-DRIVEN POLICY COHORT 2023 SUMMARY REPORT

CONCLUSION:

All organizations involved in this pilot project agree this was a fruitful learning opportunity and are already looking for opportunities to collaborate on similar projects in the future. As stated previously, one of the goals of this project was to document lessons learned and we hope that this report can be a useful tool for other organizations looking to do more community-driven policy work.



PARTICIPATING INDIVIDUALS:

- Morgan Turner, Director of Community Engagement, CCLP
- Alex McHenry, Director of Civic Engagement, CRC
- Molly Eckerle, Advocacy Intern, CRC
- Madeline Hulbert, Advocacy Intern, CRC
- Julie Piller, Community & Family Education Manager, SCCC
- Ana Fernandez Frank, Public Policy and Community Outreach Manager, EFAA
- Marjorie McIntosh, Public Policy Volunteer, EFAA

COMMUNITY MEMBER PARTICIPANTS:

- Zahira Garcia
- Sou
- Xixi Shen
- Aisha Mohamed
- Lupita Cardoza
- Elizabeth Pineda
- Victor Lemus
- Yuriana Chavira Aguilera
- Kathleen Gilligan
- Lynn Martinez