A Greener Skyline

Our grants help buildings reduce emissions, increase energy efficiency, and provide habitat for wildlife. | Page 3
The New York Community Trust supports vital nonprofits working to make a healthy, equitable, and thriving community for all, through the generosity of past, present, and future New Yorkers. Join us.

Philanthropy has always been a part of life for Susan Berkman Rahm, and her family remains committed to supporting nonprofits. “My twins made their first contribution when they were eight,” she recalls. “I was being honored by Girls Inc., and they gave to the organization from their saved allowance—five dollars apiece.”

What has changed is how Susan and her husband, David, give back. Decades ago, the Rahms created a private foundation to support the arts, their alma maters, and those less fortunate.

In 1999, she joined Wellmet Philanthropy, a giving circle at The New York Community Trust, which supports nascent City nonprofits. In the 20 years since it was formed, Wellmet has distributed more than $2.8 million. “Wellmet is one of the greatest things I’ve ever done,” Rahm says. “I’ve learned so much about New York City and met the super people who run these small organizations.”

After the recession hit in 2008, the Rahms began to give more to groups providing food and shelter, and strengthening the social safety net. And when running their private foundation became a burden, they realized they could save time and money by dissolving it into a donor-advised fund in The Trust.

“The Trust makes it easy to give back,” Rahm says. “Plus, I’ve learned about great nonprofits from attending events for donors.”

Private Foundations & Donor-Advised Funds

Q & A with John Oddy, Senior Director of Donor Services

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PRIVATE FOUNDATION AND A DONOR-ADVISED FUND?

At a high level, a private foundation is a stand-alone entity recognized by the IRS. Foundations are required to observe a complex array of regulations and file an annual tax return. A donor-advised fund (DAF) is an account within a public charity, such as The New York Community Trust.

HOW DO DONORS USE BOTH DAFS AND FOUNDATIONS ON A PRACTICAL LEVEL?

Generally speaking, both make grants to charitable organizations; however, foundations tend to be the preferred vehicle where there is a need or a desire to have an office and paid staff that manage a formal application and review process. Alternatively, The Trust, as DAF sponsor, validates the tax status and governance practices of the grantee organization and ensures that the grant check was received and cashed in a timely manner.

WHEN MIGHT IT MAKE SENSE FOR FOUNDATION ASSETS TO BE TRANSFERRED TO A DAF?

Institutions have life cycles, and private foundations are no exception. Perhaps there are no longer individuals or family members willing to become board members and take on management responsibilities. Perhaps the level of assets in the foundation does not justify the investment, legal, and accounting fees needed to keep it going. Or, a foundation board may look at its granting history and simply determine that its ongoing support for public charities can be more easily carried out by transferring foundation assets into a DAF through a dissolution process.

More questions? Contact John Oddy at (212) 686-2564 or jjo@nyct-cfi.org
A Greener Skyline

Curbing carbon emissions for the future’s sake

To keep global temperatures from rising, we need to reduce significantly carbon pollution. And that means changing how we heat and cool buildings.

“Collectively, commercial and residential buildings generate nearly 70 percent of the City’s greenhouse gas emissions,” says Arturo Garcia-Costas, The Trust’s program officer for the environment. And fossil fuels (natural gas, oil, and propane) used for heating represent the lion’s share of those emissions.

Last April, the City passed the Climate Mobilization Act, a package of legislative measures that requires building owners to meet tough new standards, slash planet-warming pollution, and install solar panels or green roofs on new buildings. Our recent grants support those efforts.

Urban Green Council is using $75,000 to put NYC’s new buildings emissions law into practice through educational events and policy development. Urban Green’s recent conference drew over 350 building professionals to explore the path to retrofitting 50,000 buildings in 10 years.

One of the most effective ways buildings can reduce emissions is by installing high-efficiency electric heat pumps, an alternative to boilers.

With $138,000, Acadia Center will work with state agencies in the Northeast to make it easier for homeowners to use heat pump technologies. The Building Electrification Initiative will use $110,000 to help several U.S. cities develop new programs, policies, and strategies that help their residents make the switch.

Building owners can also install solar panels, low-flush toilets, and energy-efficient windows. But perhaps the most visible change an owner can make is adding a green roof.

“In the summer, green roofs reflect and absorb sunlight that regular roofs would attract, while in the winter, the greenery acts as an extra layer of insulation,” says William Cosgarea, sustainability specialist at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center.

Trust donors toured the Javits Center’s green roof, where they saw bees, birds, greenery—and breathtaking views of the City’s skyline. They also heard grantee New York City Audubon and Javits Center speakers explain the construction and benefits of green roofs. A grant of $60,000 is helping NYC Audubon coordinate the NYC Green Roof Researchers Alliance, which brings researchers, educators, and policymakers together to expand the use of green roofs locally.
More Than the Sum
Combining funds to make a bigger impact

People with a wide range of charitable interests ask The New York Community Trust to help them make an impact. And they all want the biggest bang for their buck. To best serve these donors—and our region—we look closely at the purpose of each fund and weave them together to meet the needs of nonprofits doing important work. Below are two examples.

‘Unsung heroes and heroines’ battling the opioid epidemic across the U.S.

Every day, the opioid epidemic kills about 130 people in the U.S. At the same time, fentanyl-involved overdose deaths are skyrocketing. But with training, social workers could be life-savers for those addicted to opioids.

Donors who understood the power of social work created three legacy funds in The Trust. Lois and Samuel Silberman left funds to train and educate social workers. Robert and Ellen Popper were interested in the intersection of social work and health care, and Harriett Bartlett wanted to help workers in the field address social causes. And these donors wanted to have a far-reaching impact.

By combining their funds, we’re helping forge a new partnership between schools of social work and health providers to battle the opioid crisis. The National Council on Social Work Education will use $1.1 million to work with the Council on Social Work Education to train students to work in prevention, treatment, and support for those struggling with opioid and other substance use disorders.

“Social workers are unsung heroes and heroines who play a critical role in solving the opioid epidemic,” says Chuck Ingoglia, president and CEO of the National Council for Behavioral Health. “They are saving lives and bringing recovery to people caught in the cycle of addiction,” he says.

Finding treatments for teens who face hearing loss

Two funds were created in The Trust to help find cures for diseases. A third provides funding for research into the causes and cures of deafness, and the fourth focuses on alleviating children’s diseases. (See infographic.) Trust staff identified a project at Hospital for Special Surgery’s Kathryn O. and Alan Greenberg Center for Skeletal Dysplasias that would combine these funds to address a complication of an incurable bone disorder.
Skeletal dysplasias are hereditary conditions that cause dwarfism and can lead to other medical problems. For those with one type of the condition, \textit{osteogenesis imperfecta}, bones are brittle, bowed, and prone to fractures. The condition is incurable, but with care, people with the disease often lead healthy, productive lives.

Approximately 50 percent of those with a type of \textit{osteogenesis imperfecta} experience hearing loss that typically starts in the late teens. Common treatments, such as bone-anchored hearing aids and surgery, often are not an option. With our $450,000, Hospital for Special Surgery will study ways to prevent hearing loss, including exploring the effectiveness of a drug that slows or prevents bone loss.

“Research funding for rare diseases is tough to come by,” says Irfan Hasan, The Trust’s program director for Health and Behavioral Health. “We’re grateful our donors left legacy gifts that bring hope and resources to the toughest problems.”

“\textbf{The Hospital for Special Surgery’s research project has multiple benefits: We carry out the interests of our donors and we also help an early-career researcher, Dr. Ugur Ayturk, apply for larger, competitive government grants.}”

—Irfan Hasan, The Trust’s program director for Health and Behavioral Health
Better Courts for a Just New York
Simplifying the courts and monitoring criminal hearings

The Trust is focused on simplifying and improving New York’s archaic and convoluted court system. With 11 different trial courts, “the system is inefficient, inaccessible, and inequitable,” says Eve Stotland, The Trust’s program officer for Human Justice.

So-called “poor people’s courts”—Family Court, Criminal Court, and the housing part of Civil Court—serve mostly black and Latino and low-income litigants. Compared with other trial courts that deal with corporations and wealthier litigants, these venues are underfunded and overcrowded.

The time is ripe for reform. New York State Chief Judge Janet DiFiore has committed to court simplification, and the chairs of the Senate and Assembly Judiciary Committees have followed her lead, creating an unprecedented opportunity to fix the system.

With $140,000 from The Trust, the Fund for Modern Courts will lead a campaign to amend the state constitution and streamline the 11 existing courts into two—Supreme Court and District Court.

Case Study: How the Court Structure Fails Low-Income New Yorkers
A tenant in the Bronx, who was seven months pregnant, was locked out of her rent-stabilized apartment by her landlord. She tried to file an illegal lockout petition with the Bronx Civil Court, but was told she had to file the case in Housing Court. So, she trudged nearly a mile to Housing Court, where she was told by yet another clerk to go back to the Civil Court to file the petition. When she started to cry, the sympathetic clerk searched for an illegal lockout petition form and helped her file it there.

Court Watchers hold public prosecutors accountable
New York is putting criminal justice reforms into practice, including raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18 and eliminating cash bail for most defendants. District attorneys, and the hundreds of assistant district attorneys (ADAs) who prosecute criminal cases, must enact these policies. But no public database existed of charges brought, bail sought, or sentences recommended by prosecutors. To remedy this, VOCAL-NY used $90,000 from The Trust to train 700 volunteer Court Watchers to observe prosecutors’ requests and document courtroom practices. Last year, volunteers logged 74,200 hours in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens courtrooms.

Through blog posts, social media, and earned media, these watchers noted that despite commitments by the Manhattan and Brooklyn district attorneys to stop prosecuting low-level marijuana cases, both offices continued to file charges. Court Watchers also reported that prosecutors were twice as likely to request bail—as opposed to no bail—for drug crimes if the accused was black.

This year, a $90,000 grant will help VOCAL-NY continue to expand the program.

“Not only has the program been illuminating for the public, but we’re finding the district attorneys themselves are being forced to respond to how their ADAs are putting policy into practice,” says Alyssa Aguilera, co-executive director of VOCAL-NY.
A VOICE FOR IMMIGRANTS:
Khadim Niang, Civic Organizer of African Communities Together, emcees the organization’s annual World Refugee Day March and Rally in 2018. Photo by Liz Maney

Does Anyone Here Speak Wolof?

Advocates press City for job-creating translation services

More than one in four New Yorkers speaks little English, and nonprofits that serve immigrants often need interpreters and translators—particularly for clients who speak African, Asian, and indigenous Latin American languages. But the cost of translation services can be prohibitive.

With $90,000 from The Trust, African Communities Together will lead a campaign to expand the City’s translation and interpretation services. The group is proposing a model in which worker-run cooperatives offer affordable translation while providing multilingual immigrants with reliable, well-paid jobs.

“We think this is a great fit for the Alice V. and Dave H. Morris Memorial Fund, which supports efforts to improve international communication,” says Leigh Ross, The New York Community Trust’s senior program associate for Promising Futures.

Fighting Loneliness with Interactive Technology

Social isolation and loneliness can affect the physical and mental health of older people. The Carter Burden Network runs four senior centers in Manhattan—their programs, such as group lunches, provide companionship.

Last year, the nonprofit surveyed its clients on Roosevelt Island, where one of its centers is located. The results showed that many older adults and disabled residents had difficulty, or felt uncomfortable, leaving their homes and could benefit from accessing programs remotely.

With a $55,000 grant, Carter Burden will test a voice-controlled smart screen that can make video calls, giving homebound older and disabled Roosevelt Island residents a virtual connection to the local senior center. A tech consultant will install each device in the participants’ homes and provide training.

This grant was made from our Katharine A. Park Fund for the Elderly, created to curb loneliness among older adults.
She loved playwrights.

So she gave.

Helen Merrill was a theater agent and mentor to scores of aspiring playwrights.

Today, her passion for theater continues through The New York Community Trust Helen Merrill Award for Playwriting. Helen created a fund in her will, and since 1999, her permanent fund has made 88 awards totaling $1.8 million, including five awards of $30,000 this year. Congratulations to the 2019 winners: Carlyle Brown, Mia Chung, Aleshea Harris, Michael R. Jackson, and Daniel Alexander Jones.

How would you like to be remembered?

Contact us at (212) 686-0010 x363 or giving@nyct-cfi.org to learn about setting up a fund.