A look at how New York Community Trust grants are making life better for New Yorkers, thanks to generous people like you.
From the Desk of Steve Aresty

Learning effective grantmaking through collaboration

While I have always tried to give back and help others, nine years ago I began to learn how to intensify the impact of my charitable giving. Back then, I was essentially a one-person foundation, trying to figure out how to create a portfolio of grantees that would have a meaningful impact on education. Then I was invited to join the Donors’ Education Collaborative and, later, Early Childhood Partners NYC—two funds established by The Trust to bring donors together to address a critical need, pool their money, and make grant decisions.

Education had always been important in the life of my late father, Joseph—a first-generation college student—and in mine. He created his foundation to help others as he had been helped. We saw how many residents of the city struggled to achieve the American dream—and one of the biggest obstacles was a lack of educational opportunities. While the problems were plain to see, the solutions were hard to pick out.

I was welcomed into these two working groups, which were led by Trust program officers and other veteran grantmakers who thoroughly knew the issues, asked incisive questions, and had access to great research about what works. I just drank that in. It has been a terrific experience. The collaboratives invited proposals from nonprofits, and I learned even more as we considered their applications. We looked at the crux of a group: its vision, the nuts and bolts of the project. We looked at how it was going to solve the mysteries and problems of education.

“Today I’m a more selfless grantmaker—it’s not about me and what I like or don’t like: it’s about what the system needs to lift children out of endemic poverty.”

I’m very proud of the work we have done collectively and I am incredibly optimistic about the future of education.

It’s a great time to be involved in education, because there is now the public and political will to do something. People are focusing on relevant issues for schools and teaching. And as education improves, we will be improving the prospects for our children, communities, city, and the country.”

Steve Aresty is president of the Catherine and Joseph Aresty Foundation, one of 94 active donors in The Trust’s funder collaboratives.
**Getting Past Cancer’s “Dirty Little Trick”**

*Funds created to support medical research fuel discovery*

If someone in your life has cancer, there is a greater than 60 percent chance they will receive radiation treatment. Unfortunately, the treatment doesn’t always work. Dr. Samuel Sidi, an Associate Professor at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai, wanted to understand why tumors resist radiation, and find a solution.

A $600,000 grant from The Trust made it possible for Dr. Sidi to be awarded the **Pershing Square Foundation’s** Sohn Prize for Young Investigators.

Sidi found what he calls the “dirty little trick” cancer uses to resist radiation. Cells of our immune system express a specific protective enzyme which they use to avoid cell death in response to bacterial or viral infection. When exposed to radiation, cancer cells are able to hijack this enzyme and exploit its protective properties to avoid dying. When Sidi “turned off” the enzyme, cancer cells readily succumbed to radiation.

This discovery brought his lab one step closer to creating drugs that could resensitize tumors to radiation treatment.

After publishing his Trust-supported research, he went on to win competitive grants from the National Cancer Institute and the National Institute for General Medical Sciences, totaling $3.15 million, so he can continue his research.

“My goal has always been to help the largest number of people possible,” said Dr. Sidi. “This research should be able to help pharmaceutical companies create highly targeted medicines compatible with immunotherapy that would be available to millions of people.”

**HEALTH**

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**FISHY BUSINESS:**

Dr. Sidi works with zebrafish, a species that shares 70 percent of its DNA with humans. Photo courtesy of Pershing Square Sohn Cancer Research Alliance

**THANKS TO OUR DONORS:**

This grant was made by combining money left to us by four donors interested in medical research: Carol and Charles Spaeth and Helen and Harry O’Connor.

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**LEADING IN THE FIELD**

**Funding Accessibility**

In the fall, Trust Program Officer Rachel Pardoe spoke at a Philanthropy New York seminar.

She said, “Even though your foundation may not focus on people with disabilities, you are most likely serving this large segment—20 percent—of society. Make sure the programs and policies you’re funding are inclusive and accessible.”
When it comes to changing laws and the status quo, winning isn’t everything. Advocates need funding to make sure hard-won legislation is turned from vision into reality. What follow are three cases where passing legislation was just the beginning of achieving systemic, long-lasting change.

After a four-year Trust-funded campaign, the NYC Department of Education announced in September 2017 that it was making free lunch available to all 1.1 million of the City’s public school students.

That was a huge victory, giving more children access to food, relieving low-income parents of a financial burden, and eliminating any stigma for children about getting a free meal. About 600,000 students were eating school lunch, and an additional 30,000 joined them when the program became available to all.

Now, to get even more children to participate, The Trust made a grant to Community Food Advocates to work with the City to improve the food, understand barriers to participation, and launch a marketing campaign.

In addition, Community Food Advocates’ work led to more than $25 million allocated to redesign between 50 and 70 middle- and high-school cafeterias. Officials have found that making cafeterias more like a food court gets young people to eat more vegetables and has raised participation by 35 percent.
In another long-sought Trust-supported reform, the City’s system for collecting commercial waste was revolutionized in 2019. The new policy divides the city into 20 zones with no more than three selected carters per zone instead of having dozens of companies zigzagging along irrational routes. The new system will lessen truck traffic and pollution, improve worker protections, and incentivize carters to transition to zero-emission trucks and upgraded facilities.

This victory was only the beginning. Reorganizing the system is the next complicated step. For that reason, we’re continuing to support the Transform Don’t Trash Coalition, which includes an alliance of labor and community organizations known as ALIGN, the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and Teamsters Joint Council 16. The coalition will continue working with City officials, the community, and business groups.

One study found that because of financial limitations, only 5 to 10 percent of undocumented students in New York go on to college. The New York State Dream Act offered help. That 2019 legislation, which passed after almost a decade of advocacy by Trust grantees including the New York Immigration Coalition, Make the Road NY, and the New York State Youth Leadership Council, extends the state’s college financial aid program to undocumented teenagers.

The bill will affect as many as 146,000 students. To help them take advantage of the law, The Trust supported Make the Road NY to inform students in New York City, Long Island, and Westchester about the aid and how to apply.

Make The Road NY worked with officials to ensure the application was designed to keep immigrant students and families safe, was accessible and easy to navigate. The group is training young people to coach their peers and holding workshops at schools with large numbers of immigrant students. It has also identified issues and advocated for changes to improve implementation.

When building out these kinds of complex reforms, The Trust has always stayed engaged for the entire life-cycle of change—from conception to implementation—making sure there is a maximum impact for generations to come.
Bringing History Out of the Closet

New York City landmarks protect LGBTQ sites

In 2019, the city designated six sites as landmarks notable for their role in lesbian, gay, transgender, and queer history. A multi-year advocacy effort, led by the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, resulted in the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission designation, which protects historically significant buildings.

“Official recognition of these sites makes an impact and we’re thrilled to know these buildings will live on as learning tools,” said Amanda Davis, project manager for the Historic Sites Project.

The sites include novelist James Baldwin’s home, poet and essayist Audre Lorde’s home, and Caffe Cino, the birthplace of Off-Off Broadway theater and a pioneer in plays about LGBTQ life. The Trust has awarded $170,000 to the Historic Sites Project since the group’s inception in 2015.

Arts for Today’s Staten Island

Nonprofits build audiences through diversity, equity & inclusion

In 2015, Trust program officers spotted a trend in grant applications: Staten Island arts groups wanted to reach larger and more diverse audiences that reflected the borough’s changing demographics. Staten Island Arts—a nonprofit that serves cultural organizations and individual artists—said it would help. Since 2017, our $537,000 investment has proven fruitful. Staff and board members from 34 arts and cultural organizations participated in marketing and racial equity workshops, made programmatic and staffing improvements, and formed new partnerships with community groups.

At the Staten Island Children’s Museum, staff participated in workshops and consultations to understand implicit bias and its relationship to discrimination against people of color, LGBTQ-identified people, and anti-Semitic thinking and actions.

At Historic Richmond Town, racial equity workshops led to the creation of its first-ever diversity coordinator position, and African Americans now see their ancestors reflected in the organization’s exhibits and reenactments.

And the Alice Austen House—a photography center and historic home of the groundbreaking lesbian photographer—created inter-generational photography and storytelling workshops that connected local LGBTQ students with elders in that community. “For some teens, it was the first opportunity they had to spend time with older LGBTQ adults,” said Elizabeth Bennett, the executive director of Staten Island Arts. “It was a meaningful experience for young people who hadn’t yet envisioned who they might become as elders.”
When Research Makes a Difference

Report leads to new program for fundraisers of color

Fundraising—or “development,” as it’s called in the nonprofit world—can be a tough job for anyone. As a development director, the health of your organization rides on your shoulders, and being able to build trusting, personal relationships with executive staff, foundations, and wealthy individuals is essential.

Cause Effective, a nonprofit consulting group that helps organizations maximize fundraising, understands that development professionals of color face even more challenges.

With $140,000 in grants from The Trust, Cause Effective released a 2019 report, Money, Power and Race: The Lived Experiences of Fundraisers of Color. Those interviewed shared challenges in their roles and often experienced isolation and difficulty finding mentors and other people of color in the profession. Now, Cause Effective is running a first-of-its-kind program to provide support to development professionals of color to help them thrive at work and build their expertise as leaders in the field.

Data helps pre-kindergarten teachers earn fair wages

Pre-kindergarten teachers working outside of public schools but under city contracts were being paid far less than those teaching within public schools—in some cases, the pay difference was as much as $35,000 a year. "Achieving salary parity is critical for a stable workforce and for ensuring the youngest New Yorkers receive high-quality services," said Natasha Lifton, The Trust’s senior program officer for human services.

After years of advocacy, the city reached a deal in 2019 with the union representing these teachers to achieve pay parity by October 2021. The city began their commitment with incremental salary increases for the 2019–2020 school year. The deal was reached, in part, due to the research funded with $130,000 by The Trust’s Early Childhood Partners NYC Fund and conducted by the New School’s Center for New York City Affairs and the United Neighborhood Houses.
500 Graduates Strong

Green jobs, green food, green careers

Since 2016, a Trust grant of $750,000 has helped Green City Force support five urban farms within public housing developments that cultivate young workers as they learn green business skills. These open-air classrooms teach young men and women about agriculture, energy conservation, and life skills—all while composting community food waste and providing residents with free, healthy foods.

The program has graduated more than 500 young adults living in the city’s public housing—80 percent of whom go on to college or employment in related fields, from community organizing to landscaping.

The first farm, visited by The Trust’s board, was created amid the Red Hook Houses in Brooklyn in 2013. That pilot’s success led Green City Force to build five more farms at other developments. The farms were planned with community input and residents get food for free in exchange for volunteering or bringing food scraps for composting.

To date, Green City Force’s urban farms have distributed more than 90,000 pounds of organic vegetables to NYCHA residents, diverted more than 19,500 pounds of food scraps and leaves from landfills, and engaged 2,490 students in farm-based learning.

“...The most important thing that I learned at Green City Force was just how many job and career opportunities you can find in the environmental field and contribute to keeping the planet healthy.”

—Graduate Roger Nunez, seen here unloading energy-efficient lightbulbs he installed for Brooklyn residents