CLEANER ALTERNATIVES:
The Trust is funding research and advocacy aimed at converting fossil-fuel plants (like this one in Queens), which are used during peak demand, to less-polluting renewable energy sources.

Photo by Mariann Asayan

Advocating for Healthier Air
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Helping New Yorkers create lasting legacies

With this issue, The Trust says good-bye to retiring General Counsel Jane Wilton, who reflects below on her 29 years of stewardship. She will be missed greatly.

Among the greatest sources of pleasure in this job has been talking with donors about their philanthropic goals. It’s not the money-making side of people, but the money-giving side—and I think it is the best side of people. After a life of hard work, they sat down with me to discuss their passions, what they want to be remembered for, what they want their legacy to be. I feel lucky that I have had a job where I got to help people think about these issues that are so important to them. It’s also been a pleasure to work with so many great professional advisors who have facilitated making their clients’ philanthropic legacies a reality.

Many things have changed since I arrived in 1991. Technology has revolutionized the daily operations of what we do—email, online searches, social media. At The Trust, we added MyNYCT, an online portal that has been an amazing success, allowing donors to make donations and grants at their convenience. But the heart of our work with donors has stayed the same: the one-to-one discussions about the present and the future. I will truly miss the generous people I’ve connected with—at our donor events and the occasional in-person office visits, which have not been possible lately due to the pandemic.

In the field, I’ve seen governmental scrutiny of the charitable sector increase. With the skyrocketing popularity of donor-advised funds (DAFs), there has been a growing distrust of these vehicles, with critics saying that charitable dollars are not getting to the charities that need them. Our experience at The Trust has shown me that skepticism toward DAFs is unwarranted. I have seen people put in money and spend it out very quickly. They are clearly getting pleasure out of grantmaking—and how can that not be good for the field in general?

Our donor advisors have been happy to direct grants to help fellow New Yorkers. And it’s been particularly satisfying for me to work with the growing number of current donors who have decided to establish legacy gifts that will have a lasting impact on the region’s future.

Though I am thrilled to see a new generation of staff, including my successor Carrie Trowbridge, come to The Trust, it certainly has been terribly sad to be unable to say good-bye to long-time colleagues face-to-face while we work remotely. In fact, the pandemic brings to mind the other crises we have faced together—9/11, the Great Recession, superstorm Sandy—and our response to each one has brought out the best in us. Our grantmakers see issues—and solutions—before others, and they care so deeply about their work and the city. I have always been struck by the intelligence and professionalism of The Trust staff. It has been a privilege and a joy to be a small part of a team that has made such a profound difference in the lives of New Yorkers and this city we all love.”

Champion the causes you care about, forever.

Our Legacy Society brings together donors who want to make a permanent impact on the causes they care about most. The charitable goals of its members are as diverse as the people of New York City, but they are linked together by their desire to create a better world for generations to come. Please let us know if you are thinking about including, or have already included, The Trust in your estate through a planned gift by naming The Trust in your will, or using retirement plan assets.

For more information about the Legacy Society, please contact Marie D’Costa at md@nyct-cfi.org or (212) 686-2461.
As the demands for racial justice grow louder, many of The Trust’s donors have asked us how they can help philanthropically. Since race can affect many aspects of daily life, a donor can address equity in whatever issue area they are passionate about, from education, to health, to the environment.

Below are some of the questions our staff ask themselves as they evaluate the degree to which a potential grant is addressing racial equity. These questions can be a starting point as you consider which nonprofits to support.

**Who benefits from the grant?** While some nonprofits work across demographic lines, many specifically target communities of color. **Grow Brooklyn**, for example, helps families in low-income communities of color preserve intergenerational wealth, mainly through home ownership. The ability to pass along assets is a major determinant of long-term financial stability, which is why the organization has worked to protect financially strapped homeowners from predators who pressure them to sell at lower-than-market prices.

**Who are the leaders?** Look into the composition of a group’s administration and board. Nonprofits led by people of color are often well-suited to understand the needs of communities of color and how to align staff and residents. For example, **WE ACT for Environmental Justice** is a grassroots group started by three Harlem community activists that focuses its work in New York City as well as helping similar communities that are disproportionately impacted by climate change and other environmental challenges.

**What is the source of the problem your grant will tackle?** While triage is often necessary to address a problem, some groups focus on long-term solutions. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected Black and Latinx communities, illustrated the need to close racial health disparities. **Mentoring in Medicine** is using education, mentoring, and scholarships to get more Black students into medical school to, in part, improve health care and health literacy in diverse communities.

Once you’ve applied this equity checklist to a grant or two, consider your entire philanthropic portfolio. Finally, nonprofits serving communities of color report a need for multi-year general operating support grants that provide stability for the future. Fortunately, donor-advised funds are well positioned to help.

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**BRAIN SCIENCE:**
A group of high school students participated in a Mentoring in Medicine workshop. In this session, students learned about the brain and what happens during a stroke.

**HEALTHY TRANSIT:**
WE ACT’s leadership, Peggy Shepard and the late Cecil Corbin-Mark, celebrate the first electric bus route in Harlem in January 2020, having laid the groundwork by convincing the MTA to switch to alternative fuel vehicles and invest in pollution control retrofits for its entire bus fleet.

The New York Community Trust is sad to report the passing of Cecil Corbin-Mark, an inspiring leader in the environmental justice movement, and we send our condolences to his friends and family.
Air—and what’s in it—is under unprecedented scrutiny. COVID-19 has us masking up and concerned about what we are inhaling. While we’re at it, we should remember that the virus isn’t the only airborne risk to our health.

Emissions from power plants, cars, and even household products can put our health at risk and are also linked to asthma and other respiratory problems.

The Trust has long been a champion of clean air, especially in communities that are disproportionately burdened with power plants, transportation infrastructure, and other sources of air pollution.

One way our city can reduce air pollution is to replace dirty “peaker” power plants that burn oil and gas with ones that use renewable energy. Designed to meet “peak” energy demand during the heat of summer, peaker plants often run on particularly dirty fossil fuels such as oil and kerosene and are located in low-income communities with large Black and Latinx populations, including the South Bronx and Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

“The existing fossil-fuel industry, utilities, and grid operators are resistant to change, and want to continue to operate new gas plants rather than innovative clean energy technologies,” said Lewis Milford, president of Clean Energy Group, which is using a $100,000 Trust grant to make the case locally for transitioning away from peaker plants. This requires complex and expensive analysis to demonstrate that renewable energy can be a reliable, cost-effective alternative. But most community groups do not have sufficient resources to pay for that kind of analysis. Clean Energy Group’s approach is paying off. The New York Power Authority announced recently that it would work to replace peaker plants with renewable energy solutions.

STUDYING THE EFFECTS OF TRAFFIC ON OUR AIR

A recent Harvard study found that residents of areas with high-particulate pollution are 8% more likely to die from COVID than those who have better air quality. Columbia University’s Center for Children’s Environment Health has conducted research on the effects of urban pollution on the health of infants and
pregnant women, and it will look at the impact of the unique situation created by COVID-19.

Due to stay-at-home orders, reduced human and industrial activity has also meant a dramatic decrease in air pollution from transportation across the city. With $20,000 from The Trust, the Center will look at how this reduction has impacted the health of children and adults relative to previous years, and the economic benefits of better health and cleaner air.

“People seem to have accepted the continued use of fossil fuels and the dirty air that goes with it as a cost of modern life, of a strong economy,” says Arturo Garcia-Costas, Trust program officer for the environment. “That is no longer the case, if it ever was. In the 21st century, there are far better alternatives that will save lives.”

TEACHING ABOUT LOCALIZED POLLUTION
Changing the mindset of a community about air pollution is a challenge being undertaken by El Puente de Williamsburg. The nonprofit is based in a neighborhood affected by air pollution from the nearby Williamsburg Bridge and Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, along with traffic to nearby industrial areas.

“We found that many people in our community were unaware of just how polluted the air in our neighborhood is,” said Leslie Velasquez, environmental justice program manager at El Puente.

With a $150,000 grant from The Trust, the nonprofit is working to raise awareness about the impact and alternatives to air pollution and to push the city to adopt its recommendations to improve local air quality. Its work has led to mothers in the community becoming leading voices for the campaign.

El Puente also works with artists to produce visual and performance art and social media speaking to the issue.

REDUCING POLLUTANTS IN OUR HOMES
Consumer products such as rugs and paints are a regular part of our lives, but most people don’t consider the harmful chemicals these products may emit, known as “off-gassing.” These chemicals can potentially cause damage to the lungs and skin, affect brain development, and trigger asthma attacks. Advocacy efforts by the Healthier Products Coalition and funded by The Trust have led Home Depot to end all sales of carpets and rugs containing harmful additives. Another milestone for the Coalition was when New York State adopted the group’s criteria about indoor air pollution. A new $120,000 grant will enable the Coalition to develop a set of “healthy carpet” criteria for large purchasers, educate manufacturers about new research, and work to ensure products coming to market are less harmful.

REMOVING SOURCES OF AIRBORNE LEAD
The well-documented hazards of lead to humans have caused this toxic metal to be removed from many products in the U.S. But small aircraft are still allowed to use leaded gas—making them the number one source of lead in the atmosphere. Locally, this means planes landing and taking off from Teterboro and MacArthur airports are putting children at risk for developmental delays and contributing to high blood pressure in adults. Earthjustice is using a $125,000 grant from The Trust to support efforts to compel the federal government to improve lead protections. It also will work with 10 states and cities on legal strategies to reduce lead poisoning, extending that support to a national network of organizations.

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I\n\nIn recent years, the country has seen a wave of youth-led activism—from the anti-gun protests led by students in Parkland, Florida, to Greta Thunberg addressing the U.N. on climate change, to the Black Lives Matter movement. To cultivate this rising generation of activists, The New York Community Trust has made $1.64 million in grants this year to 11 youth-development nonprofits, including some that specifically encourage young women to become leaders.

A two-year grant will let Adhikaar for Human Rights and Social Justice, which serves and organizes Nepali-speaking immigrants, solidify an informal program that began when teenagers came together regularly while their mothers, who were domestic workers or nail salon workers, were attending meetings at the worker center’s offices in Queens. The group will offer workshops on topics such as college admissions, community organizing, and advocacy, while involving young people directly in Adhikaar’s campaigns and helping them build out their own program ideas.

“The youth in our community and the children of our members are aware of the many issues we work on,” said Pabitra Khati Benjamin, executive director of Adhikaar. “They are the children of immigrant women workers in informal industries who face injustices every day. The grant gives us the capacity to create a space for these young people to dive deeper into their political education and organizing with a feminist perspective.”

Girl Be Heard will use its Trust grant to expand a program that builds self-esteem among young women and helps them express their social consciousness through storytelling and performing. The group will offer the program in Brooklyn and Queens, doubling the enrollment of this workshop series. The participants will create performance pieces to develop confidence in their own voices as they educate audiences.

“We help them build their leadership muscle, explore their personal stories, and guide them in harnessing their innate talent as advocates for change,” said Chiwoniso Kaitano, executive director of Girl Be Heard.

A grant to the Red Hook Initiative will enable a group of young men and women to build on a 2017 report they created about the origins of violence in their Brooklyn community. At that time, Red Hook Initiative worked with teens to take stock of the thoughts and feelings of residents, particularly in regard to violence.

Now the group will train a cadre of teens as peer advisors and advocates who can improve the neighborhood. The leaders will survey local residents about their views on reducing violence and research successful public-safety programs elsewhere. They will present their work to the public and officials and will be encouraged to attend tenant association meetings and join the local community board.

For several years, the Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project has helped newly arrived immigrants successfully navigate the American educational system. With a recent grant from The Trust, Flanbwayan will improve college access for young women. The participating teens will learn community organizing and leadership skills, write a guide on applying to college, and stage performances to educate government and families about the importance of college and college access for their community.

Grants for other youth-leadership projects will go to the Alliance of Families for Justice, Arab-American Family Support Center, the Brotherhood/Sister Sol, Center for Anti-Violence Education, Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York, Girls for Gender Equity, and the New York State Youth Leadership Council.
Helping highly skilled immigrants

Entering the U.S. job market as an immigrant can be as disorienting as walking into the middle of a movie. What’s going on? Why are those people acting this way? Add in a language barrier and it can seem like an impossible challenge—making it difficult for highly skilled immigrants to re-start their careers.

Now working with the New York City Housing Authority, Lorena Flores received a bachelor’s degree in economics and a master’s in population studies and conducted labor market data analysis for the Mexican government. When her husband got a job in San Francisco, they moved without knowing anyone. “We started from zero,” she recalled.

Once Flores got her work permit in March 2019, she began her job search with no success. Fortunately, Flores learned about Upwardly Global, which has used $180,000 from recent Trust grants to help highly skilled, underemployed immigrants with their job searching. There are an estimated 2 million underemployed or unemployed college-educated immigrants in the U.S. and 234,000 in the city. Upwardly Global launched more than 1,000 careers in 2019.

LEARNING TO SEARCH THE JOB MARKET

“In Mexico, I had always taken classes in English,” Flores said. “But it’s not the same. It was difficult to translate all my knowledge into English.”

Upwardly Global helped Flores improve her resume and create a LinkedIn profile. She practiced her English through mock interviews, and learned to answer interviewers’ questions more directly and concisely, she said.

When her husband got a new job in New York City, they relocated in December 2019, and Flores began her job search again from zero with help from Upwardly Global’s New York office. The arrival of the pandemic made looking for a job even more challenging, but she landed a video interview with the New York City Housing Authority in March. When she received a follow-up email several weeks later, she assumed it would be like many that she had become too familiar with: “Thanks, but we are moving ahead with someone else.”

But this time she was offered a position.

“I cried when I received that email,” she said. “Because I could not believe it. It was the first time that somebody was giving me that opportunity. I was always thinking: ‘Maybe my English is not so good and maybe I need to practice more, but if someone gives me the opportunity, I will try to do my best.’”

After telling her husband and family, she called Upwardly Global with the good news. “It was a very emotional day,” she said.

Flores began working this past August, and credits the organization with making it happen so quickly. “I feel like they helped me get this job sooner. They helped me improve my English faster and to feel confident and comfortable.”

TAKING LOW-SKILL JOBS TO MAKE ENDS MEET

Another participant, information technology professional Mehmet L. (not his real name) and his wife, a lawyer, sought asylum in America in 2016, after a failed coup attempt in Turkey led to a government backlash that saw the arrest and firing of tens of thousands of people.

In the U.S., he was unable to get a job in IT and took low-skill, low-paying jobs such as dishwashing, delivering food, and driving for a ride-share company. He contacted Upwardly Global, which invited him to several networking events and introduced him to IT professionals. The staff coached him on networking and he got a job offer in data analytics.

“This job was a key to a new life in America,” said Mehmet.
New Yorkers want a way to give back, learn about strong nonprofits, and harness the power of collective giving—in a way that fits into even the busiest schedule. So The Trust created the Giving Collective. This new giving circle invites those in their 20s, 30s, and 40s to tap the expertise of The New York Community Trust staff, join us on site visits (temporarily virtual) to a range of local nonprofits, and discuss giving strategies together.

The Giving Collective made a $10,000 grant this spring to New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE) to help clients through the COVID-19 pandemic. The Collective is currently planning future grants to environmental and justice organizations.

The Collective’s grant was enormously helpful to Jesus Aviles, who had lost his job as a restaurant worker and tried to transition to construction. He was helped by NICE and then began to volunteer at its food distribution and economic relief programs.

“As soon as the pandemic crisis started,” Aviles said, “NICE opened a food security program offering warm meals, veggies, and healthy essential foods. Our program is open for everyone regardless of race, religion, or immigration status. I personally sought out housing support with NICE. They helped me find a shelter where I’m currently staying and also offered me and our community virtual classes and workshops that support personal development.”

“I joined the Giving Collective because I wanted to connect with others who shared my passion for making a difference in the NYC area. This community and expertise has helped me stay on track with my giving goals, while also making me feel really confident that my money is going to make a meaningful impact.”

– Emily Rasmussen, co-founder and CEO of Grapevine