

***What are the nominee's specific achievements?***

Caring for Denver Foundation was designed to address mental health and substance misuse needs in the city of Denver. In the three years since its inception, Caring for Denver has awarded 282 grants totaling \$70 million to 183 organizations that are committed to healing and recovery in Denver.

The Foundation was established when taxpayers voted to create a sales tax of .25% in 2019. Funding priority areas were identified through a public process of gathering community input (including engagement with 1,600 individuals) and analyzing data. The resulting four priority areas are Alternatives to Jail, Care Provision, Community-Centered Solutions, and Youth.

Shortly after finalizing its funding areas with the community, the pandemic amplified the importance of mental health and substance misuse care in nearly every aspect of our community. Because Caring for Denver had built community trust and relationships, they were quick and responsive to emerging needs, ensuring that individuals in crisis have more connections to trauma-informed care, peers with lived experience, case management, access to affirming mental health services, and linkages to community recovery resources.

Since then, Caring for Denver has garnered national attention for [Denver's STAR program](#), which sends a health professional and EMT to non-emergency 911 calls. But they have also funded mental health and recovery supports in so many other areas at a time of critical community need, from schools to homeless shelters and transitional houses, to restaurants, to community organizations.

***What impact has the nominee had on the community through financial contributions and/or volunteerism?***

Caring for Denver has improved mental health and recovery in the City and County of Denver. For the grant participants reporting to date, 70% demonstrated or reported reduced substance misuse; 83% reported improved or maintained mental health; and 86% did not re-enter the criminal justice system.

In addition to addressing mental health and substance misuse, Caring for Denver continues to ensure its actions are driven with and by the communities impacted by its funding, including:

- Creating connections among communities, organizations, and systems to help mobilize community ideas, information, and resources.
- Ensuring community members involved in and impacted by its funding areas play a meaningful role in directing the use of Caring for Denver funds. Community members review grants to identify the strengths and challenges in applications.
- Exploring and investing in capacity building to ensure sustainability of work and trusted organizations. For example, grantee Make a Chess Move, used the learning framework Caring for Denver staff built with them as part of a successful application for a SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) grant.
- Supporting grantees in being the leaders and drivers of their grant implementation. Caring for Denver partners with grantees to determine what to measure, allowing grantees to focus on collecting data that is meaningful for them, rather than the Caring for Denver determining what data matters most.

***What leadership qualities does the nominee possess that promote philanthropy and/or volunteerism?***

Caring for Denver was organized in response to the city's desire to tackle the issues of mental health and substance misuse, which are often intertwined. As a result, Caring for Denver was granted instant and reliable funding in the form of taxpayer dollars. But Caring for Denver also recognized that it must move with speed and efficiency to distribute those dollars through a swift and effective process that would reach a complete cross-section of the city. The grantmaking process was established with a model of meeting people where they are, creating alternative pathways for citizens who might have previously been prosecuted by the justice system, and reflecting the unique cultural needs, values and beliefs of the city's diverse communities.

Caring for Denver's grantmaking process started to roll out just as the COVID-19 pandemic sent the community into lockdown status. The COVID upheaval stressed the entire health care system for nearly two years, including those organizations that were treating community members for mental health and substance misuse challenges. Recognizing this, Caring for Denver ensured that staff of these organizations were also provided with online programs and the needed funding to support *their* mental health and overall well-being, given the sheer volume of COVID cases (nearly 200,000 in all, including 1,500 fatalities) in the city.

Many of the grantees shared that Caring for Denver funds were disbursed more quickly and efficiently than they had experienced with other supports.

These efforts helped strengthen the nonprofit and community organizations that are working to support the health and well-being of the city of Denver.

***How does the nominee adopt a spirit of inclusion? (i.e. inviting broad participation, mentoring young professionals, hiring diverse applicants, etc.)***

Inclusion is a core tenet of Caring for Denver. The staff is diverse and so are Caring for Denver's grantees. In 2021, 37% of the organizations funded were led by a person of color and these same organizations received 47% of the funds allocated. Caring for Denver also works to ensure that grantees cast a wide net to reach all races, ethnicities, cultures, and subcultures.

Moreover, Caring for Denver knows that healing happens in trusted, inclusive, affirming spaces. Many grantees are making it possible for more people to receive care where they feel comfortable, from schools to community spaces. For example, they funded a partnership between Center for African American Health and Therapist of Color Collaborative (offering clinical therapeutic supports to persons of color by persons of color), resulting in 84% of program participants accessing mental health services for the first time. Caring for Denver also funds several peer support programs – recognizing that healing requires inclusive spaces where you can talk to someone who has lived through it and understands and affirms your identities and experiences.