



National Philanthropy Day 2022

Letter of Support for The Caring for Denver Foundation

July 11, 2022

To the National Philanthropy Day Nomination Committee,

It's our pleasure to write this letter of support for The Caring for Denver Foundation's nomination for Outstanding Foundation. Our organization works with a large and diverse variety of funders and nonprofit organizations, and Caring for Denver stands out as a foundation that "walks the talk" with regard to its values. We are struck by the organization's commitment to engaging the broader Denver community to inform their grantmaking, and the personal attention they pay to their grantees. While we appreciate and have aligned values with all the foundations we partner with, The Caring for Denver Foundation stands out in ways that make a difference in our community and deserve recognition.

We founded The HadaNōu Collective (HNC) to support community-led nonprofit leaders develop the skills, tools, and resources they need to thrive and have precisely the impact their communities call on them to have. We've partnered with many local and national foundations and philanthropic organizations. Caring for Denver stands out among this community of funders in its commitment to, and execution of, living out its values as an organization. We've developed a deep partnership with Caring for Denver, which puts us in a unique position to speak about their work. First, we are working with the Foundation to build and implement a comprehensive community engagement process to learn from stakeholders throughout the city. Additionally, we work with many Caring for Denver grantees and can see how the foundation interacts with grantees intimately.

It's fairly common that foundations express a desire to learn about the needs of communities to drive their funding priorities, and we've seen many organizations with excellent intentions go through a seemingly endless strategic planning processes to develop funding strategies without talking to a single person outside the walls of the foundation. That approach stands in stark contrast with the ways Caring for Denver has committed to learning from the Denver community. They're in the process of implementing a survey asking individuals about their needs and thoughts in three languages that will ultimately reach thousands of Denver residents. In addition to this survey Caring for Denver has curated a list of nearly 200 community organizations, chamber of commerce groups, city agencies, religious groups, service providers, groups representing historically marginalized populations, neighborhood associations, and more with whom they'll meet one-on-one in order to go deeper into the specific needs of each community. Caring for Denver's commitment of time and resources to learning deeply, and then acting upon the insights they gain, truly sets them apart from any other foundation we partner with.

Over time we've come to realize just how challenging it is to operationalize an organization's values in the day-to-day work that needs to happen. As a foundation funded by taxpayers, Caring



for Denver takes their responsibility as stewards of community resources to heart. The Foundation consistently and intentionally works with myriad stakeholders from throughout the city to ensure that their funding has the greatest possible impact. For example, it may seem like a small thing but Caring for Denver works with grantees to streamline processes so that their administrative burden doesn't get in the way of providing excellent programming. Another way they demonstrate their commitment to the community comes from the work they did to engage with service providers and their clients to craft organizational impact goals directly related to the outcomes that people most need. These examples of operating in service of the community, and many others, demonstrate Caring for Denver Foundation's commitment to "leading from behind" through their actions and not just rhetoric.

Another way Caring for Denver leads from its values is through personal investment in its grantees, above and beyond what most other foundations offer. At HNC we see this first hand in our role as a fiscal sponsor to several of Caring for Denver's grantees. Generally foundations, even ones with great intentions and good relationships with grantees, don't stay very involved once a grant award letter has been issued. From our vantage point we can see that Caring for Denver treats their partnerships with grantees as far more than a transaction. Every single person on their grants and executive team have real relationships with the organizations and leaders they work with, and they act as champions of their grantee's work in different contexts. This comes through in the way Caring for Denver staff seek out resources to support the leaders they work with. When needed, they connect leaders to low-cost and values aligned fiscal sponsorship, leadership training support, ensure grantees are aware of and connected to other funders interested in the kinds of work they do, and work with technical assistance providers to help grantees develop and use helpful systems and supports around program evaluation. In all of these cases The Caring for Denver Foundation proactively sought the input of their grantees about what support would help, and then actively followed up to provide it. In a world where foundations often want to provide wraparound support to their grantees, Caring for Denver is one of few that has actually found ways to do it.

Our organization has the great fortune of regularly working in partnership with a growing number of community-led nonprofit organizations and foundations. It's not hyperbole to say that Caring for Denver Foundation is unique among them for the way they consistently and purposefully lead from their values. They are one of the very few foundations who we hear consistently positive things about from all the leaders our organization works with in candid leader coaching conversations. Their commitment to gathering and leveraging insight from a hugely diverse group of stakeholders is truly exemplary, as is their personal approach to supporting all of the organizations and individuals they work with. It's for these reasons that we offer our wholehearted endorsement for The Caring for Denver Foundations nomination for Outstanding Foundation, National Philanthropy Day 2022.

Sincerely,

Nathan Pai Schmitt
Executive Director, The HadaNou Collective