



SpotLight #13
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Integrating Interests in Affordable Housing, Workforce Development, and Transportation: The Fairfield County Community Foundation

SpotLights are published by the Fundations' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities in order to highlight innovative strategies and funding practices among our members. The Network thanks Yolanda Caldera-Durant, program director for the Fairfield County Community Foundation, and Ann Fowler Wallace, senior consultant for the Fundations' Network and staff to the One Region Fundations' Group, for their assistance in developing this SpotLight.

Introduction

The Fairfield County Community Foundation (FCCF) is one of the Fundations' Network's newest members and was first introduced to the Network as one of the founding members of the One Region Fundations' Group.¹ The Foundation concentrates its giving in the Fairfield County region of southwestern Connecticut, promoting the growth of philanthropy to strengthen the communities of the region. Grantmaking priority areas for FCCF are economic opportunity (including affordable housing and workforce development); education and youth development; health and human services; arts and culture; and the environment. Recognizing that transportation issues cross state and county borders, and believing strongly in the power of collaboration and partnership, through the One Region Fundations' Group the Foundation has joined with philanthropic colleagues in the tri-state metropolitan region of Connecticut-New York-New Jersey to help the region achieve a more sustainable transportation system.

¹ The Fundations' Network provides staff support to the One Region Fundations' Group, a collaborative effort and grantmaking fund among eight foundations in the tri-state metropolitan region of Connecticut-New York-New Jersey who are learning and working together to advance and support transportation planning and reform in the region. More information about One Region is available by contacting Ann Fowler Wallace at afwallace@mindspring.com.

Partnership and Collaboration for Greater Impact

As FCCF Program Director Yolanda Caldera-Durant explains, the Foundation joined this funding collaborative because, “One Region’s mission is consistent with the Foundation’s grantmaking, in particular its economic opportunity and environmental priority areas. For example, the One Region Fund’s grant to support a statewide bus study in Connecticut highlighted the need for increased service and the creation of transit for low-income workers to get to jobs, for students to get to school, and for seniors to travel safely. In addition, transportation was not an area where the Foundation had previously funded or could have made an impact on its own. By joining forces with other funders in the tri-state region, FCCF is able to leverage local, regional, and national funding, and also learn from the experiences of our colleagues to become more knowledgeable and have a greater impact on transportation reform.”

The Fairfield County Community Foundation has become a strong leader and role model for One Region funders—organizing educational events for philanthropic colleagues in Connecticut, reaching out to public officials, and helping to introduce nonprofit leaders in Fairfield County to the One Region-funded Transit for Connecticut coalition.

From Education to Action

The Foundation’s involvement in transportation issues in Connecticut has evolved from education to action. The story begins in November 2006, when FCCF co-sponsored a funder briefing that highlighted the need for a serious rethinking of bus transit capacity and services in Fairfield County and across the state. Following that session, FCCF and the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation worked with One Region staff and transportation leaders to help shape a research and outreach strategy focusing on bus transit needs in Connecticut. With foundation encouragement and support, a statewide bus study was completed in record time, and a broad-based coalition formed, Transit for Connecticut, which has educated decision-makers about the critical need for increased state investment in bus services. The Foundation has been involved every step of the way—as convener, funder, connector, and champion. As of the Fall of 2007, the Connecticut Legislature had approved \$10 million in new operating funds for bus transit services over two years and another \$20 million in capital dollars, including \$5 million for clean diesel bus retrofits. Transit for Connecticut, working with its allies, was instrumental in helping secure this additional state investment in transit.

As One Region funders explore how best to launch a new initiative in 2008 focused on transit oriented development, FCCF staff is excited about the opportunity to more fully integrate its interests in affordable housing, workforce development, and transportation. Such breaking down of silos comes naturally to community foundations, an approach that can be modeled by other philanthropic colleagues.

Resources

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