



CFGB: Current Initiatives 2021

Microtransit

In December 2019, CFGB launched a pilot project in partnership with the City of Birmingham and Via called Birmingham On-Demand. It aimed to provide low cost (\$1.50/ride), highly responsive ridesharing service to communities in Western Birmingham, downtown, and UAB/Southside as a means to provide expanded transportation options and meet critical transportation needs. CFGB Catalyst Funds supported the pilot through a \$500,000 grant. Based on the success of the pilot, despite significant COVID-related budget cuts, the city of Birmingham approved FY21 funding to sustain the service at the same level. As of February 2021, 14 months in, Birmingham On-Demand has logged over 33,000 rides, maintained a 9.5 minute average wait time with 90% on time pickups, and is extremely popular with a steady 4.86 out of 5 average user rating. Top destinations include grocery stores, health care centers, and the intermodal facility (linking to fixed transit). Over half the riders use the service to commute to work. It is also serving those who most need it. 7 in 10 riders have an income below \$50,000/year, and 1 in 5 riders have a disability. CFGB is currently helping explore future expansion of microtransit in the region by facilitating meetings with municipal leaders and key agencies interested in more flexible, responsive transit options.

Regional Cooperation

In 2016, CFGB (with Catalyst Donor support) made a significant grant to the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) to conduct an intensive study on regional cooperation. With 35 municipalities in Jefferson County and 89 in the seven-county metro-area, the region is a patchwork quilt of jurisdictions. Our metropolitan area has fallen behind regional rivals in areas such as economic, employment and population growth, in part because we lack unifying political or cooperative structures. The study and report (*Together We Can*), launched in June 2017, provided rigorous analysis of our current situation, the collaborative models other cities have employed, and the pros and cons of greater cooperation. It presented community leaders with sound information on which to evaluate possible alternatives for enhancing our region's economic prosperity. After the release of the report, Community Foundation staff has made presentations to 40 organizations representing over 2000 civic and community leaders, met with almost all regional government officials, and reached over 7,500 people through the Together We Prosper website. In 2018, CFGB moved from dissemination and discussion to planning and action. We engaged elected officials to begin building a framework for cooperation and engaged more than 40 area leaders to serve on our Champions Council and provide strategic support to regional cooperation efforts. In late 2018, CFGB helped bring mayors to begin shaping a regional cooperation agenda. In 2019 and beyond, CFGB supported the work of mayor-led committees in addressing two initial priorities for cooperation: a countywide no-poaching pledge (signed in 2019 by 23 mayors representing 80% of the county's population) and consolidated 911 services. At a follow up 'mayors' deep dive' in January 2020, the mayors identified four issues for their 2020 cooperation agenda: consolidation of jails, human trafficking ordinances, vaping ordinances, and Census participation. CFGB and the Jefferson County Mayors Association co-funded a PARCA study on jail consolidation; they are currently working together to advance recommendations in that study. CFGB is helping the Mayors Association facilitate a third deep dive in March 2021.

Inclusive Economic Growth

As Economic Opportunity for All was emerging as one of our five strategic priorities, the Foundation began stepping up to leadership roles in this space. Over the past four years, our work has centered on three interrelated efforts:

- In 2017, CFGB co-commissioned a study by Burning Glass Technologies that analyzed workforce readiness and current and potential employment sectors, leading to a data-driven regional workforce alignment strategy launched in 2019 by a broad coalition of partners.
- In 2019, the City of Birmingham engaged the Brookings Institution to research a set of goals and strategies that would move Birmingham beyond its stagnant economic growth and extreme racial disparities. In January 2020, Brookings and the city asked CFGB to facilitate the design phase of the inclusive economic growth strategy, called Prosper Birmingham. CFGB made a \$100,000 grant from Catalyst Funds to support this work. Later in 2020, CFGB took a lead in facilitating planning for the Job Access leg of this work, and President Chris Nanni joined the Prosper Board to help guide Prosper as it completed its multi-pronged strategy and prepared for implementation.
- In 2019, a group of Catalyst Fellows began working with CFGB staff to explore the potential for a fund that would provide patient, flexible capital and technical assistance to meet the needs of small, minority-owned businesses. CFGB engaged Rockefeller Philanthropy Partners as a consultant in early 2020 to conduct research and interviews and begin to shape a plan to advance this idea. In late 2020, based on the final plan and proposal, the Catalyst Fund donors recommended and the Board approved an unprecedented \$1.5 million allocation to establish the Small Business Impact Fund. In January and February 2021, CFGB convened an Impact Advisory Committee of local and regional leaders (including four CFGB Board members) to flesh out the Small Business Impact Fund parameters and RFP in preparation for a 2021 launch.

Mental Health

According to the CDC, Alabama and all but one of the Birmingham metro counties have higher rates of suicide and poor mental health than the nation as a whole. In the local Community Health Improvement Plan process, mental health consistently ranks among the top public health priorities. In 2015, recognizing mental health as a crisis-level issue, the Foundation made a commitment to play strong leadership role in this space. Our work since then has focused on two major legs of the initiative:

- Building Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: In 2015, CFGB became the backbone organization for the Health Action Partnership's Mental Health Priority Group, which aims to expand access to mental health services. Over the course of two years, the group researched children's mental health systems, engaged a national expert in school mental health, and worked with four local school districts (Tarrant City, Blount County, Homewood City, and Pell City) to develop a collaborative plan around mental health supports for students. In 2018, all this preparation and planning culminated in the launch of this unprecedented partnership between four school districts to address student mental health needs through enhanced training, assessment and mental health services. The first full school year evaluation was completed in Fall 2019, with strong results. In 2020, we engaged three additional districts (Birmingham, Fairfield, and Alabaster City Schools) to explore how to expand the model beyond

the pilot. The 2020 COVID crisis disrupted both the program's implementation and most aspects of education and student support in these districts. We have since been working with school systems and mental health providers to help pivot and meet the growing and changing mental health needs during the crisis, while continuing to work on long-term structural changes locally and statewide to improve support for children's mental health. This includes revisiting some earlier work on establishing school-based health centers with a mental health component.

- St. Vincent's Collaborative Care Clinic: Since 2015, CFGB has partnered with St. Vincent's Health System to implement an integrated care model (linking mental health and primary care) at two local primary care clinics. This model is associated with improved mental health outcomes and lower mean health care costs. A 2018 review of this pilot project was promising, finding that over 2/3 of patients showed significant improvement in depression and/or anxiety. St. Vincent's has faced challenges making the model self-sustaining due to limits on both public and private mental health insurance coverage for adults in Alabama. CFGB provided small grants in 2019 and 2020 for St. Vincent's to engage a national expert to help troubleshoot these issues. St. Vincent's has since made some major steps forward in addressing insurance reimbursement structures and implementing sustainability strategies.

Summer Adventures in Learning (SAIL)

Summer learning loss (the 'summer slide') is the primary cause of the cumulative academic performance gap for low-income students. CFGB is part of the SAIL funder collaborative that supports summer learning opportunities in the Birmingham region. Since 2014, CFGB has focused all its SAIL funding in the summer program in Tarrant, an urban school system northeast of Birmingham where 95.4% of the students receive free/reduced meals. This small system has allowed us to pursue a longitudinal analysis of how summer programming impacts a child's readiness for the next school year. The data over the past five years has shown that: students that started at the lowest performance level showed the most gains; students that participate in two or more programs (summer or afterschool) show greater gains; student scores have trended upward as the program has matured. Relative to the highest performing SAIL programs, the Tarrant program's outcomes have been inconsistent; therefore, Tarrant shifted in 2018 to the tested Power Scholars curriculum, resulting in solid gains in both reading and math. In 2019, we expanded our focus to encompass three other high-performing programs and commissioned a study to look more closely at factors contributing to SAIL program success. The results of that study have informed our 2020 investment, continuing with a broader set of grantees and building a peer learning community between programs.