



catalyst fundholder report

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM





“We are seeking your help and wise counsel as good people who love Birmingham, who know how far we have come and what we need to do to make our community so much better. Tonight we ask you to look beyond the glass to the skyline of a very real Birmingham, and join us in imagining the promise of our region, the potential of philanthropy and the power of transformation.”

— Kate Nielsen, *former President and CEO, Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham*
At the 2008 introduction of the Community Catalyst Funds

As we began preparations for the celebration of our 50th Anniversary more than 10 years ago, we asked you to join with us as we imagined a brighter future for our region.

To build on the positive momentum happening across our city, in 2008 we established a new type of fund at the Community Foundation. Community Catalyst Funds are a strategic, collective resource for transformational community change efforts.

Since the inception of the Catalyst Funds, you have believed in the power of collective philanthropy, and that by pooling resources you could bring hope, unify communities, connect assets and build on the possibilities that exist in our region.

Thank you for being a Catalyst Fundholder

In the years since, you imagined what was possible when philanthropy takes on big ideas. You shared a vision that your gifts could drive transformational change in Greater Birmingham. Because of your partnership, we've taken risks, learned lessons, made progress and seen successes that would not have been possible but for your commitment to the transformative power of philanthropy.

From a contest of ideas to transform a city block to a collaborative approach for the reduction of serious violence, we have learned about the fragile nature of relationships and the necessity of building trust in order to drive sustainable change.

Through your support of research and planning, we have been able to build the framework for a stronger workforce and a more collaborative government. And by building connections and expanding access to flexible capital, Catalyst Funds will create opportunities for a more equitable economy.

Thank you for believing in the potential of collective philanthropy. Your commitment and support has allowed us to take on challenges and move towards a brighter future for Birmingham that we only imagined ten years ago.

Thank you for
helping us realize the
promise of a Greater
Birmingham.

Project Highlights

2008

Catalyst Funds Open - 55 individuals and families pledge more than \$9.5 Million to drive transformational change in Greater Birmingham.

2010 – 2011

Prize2theFuture

The first grant from the Catalyst Fund was made in 2010 to launch **Prize2theFuture**, an ideas competition for the development of a city block adjacent to Railroad Park. Nearly 3,000 contestants from 39 countries participated in the competition and the top 50 ideas were presented at a community-wide event. The winning design, One Birmingham Place, was a multi-use facility concept that celebrated community and social reengagement. After several years of planning and negotiation with the property owners, the winning idea was abandoned for another development plan.

Investment: \$422,437



Birmingham Lights

2013 – 2014

Birmingham Lights: 14th, 18th, 19th and 20th Street Underpasses

Birmingham Lights created an important burst of momentum for Birmingham. When we flipped the switch on these installations, just after the opening of Railroad Park and Regions Field, the city almost immediately became more connected across 20th Street North, the Theatre District, and the emerging Switch district. These light tunnels have become a signature icon in Birmingham.

Investment: \$914,836

Result: The Catalyst Fund investment in our community not only helped transform four dark, dreary underpasses into destinations for thousands of family photos and social posts, it served as an inspiration for other lighting projects in the city including Regions Field and CityWalk illuminating the I 59/20 bridges.



“The Catalyst Fund is a dynamic tool for a growing community like Birmingham. It allows a group of like-minded philanthropists to focus significant funding in response to the challenges or opportunities our community is presented. I am so thankful for our Community Foundation, and the individuals and families who helped light-up our city in such a beautiful and memorable way.”

— Atticus Rominger, *Chief Strategy Officer, REV Birmingham*

2014

Birmingham Violence Reduction Initiative (BVRI)

BVRI was a group violence intervention based on a model called focused deterrence that brought together community members, law enforcement and social service providers to work to combat the violence destructive to communities. The Catalyst Fund helped launch and sustain the program through 2017. Several factors converged that affected the sustainability of BVRI, including opposition from community activists and the loss of lead partners through political turnover. Although the program was ultimately discontinued, the valuable lessons that we learned have informed ongoing efforts to reduce violence in our region.

Investment: \$431,485

2016

Innovate Birmingham

Catalyst donors supported a research and planning process led by Perkins+Will that resulted in the creation of Innovate Birmingham (IB). In addition, the Fund supported the salary for the program's Executive Director. The IB team developed a roadmap focused on doubling startup activity in Birmingham by 2023 and facilitated the engagement of Burning Glass Research to conduct an in-depth review of the region's workforce capacity. In addition, IB laid the groundwork for the efforts being led by the Brookings Institute and Prosper Birmingham that are currently underway in the City.

Investment: \$320,853

2017

Burning Glass Study

The **Burning Glass Study**, which was completed in 2018, was funded in conjunction with the work of Innovate Birmingham. The report provided a comprehensive, forward-looking and data-driven picture of skill and occupation demand in the Birmingham region. The Community Foundation partnered with other organizations to form the Building (it) Together Council to develop a strategy to build an effective workforce and grow high-quality jobs. The report has been foundational in much of the work that has been done in the last three years to move our regional economy forward.

Investment: \$50,000

2017

Birmingham Education Foundation

Catalyst donors provided a grant for the **Birmingham Education Foundation (Ed)** to conduct a 12 month strategic planning process. In 2019, Ed began implementing the new plan which is focused on creating more high-quality school options for students in Birmingham. The priority areas include: advancing effective models for school redesign with a focus on flexible governance, effective school leaders, and community support; building a strong pipeline of high-quality teachers and administrators; advocating for community-informed policy change; and stronger community engagement.

Investment: \$88,200



Regional Cooperation Initiative

2016 - 2021

Catalyst Fund donors served alongside community members on a strategic advisory committee that studied how our greater cooperation across municipalities could help our region thrive. Then, you got to work building bridges between communities to form lasting connections that lead to lasting change. Whether bringing communities together to advance regional plans, or improve inefficient systems, our entire community has benefited because of your effort.

“Together We Prosper” became a campaign to get the people of the Birmingham metro area talking about how we can work better, together, to help our entire community prosper and compete in a global economy. Following the reports’ completion, Catalyst donors encouraged and inspired conversations with Mayors throughout Jefferson County about ways to better foster greater cooperation.

Investment: \$386,000

In 2016, Catalyst donors identified Regional Cooperation as a key issue holding our region back, and commissioned the “Together We Prosper” report. You recognized that as a region, our individual communities are interconnected and that we all share a common fate. As economies have become regional in nature, the old ways of fragmentation work against future growth and opportunity.

Regional Cooperation Results

“Our future depends on us being able to nurture our existing businesses and to bring in new businesses so that we can create additional jobs and opportunities for our citizens.”

— The Honorable Hoyt Sanders,
Mayor of Pinson

“Good Neighbor” Pledge

In a historic achievement for our community, Catalyst donors ensured that an agreement dubbed the “Good Neighbor Pledge” would come to fruition and lay a better foundation for the future of our cities, our children and grandchildren. The Good Neighbor Pledge is an agreement among mayors throughout our region to combat business poaching between cities, and to pursue long-term economic growth for the region. In early 2019, the pledge was signed by 23 of the 35 mayors in Jefferson County. In the two years since, the pledge has been successful in encouraging municipalities to cooperate in economic opportunities and build trust. The Mayors Association has expressed willingness to back the pledge as an organization and it will be presented at the 2021 Mayors Deep Dive meeting for the remaining cities to sign.

Consolidation of 911 Systems

In 2018, Jefferson County had 15 separate 911 systems, and was one of the only counties in the state with more than one system, leading to challenges with critical emergency response. By early 2020, the two largest 911 centers, Birmingham and Jefferson County, launched ‘virtual consolidation’ or communication between computer-aided dispatch (CAD) systems. This allows improved continuity and emergency response time, because when a caller drives from

911 Systems Continued

one district to the next, the first 911 center transfers all CAD notes and details to the second so they can pick up where the other left off. Other large call centers in the county are tracking the progress of this pilot as they consider joining. Additionally, since late 2018, seven municipalities have joined with Jefferson County 911 to provide fire dispatch services, bringing the total to 20 municipalities operating under the countywide system.

Additional Results

Your investment in regional cooperation has also helped to strengthen the relationships between municipal leaders in our region. Since 2018, the Jefferson County Mayors Association has participated in annual deep dive meetings. These meetings, which have been facilitated by the Foundation, have led to the Good Neighbor Pledge, 911 consolidation efforts, a jail consolidation study as well as collaboration on the census and human trafficking, consideration of a vaping ordinance and interest in microtransit options.

In addition, your support has allowed the Foundation to facilitate the development of a Jefferson County Councilors Roundtable. The goal is to solidify an organizational structure for city councilors across the county, build collaborative connections to the Mayors Association and begin planning regional cooperation priorities for 2021.



“Catalyst Fund donors funded third-party research and best practices from the most successful regions in America. Their efforts, and the Community Foundation’s unwavering support, guidance, and persistence, ultimately lead to a well-crafted and highly effective non-poaching agreement we call the Good Neighbor Pledge. We are grateful for your leadership.”

— Stewart H. Welch, III, *Mayor, City of Mountain Brook, and Catalyst Fundholder*

“Legendary poet Gwendolyn Brooks once captivated us with these words: ‘We are each other’s harvest; we are each other’s business; we are each other’s magnitude and bond.’

In simpler terms, together, we prosper.

That’s why I so firmly embrace regional cooperation. When municipalities walk in unison for the shared goal of economic development and business growth, we uplift not only ourselves but the residents we have pledged to serve. Through cooperation we find growth. Through growth, we find success.”

— Randall L. Woodfin, *Mayor, City of Birmingham*



2018

Catalyst Fellowship Program

Catalyst Fellowship

The Catalyst Fellowship paired eight of our community's most dynamic young leaders with the Foundation's Catalyst Funds to engage the next generation in utilizing the power of philanthropy to better our community. The Fellows committed to a two-year program to learn about the Community Foundation, Catalyst Funds, and issues and opportunities facing Birmingham, with the ultimate goal to identify and develop projects for potential Catalyst investment

Investment: \$5,000

Result: In 2019, Catalyst donors approved the Fellows' recommendation to engage Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors as consultants to assist in the launch of a new impact fund that will support underserved business owners in our region. This led to the creation of the Small Business Impact Fund, which will launch in 2021. In addition to seeding the Impact Fund, Catalyst Fellows have become Community Foundation donors, committee members and advocates.



Inspiring Hope

“The Catalyst Fund is important to the community because it makes innovative problem solving possible. From funky lighting to critical capital for small businesses, the Catalyst Fund inspires hope!”

— Kendra Key; *Oxmoor, Alabama*



Investing in the Future

“I’m so thankful for the opportunity to work on a project with the vision to further the original intent of the Catalyst Fund, and I appreciate that these Donors are enabling and empowering younger professionals to focus on improving and investing in one of the most important areas in our state.”

— John Smola; *Homewood, Alabama*



Ideas That Thrive

“Our community needs The Catalyst Fund — capital intended to support agents of change who will take risks, push boundaries, and execute novel ideas — because we must support people and organizations who fundamentally think and operate independent of the status quo in order to expedite Birmingham’s quest to grow and thrive.”

— Whitney Wright; *Birmingham, Alabama*



Via Microtransit Pilot Program

2019

In 2019, Catalyst donors enabled a partnership with Via and the City of Birmingham to provide funding for the launch of a microtransit pilot service called Birmingham On-Demand. Due to the popularity of the service, the City has committed to continue funding the program and exploring opportunities for expansion. The success of Birmingham On Demand has generated interest in how surrounding municipalities can utilize microtransit for their communities. The Foundation has worked with these municipalities as well as the Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority to investigate opportunities for collaboration and alignment of microtransit options throughout the region.

Investment: \$425,000

Result: In its first year of service, Birmingham On Demand provided over 32,000 rides in an underserved, eight square mile footprint, and ridership continues to increase. The service is reaching riders who greatly benefit from increased mobility: roughly 7 in 10 riders have an annual household income of less than \$50,000, and 1 in 5 riders has a long term physical or mental disability. We are pleased to report that the service is achieving its goal of improving job access and economic outcomes: 50% of riders use the service for commuting to or from work.

Providing transportation that can connect people to opportunity is a vital part of ensuring economic success for everyone. Alabama is one of only four states that does not allocate state funding for public transit. The result is an underfunded and insufficient system. Birmingham data shows that 62% of households are underserved by public transit with less than half of jobs accessible via public transit. To address this dilemma, Catalyst donors provided the funding for the pilot of an on-demand, microtransit program that would help meet our critical transportation needs in Birmingham in a creative and efficient manner.



“Via is a very economical and convenient means of transportation that allows you the comfort, flexibility and feel of your own car without the hassles of having 10 stops between your destination.”

— Birmingham On Demand rider, *Birmingham*

“The service is really critical to us hospital workers. I use it for everything so it’s all useful. [The drivers] are always concerned about my safety. They know me by name. They always look out for me.”

— UAB nurse and Birmingham On Demand rider, *Birmingham*

2018

Legion Field & McClendon Park

In 2018, the Fund supported a **Community Assessment and Design Study for Legion Field and McClendon Park**. The redevelopment of Legion Field and McClendon Park was identified as a strategic investment that could bring prosperity to the surrounding community and serve as a beacon for continued revitalization in West Birmingham, similar to what Railroad Park has done for downtown redevelopment. The community assessment reflected excitement about the potential project but residents wanted to make sure it would benefit all who lived there. Along with this optimism, however, there was a fear of unfulfilled promises based on past experience. The project is currently on hold due to political considerations.

Investment: \$35,000

2020

PARCA Jail Consolidation Study

In Jefferson County, there are 18 municipal jails and two county jails, which makes the number of jails in our county one of the highest per capita in the nation. Given the ongoing costs of running and maintaining a jail, mayors became interested in looking at the potential of consolidating efforts.

Thanks to Catalyst funding, the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama was commissioned to provide an analysis and possible options for a more streamlined infrastructure. The report revealed two options,

PARCA Jail Consolidation Study

2020

one short-term and one long-term. The short-term option is for smaller municipalities to contract with larger ones to house their prisoners at a per diem rate. This has the potential of reducing the 20 jails to 14. The long-term solution is a new county facility that could house most or all prisoners in Jefferson County. The Foundation is in the process of contracting with PARCA to further explore these two options.

Investment: \$25,000

COVID Response and Relief

In the spring of 2020 Catalyst Donors provided funding for **COVID Response and Relief** for two critical areas of need: a matching grant to The Women's Fund for childcare centers for frontline workers, and support to UAB for COVID-19 Vaccine and Treatment Research.

Through this investment, The Women's Fund has provided grants to 11 organizations serving 289 children. They are adapting their next phase of funding to meet the needs of childcare centers as the impact of the pandemic evolves. UAB is continuing to utilize the funding provided by the Catalyst grant to support research, technology development and vaccine testing to combat COVID.

Investment: \$150,000



2021

After nearly a year of research in exploring how Catalyst Funds could support our region’s disadvantaged business enterprises, the Small Business Impact Fund was created to spark creative solutions that fill gaps and help those businesses grow. In our region, African Americans constitute 28% of the population but own just 3% of businesses with employees, the largest disparity among metro areas with more than 1 million residents. This fund will support Black-owned businesses and other small businesses that are under-resourced and face significant barriers to success.

Small Business Impact Fund

Working with key leaders in the community, we sought to build knowledge, awareness, and tools to increase, facilitate, and support small business growth. Through dual mechanisms of capital and technical assistance, the Small Business Impact Fund will support Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) and other non-traditional lenders in expanding access to patient and creative capital to better provide the resources these small businesses need. Funds will also be allocated for robust coaching and technical assistance. The goal is to build an infrastructure of services for our minority businesses, provide much needed capital which has been lacking, strengthen our local CDFI network, and prepare our minority businesses to establish direct relationships with our local banks.

Investment: \$1.5 Million

Result: To make real progress toward a more equitable economic growth, we need to unlock more catalytic capital and ensure that it is deployed more efficiently. These funds will meet a need in the marketplace for more flexible, patient capital combined with expert technical assistance for those small businesses in Greater Birmingham. The Small Business Impact fund will launch its first Request for Proposal to CDFIs in the summer of 2021.

Moving Forward, Together.

The future you imagined for a Greater Birmingham more than ten years ago has begun to take shape. The momentum provided by the Catalyst Fund has launched high-impact initiatives, supported innovative thinking and laid the groundwork for a Greater Birmingham.

But this is not the end of the work of the Catalyst Fund. Because of the Catalyst endowment we can continue to move forward with the proactive leadership and strategic grantmaking that have been the hallmark of the Community Catalyst Funds.

We look forward to reporting back to you in 2030 about this decade of transformative change made possible by the forward thinking donors of the Catalyst Fund.

Thank you for championing the power of creative philanthropy. Thank you for your willingness to take risks. Thank you for being engaged, available, and involved.

Thank you for all you have done and will continue to do for our city and for the generations of families, neighbors and friends who will continue to benefit from your generosity and vision for the future.

10 Year Grantmaking Highlights

55
Number of Catalyst Funds
\$4,753,811
Grants Awarded
\$9,10,181
Gifts to Catalyst Funds
13
Number of Grants

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead

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