

STRONG COMMUNITIES FUND GRANT IMPACT REPORT



Letter from the Executive Director

It has been an honor to partner with and provide support to each of the incredible Strong Communities Fund grantees. These community-based organizations acted quickly in the face of crisis, demonstrating their leadership and ability to drive change in even the most difficult circumstances. With Brooklyn being one of the first and hardest hit COVID-19 hotspots, these organizations quickly mobilized in a time of unbelievable uncertainty and fear to provide food, smart phones, online fitness classes, summer internships, diapers, children's books, emergency cash grants, personal protective equipment, and much more to meet the rapidly changing needs of communities across Brooklyn. I applaud them for their dedication and service, and thank them for their partnership.

I also want to thank the members of The Strong Community Fund Review Committee, who worked diligently together for more than a year to carefully review applications, offer thoughtful feedback, and ensure that community voice drove decisions about the allocation of these grant dollars. Thank you to the BCC Board of Directors for their leadership throughout this process, and for their thorough and rapid review of the Committee's recommendations.

As Brooklyn continues to recover, I look forward to working in partnership to build more equitable, healthy, and resilient communities for all Brooklynites.

— *Shari Suchoff, Executive Director, Brooklyn Communities Collaborative*

Executive Summary

Brooklyn Communities Collaborative (BCC) convenes and supports health, education, and labor organizations; community-based organizations; economic development corporations; government; and advocacy groups to join together to positively affect the health and well-being of those living and working in the communities they serve. One of BCC's priority initiatives is The Strong Communities Fund, which launched in April 2020 with an initial \$3 million investment to meet immediate needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. To date Strong Communities Fund has provided financial and technical support to 44 projects in health and social services, youth services, digital resources, food security, and census work. Strong Communities Fund positively affected tens of thousands of Brooklyn residents and supported organizations shifting their operations to meet the changing needs of the pandemic. Looking forward, BCC is providing an additional \$1 million in short-term grants to 14 organizations to conduct COVID-19 outreach and to improve accessibility for testing and vaccination. The time period for this new round of funding begins on December 1, 2021 and runs through May 31, 2022.

The Strong Communities Fund Review Committee

Dr. Marilyn Fraser, Chief Executive Officer, Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health (Co-Chair)

Dr. Karen Nelson, Former Chief Medical Officer, Community Care of Brooklyn (Co-Chair)

Ms. Ghadeer Ady, Director of Community Health and Well-Being, Arab-American Family Support Center (AAFSC)

Ms. Milenka Berengolc, Community Health Worker Program Director, Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled, Inc. (BCID)

Mr. Lawrence Haseley, Program Manager for Affordable Housing, Solar One

Mr. Okenfe Lebarty, Senior Director for Community Affairs, NYC Health + Hospitals

“I am so pleased that the BCC’s Strong Communities Fund has been able to support the much needed work of local community-based organizations. Our communities were severely affected by the COVID pandemic, which claimed many lives, but also brought to the forefront the grave inequities that exist within communities of color. Therefore, the tireless efforts of community based organizations to meet the needs of community members, especially during the pandemic, have been crucial. Nevertheless, we know that there is much more to be done, and we look forward to supporting these efforts in the future.”

— *Marilyn A. Fraser, MD, Chief Executive Officer, Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health*

“I am proud to be a member of the Brooklyn Communities Collaborative board and the Strong Communities Fund review committee which focused on using its grant funding to support small community-based organizations that needed immediate help early in the COVID pandemic. The committee, made up of community members and BCC staff, had first-hand knowledge of most of the small CBOs that were funded by SCF and they helped tailor the relatively small grants to the real needs of organizations that lack the infrastructure of larger medical and social service agencies. We were proud to provide funding and technical assistance that helped even small CBOs pivot so that they could provide services during the initial COVID shutdown.”

— *Karen Nelson, MD, MPH, Former Chief Medical Officer, Community Care of Brooklyn*

Introduction to BCC

Brooklyn Communities Collaborative (BCC) envisions a Brooklyn where all communities are healthy, economically sound, culturally vibrant, and civically engaged. BCC convenes and supports health, education, and labor organizations; community-based organizations (CBOs); economic development corporations; government, and advocacy groups to join together to collaborate, coordinate and integrate services, develop community-driven programming, harness their economic power, and inform policies and practices, to positively impact the health and well-being of those living and working in the communities they serve. More specifically, BCC is focused on four interrelated priorities that emerged from a series of Participatory Action Research (PAR) efforts in neighborhoods throughout Brooklyn, and in close collaboration with the community and our anchor institutions, the One Brooklyn Health System, Maimonides Medical Center, and the City University of New York.

BCC's four priority areas include:

Homes for Health, a public-private effort to expand housing stability as the foundation for health and well-being. BCC helps coordinate major City and State investments in planned supportive and affordable housing;

Citizen Share Brooklyn (CSB) strengthens economic democracy and education to build health and wealth through workforce training, education programs, and incubation of worker-owned and minority/women-owned businesses to supply anchor institutions;

Caring Communities provides coordinated care management to connect vulnerable Brooklynites to essential services; and;

The Strong Communities Fund supports Brooklyn community-based organizations to address community priorities with flexible funds. The Strong Communities Fund launched with an initial \$3 million investment in April 2020, and, because of COVID-19, has focused to date on meeting immediate needs resulting from the pandemic.

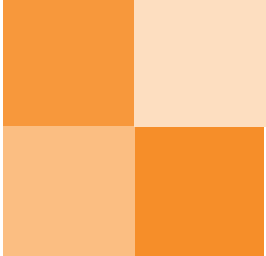
About The Strong Communities Fund

The Strong Communities Fund works to build strong civic infrastructure for amplifying community-led voice and impact. By supporting community-driven interventions that address the social determinants of health, the Strong Communities Fund works to strengthen individuals and communities and improve economic conditions that make people vulnerable, especially during times of crisis.

Through years of collective work and strategic actions supported by New York State's Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment Program (DSRIP), BCC built close relationships with Brooklyn-based CBOs, understanding firsthand the barriers these organizations can face securing funding from traditional funding sources. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these difficulties and many struggled to provide their communities with necessary resources during this time of crisis. Recognizing this, BCC launched The Strong Communities Fund in April 2020 as a direct response to the pandemic, while maintaining its initial goal of providing technical assistance and flexible funds to smaller, local CBOs.

To ensure that funding met the needs of Brooklyn neighborhood residents, BCC assembled a community-led Review Committee, with members that serve to further health and well-being in Brooklyn communities from a range of community perspectives. Applications were reviewed on a rolling basis and evaluated based on the CBO's ability to provide not only short-term COVID-19 relief, but also to help create a more equitable Brooklyn. Specifically, applications were evaluated on 1) a track record of work in historically disadvantaged communities; 2) the likelihood of effectively responding to acute needs related to COVID-19; and 3) a long-term impact on health and wealth in Brooklyn. CBOs were encouraged to collaborate, and those who did were eligible for additional funding.

The first round of support from The Strong Communities Fund provided support to 44 necessary and inspiring projects, each of which is described in the following pages.



FUNDED ORGANIZATIONS

The Strong Communities Fund provided support to a broad range of organizations meeting the multifaceted needs that the pandemic brought to light. Grant awards ranged from \$10,000 to \$125,000 with many grantees providing support to expand access to digital resources, strengthen food security, provide access to health care and social- and youth services.

The Alex House Project (AHP) is a Brooklyn-based, peer-led, social service support and leadership development organization for young expecting and parenting mothers ages 15-25 who reside in economically depressed neighborhoods in New York City. AHP was awarded \$36,000 to provide mini grants to AHP participants in Red Hook for one time assistance for food, rent and other necessities.

Anne Kastor Brooklyn Free Clinic: \$15,187 to support medical equipment for the free clinic

Arab American Family Support Center: \$50,000 for remote services support, mental health clinician, PPE, emergency fund, and indirect costs

Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health: \$94,842 to provide information on COVID-19 and resource referrals through the Institute's network of barbers and stylists

Arts East New York, in partnership with WEB Center: \$102,100 in support of virtual summer internships for youth to produce content based on the impact of COVID-19 on their communities

Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation: \$125,000 to expand economic mobility programs, benefits screenings, financial counseling, job training and placement, emergency cash assistance, digital upskilling, and support local food procurement and distribution

Brooklyn Book Bodega addresses barriers to book ownership among low-income families and those living in underserved communities in Brooklyn. Brooklyn Book Bodega was awarded \$10,000 to host a series of eight Covid-safe community events in Brownsville and East New York (4 in each geography) where children, adolescents and families were able to self-select books to add to their home libraries.

Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled: \$63,173 to improve the quality of life and foster integration of persons with disabilities

Brooklyn Queens Long Island AHEC: \$75,000 for virtual paid internships for underserved minority students area and educating students on the COVID-19 pandemic and the relationship between social determinants of health and access to care

Brooklyn Community Services: \$115,000 to support a mobile shower unit, outreach services and healthy meals

Brooklyn Perinatal Network and Fort Greene SNAP: \$250,000 for for a merger between the two organizations, and increasing capacity for immediate COVID-19 response in the community

CAMBA: \$60,500 for 400 cell phone data plans for 3 months, 50 phone cases, and indirect costs

Camp Friendship: \$75,600 for produce, storage and digital resources to support food pantry expansion

The Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) promotes reintegrative justice and a reduced reliance on incarceration through advocacy, services, and public policy development in pursuit of civil and human rights. CCA was awarded \$55,000 to lead the Community Carpenter Program (a mentorship program for youth), develop welcome home bags for previously incarcerated youth, and distribute menstrual product packages.

Christopher Rose Community Empowerment Campaign, Inc. (CRCEC): \$30,000 in support of a community health worker to provide comprehensive risk assessment and linkage to care

Elite Learners: \$25,000 for to support a violence prevention program

Exalt Youth: \$50,000 for student and alumni youth stipends and necessary equipment to implement/transition to a virtual platform

FAN4Kids: \$92,000 for preparation and execution of digital content for students and families

"The critical and generous support provided by the Strong Communities Fund enabled [exaltYouth] to quickly home deliver dozens of laptops and data plans to our court-involved youth, increase their stipend pay, and develop innovative internships projects. On behalf of [exaltYouth], we are deeply grateful to Brooklyn Communities Collaborative for their ongoing collaboration and support."

- Gisele Castro, exaltYouth Executive Director

First Tech Fund is dedicated to empowering students from low income communities of color with technology access, practical skills training, and introductions to opportunities to succeed in the modern world. First Tech Fund was awarded \$10,000 to provide 12 youths with laptop computers to keep, mobile WiFi devices capable of connecting to up to 16 devices, and a curriculum of career panels, digital skills training, college & career preparedness workshops, individualized mentorship support and a social community.

Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project: \$30,000 to support remote learning and for additional academic and digital literacy support to Haitian immigrant youth

GrowHouse International empowers Black, Indigenous, and LatinX people to become developers of their communities through collective ownership of key assets such as real estate, land, essential businesses, and cultural institutions. GrowHouse International was awarded \$20,152 for technological equipment for their Youth Leadership Program. The Youth Leadership Program trained youth ages 18-24 to co-create an intervention that addresses a selected topic of focus building consciousness surrounding race and ethnicity in the United States and gain a greater understanding of their relationship with power and articulate their biases, privileges, unseen areas, and the strategies they can employ for gaining and sharing power.

Haitian American Community Coalition, Inc. (HCC) is a community-based organization serving Central Brooklyn by providing access to free resources, low to no cost direct care, preventative and supportive services to a large Caribbean population regardless of their socioeconomic conditions. During the pandemic, many fitness gyms and wellness centers

Haitian Americans United for Progress, in partnership with Diaspora Community Services: \$125,000 for case management and legal services to clients in need, including undocumented individuals

Her Village, Inc. *is committed to the work of ending diaper need and period poverty. 1 in 3 American families experience diaper need. 1 in 4 women and girls struggle to afford period supplies. When a mom experiences diaper needs and/or period poverty, other aspects of her life suffer as well. This includes her mental health, her dignity/self-image and more practically her ability to go work, go to school and send her child to school for early education. These issues were further exacerbated during the pandemic. Her Village, Inc. was awarded \$40,920 for period supplies and diapers distributed in Brownsville, Coney Island, East Flatbush, and East New York.*

I AM GYM Foundation Inc.: \$121,000 to provide fitness and entrepreneurship workshops for youth

Kings County Tennis League: \$25,000 for increased tennis-based programming for NYCHA residents, as well as phone outreach to current program participants to determine needs

Little Essentials: \$50,000 for costs related to expansion in Brooklyn and to provide early childhood care supplies for families

Madison Square Boys and Girls Club: \$50,075 to support recreational and vocational programs for local youth in under-resourced communities

Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn D.M.A. *fosters an inclusive vibrant community by engaging and supporting Fort Greene and Clinton Hill neighbors, cultivating partnerships, building community capacity, and identifying needs and providing services that connect residents to resources and opportunities. Food insecurity has always been a present problem in Fort Greene and worsened due to COVID-19. Myrtle Ave Brooklyn D.M.A. was awarded \$14,000 to pivot their longstanding monthly food pantry from a traditional pick-up model to a delivery model. Providing at-home deliveries enabled Myrtle Ave to safely serve at-risk neighbors and those homebound.*

National Association on Drug Abuse Problems, Inc.: \$49,163 for case management services and free smart phones and monthly plans for clients

New Heights Youth Inc.: \$50,000 to provide athletic and academic support to Brooklyn's at-risk youth

Neighborhood Technical Assistance Clinic: \$23,000 to create a network of black clergy women to provide frontline support to community members during COVID-19 crisis, and a community resource guide

Qualitas of Life Foundation (QoLF) *is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide basic financial education to Hispanic individuals and families in New York, in order to promote their financial security and improve their standard of living. As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of businesses, nearly 48% of Hispanic immigrant families were unable to meet their monthly expenses. Additionally, the majority of those families either do not qualify for government assistance or are struggling to access benefits. QoLF was awarded \$50,000 to develop an Entrepreneurship Program for Hispanic women in NYC, focused on the idea of "entrepreneurship from home" (Emprendimiento desde Casa) that covered the primary concepts and structures involved in Latinas' entrepreneurship process, with a focus on improving economic opportunities for Hispanic women starting, formalizing, or wanting to expand their businesses.*

Reaching Out Community Services, Inc.: \$50,000 for food pantry support, education assistance and social services assistance

Sadie Nash Leadership Project: \$54,850 to promote college and career readiness for young women and gender-expansive youth in NYC

Seeds in the Middle Inc.: \$35,000 to combat health disparities and obesity in schools

Services for the Underserved, Inc.: \$125,000 for smartphones, tablets, and data plans for individuals that are served by the organization, PPE, and upgraded HVAC systems and HEPA air filtration

Teens for Food Justice Inc., in partnership with Ace Endico, BMS Family Health and Wellness Centers, Brooklyn Packers, Collective Fare Catering, Grow NYC, and Universe City: \$250,000 to supply and distribute boxes of fresh produce and shelf-stable items that can be purchased weekly, using cash, card, or EBT benefits at a discounted rate

The Campaign Against Hunger: \$125,000 for food distribution, social services assistance, and to support transportation costs

United Community Centers: \$125,000 to conduct food distribution and STI testing kits at various pop ups in East Brooklyn

"The Campaign Against Hunger (TCAH) is grateful for the support received through the Strong Communities Fund. As one of the largest emergency food providers in Brooklyn, the grant allowed us to bolster our food distribution to ensure that families disproportionately impacted by the pandemic did not go hungry. The support came at a critical time in our city when many already struggling Brooklynites needed food and access to vital resources. This is the kind of partnership and commitment necessary to bridge the gap for vulnerable families and those teetering on the brink of hunger. We laud the fund's efforts to expand healthy food access for Brooklynites and look forward to a continued partnership as we advance food justice in our city."

- Dr. Melony Samuels, TCAH CEO and Founder

The Foundation for the Advancement and Rehabilitation of the Marginalized (The F.A.R.M.) works to encourage, educate and assist community residents and their families in their efforts to achieve autonomy from system involvement, overall health and wellness, and interventions aimed at creating sustainable futures. Underserved communities in Brooklyn have historically been severely undercounted in the U.S. census resulting in underrepresentation and inequitable allocation of resources. The F.A.R.M. received \$58,000 to conduct census outreach in East Brooklyn, reaching over 18,000 residents and conducting 19 community events.

Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls (WMRC) is a non-profit music and mentoring program dedicated to empowering girls, trans youth, and gender-expansive youth through music education and activities that foster self-respect, leadership skills, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. With in-person programming suspended, and school-day learning occurring online, the need to ensure access to music-based programs for girls and gender-expansive youth was more urgent than ever. WMRC programs support young people who are already at risk of experiencing disparities in access to resources and programming. This community of NYC youth come from families who were hardest hit by COVID-19 health disparities, racial trauma, and disconnection from education. WMRC was awarded \$45,000 to adapt their after school programs into interactive online curricula.

YWCA of Brooklyn: \$100,000, to cover rent arrears for those living in YWCA housing, and in support of a social worker for residents

FOOD SECURITY

As schools closed and unemployment rose, many Brooklyn residents experienced hardships in providing adequate meals for themselves and their families. Organizations funded by The Strong Communities Fund worked to provide food to Brooklyn's most vulnerable residents through food distributions and meal deliveries.

500,000+ Pounds of food to Brooklynites

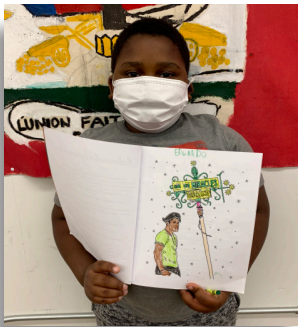
20,000+ Households/families served

300,000+ Bags and boxes of food



YOUTH SERVICES

The shutdown of schools and almost all after-school programs left many Brooklyn youth with limited or no access to education and social interaction with peers. The Strong Communities Fund grantees supported youth through virtual academic and extracurricular programming, fitness, and group therapy.



165 Stipends and internships

Books provided to **674** Brooklynites

Enrichment and community events for **700+** youths

HEALTH CARE & SOCIAL SERVICES

Studies show that Brooklyn's neighborhoods most affected by COVID-19 were already experiencing poor health outcomes before the onset of the pandemic. Many organizations worked to combat health issues that were further exacerbated by the pandemic, providing a wide range of services including mental health care, referrals to resources, and distribution of day-to-day necessities.

72,000+ Diapers to Brooklyn families

COVID-19 vaccine outreach to **2,000+** Brooklynites

\$72,000 in emergency cash grants to families in need

Enrollment or referrals to **13,000+** Brooklynites for legal services, health or unemployment insurance, SNAP, and job placement

"The Strong Communities Funding was critical in allowing our organization to maintain its operations during the summer of 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City. The organization experienced severe budget cuts and would have had to lay off staff and suspend its summer health internship program for underserved young people. The funding allowed us to pivot our operations and offer virtual paid internships to almost 100 students. These students all participated in community based projects to help community residents impacted by COVID -19. The Strong Communities Fund was instrumental in supporting our programs to mentor future health professionals critically needed to meet the needs of our underserved populations in Brooklyn communities."

- Gabrielle Kersaint, Executive Director Brooklyn-Queens-Long Island Area Health Education Center

DIGITAL RESOURCES

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted the world to one that was almost completely virtual. Many CBOs focused on providing access to technological resources to some of Brooklyn’s most vulnerable residents. This included the distribution of cell phones and tablets, as well as converting in-person programming into virtual learning.

400+ phones/tablets and data plans

\$200,000+ to organizations supporting the transition to digital resources

SATISFACTION SURVEY



88% of grantees strongly agreed or agreed that the time/effort their organization put into applying for the grant was appropriate relative to the size of the grant award.



100% of grantees strongly agreed or agreed that BCC clearly explains its grant application and approval processes.



88% of grantees felt that BCC’s requirements to monitor and report on activities and performance were just right.



88% of grantees strongly agreed or agreed that BCC understands (or has an appreciation for) the local community or neighborhood in which they work, and the social, cultural, or socioeconomic factors that affect their work.

CONCLUSION

BCC sought to create a funding source that was supportive and not overly burdensome to organizations on the frontlines, those providing direct services and support to Brooklyn residents most in need. Many of the organizations funded through The Strong Communities Fund have been overlooked and underfunded by larger foundations. The grantees demonstrated immense dedication and commitment to their communities when they needed them most. While many of these organizations stepped up and pivoted during one of the biggest humanitarian crises of our lifetimes, they too were affected by staff shortages, loss, health scares, and limited resources. Every organization in this report should be recognized for their efforts.

In its first round of support, The Strong Communities Fund affected tens of thousands of Brooklynites and successfully supported organizations in shifting their operations to meet the changing needs of the pandemic. Grantees reported that the Fund's intentional grant-making strategy, relationship building, and management were vital in making impact and providing much needed support during dire times. It is our goal to grow these connections and capacities with further community-advised investments in the coming year and beyond.

LOOKING AHEAD

In October 2021 BCC announced the next round of The Strong Communities Fund with an additional \$1 million investment. While BCC plans to expand its grant-making focus beyond COVID-19 related projects in the near future, the virus continues to threaten the health of Brooklyn residents. This next round, which begins on December 1, 2021, will provide grants of up to \$75,000 to grassroots CBOs working to safeguard their community through vaccination and testing outreach.

Additionally, BCC is surveying Strong Communities Fund grantees to inform the development of an engagement strategy that focuses on providing CBOs with technical assistance on program and organizational management. Strong Communities Fund grantees have also expressed particular interest in opportunities to connect with BCC's network of over 100 CBOs to build strategy based on mission areas and service locations. BCC will begin to host strategy-development convenings in early 2022.



Many thanks for the ongoing support and efforts from the BCC Board, Strong Communities Fund Review Committee, and BCC team for their dedication to Brooklyn communities.

Brooklyn Communities Collaborative Board of Directors

Dr. Patricia Simino Boyce, PhD, RN, University Dean of Health and Human Services, The City University of New York (CUNY)

Dr. David Cohen, EVP – Population Health, Maimonides Medical Center

Dr. Marilyn Fraser, Chief Executive Officer, Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health

Mr. Colvin Grannum, President & CEO, Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation

Ms. Dona Green, SVP – Strategy/Project Management, One Brooklyn Health System

Mr. Roger Green, Director of Public Policy, CUNY Law, Community Economic Development Clinic

Dr. Karen Nelson, Former Chief Medical Officer, Community Care of Brooklyn

Mr. Maurice Reid, Advisor, Alliance for Healthy Communities

Mr. Bruce Richard, Senior Advisor, 1199SEIU

Brooklyn Communities Collaborative Team

Emmanuella Chevalier, Tahirah Cook, Alison Feuer, Katherine Kahley, Gretchen Susi