



FAIRFIELD COUNTY

FORWARD

Fairfield County's Community Foundation's 2022 Strategic Plan



Introduction

Imagine a Fairfield County where everyone has an equitable opportunity to thrive.

That's the vision behind Fairfield County Forward — a bold new strategy to address the root causes of the disparities that exist in Fairfield County and position our community for a new era.

In announcing this strategy, Fairfield County's Community Foundation commits to centering our investments on creating systemic and structural change in education, housing, health, and income and asset building to achieve greater racial equity and create a stronger, more thriving region.

Fairfield County Forward has been informed by close collaboration with community partners and expands on our existing work in closing Fairfield County's opportunity gap.

It also acknowledges that many of the approaches historically taken by foundations — including our own —

have not produced systemically impactful results. In going public with this new strategy, we are committing to continuous learning and partnering with and supporting our community with humility.

With that in mind, we aim to execute our work differently — putting faith in the people and organizations that are closest to the problems and challenges in our community to develop and carry out the most promising approaches to systemic and structural change.

In turn, we strive to contribute to building a Fairfield County where businesses have a strong and well-trained workforce, where those who work in our community have access to housing they can afford, where we all have the chance to lead healthy lives, and where all children can grow safely and securely and thrive.





A History of Inequity

Why are we taking this new approach?

Quite simply, traditional approaches have not worked for a large segment of our community.

The data is clear. In Fairfield County, race is highly correlated with outcomes in education, health, housing, income and wealth generation.

These racial disparities are the result of racist systems and structures that were created decades and centuries ago, and have been reinforced over time.

These structures have essentially created two versions of Fairfield County — one that exists for those who are prosperous and well-off, and the other for those who face systemic barriers to success. This reality has been reinforced time and again through national and local data that measure our community’s social and economic health.

For example:

- Black and Latinx communities in Fairfield County posted the lowest scores on five critical indicators of wellbeing: health, housing, education, economy, and income and wealth, according to the Fairfield County 2022 Equity Profile.
- A 2019 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York found that Fairfield County was the most economically unequal metropolitan area in the country.
- The median income for White households in Fairfield County is more than two times the median incomes for Black and Latinx households.

9% for Black parents
4% for Latinx parents



3% for White parents



Black or Latinx households

Home Ownership



White households



Black or Latinx households

Median Income



White households

14% of Black adults lack a high school diploma

30% of Latinx adults lack a high school diploma



4% of White adults lack a high school diploma

These inequities will persist unless our community comes together to dismantle the racist structures that created them and build improved systems that will ensure that all of us have equitable opportunities to succeed.





Building on What We've Learned

Fairfield County Forward offers a vision for changing these entrenched dynamics and creating an equitable Fairfield County.



It is a strategy informed by research, meetings with people throughout the community, and engagement with the Foundation's board and staff over the past two years.

And it is influenced by the Community Foundation's existing work — as well as the COVID-19 pandemic and the campaign for racial justice that predates COVID-19 but was amplified by the murder of George Floyd in 2020.

Our previous strategy — which centered on aligning the Community Foundation's resources around closing Fairfield County's opportunity gap — yielded several important initiatives that will inform Fairfield County Forward.

These include:



Fairfield County's Center for Housing Opportunity

A pioneering regional effort to preserve and increase access to affordable housing — with a focus on increasing equitable housing opportunities in communities with health resources, food security, transportation and workforce opportunities.



Family Economic Security Program

A partnership between the Community Foundation, Norwalk Community College, and Housatonic Community College to help adult students overcome challenges to earning degrees and securing family-sustaining employment.



Fairfield County Business Collaborative for Education Equity

A coalition of businesses working with the Community Foundation to reduce and eliminate educational disparities among pre-K through 12+ students, parents, guardians, teachers, and staff.

These efforts show what's possible when the Community Foundation focuses its energy on supporting and amplifying the work of others in our community who are committed to advancing equity. They also show us that working at systemic and structural levels with partners can help us achieve greater impact.





Our Values

To support this strategy, the Community Foundation is committing to a set of values that will inform how we partner with our community. These six values are:

 <p>EQUITY We commit to fairness and justice in our work and are accountable to the highest standards.</p>	 <p>INCLUSIVITY We work to share power and amplify systematically excluded voices to advance equity.</p>	 <p>COLLABORATION We create solutions through transparency and authentic relationships, harness Fairfield County's diversity, and partner with our community to accelerate change.</p>
 <p>HUMILITY We practice humility by listening first, respecting different voices, and searching for ways to continually learn.</p>	 <p>RESPECT We honor every person's basic human rights and treat each person with dignity.</p>	 <p>COURAGE We seek the bravery and conviction to live our organizational values, confront wrong, take strategic risks, and pursue solutions that advance positive social change.</p>

We are evaluating everything we do to ensure that our internal and external actions align with these values.





An Evolving Approach

The Community Foundation is evolving its approach to philanthropy.

This evolving approach begins with our guiding principle to focus on addressing the structural and root causes of persistent racial inequities.

To most effectively do this, we are embracing trust-based approaches to grantmaking and community leadership. This means the pace, tone, and content of our work will be informed by our community and that those negatively impacted by systemic inequities and who currently have little influence over the flow of resources and power will help guide our work.

In turn, we will work with all parts of the community — including those who live and work in Fairfield County as well as public, private and nonprofit partners — to understand and acknowledge racial history; create a shared affirmative vision of a fair, antiracist, inclusive society; and build civic, cultural, economic, and political power for those most impacted by inequities and injustices in our current systems.

Together, we will invest in transformative solutions and will analyze data and information about race and ethnicity within cultural and historical contexts to identify focus areas and issues in collaboration with our community partners; build an understanding of disparities and the reasons they exist; name race when talking about our issues and solutions; and measure progress toward our vision.



What does success look like?

What are we striving to achieve with Fairfield County Forward?

In short, we are seeking the Fairfield County all of us deserve.

In partnership with our community, this new strategy centers on four key results we seek for our region. Collectively we aim to ensure all Fairfield County residents:

Have equitable access to workforce, entrepreneurship, and employment skill-building opportunities to achieve and maintain financial self-sufficiency and build assets.

Have equitable access to high-quality, culturally competent physical and mental health services.

Graduate with a high school degree and are prepared for post-secondary education and/or employment.

Have safe, stable and affordable housing in communities of opportunity.

By working together to achieve these bold goals, we will create a stronger local economy powered by a larger, more skilled workforce. We will create a safer and healthier community. We will ensure that every child born in Fairfield County — regardless of their ZIP code or race — has the tools and support they need to live their best lives.

If we can create a community where all our neighbors have an opportunity to succeed, we all thrive.





How You Can Get Involved

If you have questions or want to share your thoughts about Fairfield County Forward, contact us at info@fccfoundation.org



About Fairfield County's Community Foundation

Fairfield County's Community Foundation is partnering with our community to create a county where every person has an equitable opportunity to thrive. We work closely with community organizations, nonprofits, businesses and philanthropists to address challenges and identify opportunities to create a stronger, more vibrant community. Informed by three decades of partnering with and serving our community, we have awarded more than \$390 million in grants to nonprofits in Fairfield County and beyond.

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