



The Schenectady  
FOUNDATION  
*Catalyst for Community Change*

# gifts & grants

## Getting to Root Causes

The direction of The Schenectady Foundation's work has been to provide greater voice and power to residents. Why has this been important?



Robert A. Carreau,  
Executive Director

The clearest example of how resident engagement pays off are the many successful projects from our Thriving Neighborhoods Challenge, where residents developed ideas on what their neighborhoods needed — and the Foundation offered funding and technical assistance to implement their concept. To date, we've invested over \$700,000 in 25 resident-led projects that demonstrate what can change when you provide opportunities for people to be involved. Examples of some of these projects are featured in this newsletter.

This year we take another step deeper. We've established a **Grassroots Fund for Equity**. The Fund is intended to provide resources to smaller grassroots and neighborhood initiatives that typically do not fare well in competitive grant programs. By investing in the people and groups who are on the ground working in neighborhoods, we believe that solutions to difficult and systemic problems will emerge.

**Those people who are closest to the problem are most likely to come up with solutions.**

The Foundation has made a \$130,000 grant that will match contributions to the Fund dollar-for-dollar. We've gathered \$96,000 in donations to-date, and have until end of 2023 to meet the challenge.

As you learn more about resident-driven change, we hope you will consider a contribution to the Grassroots Fund for Equity. It will be a game-changer for our neighborhoods and residents.

With gratitude,



Residents gather around the inaugural Schenectady and Me sculpture bench. This project brought local artists and the community together to create unique benches adorned with residents' collages celebrating their beloved Schenectady landmarks.

## What's inside

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About the One Schenectady systems change movement  
Successful resident-led projects

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Foundation invests in four neighborhood revitalization projects



# TOGETHER WE THRIVE

## Residents Driving Change



**Splashing into Summer Fun:** Kids and adults alike enjoy the Wallingford Park Splash Pad during its grand opening ceremony. This project, developed by the Mont Pleasant Neighborhood Association, brings summer delight to the community. The splash pad offers a cool respite on scorching summer days and addresses an important need in an underserved area of the city.



**A Father's Vision Realized:** Tyrel Outlaw, the driving force behind the transformation of Jaylen's Park, sits proudly on the new equipment. What began as a personal mission to create a safer space for his son's playtime evolved into a collaboration of efforts of volunteers, neighbors, and community organizations. The once-neglected park now boasts a mural basketball court and vibrant entryway.



**Inspiring the Next Generation:** A captivating Common Unity Banner, one of seven beautifying Schenectady's Craig Street Bridge, brightens the path for students on their way to school. These banners transform a busy highway overpass into an inspiring walkway. This initiative showcases the commitment to community and unity, providing a colorful and uplifting backdrop to students' daily journey.



**Empowering Community, Shaping Dreams:** A young man, Tyrel Outlaw, reflects on the future of Jaylen's Park during the Kick-off for the New Carrie Street Park event, where residents took the lead in designing their dream park. A young man contemplates the future of the park's features. Concepts for the park's features include a splash pad, fitness equipment, a basketball court improvement, drinking fountains, and community gardens.

**Celebrating Diversity and Community:** The Rainbow Pride arches at Gateway Park stand tall as a symbol of inclusivity and community involvement – a testament to the city's welcoming and affirming spirit for the LGBTQ+ community. Their presence reflects the power of resident-driven change in creating an open and vibrant urban space.



To Support Programs like these – give online



# Working Together, as One Schenectady

**At The Schenectady Foundation, we are committed to building a community that's more inclusive, equitable, engaged and hopeful.**

**A** community where residents are empowered to improve their neighborhoods, work together to achieve their dreams and eliminate the systemic barriers that make it hard for people to meet their needs and achieve their dreams.

*"It's a bottom-up strategy and resources are being put into the neighborhood level. So it's not just talk. It's actionable, it's possible, and it's beneficial for the whole city."*

*– Mike Sacoccio, CEO City Mission*

We can't do this work alone. It can only happen when you lend your knowledge, talents and ideas to an initiative that grew out of the unsurpassed collaboration during the pandemic: **One Schenectady**. This movement aims to shape the Schenectady of tomorrow — transforming communities into places where everyone can thrive. We call this approach Resident-Driven Change.

## What Is Resident-driven Change?

Typically, change is imposed on communities by institutions and other powerful actors with minimal input from those who live there. With resident-driven change, people lead the way, giving voice to their concerns, desires and ideas for transforming their community for the better, into a place that works for all, not just a fortunate few. Most importantly, residents are respected and listened to.

## Shifting power to residents benefits everybody.

The people who live in a community have valuable expertise from lived experience, but power brokers and institutions often overlook this insight and knowledge. Tapping into this underused resource generates ideas and solutions that come directly from the people most impacted by problems. This leads to improved outcomes for all, because when change comes from within, it lasts.

Resident-driven change enables diverse communities to find common ground and purpose. It gives all Schenectady residents, especially groups that have been historically marginalized, greater power over what happens to their families, friends and neighbors. It creates shared prosperity.

## Why Are We Doing This?

A once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, unprecedented shutdowns and the most significant racial justice protests in decades combined to reveal deep-seated, systemic problems. Poverty, racism, a fraying social safety net and lack of support for children and families require more than band-aid solutions.

They require transformative change, where the community's needs are placed front and center, and residents lead the way. We seek to address the root causes of our troubles, not just the symptoms.

## What Happens Now?

Resident-driven change requires a long-term commitment. It takes time, energy and focus to build up the community's capacity for making meaningful change. We're up for the challenge.

To build a stronger, more resilient and unified Schenectady, we need to expand the metaphorical table where big decisions get made. We need a larger, more inclusive table that represents the wonderfully diverse mix of people who live here.

**Will you join us in creating a bigger table and a brighter future for all Schenectady residents? Will you be a part of One Schenectady?**

*"We want to make sure these systems are recreated so that they're more inclusive and equitable, and involve all the people of Schenectady in the decision-making of those systems."*

*– Kim Siciliano, CEO, YWCA of NENY*



communities,

A snapshot of Northside's here  
designing resident the park.  
features  
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community



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## We've Moved!

Our new office is located at:

**251 State Street,  
Schenectady, NY 12305**

Our mailing address is:

**PO Box 710  
Schenectady, NY 12301**

### Contact Us

518.393.9500

[www.schenectadyfoundation.org](http://www.schenectadyfoundation.org)

## Foundation grants \$265k for neighborhood projects

In March 2015, a devastating fire destroyed two high-rise apartment buildings on Schenectady's Jay Street, directly across from City Hall. Since then, the lot has stood empty, a grim reminder of the tragedy that killed four and left dozens homeless.

Soon the lot will be reborn as **Jay Square**, a welcoming public space with game tables, shade, art, benches and a small stage.

The hope is that **Jay Square** will be an "ever-evolving space" that changes based on the needs and wishes of residents. It will also give downtown Schenectady, which has undergone an apartment boom over the past decade, something it has lacked: a public space where people can gather, relax and experience a revitalized downtown with a thriving dining and arts scene.

**Jay Square** will also memorialize the victims of the Jay Street fire, with four trees planted in their honor.

**Jay Square** is one of four neighborhood revitalization grants awarded funding in 2023 by The Schenectady Foundation. These projects aim to transform neighborhoods into thriving communities where families

feel safe and cared for and have access to economic, educational and quality housing opportunities.

Another exciting neighborhood revitalization project is **The Artistry Studios**, a new venture from of the Albany Barn.

Located in a former convent on Eastern Avenue, **The Artistry Studios** will provide affordable studios for 20 artists, giving them a place to work and be part of the city's burgeoning arts scene. Renovations are ongoing, but some studios have already been rented, and the expectation is that all will be in use by early 2024.

**Jay Square** and the Albany Barn both received \$75,000 from The Schenectady Foundation.

### Other organizations winning neighborhood revitalization grants:

**Messiah Lutheran Church** in Rotterdam was given \$75,000 to hire a community organizer to develop a community needs assessment for the Rotterdam/Bellevue community.

**COCOA House** was awarded \$40,000 to expand the non-profit's programming for at-risk youth by turning a vacant lot into community garden space.