



# WOMEN ACHIEVING GREATER ECONOMIC SECURITY (WAGES)

*Progress of the WAGES Grantee Cohort*

**2020-21 Annual  
Report**



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# Progress of the WAGES Grantee Cohort: 2020-21 Annual Report

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# Introduction

The Women's Foundation of Colorado (WFCO) has a mission of "Catalyzing community to advance and accelerate economic opportunities for Colorado women and their families." In addressing gender, racial, and economic equity, WFCO is committed to deepening understanding of how women's identities intersect and addressing structural systems that perpetuate inequity. In 2016, WFCO surveyed 1,300 diverse Coloradans and identified five key resources that women need to achieve economic security: livable wages, equal pay, employment opportunities, child care and higher education. WAGES (Women Achieving Greater Economic Security) is WFCO's programmatic body of work that promotes Colorado women earning livable wages through research, public policy, advocacy, and strategic grantmaking.

The aim of WAGES is to propel more women into careers that enable them to meet their needs and the needs of their families by elevating "practices that work and by dismantling systems that continue to hold women back." Twenty-three diverse organizations across the state – 15 Direct Service (DS)<sup>1</sup> and eight Policy Advocacy (PA) organizations – were funded for three years to implement services, strategies, and tactics that aim to improve the lives of Colorado women and their families through attainment of livable wages. PA grantees were initially awarded grants in December of 2017 and DS grantees were awarded in February of 2018. In 2019, the WFCO board approved a fourth year of funding for the WAGES cohort. WAGES grantees include the following direct service and policy advocacy organizations.

## Direct Service Grantees

- Center for Work Education and Employment (CWEE)
- Colorado Coalition for the Homeless
- Community Partnership for Child Development (CPCD)
- Collaborative Healing Initiative within Communities, Inc. (CHIC)
- Durango Adult Education Center (DAEC), Women's Resource Center, and La Plata Family Centers Coalition (Southwest CO Women's Project)
- Eagle County Govt, DHS
- Emergency Family Assistance Association, Inc. (EFAA)
- Florence Crittenton Services of Colorado (Flo Critt)
- Mi Casa Resource Center
- OneMorgan County (OMC)
- Project Self Sufficiency of Loveland-Fort Collins (PSS)
- Pueblo Community College and Pueblo Community College Foundation

## Policy Advocacy Grantees

- 9to5 Colorado
- Bell Policy Center
- Colorado Center on Law & Policy (CCLP)
- Colorado Children's Campaign
- Colorado Fiscal Institute
- Denver Metro Chamber Leadership Foundation
- Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC)
- Young Invincibles

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<sup>1</sup> WFCO funded 15 direct service organizations. However, because a few of these organizations are working in partnership or formal coalition to deliver their program, there are 15 organizations working on 12 projects. For simplicity, this report references 15 direct service organizations.

## Components of the WAGES Initiative



**Convening & Learning:** WAGES has put in place a “[cohort learning model](#)” or learning community among grantees to share and innovate strategies, foster new conversations and collaborations, and inform the larger field of stakeholders interested in improving economic opportunities for women and their families. As part of the cohort learning model, WFCO holds regular WAGES convenings to bring together DS and PA grantee organizations. From the beginning of the grant through September of 2019, these convenings were in-person sessions. However, beginning in November of 2019, a virtual almost-monthly format was employed to bring grantees together more frequently but for shorter periods of time to be more responsive to the time policy advocacy grantees needed during the Colorado legislative session (January - May). However, as the COVID-19 pandemic began in mid-March of 2020, virtual convenings were continued to ensure safety.



**Equity:** Equity requires systemic interventions that promote fair outcomes and close gaps to opportunity. WFCO works to achieve equity by redistributing resources to people who have historically and systemically been denied them based on their gender, race, class, or other intersections of identity. Equity has been a frame intentionally infused throughout WAGES - in the selection of diverse grantee organizations from around the state; the types of evaluation questions that have been asked; the co-created and responsive approach to the evaluation; the selected WAGES facilitators; and the cohort learning opportunities that have been implemented as part of the WAGES cohort learning model.



**Two-generation Approach:** Additionally, WFCO is interested in promoting two-generation solutions to addressing gender and racial inequity, understanding that incorporating the interests of women and their children is key to advancing equity and breaking the cycles of poverty. Two-generation strategies focus on the family system and connect families to services that simultaneously address the needs of both adults and children. Although WAGES grantees vary in their capacity to implement two-generation strategies, all share WFCO's commitment to service-delivery reforms and policy solutions that help Colorado women and their families.



**COVID-19:** Due to the large impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women and their families, we conducted a literature review to highlight COVID-19 related issues around employment, education, child care and other aspects that affect women and their families. The challenges women were already experiencing around employment and economic self-sufficiency were exacerbated by the impact and aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Though COVID-19 significantly affected everyone negatively, women, and especially women of color, were affected disproportionately (Brown, Giannou & Riehl, 2021). Throughout the report, we highlight key issues and impacts of COVID-19 from the literature review in blue text boxes.

## Evaluation and Learning

OMNI Institute, a nonprofit social science consultancy that provides integrated research and evaluation, capacity building, and data utilization services to accelerate positive social change, was selected as the external evaluator and learning partner for WAGES. To develop the WAGES evaluation, OMNI co-created an evaluation framework with WFCO and grantee organizations. The co-creation approach included facilitated meetings with WFCO and grantee organizations to develop and refine evaluation questions; creating an evaluation plan with grantee input; and implementing data collection tools and processes to facilitate reporting. This collaborative and iterative process

was key in the design of the evaluation due to the diversity of grantee organizations and the evolving nature of the work and stakeholder needs (see Appendix A for more description on the Methods of the evaluation).

**Evaluation Questions:** Designed to inform WFCO's strategic grantmaking and desires to support learning in the field, the WAGES evaluation seeks to answer the following overarching questions:

- **Reach** – Who are the women and families reached by WAGES direct service grantees?
- **Implementation** – What services and strategies are WAGES grantees using to advance and accelerate economic opportunities for women and their families? What are the strengths and challenges of a given approach?
- **Outcomes** – To what extent are WAGES grantees supporting women and their families' progress toward a livable wage?
- **Cohort Learning** – How is the cohort learning model implemented and facilitating improvements to grantees' strategies? How can these learnings be used to inform the field?

**Annual Report:** This Year 3 Annual Report provides updates on the women served by DS grantees from the beginning of the grant through March-April of 2021; the strategies and tactics that direct service and policy advocacy grantees are implementing; and learnings from these efforts. In Appendix B, a journey map highlighting key activities of the WAGES cohort during Year 3 is presented. The evaluation will continue to document the WAGES cohort's journey through the remainder of the grant.

**Reading this report:** Please note that “grantees” will be used to indicate direct service and policy advocacy organizational representatives, and “participants” will be used to describe the women who were utilizing services and supports through the WAGES direct service organizations.



# Direct Service Grantee Efforts

## Reach

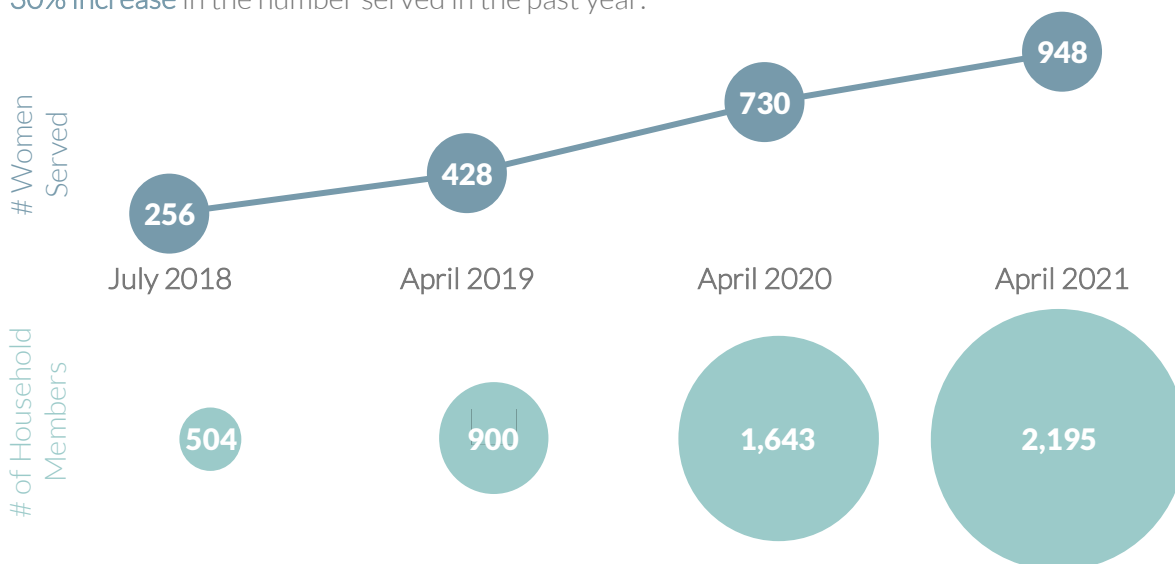


In March-April 2021, the 2021 WAGES Survey was administered. The 15 direct service DS grantees provided data on **948 women** who were directly reached through WAGES funding, serving an additional 218 women since the last reporting period a year earlier.

Further, an estimated **3,143 individuals** benefitted from WAGES direct service grantee efforts - 948 women who were directly served plus 2,195 household members (see Appendix B for more information on the number of household members in families).

**FIGURE 1. NUMBER OF WOMEN SERVED THROUGH WAGES FUNDING**

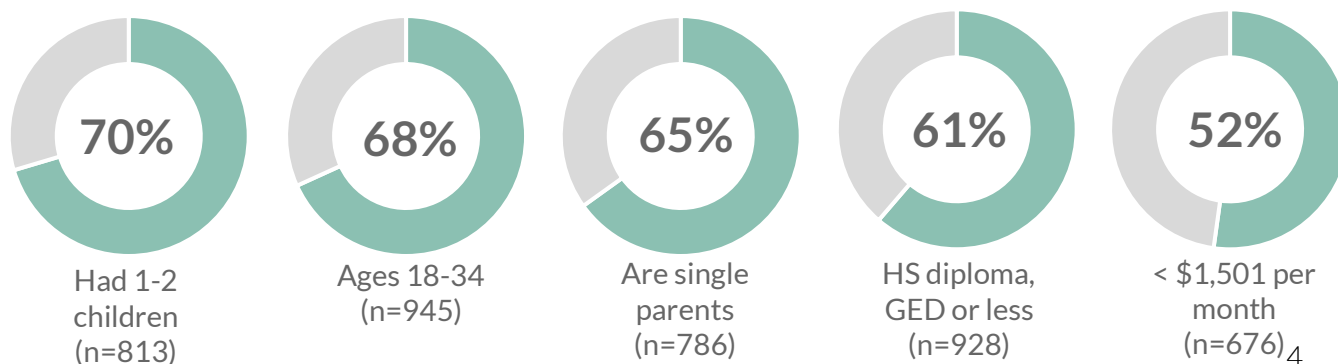
Direct Service organizations provided services to **948 women** since the beginning of the grant, a **30% increase** in the number served in the past year.



## Demographic Profile

Overall, most WAGES participants are single mothers with one or two children (see Figure 2 below). At program entry, 61 of participants had a high school diploma/GED or less, and 52% were earning \$1,500 or less per month. For full demographics, please see Appendix B.

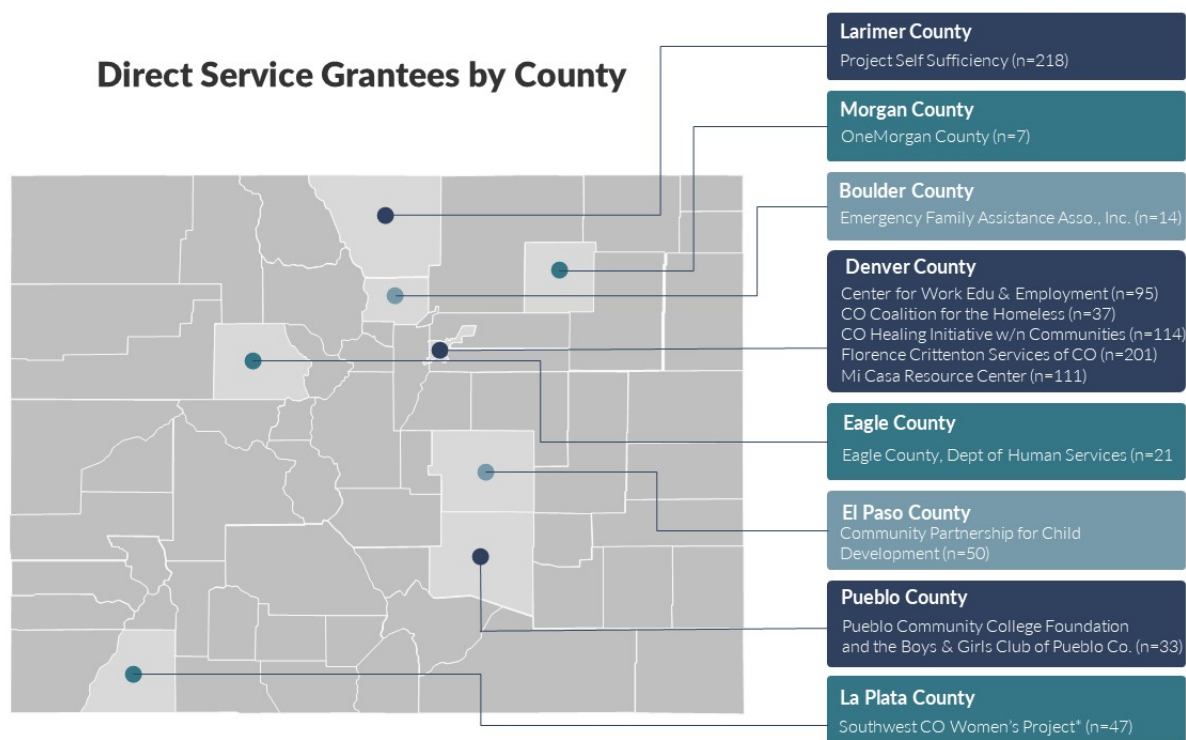
**FIGURE 2. WAGES PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE**





As Figure 3 shows, DS grantees served women throughout Colorado, including in the Denver Metro Area (5), Boulder County (1), Larimer County (1), Morgan County (1), La Plata/Durango (3), Pueblo County (1), El Paso County (1), and Eagle County (1). About 59% of women served were in the Denver Metro Area.

**FIGURE 3. DIRECT SERVICE GRANTEE GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS**

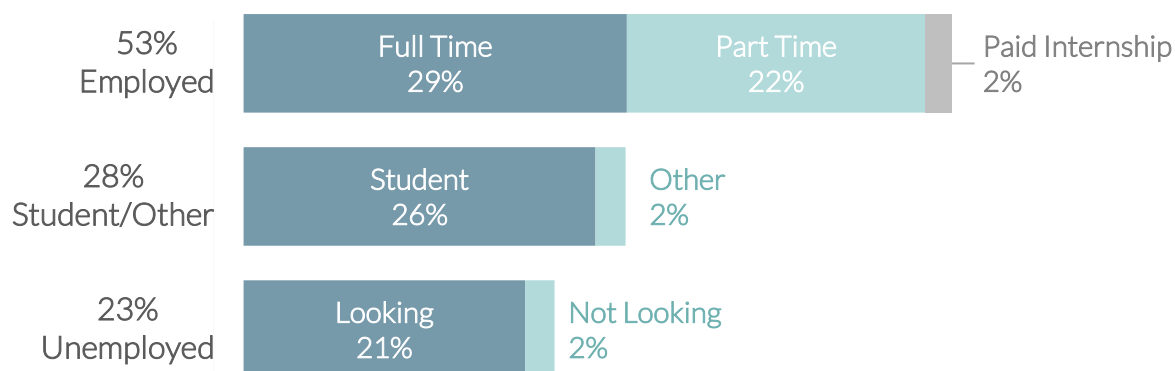


\*Note: The Southwest Colorado Women's Project is implemented by the Durango Adult Education Center (DAEC), Women's Resource Center, and La Plata Family Centers Coalition.

### Employment Status

At program entry, DS grantee organizations reported that most WAGES participants were employed (54%) and worked either full-time (29%) or part-time (22%). Twenty-two percent (22%) of women were unemployed. Recall that these data come from program entry and largely reflect pre-COVID-19.

**FIGURE 4. WAGES PARTICIPANTS' EMPLOYMENT STATUS**



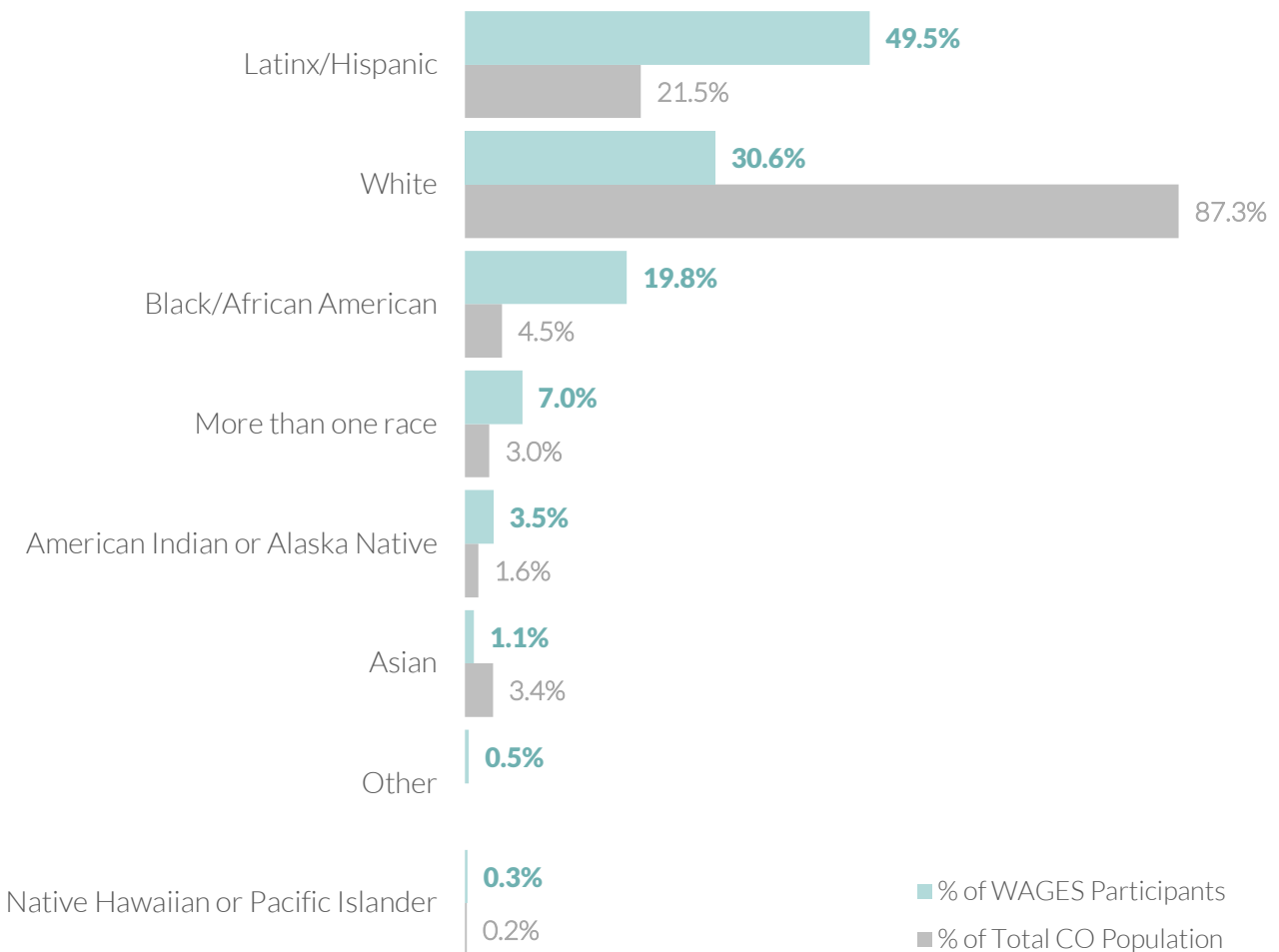
Note: Valid percentages are utilized (n=898). Total is greater than 100% due to rounding.

## Race and Ethnicity

As Figure 5 shows, WAGES participants are more racially/ethnically diverse than the Colorado population. Among WAGES participants, the majority identified as Latinx/Hispanic (49.5%), followed by participants who identified as White (30.6%) or Black or African American (19.8%). In other words, communities of color were reached at higher rates when compared to the racial/ethnic distribution of Colorado's population, except for members of the Asian community.

**FIGURE 5. RACE/ETHNICITY FOR WAGES PARTICIPANTS COMPARED TO CO POPULATION**

Most WAGES participants are women of color.

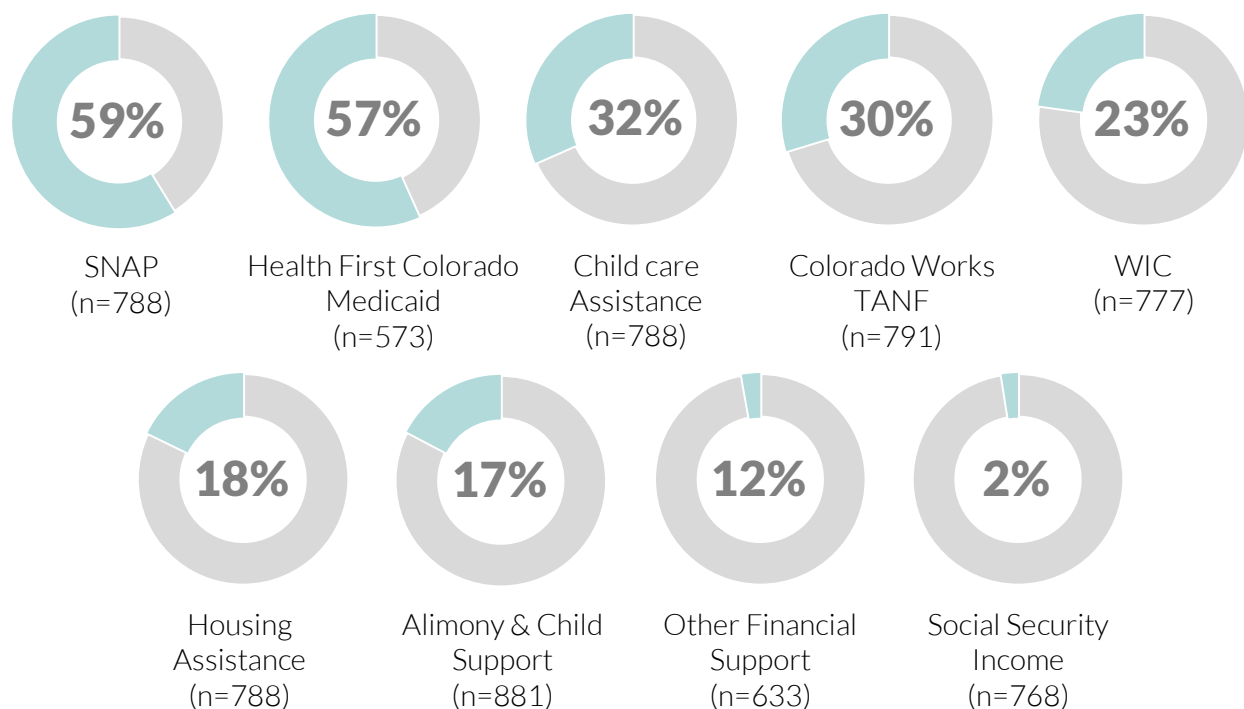


*Note: Grantees were able to select more than one race/ethnicity for each participant. Percentages slightly exceed 100%. Colorado population estimates are from the 2018 U.S. Census estimates and for both women and men, as data were not available by race/ethnicity and gender. Further, the U.S. Census asks race and ethnicity questions separately, whereas WAGES grantees provided data on race and ethnicity as one question. "Other" race/ethnicity is not an option for the census data but was for WAGES grantees; for these reasons, comparisons are not exact.*

## Financial Support Systems

DS grantees were asked to indicate what financial support systems their WAGES participants utilized at program entry. As Figure 6 shows, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP had the highest valid percentage of users (59%, n=788) followed by Health first Colorado Medicaid (57%), noting that fewer participants provided data (n=573). Only 30% of participants reported receiving Colorado Works (the state's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families [TANF] program) and 23% received WIC (The Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children). When reading Figure 6, please note variation in missing data across support systems. Table B.3. in Appendix B provides more information on and definitions of financial support systems.

**FIGURE 6. WAGES PARTICIPANTS' FINANCIAL SUPPORTS**



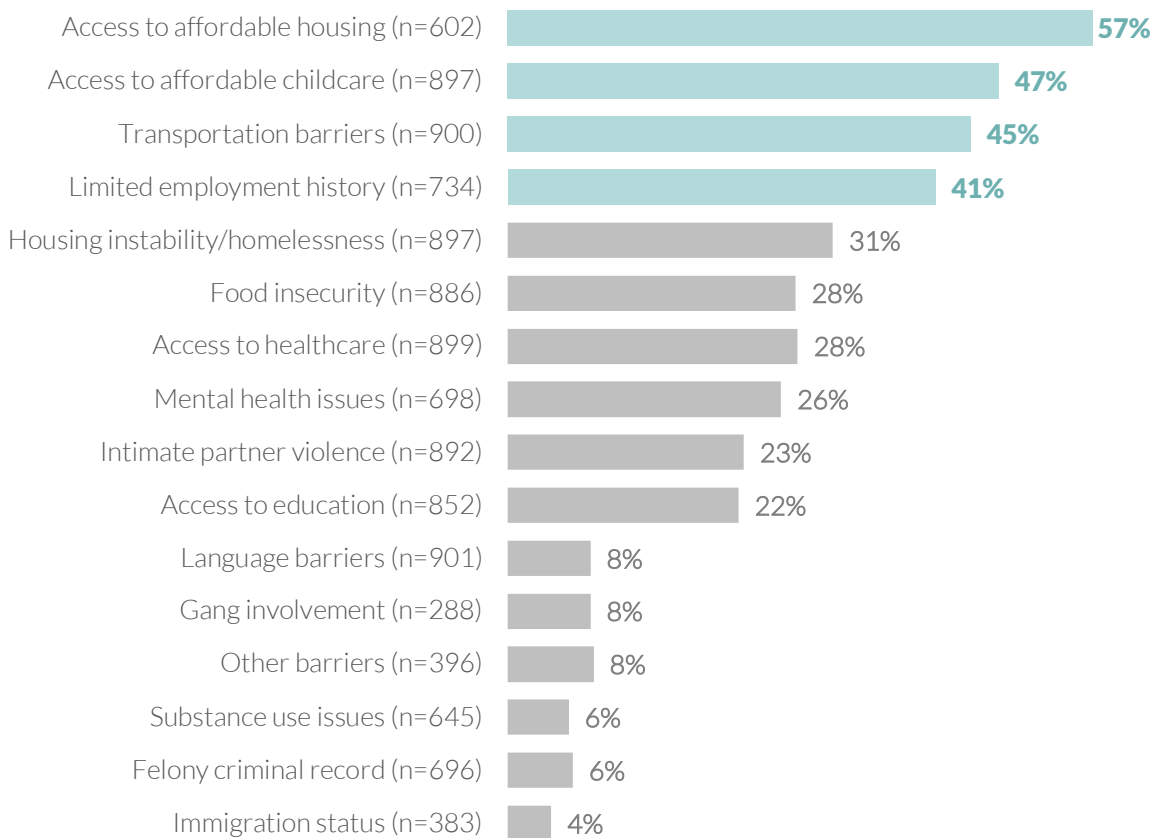
*Note: Valid percentages that exclude missing data are utilized, and numbers in parentheses reflect the total number of responses available for each variable. Please note that missing data varies on several types of support. Percentages for areas with small sample sizes may not accurately reflect patterns of use.*

## Barriers to Economic Security

DS grantees were asked to report on the number of participants who experienced specific barriers to obtaining a livable wage. As shown in Figure 7, the top four barriers at program entry were access to affordable housing, access to affordable child care, transportation, and limited employment history. This year, access to affordable housing became the largest barrier for WAGES participants (from 51% in Year 1 to 57% in Year 3). It is worth noting that limited employment history was a barrier for many women served by the DS grantee that supports young mothers completing high school. Thus, participants' limited employment history largely reflects that these are young mothers who have not yet fully participated in the workforce. Also, please note the variation in available data across types of barriers when interpreting the findings below.

## FIGURE 7. BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC SECURITY

At the end of Year 3, **access to affordable housing**, **lack of access to affordable child care**, **transportation barriers**, and **limited employment history** were identified as barriers by over 40% of women reporting.



*Note: Valid percentages that exclude missing data are utilized, and numbers in parentheses reflect the total number of responses available for each variable. Please note that data were missing on several types of barriers. Percentages for areas with small sample sizes should be read with caution.*

# Implementation

To address the diverse needs/barriers to achieving economic security, grantee organizations implement a variety of services and approaches. Table B.4 in Appendix B summarizes each DS grantee's programming and the targeted population/demographics of the women they serve. Below, we share common approaches/strategies to implementation.

## Program Services and Activities

As Figure 8 shows, most participants received case management, financial assistance, and employment services, thus ensuring that a whole-person and individualized approach is being implemented to best support participants.

From qualitative feedback on the 2021 WAGES Survey, grantees continue to surface the importance of providing **financial stipends**<sup>2</sup> to support participants on their path to economic security. Financial and basic needs assistance was identified as a particularly important support during COVID-19.

**Referrals and wrap-around services** to provide complimentary, whole-person services was also noted as an effective implementation strategy especially during COVID-19. One DS grantee further discussed the importance of communication and being flexible to meet the current needs of participants.

Due to the impact of COVID-19, DS grantees were focused on addressing challenges that were sharpened by the pandemic. For example, **financial coaching** became even more important as WAGES participants dealt with turbulent and uncertain job security. **"The resources participants gained from their financial coach provided them with the tools to budget, understand their financial situations, and access financial resources that they did not know existed."** These supports will be especially critical as WAGES participants continue to recover from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Example quotations from DS grantees around their implementation strategies and challenges in relation to COVID-19 included:

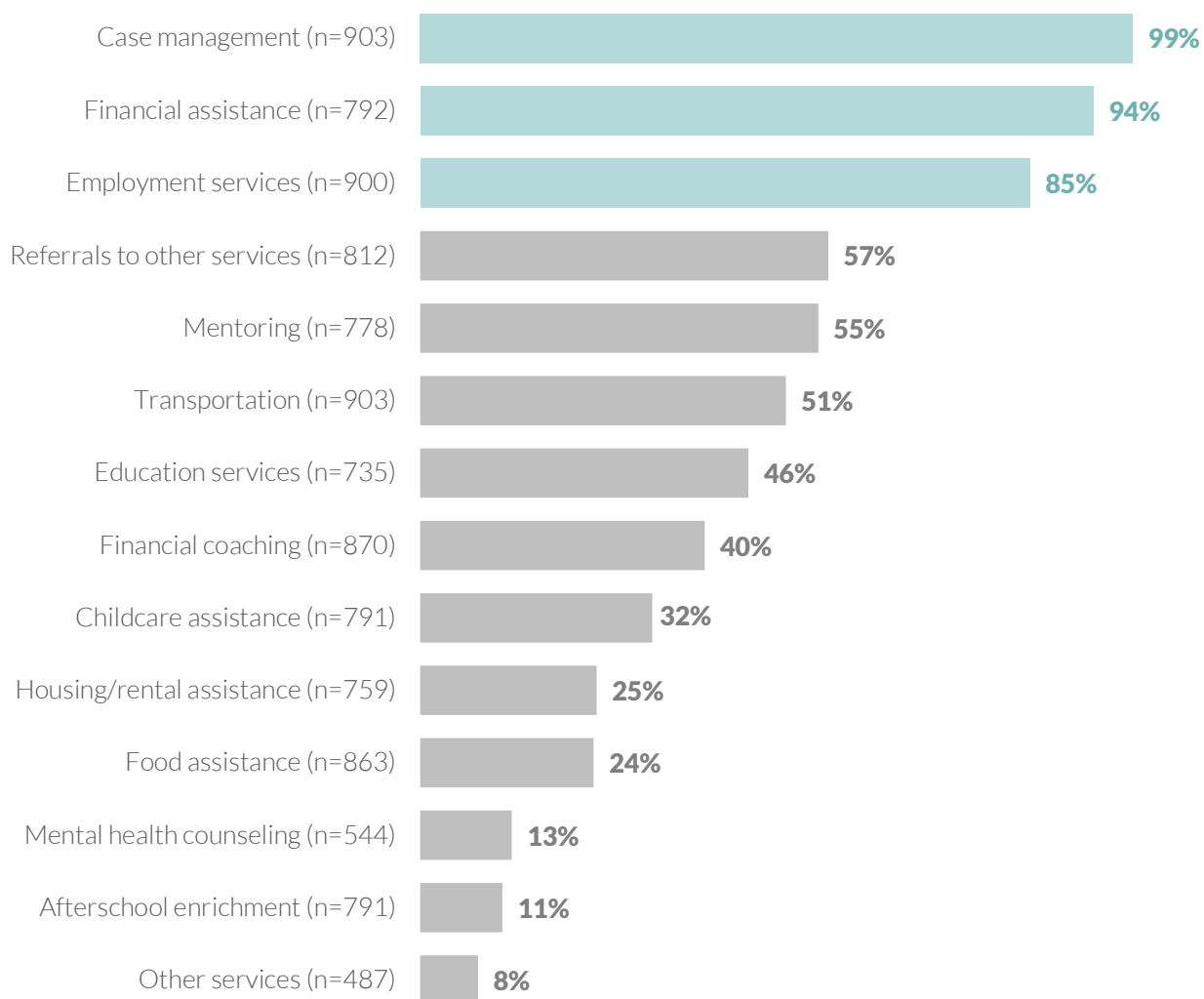
- "Communication during COVID has been challenging. Clients we have stayed in contact with, and new clients were seeking more support for wrap-around services (food, computers, books/learning tools, bill assistance, etc.) instead of actual job training/placement."
- "The ability to have quality follow-up with participants, even after they have finished their training courses proves very helpful in helping them take the next step in their pathway. We are in the process of hiring a family advocate who can offer intensive follow-up with all program participants and their families (following a two-generation approach)."
- "COVID-19 pandemic accelerated our strategic plan objective of expanding community impact by developing offsite, virtual and telephone advisement sessions as a mode of service. These service delivery modes provided increased flexibility and easy access to Help Sessions (resource navigation) for applicants, as well as for working parents who could eliminate travel time to participate in meetings."

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<sup>2</sup> Stipends consist of a regular, fixed amount of money paid to women to offset expenses and allow them to participate in unpaid/underpaid educational opportunities, trainings, or internships.

**FIGURE 8. PROGRAM SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES AT INTAKE**

Most women served received **case management, financial assistance, and employment services.**



*Note: Valid percentages that exclude missing data are utilized, and numbers in parentheses reflect the total number of responses available for each variable. Please note that data were missing on some service types. Percentages for areas with small sample sizes should be read with caution.*

## Progress Towards Achieving Economic Security

On the 2021 WAGES Survey, DS grantees were asked to report on the cumulative number of women who made gains in various areas (e.g., employment, education) and applicable job sectors in which those gains were achieved. Outcomes were reported on women as they became available (i.e., while in or after completing programs). The number of women achieving outcomes is influenced in part by differences in the number of women served by grantees who target educational versus employment-based programming.

### Employment

**256 WAGES participants have made employment gains** in various fields including child care, customer service, education, financial services, food services, healthcare, information technology (IT), non-profits, real estate and leasing, security services, pest control, construction, heavy machinery driving, etc.

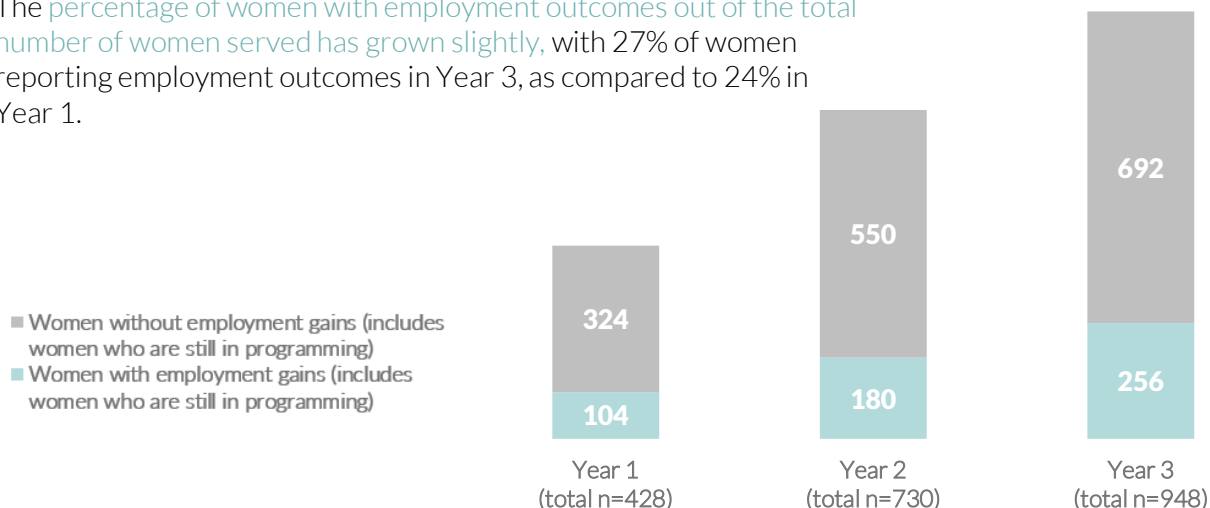
As Figure 9 shows, the percentage of women making employment gains has grown slightly from Year 1 and Year 2 to Year 3. In Year 3, 27% of participants were making employment gains, compared to 25% in Year 2 and 24% in Year 1. However, as stated above, outcomes are reported cumulatively (so some occurred in prior years) and regardless of program completion so that progress can be shared as it becomes available (see Data and Evaluation Considerations in Appendix A for more information around outcomes).

"One WAGES participant went from working full-time outside of sector to a job with career potential within the sector, feeling that she now has the tools to expand her scope and practice. She also is planning to continue to her AAS and BS degrees in field."

- Direct Service Grantee

**FIGURE 9. NUMBER OF WOMEN MAKING EMPLOYMENT GAINS FROM YEAR 1 THROUGH YEAR 3 OF WAGES**

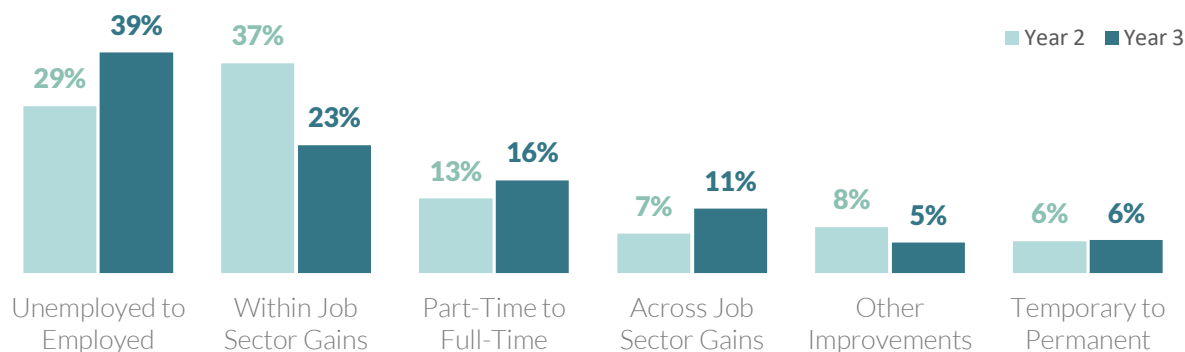
The **percentage of women with employment outcomes out of the total number of women served has grown slightly**, with 27% of women reporting employment outcomes in Year 3, as compared to 24% in Year 1.





As Figure 10 shows, in Year 3, the 256 women who made employment gains did so in a variety of ways, including gaining access to employment (39%), making within job sector gains such as a promotion, salary increase, added benefits (23%), and making across sector gains such as gaining a full-time position in a more desired sector/field (11%). As the figure shows, more women had accessed employment than was reported in Year 2, but fewer women had within job sector gains.

**FIGURE 10. YEAR 2 VS. YEAR 3 EMPLOYMENT GAINS**



Gains that were described qualitatively in the 2021 WAGES Survey included, for example:

- Obtaining full-time employment (e.g., heavy machine operator, Health Information Technology position, office administrator, construction position, etc.)
- Gaining more flexible work schedules, allowing WAGES women more time to care for their families and remain employed
- Started their own businesses to offset wages loss due to COVID-19
- Promotions within existing employment (e.g., to a supervisor role)



## IMPACT STORY: Reaching Employment Goals

Born and raised in Denver, Alea (pseudonym) is a young mother of three boys who left an abusive marriage and was motivated to find financial stability for herself and her children. After having twins as a teenager, Alea felt lost when it came to financial planning, getting her GED, and starting a career; however, she knew she wanted to be a good role model for her children.

In 2016, Alea lost her retail job due to a lack of childcare options. She applied to Denver Human Services (DHS), who referred her to the Center for Work Employment and Education (CWEE). Shortly after starting services, Alea said that she felt like she had finally found a community and approach to help her achieve her goals, **“They just have a huge support system. I never had such strong women come together and support me. I felt like I wasn’t judged when I was with them. I felt like [the organization] was absolutely a place where I could...get the support I needed.”**

### Learning New Skills for the Job Market

CWEE’s programming and community allowed Alea to thrive professionally and personally. She attended classes on a range of topics including computer skills and building financial literacy, and she attended group therapy. The CWEE also assisted Alea financially through support obtaining a vehicle as well as rent assistance. After obtaining her GED, Alea attended professional development classes at CWEE, including resume workshops, mock interviews, and computer certifications. Alea decided she wanted to give back to the communities that helped her, and she secured a helping-focused governmental job, where she was very quickly promoted and indicated earning a livable wage.

### Overcoming Unexpected Hurdles

Graduating from the program was a powerful experience for Alea and her family. She said, **“All I ever wanted to do is graduate from school. So, when you walk down the aisle, my boys’ eyes lit up to see their mom graduate.”** However, after beginning her new job, Alea experienced what is known as the “Cliff Effect” where her new income disqualified her from much of the assistance she was previously relying on, despite the fact that she hadn’t even received her first pay check: **“It was really hard for me because I didn’t have savings, just started my job, waiting for a paycheck to come in. I didn’t even get paid yet, and everything happened.”** Luckily, CWEE had anticipated Alea’s need and helped support her for three months while she got back on her feet. Then, the pandemic hit, and while Alea received her second promotion during the crisis, she was also furloughed for 8 days and struggled to make ends meet. Alea reached back out to CWEE, and they were able to provide her with the necessary financial assistance to allow her to support her family during her time of reduced work hours.

Alea shared that the Earned Income Tax Credit would positively benefit her life. When asked about other policies that might help her, she said wished that she would be able to hold her children’s father accountable for his over \$20,000 owed in child support. Alea also reflected that childcare subsidies are critical supports for single mothers – ones that would have been extremely helpful when she was younger.

Alea’s future goals revolve around increasing financial stability, buying a house, and going back to school. **“The options are endless for me right now,”** she says. She plans to utilize CWEE’s resources to get information on going back to school for a degree in communications, human services, or administration. Her main priority, however, is to make sure her children are financially literate and have the resources to become financially stable adults. She reveals, **“I want to be somebody that my boys look up to and are proud of, and I wasn’t that before I went into CWEE.”**

## Workforce Issues During the Pandemic Affecting WAGES Participants and other Women and Families

Like the nation, Colorado's workforce is beginning to rebound from the effects of COVID-19. In May 2021, The Colorado Department of Labor and Employment reported the state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 6.4 percent, down from a high of 12.2 in April 2020 (Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, 2021). Before the pandemic, the gap between male and female workforce participants was less than four percentage points (Common Sense Institute, 2020), but now, the difference is greater than ten points (Status of Women in the States, 2021). Stay-at-home orders, office closures, layoffs, and especially challenges with child care or caregiving for children during school closures forced women to leave their jobs.

The loss of women from the global workforce has many implications; some estimate that gross domestic product growth will be \$1 trillion lower by 2030 due to the loss of women in the workplace alone (McKinsey & Company, 2020a). Furthermore, research suggests that even short-term time outside of the workforce can have long-term career consequences for women, such as affecting earning potential (The Brookings Institution, 2020). There is concern that decades of progress in workforce equity could be lost, should employers and the economy not act to resolve women's absence (McKinsey & Company, 2020b).

The sectors most severely impacted by COVID-19 were hospitality and restaurants, health care, child care, education, and other service industries (Roy, 2021; Sealover, 2021). Thus, jobs in women-dominated industries have not recovered from the pandemic at the same rate as those dominated by men, and mothers left the workforce at a higher rate than fathers (Common Sense Institute, 2021; McKinsey & Company, 2020b). Additionally, unpaid labor, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, and taking care of children and parents in the household, is traditionally disproportionately done by women, almost twice than that of men, still even in 2015 (McKinsey & Company, 2015). With the pandemic necessitating more stay-at-home, work-from-home, and school-at-home situations for all, these unpaid labor activities increased on a massive scale, essentially constituting a part-time, unpaid job (McKinsey & Company, 2020b).

## Education

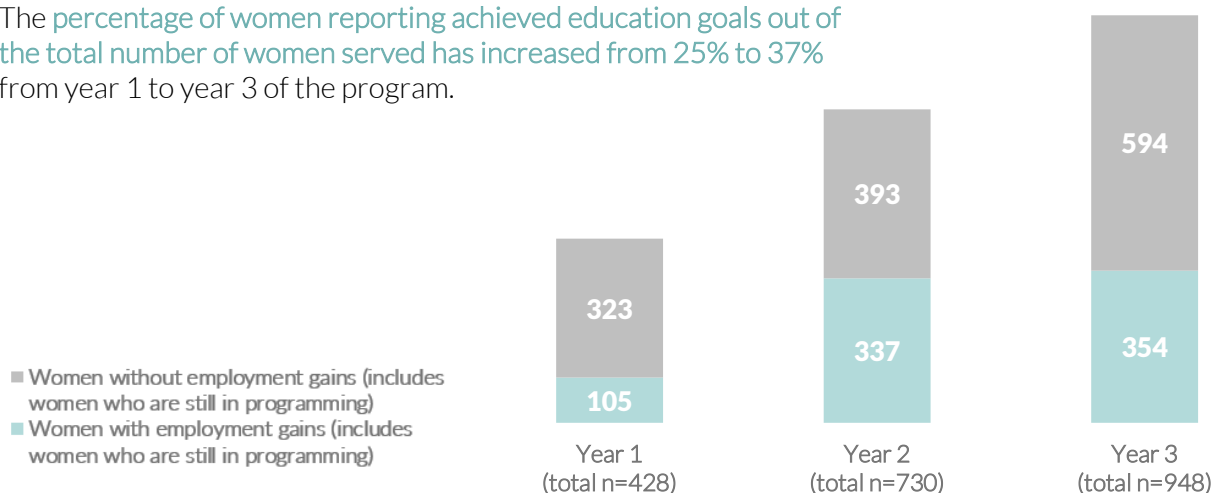
354 WAGES participants have reached their educational goals in fields such as early childhood education, healthcare, financial services, the healing arts,<sup>3</sup> cosmetology, sociology, and apparel and merchandising. Comparing the cumulative reporting across years, there has been a notable increase and then plateau in women making educational gains, with 25% of participants making educational gains in Year 1 compared to 46% of participants in Year 2 and 48% in Year 3 (see Figure 11). DS grantees reported that many women had to put education plans on hold due to family and financial needs, but the relationship between the pandemic and women's experiences is not uniform. For example, while some women increased work hours and reduced educational time to make ends meet, others lost jobs due to COVID-19, but used the time to explore educational or new career pathways.

“Balancing work, children and classwork is challenging for families and participants. Most women being single parents, do not have a lot of expendable time to attend classes. During the pandemic, virtual class offerings helped to alleviate the barrier as participants could attend online.”

– Direct Service Grantee

FIGURE 11. EDUCATIONAL GAINS FROM YEAR 1 THROUGH YEAR 3 OF WAGES

The percentage of women reporting achieved education goals out of the total number of women served has increased from 25% to 37% from year 1 to year 3 of the program.

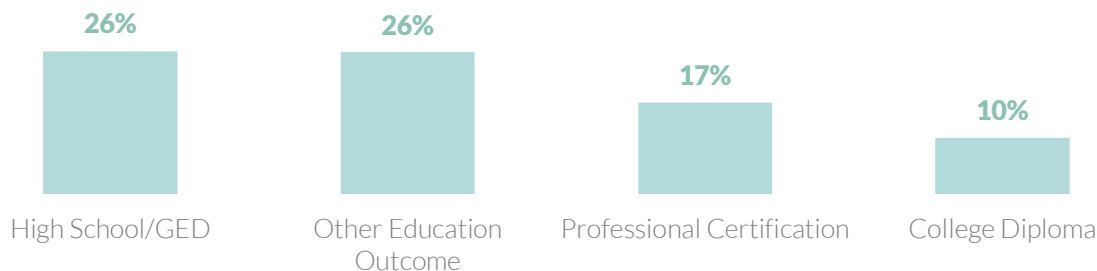


As Figure 12 shows, of those 354 participants attaining an educational goal cumulatively across the three years, 26% gained their high school diploma or GED, 17% completed a professional certification (e.g., Child Development Associate Credential; Family Developmental Credential; A+ Certification; MIG Welding Class Certificate, etc.), and 10% graduated from college. Of the 26% of participants who achieved "other" educational outcomes, this included achievements such as completing a series of entrepreneurship classes, courses necessary for professional licensing, job training skills (e.g., computer skills, communication skills, etc.), school-based internships, and

<sup>3</sup> The healing arts is a broad term that consists of practices in traditional, complementary and alternative medicines, which promote healing and wellness.

attending leadership program/speaker events. It should be noted that percentages were relatively consistent between across the years; thus, only Year 3 data are visualized below.

FIGURE 12. YEAR 3 EDUCATIONAL GAINS



In qualitative responses, DS grantees further indicated that participants:

- Attained educational certificates or coursework that allowed them to be eligible for new positions with higher pay.
- Many WAGES participants were able to achieve educational gains, whereas for others the pandemic put “on pause” their educational progress.



## IMPACT STORY: Reaching Education Goals

Ashley (pseudonym) was determined to make a better life for herself. Prior to her involvement with the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH), she worked many different jobs but felt drawn to truck driving. After being furloughed from her job in March of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she became involved with CCH through a family connection. With the support of CCH as well as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Ashley was able to begin a program to receive her Commercial Driving License (CDL).

### Getting Back into the Classroom

The process of obtaining her CDL was challenging. She worked all day and then completed her classes over Zoom at night. She had to study constantly and balance school with work. Despite the challenges, she graduated with a CDL in spring of 2021. Throughout the process, CCH provided her with financial and emotional support. This was necessary to her success as a truck driver since she needed to increase her self-confidence in order to successfully drive an 18-wheeler. Ashley had frequent check-ins with her caseworker to ensure that she had what she needed to successfully complete the program. The CCH also provided financial support for rent and purchasing trucking supplies.

After graduating with her CDL in spring of 2021, Ashley was hired by a commercial trucking company the following summer. As she began her new career, she reflected on seeing the empty shelves during the early pandemic and felt excited to help. **"I remember going to the store and the shelves are just empty and I've never in my life seen Walmart, King Soopers like that, so I'm like, 'Hey, I need to go and help. I need to go put my hard work, blood, sweat, and tears in and go help.' You know, go out and get some products distributed."**

### **Dreaming about the Future**

In the future, Ashley is excited about all the opportunities that come with truck driving. Her ultimate goal is to become an owner-operator and have her own fleet of trucks and drivers. As an owner-operating, Ashley could make upwards of \$200,000 in gross annual income. This would enable her to achieve her goal of buying land and starting a family. She also wants to serve as an example for other female truck drivers. In the meantime, she continues to stay involved with CCH through financial support programs and as a member of the community.

### **Education Issues During the Pandemic Affecting WAGES Participants and other Women and Families**

Education is significant predictor of workforce participation and economic security. Householders with more or greater education experience lower rates of insufficient income (Pearce, 2018). This became more evident during COVID-19, when unemployment rates for both men and women were greater for those with less education. However, these dynamics are not shared equally. For Colorado women, in 2020 their unemployment rates were four times higher for those without a college degree than for those with an associate degree or higher (Brown et al., 2021).

Women must gain more education than men to see economic benefits from education (Gould & Kroeger, 2017). Though more women in Colorado enroll in college and are awarded more degrees than men (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2021), women seeking postsecondary education are more likely to earn degrees in fields with lower wages and fewer opportunities for advancement because they are in fields that tend to have lesser growth (Valle Gutierrez, 2020). Women of color with a bachelor's degree or more have only a slightly lower rate of income inadequacy than White men without a high school diploma (Brennan & Contorno, 2020).

## Reduced Public Supports

“This past year our participants faced many challenges. Our participants at risk of experiencing the "cliff effect" create budgets with our financial coaches so they can plan for setbacks. This year COVID-19 added new challenges for our participants. Our participants had to face the turbulence of workplace closures, cuts in hours, and unpredictable schedules for their children due to school closures and even daycare closures. Some of our participants had to re-apply for TANF benefits not long after transitioning off of these benefits. As mentioned, our participants have shown remarkable resilience and have been finding innovative ways to work through these challenging times, such as gaining additional employment with Lyft and Uber that allow for flexible scheduling. Others leveraged their skills to become entrepreneurs who sold meals and hair styling services to create supplemental income, a true testament to their resiliency.”

- Direct Service Grantee

94 WAGES participants have reduced public supports, including two women reporting they were completely off all public supports and were fully able to care for their families. Others have reduced government subsidies and supports in areas of income, housing, child care, food, and healthcare.

However, even after obtaining economic advancements, reducing public supports can be challenging. From the start of WAGES, grantee organizations have surfaced how the [Cliff Effect](#) impacts women's ability to achieve economic security. In the 2021 WAGES Survey, DS grantees continued to describe this impact on their participants. For example:

- One program noted that challenges to reducing public supports this year were due to COVID-19. Specifically, “[Participants] were laid off, scared to let other benefits go...were more focused on staying healthy and remaining stable.” Another DS grantee reported, “The cliff effect is exaggerated in our community due to the high cost of living and limited resources. The pandemic was a barrier for the community and our participants. Despite these challenges, our participants were highly engaged in moving toward goals in creative ways.”

## Additional Outcomes at Program Exit

For the 2020 and 2021 WAGES Survey, DS grantees were asked two additional outcome-related questions: What were participants' hourly wages at program exit? What were participants' family income at program exit? As with the rest of data requests, DS grantees were asked to report only on data they currently have and/or were able to collect.

93 WAGES participants (36%) for whom data were available earned above \$15.01 an hour at program exit or follow-up. Please note that hourly wage was only asked at program-exit/follow-up, with a total of 261 women reporting from six of 12 DS grantee organizations.





**36%** of WAGES participants earned at least \$15 per hour, slightly above the Denver minimum wage of \$14.77 per hour and \$2.68 above the Colorado minimum wage of \$12.32 per hour, at program exit or follow-up

Of the 93 women earning \$15.01 or above:

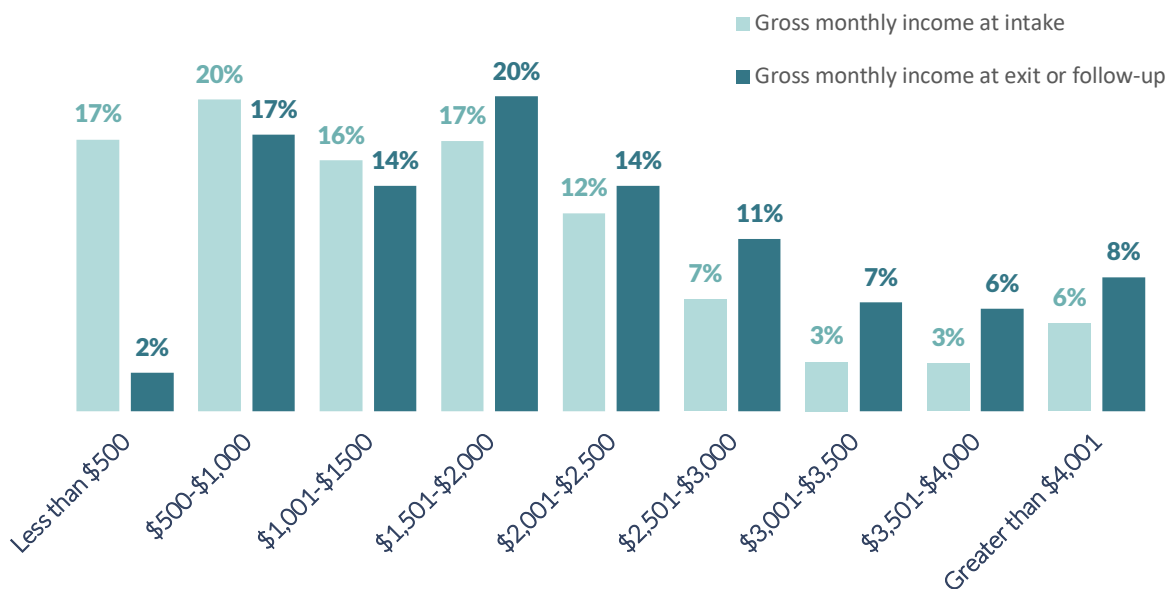
- 73% (n=68) were earning between \$15.01 - \$20.00
- 12% (n=11) were earning between \$20.01 - \$25.00
- 11% (n=10) were earning between \$25.01 - \$30.00
- 4% (n=4) were earning more than \$30.00.

"Women who graduated our Financial Services Training report an average wage increase of \$1.56 per hour upon employment. This translates to an additional \$3,000 per year, and the opportunity for participants to work in an industry with regular hours, health insurance, and paid time off. The financial services industry also provides opportunity for tuition reimbursement and continuing education."

– Direct Service Grantee

At program intake, participants earning \$1,000 or less made up 37% of the sample; this fell to 20% of the sample at program exit or follow-up. A total of 249 women from six DS grantee organizations (of 12) reported gross income at program exit or follow-up, representing 26% of women served by DS Grantees. Thus, findings below should be read as suggestive and reflective of these six DS grantee organizations' participants.

FIGURE 13. GROSS MONTHLY INCOME AT PROGRAM INTAKE VS. PROGRAM EXIT



## Reasons for not Completing Programs

DS grantees were also asked what reasons participants had for not completing programs. Primary reasons are listed below:

- **COVID-19** has created and/or exacerbated challenges participants faced.
  - **Survival mode:** Factors like sudden job loss or decrease in hours also forced participants to seek more employment opportunities to support their families, which prevented them from having time to dedicate to completing programs. Participants struggled to pay for housing, make ends meet, and get their basic needs met.
  - **New family dynamics:** Some participants struggled with new family dynamics of having children at home for virtual school, as well as adjusting to working from home themselves.
  - **Child care closures:** Participants may have to delay taking exams or may struggle to study while having to watch their children due to child care closures. This reinforces how child care is essential in supporting the educational and economic goals of women.
  - **Tipping point:** Participants who were already struggling to balance life stressors had the added unexpected stress of a global pandemic. Thus, participants who were already on the verge of dropping out did not complete programs.
  - **Mental health:** Grantees also raised increased stress and mental health needs among WAGES participants due to the pandemic. **"COVID-19 has affected our students [women] very much...and has created significant stress."**
- **Societal pressures of motherhood**, according to several grantees, resulted in many women lacking support for completing their education due to pressures of feeling they need to support their children and families first, and mothers should come second.
- **Language barriers** can mean additional economic and other hardships. A few grantees stated that for participants that were English Language learners, the additional requirements, and overall difficulty to navigate institutions dominated by the English language, also was a reason for not completing programs.
- **Insufficient social support**, while battling economic and financial hardship, was a barrier noted by several DS grantees. Several DS grantees reported that participants lacked sufficient social support, which affected the motivation to complete programming.
- **Constraints of eligibility requirements** according to one DS grantee, where, for example, family income composition changed (e.g. income increase), the age of a dependent child was above 13, or a participant missed the required number of meetings.
- **Program "completion" is difficult to determine**, as some programs may never truly 'exit' clients; other programs will be better able to determine those who have truly completed or exited by the end of the grant, as it is common for clients to return to DS grantees for additional support on their journeys to self-sufficiency.
- **Staying in communication with participants** can be a barrier, particularly during the pandemic, despite multiple efforts at outreach. **"Communication with clients was extremely challenging in 2020. Although several attempts were made, many of our clients became unresponsive."**

## Barriers During the Pandemic Affecting WAGES Participants and other Women and Families

**Housing:** In Colorado, an estimated 25-36% of all households were at risk of eviction in April 2020 (Benfer et al., 2020). Before the pandemic, it was estimated that Black women faced evictions at twice the rate of White people in at least 17 states (Carrazana & Bragg, 2020). In Colorado, people of color were more likely to report housing instability and worry about having a stable place to live than white Coloradans in 2019 (Colorado Health Institute, 2020).

Housing instability has unique consequences for women. For example, domestic violence is one of the most common reasons why women become homeless (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2013). During the pandemic, women experiencing such violence are in a dangerous bind: along with stay-at-home orders, the threat of housing instability has caused women who are survivors of domestic violence to continue to stay at home with their abusers (Evans et al., 2020). While experiencing homelessness, women lose privacy and safety, their financial instability compounds, and their reproductive health and welfare of their children is affected (Cutts et al., 2015). Children of mothers who face evictions are more likely to live in substandard housing, which leads to poor health outcomes (Desmond & Kimbro, 2015).

Although the U.S. implemented as a part of pandemic stimulus plans rental assistance and eviction moratoriums, these temporary protections are about to expire in Colorado (Chapman, 2021).

**Child care:** Colorado ranks eighth highest in the U.S. for child care costs (Economic Policy Institute, 2020), and there were already significant barriers to accessing child care before COVID-19 in both rural and urban areas (The Associated Press, 2021). Women are still perceived as the primary providers of child care and spend more than 40 percent more time on child care than men (Alon et al., 2020).

A major driver of job losses during COVID-19 was the increased need for childcare. A perfect storm of circumstances affected millions of families with children: child-care providers had to cease their services to prevent the spread of the virus, families could no longer afford to use childcare services due to losses in job or wages, and/or schools were forced to move to stay-at-home virtual education (University of Oregon, 2020). During the pandemic women have assumed a much larger burden of child care duties than men (Rinaldo & Whalen, 2020). Nationally, mothers were twice as likely to cite child care or school closures as the reason for their unemployment compared to fathers (Valle Gutierrez, 2020). This leads to mothers and fathers returning to work at significantly different rates. In addition to the care needed by small children who could no longer be admitted to childcare facilities, older school-aged children still require assistance navigating through their virtual education and need significant supervision while at home (Center for American Progress, 2020).

**Mental health care:** The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that in 2019 14% of all women in Colorado reported not going to a doctor in the past year, due to cost, and that women of color experience poorer health outcomes compared to white women, including mental health (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2021a). In April of 2021, the foundation also found that females experienced symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorders at almost twice the rate of men during the pandemic (Kaiser Family Foundation 2021b).

# Solutions to Overcoming Challenges and Achieving Success



DS grantees were asked to share more about participants' challenges and barriers while working towards employment, educational, and other goals. Detailed information on participant barriers is reported in the Year 1 WAGES Evaluation Report. In this section, we highlight innovative solutions that were highlighted in the 2021 WAGES Survey.

## Participants' Innovative Solutions

COVID-19 required many participants to create new innovative solutions to respond to the new challenges the pandemic presented. Participants used COVID-19 as a motivator to explore new career opportunities, begin entrepreneurial careers, and develop new work/home life balances to stay on track with their goals. Below, we share strategies that emerged from the 2021 WAGES Survey.

### Year 3 Highlights

Participants were:

- Engaging in new entrepreneurial endeavors
- Seeking co/multi-family housing opportunities to cut financial costs
- Open to temporary employment to offset disruptions in work hours from COVID-19
- Balancing new home/work life commitments
- Utilizing new flexible financial support (e.g., COVID-19 stipends) for emergency needs
- Pursuing traditionally male-dominated fields (similar to previous years)

Further, DS grantees continue to adapt their services to help participants reach their goals (see What Helps Women and Their Families Achieve Economic Security on the following page).

"Our primary innovation in the past year was a result of COVID and our services quickly migrating to a remote environment. We quickly pivoted to provide virtual meetings - both to current program Participants and to Applicants (Help Sessions) - using virtual tools such as Zoom and Calendly for scheduling. Our anecdotal evidence is that this actually worked very well for clients. We had to work through some technology and access hurdles, but once that was accomplished, meetings held virtually had a higher attendance rate and we on-boarded 51 new families in 2020, despite the pandemic."

– Direct Service Grantee

## Systemic Solutions Supportive of WAGES Participants and other Women and Families

**Workforce:** Many employers have implemented workplace and hiring policies to accommodate remote work. The shift in workplace norms that have resulted in such policy changes should act as a springboard for continued building of equitable practices, to both limit the severity of impact from COVID-19 and provide a path forward for working women. Practices and policies should include flexible work-life balances that respond to the added burdens that women workers have had to endure, such as paid leave, flexible scheduling, and "returnship" internships that enable women to re-enter the workforce (e.g., Bianchi, 2021). Returnships allow opportunities for women who have left the workplace during the pandemic to make up for lost time. Additionally, reskilling and retraining is critical for women returning to work in different roles and adjusting to new the "new normal" (O'Connell, 2021).

**Education:** Educational support should be provided to women without high-school or college degrees, and reskilling programs can prepare women for workforce demands.

Further, according to the National Women's Law Center, women especially are vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19 on student debt issues. The Center recommends several solutions during the pandemic to address the increased demands that women disproportionately have regarding debt, address critical immediate needs, and ensure debt repayment moves forward in a more equitable way (National Women's Law Center, 2020):

- Provide immediate payment relief for student loan borrowers, and cancel at least \$30,000 in outstanding student loan debt
- Provide additional relief from fees, penalties, and negative notations on credit scores, and provide a grace period for starting repayment
- Bolster emergency financial aid and services for students
- Redouble measure to prevent predatory lending and for-profit institutions

**Child Care:** Both employers and governments should increase child care assistance to empower women to reenter the workforce more quickly and effectively after the pandemic. Child care policies must make child care affordable for all families and prioritize the needs of historically marginalized communities, including culturally and linguistically competent care options, home-based care, and care during nonstandard hours such as weekends, after school, nights, when job schedules change, and in areas that are currently child care deserts (Kalipeni, L. and Kashen, J., 2020).

**Housing:** What is needed to disrupt the income inadequacy-housing instability cycle are economic assistance and rent cancellation. Just as we are not equally vulnerable when it comes to COVID-19, health, education, employment, some populations are at a higher risk of housing instability than others; policies should reflect a focus on equity.

# What Helps Women and Their Families Achieve Economic Security

Over the past three years, both DS and PA grantees have shared what direct service and policy tactics and strategies have worked to support Colorado women and their families make progress towards livable wages. The bullets below have been updated from previous years to reflect [additional Year 3 reflections](#) (underlined below) and include COVID-19-related observations.

## Direct Service

- Job training programs that include both technical and social skills training, provide comprehensive supports to women and their families, and utilize relationship-building and strengths-based approaches are effective. Additionally:
- [Financial supports](#) like stipends and scholarships to reduce systemic drivers of inequity; direct cash assistance and public supports during COVID-19 to support financial stability; scholarships.
- [Program flexibility](#) like flexible training times, asynchronous programming, moving to online platforms, etc. was necessary to meet participant needs. This is always needed but particularly during COVID-19.
- [Employment opportunities](#) that connect participants directly to wages such as employment; registered apprenticeships; and paid internships ('earn to learn' opportunities).
- [Addressing digital access barriers](#) to ensure participants have digital literacy skills and low-cost technology (e.g., internet, laptops, etc.)
- [Providing mental health support](#), particularly because of the pandemic, is needed to address the chronic stressors that WAGES participants may be experiencing.
- [Dedicated case manager](#), advisor, financial coach, and/or transitions/family advocate role to provide support and resources to participants.
- [Community partnerships](#) that support complimentary services for wrap-around/whole-person support. Partnerships with organizations that provide workforce training.
- [Relationship-building](#), peer support, and working from strengths to build connections and recognizing that participants already have what they need to be agents of their own change.
- [Individualized goals](#) and success plans that are attainable and break down barriers; supports to meet goals.
- [Providing early childhood education](#) and care as part of two-generation strategies.
- [Assessing needs](#) through needs assessments at program enrollment to surface top barriers to completing programs and gaining employment.

"Our teams have been working particularly hard to problem-solve issues related to child care during and after the pandemic, as the shift from extended time at home to in-office work will be difficult for many mothers."

– Direct Service Grantee

PA grantees' strategies are summarized below. The bullets below have been updated from previous years to reflect additional Year 3 reflections (underlined below) and include COVID-19-related observations. In the following section, PA grantees' progress around policy advocacy strategies in Year 3 are described in further detail.

## Policy Advocacy

Policy advocacy strategies that are bipartisan, multi-pronged, leverage organizational strengths and collaboration, engage communities impacted by the issues, and are well covered by the media are effective. Additionally:

- Being nimble and responsive to changing conditions, like COVID-19, and maintaining organizational capacity.
- Enhancing messaging and communications strategies (e.g., centralized depository for information on COVID relief; expanded visual communications [videos]; simplifying messaging that avoids industry jargon).
- Advocating for sustainable ways to increase worker benefits and wages, including paid family and medical leave.
- Fostering bipartisan support and working on issues with broad-base appeal; showing how issues are interconnected to build broader support.
- Sharing research broadly and in ways that are relatable to non-policy experts.
- Working in diverse coalitions and laying the groundwork in the 'off-season' when policy makers have more time to engage.
- Directly engaging the community, particularly those with lived experience around the issues; supporting leadership development of community members, especially for women and women of color so that they are at the forefront of policy initiatives.
- Perseverance, patience and leveraging openings when available to take maximum advantage of opportunistic legislative environments.
- Developing pilot programs to assess the impact new career ladder opportunities have on worker retention.
- Prioritizing direct action efforts to create immediate change when policy advocacy efforts can be a slow-moving needle to change.
- Calling attention to racial inequities exacerbated by COVID-19, as the effects of the pandemic have been particularly detrimental to women of color.

“In terms of issue work, there is significant momentum around efforts to expand financial empowerment resources in our state, particularly as more Coloradans are turning to debt to help make ends meet. There are a number of ways in which local offices of financial empowerment can help Coloradans recover from the economic effects of the pandemic, such as helping them learn about eviction or foreclosure prevention options available to them, help connect them with financial counseling services, help them avoid COVID-related financial scams, set up banking resources to receive stimulus payments, and other supports.

– Policy Advocacy Grantee





## IMPACT STORY: Two-Generational Approach

Inspired by her own upbringing in a large and close-knit family, Jeanette (pseudonym) was determined to create a warm and supportive environment for her own daughter and to seek out positive educational opportunities for her. She had heard good things about Community Partnership for Child Development (CPCD) from her sister and in the midst of the pandemic enrolled her daughter in the Early Head Start program when she was 20 months old. After her daughter became involved with CPCD, Jeanette found herself drawn towards childhood development and early childhood education. CPCD offered to pay for Jeanette to obtain her Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, which enabled her to be a teaching assistance in CPCD preschool classrooms and start the path towards becoming a lead teacher.

### **Positive Outcomes for Mother and Child**

While taking classes to obtain her CDA, Jeanette found herself really enjoying learning about her daughter's Early Head Start curriculum. She decided she wanted to stay involved with the Early Head Start age (under 3) and found employment at CPCD. She says it has been "an amazing experience." Through working with CPCD, Jeanette is on track to get the 480 hours of work experience she needs to complete her CDA. It's been a wonderful learning experience full of diverse hands-on perspectives. In addition to her own educational goals, Jeanette indicates that her daughter has benefited directly from being a part of CPCD, "everything that they provide for the children is definitely very beneficial."

Jeanette continues to receive value from CPCD's professional development support and goal-setting process – she is excited about the idea of going back to school for an associate or bachelor's degree, and CPCD will cover a portion of her tuition the longer she works with them. Jeanette's goal is to be a positive female role model for her daughter, and CPCD has been instrumental in allowing her to grow professionally and personally into that role.

### **Real-life Effects of Public Policies**

Jeanette also benefited from various public policies and programs throughout her early involvement with CPCD, including food stamps and Medicaid. She also cited paid sick time, which many WFCO policy advocacy grantees helped Colorado workers secure through the passage of the Healthy Families and Workplaces Act of 2020, as being particularly useful in allowing her to take care of her child and make ends meet when she had to miss work due to a health issue with her child. In terms of the future, Jeanette strives to be a lead teacher in a classroom soon, and is excited to continue spending time with her family and caring for her daughter. She feels excited about the ways CPCD is able to support her ability to do that.

# Policy Advocacy Grantee Efforts

For the 2021 WAGES Survey, PA grantees updated information about their ongoing WAGES efforts in the following areas:

- 1) New or continued promising strategies and activities, including example achievements and wins at mid- and end-of-year
- 2) Key learnings from both successes and challenges that can inform similar efforts
- 3) Changes and adaptations in strategies
- 4) Challenges and barriers that require ongoing strategizing

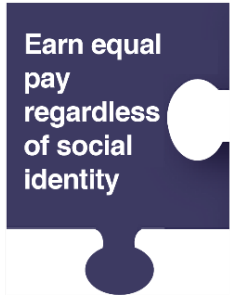
PA grantees continue to employ a complex, multi-strategy approach to increasing economic security for women and their families. Most reported activities in the following strategy areas: Building coalitions, informal partnerships and networks; community and volunteer engagement; research and policy development; influencing policy and decision-makers; and information dissemination. Much of this work occurs at the state and local-levels, though a few indicated federal advocacy activities on WAGES-related issues. Across grantees, there were extensive efforts to engage stakeholders, build policy- and decision-makers' understanding of WAGES-related priorities, and identify strategies with the greatest level of support and feasibility of success.

For the 2021 WAGES Survey, PA grantees provided information on their efforts and progress in the past year. We organize their responses around WFCO's priority areas for WAGES (see Figure 12). The status of the bills that PA grantees worked on is then presented at the end of this section.

FIGURE 14. WAGES PRIORITY AREAS



Of note and similar to the DS section above, the impact of COVID-19 was a consistent theme affecting PA grantees' work. The pandemic was and still is devastating vulnerable communities, and PA grantee efforts around more equitable policies that support women, and women of color in particular, deepened. During this time, PA grantees also noted the importance of capitalizing on the momentum of the call for racial justice. They responded to the call by elevating policy, advocacy, and research that was committed to eradicating racial inequity as it impacts women of color and communities of color overall.



Earn equal  
pay  
regardless  
of social  
identity

### EARN EQUAL PAY REGARDLESS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

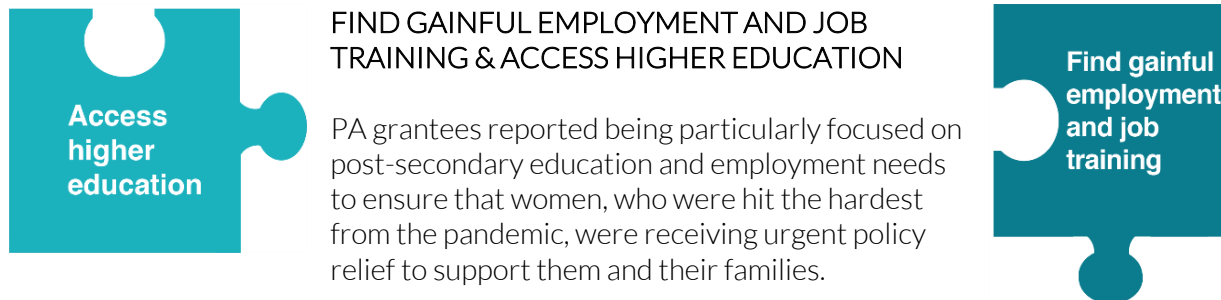
Although the pandemic had many negative effects, an unexpected outcome was the elevation of research and coalition work to address the systemic and intersecting inequities that prevent women, particularly women of color, from advancing economically and building assets and wealth across generations.

Example **research** raised by one grantee includes the following:

- [The Future of Work: COVID-19's Impact on Women](#): Building on the insights from previous research to examine the ways the COVID-19 pandemic will accelerate and exacerbate existing trends and gaps without targeted policy interventions.
- [Economic Mobility for Low-Income Families in Colorado: The Need for Targeted Increased Public Investment](#): Analyzing the connections between public investment and economic mobility, and highlighting the need for increased public investments that are targeted toward programs that increase economic mobility (such as more supports for students to complete post-secondary education)
- [Equitable Stackable Credentials Program](#): In the financial services industry looking at opportunities to develop similar career and training pathways for the caring workforce.
- [Making the Invisible Visible: A Year in COVID series](#): Providing snapshots of some of Colorado's invisible systems that were made more visible in the crisis—including informal child care providers, our evolving workplaces, undocumented workers in Colorado's caring workforce, debt collection, education, and the economy.
- [Colorado's Racial Wealth Gap: Wages & Labor](#): These publications highlight racial inequities in pay and how the intersection of race and gender means that women of color, and Black, Latina, and Native American women in particular, experience a larger pay gap than white women when compared to white men.
- [Race, Taxes, & Colorado's Regressive Tax Codes](#): Research series analyzing Colorado's tax system from an equity perspective.
- [Impact of COVID-19 on Early Childhood Care and Education Providers](#): Assessing impact on providers, educators, and families.

**Coalition work** led by one grantee also focused on the intersections of social identity and equal pay. Prosper CO created a Leadership Council convening diverse business and civic leaders as well as nonprofit and government partners to focus on closing pay gaps. The group works to collaboratively examine disparities in economic prosperity data and develop a range of potential strategies. Prosper CO also worked with existing coalitions, such as the Fair Change Hiring Coalition, and the Attorney General's office to identify additional employer partners as Fair Chance Employers.

"The Colorado Democratic Black Legislative Caucus and Latinx Caucus have been tremendous on family economic security issues. The unity within these two groups and across these two groups moves a lot of legislation, and mutually reinforces bold legislation that was unthinkable just a few years ago." – Policy Advocate Grantee



Various PA grantees reported that unemployment policies were a high priority for their policy advocacy. The pandemic highlighted how the most vulnerable, such as undocumented workers, were being left behind in COVID-19 policy relief. One grantee shared that efforts to support this population had gone into overdrive as a result and was hopeful for a "new normal" in which legislative priorities included undocumented workers (as essential workers during the pandemic). Post-secondary education was also an essential focus for policy advocacy efforts, as access to affordable post-secondary education is key for carving a pathway to a strong economic future for women.

#### Coalition work and Policy Development in Year 3 included:

- Leveraging COVID-19 to build coalitions to tackle issues impacting the diverse needs of women and their families
- Understanding the importance of elevating diverse narratives of women that transcend a one-dimensional representation, to advance equitable policy change.
- Engaging approximately 25 experts in postsecondary education and workforce development - including adult learners and workers, workforce development and postsecondary education providers, and representatives from state agencies - to inform research on equity gaps in Colorado's postsecondary and workforce development ecosystem, as well as provide feedback on potential policy recommendations to address these gaps.
- Youth empowerment as part of workforce development was also the focus of two WAGES PA grantees (working on the Denver Opportunity Youth Steering Committee; CO State Youth Council; Healthcare Pre-Apprenticeship Coalition). One PA grantee noted training 14 young adults on livable wages, apprenticeships, and advocacy skills. Another noted engaging five students as leaders in coalition work to center their expertise, develop their leadership capacity, and include their perspectives in policy work.
- Identifying the barriers preventing Coloradans from more fully accessing the economy, prioritizing racial/ethnic and gender disparities; leading a community dialogue session to unpack data further to uncover barriers.
- Developing a set of strategies for employers to help move more women and women of color into better paying jobs. A few of their strategies were: 1) Provide training opportunities and career tracks to ensure lower-paid employees have the opportunities and supports needed for advancement; 2) engage in best practices to retain diverse teammates in your workplace; and 3) take steps to increase the diversity of applicant pools.

Research that was noted in this area was the [Economic Mobility for Low-Income Families in Colorado: The Need for Targeted Increased Public Investment](#), research from CSU economist Dr. Anita Alves Pena that analyzed the connections between public investment and economic mobility. The research highlighted the need for increased public investments that are targeted toward programs that increase economic mobility (such as more supports for students to complete post-secondary education).

## ACCESS TO CHILD CARE

Child care, although a priority for grantees every year, was amplified in Year 3 due to the impact the pandemic had on women around child care (e.g., the need for women to support their children's remote learning needs while navigating work, child care shortages for essential workers, etc.). One grantee noted that, "**Women - mothers of young children and women of color - have not made a full recovery, despite a full recovery by the male labor force.**" Access to affordable and high quality child care and early childhood education is a crucial factor in women's workforce recovery after COVID-19.



Coalition work included:

- Addressing system-level solutions to affordable high quality child care.
- Leveraging COVID-19 to bring much needed media coverage to legislative needs around addressing child care capacity and other child care related issues.
- Celebrating the passing of [Proposition EE](#), which supports universal preschool in Colorado by using revenue from tobacco and nicotine taxes to fund 10 hours of free preschool for all 4-year-olds in Colorado.
- Preparing for future policy work - many grantees recognized that the conversation around child care has shifted for the better as it relates to empowering women.

"We know that COVID has changed the way our society values child care and brought these issues to the forefront of conversation. It is now more important than ever that [our organization] is a leader in these conversations representing women in workforce and women who seek to join the workforce."

- Policy Advocacy Grantee

Research examples around access to child care that were noted:

- [Impact of COVID-19 on Early Childhood Care and Education Providers](#), assessing impact on providers, on educators, and on families.
- [A Year of COVID](#) series, providing snapshots of some of Colorado's invisible systems that were made more visible in the crisis, including looks at informal child care providers, evolving workplaces, undocumented workers in Colorado's caring workforce, debt collection, education, and the economy
- [The She-Cession in Colorado: Impact of COVID-19 on Women in the Workforce in 2020](#), highlighting how the pandemic has affected women, and which one PA grantee has used for policy advocacy around employer-based child care solutions.

## OTHER WAGES-RELATED PRIORITIES

PA grantees also continued work on WAGES-related issues that affect women's ability to achieve greater economic security, although did not cleanly fall within one of the WFCO identified priority areas for WAGES. These were mainly around:

- Continued coalition work around [housing and transit](#); and [access to affordable healthcare](#)
- Producing research and communications on [Colorado's tax system and budget](#), including examination of the fiscal constraints that limit investment in programs and services that would advance women's economic security and potential options for the future.

- Collaborating with the Financial Equity Coalition to establish a first-in-the-nation public-private partnership for a statewide Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE) through legislation, as well as work toward several local-level offices in Aurora, Adams County and Roaring Fork Valley. These offices are designed to provide local support related to consumer protection, strengths-based financial coaching, and access to affordable banking and credit resources. The coalition is also working to further advance the OFE model, specifically focusing on financial coaching and community wealth-building.
- Policy development and advocacy related to fair tax laws, as well as some successful efforts preventing harmful fiscal measures that would increase inequities (Proposition 116 and 117). Grantees noted that although one key tax-related measure was not qualified this time, the work resulted in significant increased dialogue around systemic inequities in the current tax system and the need for tax fairness.

## 2021 COLORADO LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

In 2021, legislative priorities for many PA grantees were refocused due to COVID-19, as the pandemic cast a bigger spotlight on the issues that impact women and their families. A few legislative priorities centered on improving women's economic security through tax credits, income transfers that support a return to work for those who want to and bolstering family economic security. These priorities are similar to previous years but gained new meaning under COVID-19. Similarly, priorities from previous years have become more essential, such as revising the state income tax code for greater equity, establishing family medical leave, and ensuring safety nets like unemployment, housing assistance, and health coverage.

The pandemic altered how key 2021 legislative processes were carried out. First, providing early input on proposals was more challenging as legislators convened smaller circles of allies for the development process and there was less capacity to engage with legislators at their offices. Public testimony was also limited due to the pandemic, with written substitutions for testimony proving far less reliable and impactful. Additionally, the cancellation of in person events such as "Days at the Capitol" prevents new policy advocates from gaining the firsthand experience and knowledge needed for their efforts. Finally, instead of bipartisan sponsors, legislative leadership requires meeting with "stakeholder" interests that can quickly hinder the bill's progress. PA grantees also noted increased stress among staff due to strained capacity: **"The cascading and uncertain nature of the pandemic required staff to tackle new crises and issues while already managing multiple, ongoing, defensive and proactive advocacy fronts."**

Although COVID-19 presented these challenges for policy advocacy work, there have also been positive aspects according to grantees. For example, COVID-19 provided some PA grantees more time to build coalition efforts with other grantees and work with WAGES participants to prepare "to hit the ground running" for the new legislative session. One grantee described how COVID-19 provided an opportunity to train women on how to advocate for policy changes by learning how to share their stories and how to testify at a legislative committee hearing.

Another positive aspect of the pandemic has been the opportunity to center racial equity in policy advocacy and legislative priorities. For example, one grantee noted how COVID-19 also shifted their policy focus on how undocumented workers were being left out of federal relief. The grantee continued to say, **"Oddly, policy development has been in overdrive. Work has become ever more intense, ever more ambitious. Legislators themselves seem eager to not return to 'normal,' but to come out of the pandemic into a new world - one that no longer finds it acceptable to exclude**

immigrants without lawful status, no longer allowing historic discrimination against farmworkers, caregivers, gig workers, etc."

**Key legislative priorities for 2021** included measures related to tax equity, child care and education, housing, and financial support to women and their families. One significant success included grantee-led efforts around Proposition EE which will raise approximately \$222 million annually to create and operate a universal preschool program for children in their year before kindergarten to have access to quality early childhood care and education. The revenue for universal preschool access will also support increased compensation for early childhood educators as well as quality and infrastructure improvements. Key strategies included committee participation and community engagement through social media and a comprehensive digital strategy (e.g., text messaging).

Fair Tax Colorado/Initiative 271 was one of the policy efforts negatively impacted by the pandemic. It was not included on the November 2020 ballot. If passed, it would have created a new graduated income tax and raised \$2 billion for education and other priorities. A 5-year volunteer and stakeholder strategy resulted in over 100,00 signatures across Colorado and highly favorable polling data. Still, the pandemic and an unfavorable Colorado Supreme Court decision on single line petitions to COVID-19 hotspot outbreaks hampered efforts. Though a difficult loss, grantees and partners are now working to identify next steps for action.

Table 1 below provides a snapshot of key legislative priorities that grantees highlighted for 2021.

**TABLE 1. EXAMPLE 2021 WAGES GRANTEE LEGISLATIVE AND BALLOT PRIORITIES AND STATUS**

	Bill	Status
<b>WAGES Priority Area</b>		
Access child care	<a href="#"><u>HB21-1222</u></a> : Regulation of Family Child Care Homes	Passed
	<a href="#"><u>Proposition EE</u></a> : Tobacco and E-Cigarette Increase for Health and Education Measure, which includes a cash fund towards preschool programs	Passed
Financial supports to Women and their Families	<a href="#"><u>Proposition 118</u></a> : Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program	Passed
Housing	<a href="#"><u>HB21-1028</u></a> : Affordable Housing	Passed
	<a href="#"><u>HB21-1134</u></a> : Using Rental payments to build credit history	Passed
	<a href="#"><u>SB21-173</u></a> : Rights in Residential Lease Agreements	Passed
Equitable Tax Policy	Initiative 271: Fair Tax Colorado which would have created a new graduated income tax and raised \$2 billion for education and other priorities	Did not appear on ballot



# Cohort learning Model

The learning community consists of grantees, WFCO, project facilitators (Davian Gagne and Zoë Williams), and the evaluators (OMNI Institute).

In Year 3, WFCO hosted eight virtual convenings for grantees to connect around emerging issues, updates, and resources. Convenings were conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and many were optional offerings for grantees. Below, we share key activities from Year 3 convenings to date in the areas of collaborative learning, setting and working towards a policy goal, equity, and COVID-19, followed by key learnings to date from implementation of the WAGES Cohort approach. Please see Appendix B for Year 3 agendas with further information on the structure of convenings.

## Cohort Learnings to Date

### Shared Learning



OMNI administers a brief evaluation to gather cohort input on the format, content, and effectiveness of each convening. Participants were asked to rate three general items from a scale of 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree. As Table 3 below shows, there was strong agreement among participants about the benefit of being part of the WAGES Learning Cohort. Scores were consistently high through the shortened virtual format of convenings.

TABLE 2. MEAN SCORES OF CONVENING AND COHORT EFFECTIVENESS

	Aug 2020 - 2 hour virtual (n=17)	Oct 2020 - 2 hour virtual (n=18)	Dec 2020 - 2 hour virtual (n=6)	Mar 2021 - 2 hour virtual (n=12)
This convening was a good use of my time.	4.6	4.2	4.5	4.3
I will apply learnings from this convening in my future work to advance women's economic security.	4.6	4.3	3.8	4.1
My organization benefits from being a part of WAGES Learning Cohort.	5	4.5	4.7	4.5

Note: Convening Evaluation Forms were not collected at all convenings in Year.

Additionally, in interviews (see Appendix A for more information on grantee interviews), grantees were asked what they most liked about the cohort learning community, how being part of the cohort learning community supported their strategic learning if at all, what has been challenging, and ways in which grantees have collaborated or partnered with other grantees as a result of the cohort learning community.<sup>4</sup>

**What Grantees Like about the Cohort Learning Community:** Overwhelmingly, grantees discussed that being part of a statewide cohort learning community with diverse direct service and policy advocacy organizations that have similar visions, missions, and initiatives to advance women's economic security is valuable.

"In my mind, the WAGES cohort represents an opportunity to do better and differently."

-Policy Advocacy Grantee

"I think having both sectors in the room really helps us be more knowledgeable about the why behind the issues and how policy is impacting the issues, and I feel like this approach is win-win for both sides, direct service and policy. Policy needs to hear directly from folks who are living the reality, and we need to hear from policy how they're approaching resolution to the problems from a policy standpoint."

- Direct Service Grantee

More specifically:

- The cohort learning community has deepened learning, particularly around equity, policy advocacy (updates, the ECE workforce bill), and direct service provider and participant challenges and solutions.
- Meeting regularly and sharing updates (both policy updates during the legislative session and updates from direct service grantees around community and participant issues), was seen as helpful for a "regular pulse on what's happening" and how issues are playing out in communities.
  - One grantee also noted that efforts around early childhood have felt more effective, as various meetings to have the same conversation are not needed.
- Deeper relationships are fostered by bringing together direct service and policy advocacy organizations, as grantees have the opportunity to interact with organizations they may not have very much opportunity to otherwise. There is also opportunity for informal networking, partnership and referral source development, and leveraging "resources and comparative advantages towards a selected issue or issues" (see Collaborations above).
- The statewide focus, rather than just metro Denver, was seen as particularly beneficial for deepening learning and relationships.
  - "... it's great to hear from folks in Durango and in Pueblo and in other parts of the state... about really understanding those communities a little bit better because most of those fellow grantees are working closely in community."
  - "And whether it's a policy organization or direct service organization, I certainly learned more about what's going on around the state and how people are

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<sup>4</sup> Grantees were also asked about the largest impacts to grantees' work and communities, integrated into the COVID-19 section below, and recommendations for WFCO's future strategic grantmaking, which is in Appendix B.

approaching early childhood education in particular. And I was pretty darned excited when that really was the policy focus we landed on."

- The evaluation reports are beneficial, as grantees have access to the aggregate/synthesis of data across grantees "in a really nice format," which is not always provided by funders, as well as OMNI's technical support.

**Benefits to Strategic Learning:** Grantees shared various examples of how their strategic learning had been enhanced by participating in the cohort learning community.

- **All grantees:** Resources and equity trainings from convenings have deepened strategic learning, and a few grantees discussed bringing this training back to organizations. One grantee for example is engaging a consultant to become an anti-racist organization and attributed their participation in WAGES as informing that journey. Another grantee shared that they have brought their equity-related learning back to their organization to inform their resource development and fundraising efforts.
  - "We've been able to further our knowledge regarding classism, bias, decision-making, policing, gender issues, all of which I think have really improved the framework of our policy and the way that we're engaging in all of our programmatic practice."
- **DS Grantees:** Several direct service grantees noted that they learned more about policy advocacy as a result of the cohort, and a few were becoming more involved in policy advocacy work. One grantee also discussed sharing about policy advocacy efforts with their board as an important area to expand for their organization. Example included:
  - "For me personally not having a background in policy, I think I've learned a lot more coming to the WAGES meetings, regarding the policy aspect of it all."
  - "Policy advocacy was not in our mission before, but I see it slowly creeping in...just being in this cohort alone has made us open our eyes to the advocacy and the policy work that has to be done."
  - "I think we are more invested in statewide policy work and change and being involved with that and more aware of the weight that a lot of our rural stories can carry at the Capitol."
  - A couple of direct service grantees noted being able to create and/or evolve their programming as a result of hearing from other direct service grantees. For example, one grantee noted improving their follow-up efforts as a result of cohort conversations. Another grantee discussed iterating their program to include a local coach and to improve internal referral systems. Around the referral process, the grantee shared, "I learned so much from the convening about how to successfully do that in a way that I think helped us get to where we are."
- **PA Grantees:** Hearing from direct service grantees about their participants' struggles has highlighted for one policy advocacy grantee the driving concern of housing and as a result has inspired them to expand "our conception and view of what we need to be working on." "One of the great things about the cohort is to have regular contact with Coloradans on the ground... [to] illustrate what's happening that might need to be addressed by policy."

**What is Challenging about Participating in the Cohort Learning Community:** Several grantees said there was nothing that was challenging or that they would change. Many said "nothing," "we didn't identify any big challenges," and one grantee said they only wished the grant would "go forever."

"I've worked with a lot of grantors, and I can honestly, without question, say that The Women's Foundation of Colorado is the best grantor I've ever worked with. The way that they break down the hierarchy and put everyone on the same level to do collaborative work, and they're focused

on equity and inclusion and providing education, I think is remarkable. I think it's one thing to say that that's something an organization prioritizes, and it feels like the Women's Foundation is walking that talk. It's hard to come up with anything constructive because they've been so amazing."

-DS WAGES Grantee

Constructive feedback that was offered included:

- Several grantees voiced a desire to connect more and have more opportunities for "organic relationship building" that are deeper, particularly Denver grantees desired deeper connection with grantees outside the Denver metro area. More collaborative learning/co-creation around specific issues (e.g., how to craft inclusionary practices; working to resolve participant barriers, including those related to historical trauma).
- A few grantees indicated that building a cohesive strategy or collective action around a priority policy issue was difficult. Reasons for the challenge included the myriad of interrelated issues that can be tackled (making it difficult to focus on only one issue), limited capacity, and obtaining contextual understanding of the broader issue.
  - "And there were some points where I did feel that just with the nature of how this grant works, it is hard to build cohesive strategy with direct service organizations and the policy advocacy organizations like [us]."
  - "If you're not aware of the ecosystem, you're not going to be very effective at working on that one thing you have focused on. Because even if you say - okay, we're going to focus on child care, there are so many things you can do with that as we saw...and to some degree, those things all work together, but it does mean that it's a lot more complicated to tackle something."
- Some shared learning activities, equity topics, and the shared policy goal of the ECE workforce bill have been interesting but not always directly relevant to grantees' work. For example, a convening prompt around increasing diversity in grantee organizations did not feel relevant to the women of color-led organizations. Or, the shared policy goal around the ECE workforce bill felt "tangentially related" but not directly related to the work of a couple of grantees.
- Limited capacity came up in a couple of different ways.
  - Capacity can be limited to act on cohort learnings, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy: "I just wonder sometimes if we're meeting the expectations in [the follow-up action] for The Women's Foundation."

"I generally think that the learning part of it is almost better than the action part of it. I think we're still struggling on what we all collectively do. But I think that's just a nut that's hard to crack."

- Policy Advocacy Grantee

- Shorter, virtual convenings have helped with time management. One rural grantee noted that the virtual convenings have actually helped them feel more engaged as it addressed a geographical barrier (i.e., not missing convenings due to an inability to travel to Denver). A couple of grantees suggested keeping a mix of in-person convenings (post COVID-19 if in-person convenings will take place) and shorter virtual convenings in the final year.
- Resources tend to be focused to the Denver area, though WFCO has done a great job of making non-Denver grantees feel included. For example, the WAGES Monthly Newsletter tends to have resources, training information, etc. for the Denver metro area.
- There is a desire to hear more from directly impacted women/participants in a way that feels equitable.

"The more we can highlight the stories of directly impacted women and really help make these struggles and challenges very real for business leaders and members of the general public and legislators to understand, the better that can help our work."

- Policy Advocacy Grantee

## Collaboration



Grantees were asked to share about any new collaborations developed with other WAGES grantees. Grantees reported a mix of formal and informal collaborations, as well as expansions of existing collaborations.

Grantees noted that new or enhanced partnerships offered the following collaborative support:

- The most common way grantees discussed collaborations was through informal conversations and networking. These informal conversations were in some cases between DS grantees who wanted to further discuss similar program offerings and challenges and explore partnership/collaboration opportunities (e.g., to serve as referral sources, for internship opportunities, etc.). Conversations between DS and PA grantees were around a shared policy priority (e.g., mobile homes advocacy). Typically, these informal conversations did not extend to more formal partnerships due to limited time/capacity (see challenges below).
  - "I feel like [the CEO of another DS organization] has been a great resource for me, as far as just bouncing ideas in the middle of this tenuous political history we just endured the last few months...it's been very supportive to reach out to her and see what she's doing, and what things are happening. But had I not been in WAGES, we would have never met. "
  - "I've had many conversations with [staff from another DS organization] to just learn more about their work, the challenges of their work. They've come over here, this was pre-COVID, to do a tour and learn about our services...two of their young women did an internship with us...I think the WAGES cohort has helped us keep each other informed about the work, what we're doing, and ways that we can better collaborate as neighbors and community partners."

" Other grantees were willing to meet and share strategies with one of our organizations for creating and maintaining technology loan programs. This came about because of virtual convening networking."

- Direct Service Grantee

- As noted in previous reports, many of the policy advocacy grantees work together along with WFCO in established coalitions around shared policy priorities, and PA grantees found WAGES convenings helpful for continuing/deepening conversations that took place in those settings. In particular, grantees noted collaboration around early childhood education and child care policy.
- A few formal partnerships were also noted, some from previous years that have continued.
  - There was a formal partnership between a DS and PA grantee around a grantmaking opportunity to help adult learners receive credit for existing skills.
  - One DS grantee contracted out their coaching services to another DS grantee for their program (as noted in previous reporting). The geographic distance made the partnership unsustainable, but the DS grantee that received the coaching has since used the model and hired a local coach for their program participants.
  - One PA grantee co-facilitates another PA grantee's summer youth leadership program.
  - One PA grantee completed an initial feasibility study for a DS grantee initiative.

#### Challenges to deeper collaborations:

- Limited time/capacity to deepen collaborations.
- Relationship-building and forging collaborative opportunities is harder to foster in a virtual setting (the in-person convenings facilitated relationship-building)
- Difficult to ask other organizations to add another issue to their agenda.
- Challenges when the model or program is very different than others in the cohort and/or a remote geographic location compared to other grantees.

### Equity



Grantees value the equity lens that WAGES employs and have appreciated the various opportunities to learn and grow in this area, Year 3 was no different.

TABLE 3. EQUITY LENS IN WAGES COVENINGS

	Equity Topic/Activity	Grantee Feedback
August 2020	Bias, Policing, and Safety presentation	Grantees described it as very informative, deepening understanding of the history of policing, as well as providing clarity on "defunding" or "abolishing" the police.
October 2020	Voting Rights presentations	Grantees shared get-out-the-vote strategies that have worked and grassroots efforts they are engaged in (e.g., encouraging clients to ensure they are registered to vote; sharing registration link; providing stamps for mailing in ballots; presenting a ballot measure webinar, etc.).
November 2020	Break-out session on equitable implementation of passed ballot measures	The session surfaced various considerations (e.g., universal preschool to all needs more intensive intervention for at-risk children).

	Equity Topic/Activity	Grantee Feedback
December 2020	Organizational Equity Capacity Resource Sharing & Discussion	Grantees engaged in active discussion and received resources around how to navigate working from home during the pandemic (e.g., professionalism standards and how those are rooted in "white supremacy culture" <sup>5</sup> ) and digital access for staff and adapting to providing services online.
March 2021	Equity Learning & Practice small group discussions	Grantees discussed how they were implementing these learnings into practice (e.g., developing a participant advisory council, convincing Board of Directors that equity must be a focus for the organization, etc.)

"I've loved all of the trainings to bring intentional learning around different facets of equity and inclusion. They have been incredibly valuable and are just kind of refreshing because you don't always get a chance to step back and be a learner. You're always doing or thinking."

-Policy Advocacy Grantee

### Policy & Election



In Year 3 of WAGES, the ability to move policy priorities forward was shaped in a significant way by COVID-19. PA grantees needed to pivot policy advocacy strategies due to COVID-19 and its effects on the 2021 legislative session (see the Policy Advocacy Grantee Efforts section for more detail).

In convenings leading up to the 2020 election, WAGES grantees:

- Provided updates and shared resources around ballot measure efforts (e.g., Propositions EE, 118, and 271)
- Shared get-out-the-vote strategies and tactics to encourage Coloradans to vote
- Participated in an optional virtual training around policy advocacy where opportunities for collective action were surfaced

In the November convening following the election, WAGES grantees came together to check in with one another, discuss the status of outcomes and implications of the election, and explored action steps needed to implement state ballot measures equitably.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see the following for more detail on white supremacy culture:  
[https://www.thc.texas.gov/public/upload/preserve/museums/files/White\\_Supremacy\\_Culture.pdf](https://www.thc.texas.gov/public/upload/preserve/museums/files/White_Supremacy_Culture.pdf)





## COVID-19

During Year 3 of WAGES, the COVID-19 pandemic was a top issue for grantees and for the participants served by WAGES.<sup>6</sup> WFCO converted all WAGES grants to general operating grants so grantees could respond to changing needs for their organizations and the communities they serve. Through WFCO's Women and Families of Colorado Relief Fund, each WAGES grantee also received additional general operating support to help them address the emergency needs of Colorado women and their families impacted by COVID-19 and advance policy solutions to the challenges exacerbated by the pandemic.

Grantees were asked about issues and short- and long-term needs for WAGES participants (and Coloradans) as a result of the pandemic.

### Several pandemic-related challenges were identified by grantees:

**All grantees** were addressing digital divide issues for program participants, staff, volunteers, etc. (e.g., digital literacy issues; lack of devices, no internet, etc.), and because they were unable to do face-to-face meetings, outreach, etc., they were pivoting to providing services online and bolstering organizational websites. Grantees were also shifting efforts to pandemic relief, cash assistance, and basic needs support for families and communities.

The pandemic was also creating concerns around organizational stability, staff management conducted virtually, and fostering a supportive work culture during a challenging time. Additionally, in interviews, grantees raised:

- **Staff Capacity:** Due to organizational demands and an insufficient workforce, staff are often left wearing too many hats. This was a reality for some organizations prior to the pandemic and has been exacerbated with the pandemic. This, along with staff turnover, creates challenges in maintaining efficiencies in workflow, engaging in larger strategic planning efforts and implementation, and/or allowing for innovation or growth to take place.
- **Funding:** Long term funding stability was noted as a key concern, with numerous reports of loss of funding as a result of shifted priorities by funders and the state as a result of COVID-19. This instability results in significant organization capacity going to seeking and maintaining funding, thus detracting from the ability to implement efforts and engage in long-term planning, program growth, and innovation. Further, funders often fund specific, generally smaller programs, leading to tailor programs to funding requirements rather than to larger strategic organizational needs and to organizational capacity issues (e.g., staff must track various funder-related data points).

**DS grantees** were shifting programs and supports online and were bolstering existing online programs to meet participant needs. The pandemic was also exacerbating many challenges for DS

"Women of color with children are being pushed out of the workforce at disproportionate rates."

"Tech needs trump all other needs when the only way to get the service is via technology."

- WAGES Grantees

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<sup>6</sup> Early action that was taken in April and May of 2020 by WFCO and WAGES grantees was highlighted in the Year 2 WAGES Evaluation Report due to the timing of when the report was being developed and a desire to not delay the dissemination of pandemic-related information until Year 3 (please see the Year 2 WAGES Evaluation Report for further detail on April and May 2020 activities).



grantees and the respective communities they served. DS challenges that were surfaced in grantee interviews included:

- **A need for flexibility:** DS grantees discussed that COVID-19 required much pivoting, flexibility, and creativity in how they supported women. For example, one DS grantee developed a virtual interview booth for people who are applying for jobs. The DS grantee said, “If they don't have what they need, if they don't have Zoom, or if they don't have a computer, they can come into our office, they can use our virtual interview booth to do interviews.”
- **Addressing digital literacy:** Another important challenge grantees faced was addressing digital literacy skills, and digital access. One grantee expressed gratitude in being able to use funding to support women getting new laptops. One grantee stated how they tried to find the silver lining in COVID-19 by recognizing that by going virtual, services became more accessible for many women thereby expanding the organization's reach.
- **Intersection of racial injustice and COVID-19 on staff mental health:** For some grantees, the intersectionality of racial injustice in combination with COVID-19 proved trying to their mental health, and they learned the importance of slowing down in order to best serve women and women of color more specifically.
- **Decreasing opportunities:** One DS grantee shared that finding hosts for internship programs were dwindling, and the grantee was developing virtual internships. DS grantees were also seeing decreased engagement from some participants and were seeing less interest from potential participants (“a low economy usually encourages enrollment, but not this time”).

**WAGES Participants**, according to DS grantees, were experiencing a lot of uncertainty and confusion. Further, WAGES participants were in some cases seeking out fewer services and interacting less; delaying jobs due to needing to support children's remote learning and due to fears of losing benefits; and were experiencing increased mental/behavioral health needs.

**PA challenges** that were noted in convenings and grantee interviews included:

- **Complexity of Issues:** It is not possible to address family leave policies without also addressing child care and early education access. If examining these issues, you also need to look at the declining workforce in child care and early childhood education, industries largely supported by women, and women of color in particular, who are also faced with injustices and barriers to security as a result of systemic racism. Policy work feels incredibly daunting as result.
- **Dismantling systemic racism:** Many of the issues are rooted within existing policies, making an entry point difficult to identify and stunting the impact of legislation and policies that are implemented to promote the economic security of women and families, particularly for women of color.
- **A demanding legislature:** COVID-19 has led to many changes in the workings of the legislature, creating challenges in planning for and participating in legislative sessions or issue advocacy and lobbying. Garnering participation and testimony from the women and children at the heart of the issues is likewise challenging, particularly during virtual lobby days where tech issues/access and the digital divide make it difficult to engage community members in a meaningful way.

**"We're really just pushing for crumbs in the grand scheme of what people genuinely need to survive and thrive."**

- Policy Advocacy Grantee

- **Political climate:** A divisive political climate makes it challenging to pass policy that is equitable for all. For example, a PA grantee laments, "How do you convince folks of a certain ideology that everyone, universally, regardless of immigration status, is deserving of basic humanity or human rights?"

Immediate, intermediate and long-term needs around COVID-19 relief include:

- **Immediate:**
  - Basic needs (e.g., food, diapers housing, etc.)
  - Access to child care
  - Employment
  - Technology solutions (e.g., internet, phone service, laptops, etc.)
  - Access to services
  - Cash assistance
  - Digital and technology access (e.g., pcs for people, comcast)
  - Social supports for undocumented families
  - Expansion of CCAP
  - Portable/flexible benefits
  - Flexible and trusting funding
- **Intermediate and Long-term:**
  - Training for displaced workers, primarily for service industry and other low wage work
  - Post-secondary and workforce training;
  - Access to affordable (emergency) child care (especially for infants) and elder care
  - Upskilling investment; increased compensation for front-line workers
  - Continued access to public supports (e.g., SNAP, WIC, etc.)

"Trust around creativity and pivoting. Trust that we will use funding correctly, even if it doesn't look the same as years past. Let us be creative and trust we have best interest of clients in mind."

# Summary

This report presents findings from evaluation of WAGES activities from March 2019 - through April of 2021 and is designed to support ongoing learning for WFCO, WAGES grantees, and other stakeholders interested in advancing and accelerating economic opportunities for Colorado women and their families.

The third year of WAGES work was one unlike any other, with incredible challenges facing women and the organizations serving them. WAGES grantees and women met these challenges with innovations, flexibility, persistence, and resiliency. As WAGES enters its fourth and final year, grantees will continue to engage in shared learning, center equity in all efforts, work towards policies that dismantle structural barriers to achieving women's full potential, and support women to overcome the challenges exacerbated by the pandemic.

Throughout WAGES, grantees have shared the many benefits they have had from being a part of the learning cohort community. Based on grantee feedback, Year 4 virtual convenings that bring grantees together will continue to be of value for advancing equity, resource sharing, staying up to date on work happening across the state, and informal and formal networking opportunities. In this final year, the group may want to consider desires and opportunities for shared learning and engagement post WAGES.

Finally, grantee input also was gathered (see Appendix B) and used to inform WFCO's 2021-25 strategic framework and future grantmaking efforts. WFCO will continue to support gender, racial, and economic equity for Colorado women and families through its WINcome grantmaking program, designed to address the economic realities of women in Colorado by providing flexible and holistic resources.

WFCO's WINcome grantmaking strategy builds on learning with the WAGES cohort and from the Women and Families of Colorado Relief Fund. WINcome is an evolution of WAGES that will continue to invest in partnerships with both direct service and policy advocacy grantees to demonstrate that individuals can advance economically when they are trusted to make their own decisions about what they and their families need. WINcome grants will support Colorado women who participate in programs offered by grantee partners by providing direct cash assistance to supplement, not replace, their income and other benefits they may receive through public and nonprofit programs. WINcome grants will also advance systemic changes that support gender, racial, & economic equity for Colorado women and families.

# Appendix A - Methods

To answer the WAGES evaluation questions and minimize reporting burden on grantees in Year 3, three primary data collection methods were selected: 1) A WAGES Survey that was administered to grantees once; 2) information gathering from grantees during WAGES Convenings through activities, facilitated discussions, and surveys, as applicable; and 3) one-on-one interviews that were conducted with all WAGES grantees.

**WAGES Survey:** The WAGES Survey was designed to collect the following information:

- **Direct service information** (Direct Service grantees only) – participant demographics, barriers to a livable wage, financial support systems utilized, services accessed, and participant outcomes; and grantee successes and challenges with implementation of services and lessons learned.
- **Policy advocacy information** (Policy/Advocacy grantees only) – strategies and tactics implemented, outcomes, successes and challenges of strategies and tactics, and lessons learned.
- **Cohort learning** (all grantees) – reflections on the cohort learning model, including how the model has supported services/strategies/tactics, ways to improve the model, and new collaborations, strategies, and efforts that have resulted.
- **Evaluation & TA** (all grantees) – questions on areas for evaluation support as well as length of time spent on the survey and what felt difficult to answer to support future refinements to evaluation tools and processes.

**WAGES Convenings:** WFCO conducts WAGES convenings to bring together all grantees, and OMNI collects session evaluations as applicable to collect grantee feedback. OMNI also documents convening notes for analysis and reporting.

**Grantee Interviews:** From October to December 2020, OMNI conducted grantee interviews with all 20 grantee organizations/coalitions. The purpose of the interviews was to better understand the impact of being part of the cohort learning model, what the largest impacts are to grantees' work and communities right now, and to surface recommendations for WFCO's strategic grantmaking in the future. Interviews ranged in length from 40 minutes to one hour and were audio-recorded and transcribed for theme analysis.

# Data and Evaluation Considerations

Below, we share important data and evaluation contextual information that will be helpful to the reader in interpreting evaluation findings.

## Direct Service Data

**Aggregate-level reporting.** Grantees provide aggregate-level information on women served through WAGES (e.g., grantees provide the total number of women who received financial coaching services rather than a person-level data file with information on each woman served). After careful consideration during the planning stages, we determined that aggregate-level reporting will meet the needs of the evaluation and is appropriate for the resources available to support grantees in providing data for the evaluation. A limitation of this approach, however, is that the evaluation 1) relies on the accuracy of grantees to tally the information on women served and 2) cannot examine information beyond the set of variables provided (e.g., we cannot further disaggregate the data to explore additional questions by sub-groups of women such as the number of women employed by race/ethnicity).

**Variation in number of women served.** The number of women served through WAGES varies by direct service grantee. As such, summary information on women served is weighted towards those grantees who serve greater numbers of women. For a breakdown of each grantee's number of women served in relation to the overall sample, see Table B.1. in Appendix B.

**Information excluded:** Through the co-creation process, it was determined that some questions about women's identities, although important, would be too difficult to collect systematically across organizations due to inconsistent existing data collection practices (e.g., sexual orientation, immigrant status were not typically captured). As such, the evaluation cannot report on these areas through the WAGES Survey but could capture information on these factors through qualitative efforts in the future.

**Outcomes reporting:** Due to the diversity of DS grantee programming, participant outcomes are reported as data become available to allow for greater flexibility in tracking when changes occur. This approach means progress can be shared during and after programming, regardless of program completion status, which can be particularly helpful for programs that take place over a greater length of time or for programs that do not truly "exit" participants due to the ongoing support that is offered. In Year 4, OMNI will implement a process to ensure that final outcomes reported are appropriate to the nature of programming.

## Policy Advocacy Data

**Evaluating the impact of advocacy and policy work.** Methods to evaluate policy and advocacy efforts lag other evaluation areas due to the complexity and evolving nature of the political process itself. The WAGES evaluation has an added layer of complexity in that it seeks to examine efforts across multiple organizations engaging in different focus areas and in different policy and advocacy arenas. As such, rather than evaluate the outcomes of these activities, the evaluation was designed to learn from the reflections of grantees as they engage in the work, and to leverage their expertise to understand the strategies and tactics that will help advance women's economic prosperity.

**Contribution versus attribution.** There are many forces at play and factors that intersect to influence changes in complex systems. It is rarely possible to attribute policy changes to a single organization, initiative or effort. As such, we are using the evaluation to learn about the work of grantees to identify a deeper understanding of the strategies and tactics that contribute to changes rather than trying to attribute definitive judgements about the successes or failures of efforts.

**Isolating WFCO-funded activities.** In some instances, WAGES funding is a small portion of an organization's overall operating budget. As such, it is often difficult for grantees to parse out and report on activities that are specifically WAGES-funded. On the WAGES Survey, grantees were asked to do their best to report on activities to which WAGES funding contributed, but it is important to note that the evaluation is not designed to isolate the impact of WAGES funding.

## Strategic Learning

The WAGES evaluation is designed to learn about what grantees are doing to promote Colorado women's economic security – what services, strategies, and tactics are being carried out; what's working and what isn't – and what impact grantee organizations are having in different ways that are supportive to Colorado women and their families. The audiences for this information include WFCO, its board, grantee organizations, and when applicable, the larger field.

# Appendix B - Additional Data

## WAGES Cohort Journey Map

WAGES grantees receive funding



### 1<sup>st</sup> Policy Advocacy Grantee Convening

Grantees focused on organizational **strengths** and **priorities** heading into 2018 legislative session, discussing needed support and what **good partnerships** look like.



### 1<sup>st</sup> All Grantee WAGES Convening

Grantees were introduced to the **vision** and **goals** for WAGES. They also focused on their organizations' capacity for **equity** and **inclusion**.



December 2017

February 2018



### 2<sup>nd</sup> All Grantee WAGES Convening

Convening focused on continued learning around **equity**, **two-generation strategies** & identifying **cross-cutting policy issues**.



### Two-Generation and Equity Webinar

Webinar deepened understanding of **two-generation strategies** and internal organizational capacity to improve **equity**, as well as created a space for WAGES members to **connect with each other**.



August 2018

July 2018



### 2<sup>nd</sup> Policy Advocacy Grantee Convening

Grantees explored the **changing legislature** and how they will need to shift strategies and tactics. Selected grantees also **shared their research** as it related to WAGES.



### 3<sup>rd</sup> All Grantee WAGES Convening

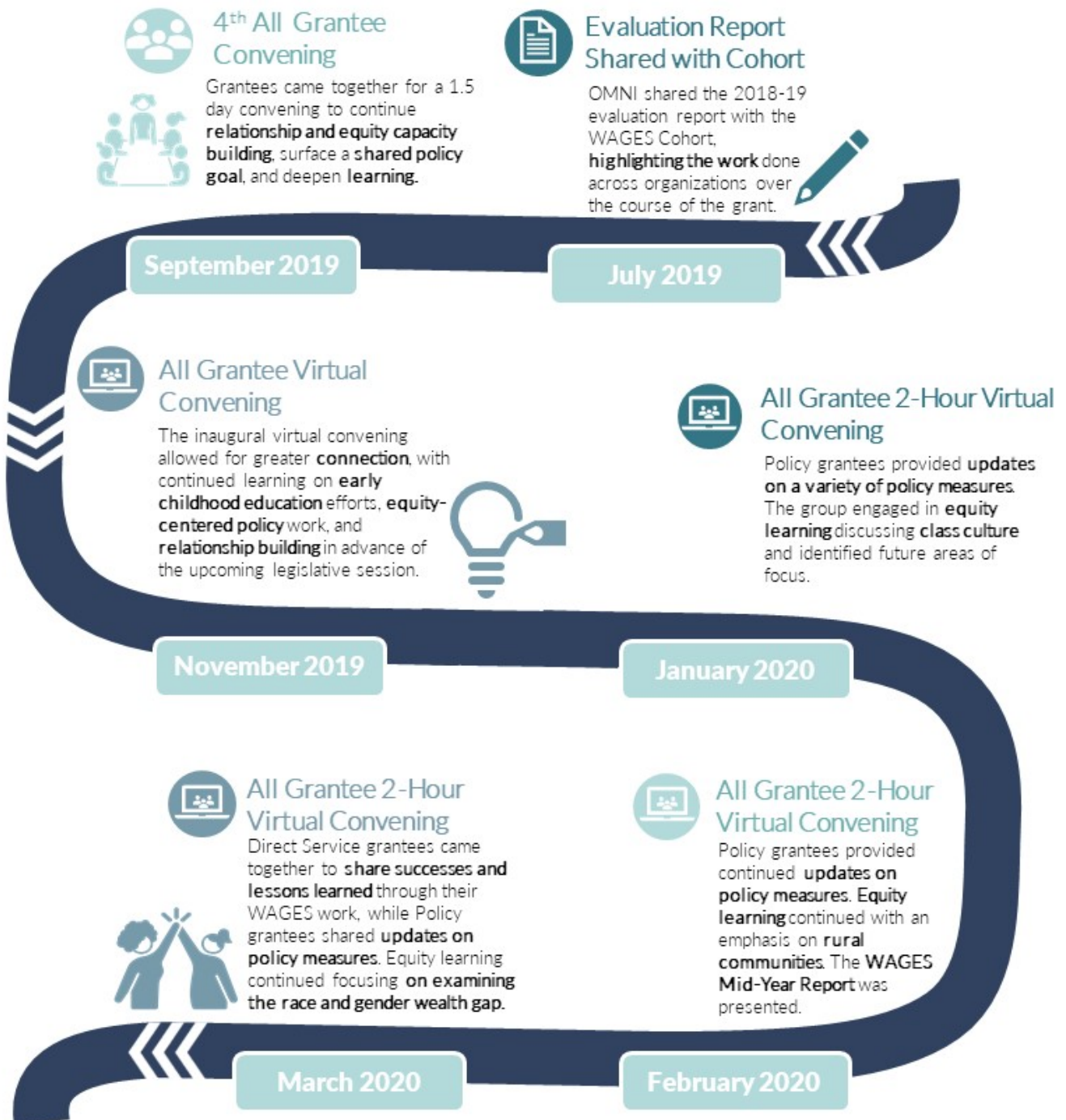
Grantees continued dialoguing about improving **equity** within organizations, **forming partnerships**, as well as identifying **shared policy priorities**.



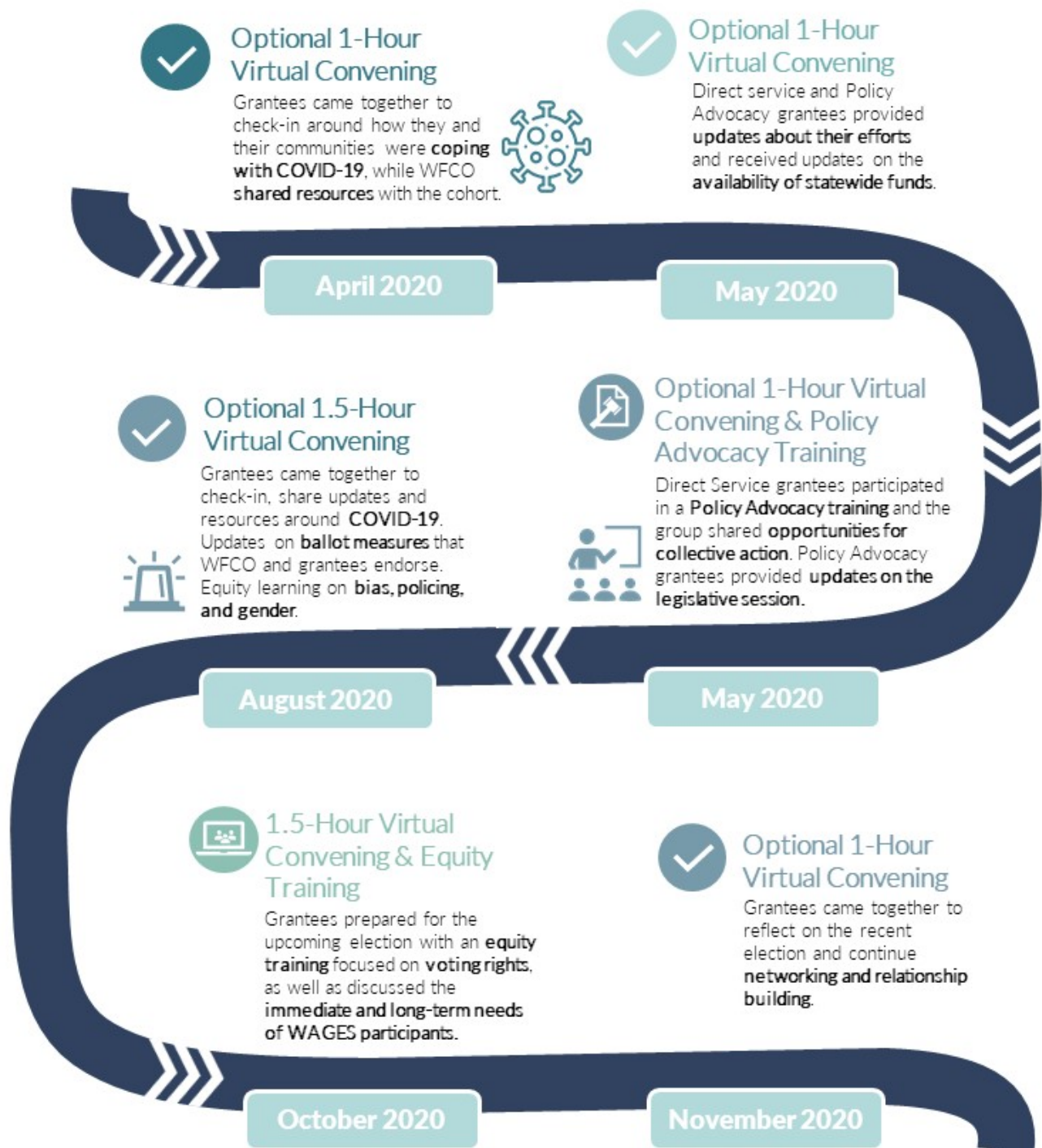
December 2018

February 2019











## Data Tables

TABLE B.1. WAGES DIRECT SERVICE PARTICIPANTS SERVED BY DIRECT SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Organization Name	n	%
Center for Work Education and Employment	95	10%
Collaborative Healing Initiative within Communities, Inc.	114	12%
Colorado Coalition for the Homeless	37	3.9%
Community Partnership for Child Development	50	5.3%
Durango Adult Education Center, Women's Resource Center, and La Plata Family Centers Coalition	47	5%
Eagle County Govt, Department of Human Services	21	2.2%
Emergency Family Assistance Association, Inc.	14	1.5%
Florence Crittenton Services of Colorado	201	21.2%
Mi Casa Resource Center	111	11.7%
OneMorgan County	7	0.7%
Project Self Sufficiency of Loveland-Fort Collins	218	23%
Pueblo Community College/Foundation and Boys and Girls Club of Pueblo County	33	3.5%
Total	948	100%

TABLE B.2. WAGES DIRECT SERVICE PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS

General Demographics	n	%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
American Indian or Alaskan Native	33	3.5%
Asian or Asian American	10	1.1%
Black or African American	186	19.8%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	3	0.3%
Latinx, Hispanic or of Spanish origin	464	49.5%
White or Caucasian	287	30.6%
More than one race	66	7%
Other	5	0.5%
Note: Because grantees could select multiple race/ethnicity categories for participants, a Total row is not included.		
<b>Age</b>		
< 18 years old	24	2.5%
18 – 24 years old	287	30.4%
25 – 34 years old	357	37.8%
35 – 44 years old	180	19%
45 – 54 years old	64	6.8%
55 – 59 years old	25	2.6%
60 – 64 years old	3	0.3%
65 – 74 years old	2	0.2%
75+ years old	3	0.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>945</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Education</b>		
Less than high school	270	29.1%
High school degree or GED equivalency	299	32.2%
Some college, no degree	177	19.1 %
Associate's degree	84	9.1%
Bachelor's degree	52	5.6%
Master's/Professional/Doctorate degree	9	1%
Other	37	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>928</b>	<b>100%</b>

Family Demographics		n	%
<b>Relationship Status</b>			
Single (Never married, divorced, widowed, separated)		670	77.6%
Partnered (Married, common law, domestic partnership)		193	22.4%
Other		0	0.3%
Total		863	100%
<b>Single Parents</b>			
Single parents		512	65.1%
Non-single parents		274	34.9%
Total		786	100%
<b>Number in Household</b>			
1		86	9.3%
2		229	24.7%
3		234	25.2%
4		160	17.2%
5		115	12.4%
6		63	6.8%
7		24	2.6%
8 or more		17	1.8%
Total		928	100%
<b>Number of Dependent Children</b>			
0		105	12.9%
1		381	46.9%
2		191	23.5%
3		80	9.8%
4		34	4.2%
5		17	2.1%
6		4	0.5%
7		1	0.1%
8 or more		0	0%
Total		813	100%

## Economic Demographics

### Employment Status

Full time (35+ hours per week)	231	28.6%
Part time (Less than 35 hours per week)	200	22.3%
Paid internship	20	2.2%
Unemployed (looking for work last 30 days)	186	20.7%
Unemployed (not looking for work last 30 days)	20	2.2%
Homemaker	13	1.5%
Student	236	26.3%
Retired	0	0%
Participant that is unable to work	7	0.8%
Other	9	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>908</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Gross Family Income (monthly)

Less than \$500	115	17%
\$500 – \$1,000	132	19.5%
\$1,001 – \$1,500	106	15.7%
\$1,501 – \$2,000	114	16.9%
\$2,001 – \$2,500	84	12.4%
\$2,501 – \$3,000	47	7%
\$3,001 – \$3,500	21	3.1%
\$3,501 – \$4,000	20	3%
\$4,001 or more	37	5.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>676</b>	<b>100%</b>

TABLE B.3. FINANCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM INFORMATION

Funding Sources	Individual Programs	Program Definition
Alimony and/or Child Support	Alimony	An amount of money given by a former spouse for financial support.
	Child Support	An amount of money given by a child or children's co-parent to financially support the child/ren.
Child care Assistance Programs	CCCAP	The Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) program provides child care assistance to families who are working, searching for employment, or are in training, and families who are enrolled in the Colorado Works program and need child care services to support their efforts toward self-sufficiency.
	DDP	The Denver Preschool Program (DDP) provides tuition support to families with 4-year-olds, in order to allow children to go to preschools of the families' choice.
	CCP	The Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) allows eligible children to attend high-quality preschool for free (children are eligible if they have certain challenges in their lives).
Child Health Insurance Program and Child Health Plan Plus	CHP+/CHIP	Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+) is public low-cost health insurance for certain children and pregnant women. It is for people who earn too much to qualify for Health First Colorado (Colorado's Medicaid Program), but not enough to pay for private health insurance. Outside of Colorado, this program may be known as CHIP.
Colorado Works	TANF	Colorado Works/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a federal program that provides cash assistance to families in need who have dependent children or unborn children. The program requires applicants to seek employment and be involved in a work activity from the day of the application.
Health First Colorado	Medicaid	Health First Colorado (Colorado's Medicaid Program) is public health insurance for low-income Coloradans.
Housing Assistance	HCV/ Section 8	The Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCV), which was formally known as Section 8, provides rental assistance to income-eligible tenants by subsidizing a portion of their monthly rent and utilities and paying it directly to their landlords.
	Section 811	The Section 811 Program assists the lowest income people with significant and long-term disabilities to live independently in the community by providing affordable housing linked with voluntary services and supports.
	S+C	The Shelter Plus Care (S+C) program provides housing options for homeless persons (and their families) with targeted disabilities, primarily those with serious mental illness, chronic problems with alcohol and/or drugs and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) or related diseases. The program requires participants to engage in services such as mental health and substance abuse treatment, job training and life development skills.
	FUP	Family Unification Program (FUP) provides a housing choice voucher program to assist homeless youth, aging out of the foster care system (ages 18 through 21) and families where available housing is an obstacle to full custody of their children.

Funding Sources	Individual Programs	Program Definition
<b>Housing Assistance (continued)</b>	HCV Homeownership Program	<b>The Housing Choice Voucher Homeownership Program</b> empowers eligible participants interested in purchasing their own home. The voucher may be applied toward the family's portion of a mortgage.
	VASH	<b>The Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH)</b> provides housing choice voucher rental assistance and intensive case management and clinical services to enable homeless veterans access to permanent housing while leading healthy, productive lives in the community
	CCT	<b>The Colorado Choice Transitions (CCT)</b> allows Medicaid funding to follow a person from an institutional setting to housing in the community. The goal of CCT is to move persons with disabilities out of nursing homes and other long-term care and into the community.
<b>Social Security Income</b>	SSI	The Social Security office gives monthly benefits to people with limited income and resources who are disabled, blind, or age 65 or older. Blind or disabled children may also get SSI.
<b>Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children</b>	WIC	<b>Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)</b> is a federal assistance program for low-income pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and children under the age of five, that gives women and families food assistance, food education, and breastfeeding support.
<b>Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program</b>	SNAP	<b>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)</b> is the food assistance program in Colorado, formerly known as Food Stamps. SNAP helps households purchase food and individuals on SNAP receive an EBT card, which can be used at most grocery stores to buy food and other products.



**TABLE B.4. OVERVIEW OF WAGES DIRECT SERVICE GRANTEES, PROGRAMS, AND DEMOGRAPHICS SERVED**

Please note that program descriptions were summarized from Year 1 grantee applications and programs may have made modifications to their services during implementation.

Organization	Name of Program/Project	Demographic Served	Description of Program/Project (from grant applications)
<b>Center for Work Education and Employment (CWEE)</b>	Steps to Success Program	Low-income women on TANF; Denver (Denver Metro Area)	CWEE provides guidance and support for women as they enter livable wage careers through the Steps to Success Program, which was piloted with support from WFCO in 2013. The job retention services have helped single mothers maintain long-term, stable employment by mitigating the cliff effect.
<b>Collaborative Healing Initiative within Communities, Inc. (CHIC)</b>	Collaborative Healing Initiative within Communities	Formerly/currently gang-involved women; Denver (Denver Metro Area)	CHIC is a program designed to lift gang-affiliated women out of a cycle of poverty and violence through mentorship, education for employment, family and community engagement, counseling, and holistic healing. This grant will support education for employment programming, which connects participants with a CHIC mentor, a peer group with similar career goals, a workforce development specialist through IEG, Inc., and job training programs such as construction apprenticeships for training and placement in construction careers.
<b>Colorado Coalition for the Homeless</b>	Vocational Services	Formerly/currently homeless mothers; Denver (Denver Metro Area)	CCH will pilot a technology training program to prepare women who have been homeless for careers in the tech industry, with starting annual pay ranging from \$36,000 to \$50,000. Through this program, women will participate in four months of training with a local technology training provider that is designing coursework specifically for this group of women and that has a track record of employment placements with local companies. In addition to the Computer User Support Specialist and network maintenance training, participants will also receive soft skills training, job placement assistance, and job coaching upon entering employment. Participants will also have access to the full range of services and supports CCH provides to help people overcome homelessness.
<b>Community Partnership for Child Development (CPCD)</b>	Two Generation Program	Low-income women; El Paso (El Paso County)	CPCD's Two Generation Program helps low-income parents (90% mothers) make progress toward economic independence while their children receive quality early childhood education. Participants have no-cost access to three career training tracks: child development associate, information technology, and advanced manufacturing, through partnerships with Pikes Peak Community College and Colorado Springs School District 11 Adult and Family Education Center. This grant will support the CPCD Two Generation Program Coordinator position, which provides long-term case management for participants, as well as small monthly stipends to help offset transportation and food costs while they are enrolled in training.
<b>Durango Adult Education Center (DAEC)</b>	Southwest Colorado Women's Project	Low-income women; La Plata (SW CO)	The Southwest Colorado Women's Project is a collaboration among the Durango Adult Education Center (DAEC), Women's Resource Center (WRC), and La Plata Family Centers Coalition (LPFCC). Together, the partners will support women into livable wage careers by providing case management, career planning, and targeted education and training, along with a range of additional supports. The collaboration will draw on the strengths of each partner, including DAEC as the region's educational safety net; LPFCC as the safeguard for parent and child health, education, and support; and WRC as the center for women seeking resources and educational support.

Organization	Name of Program/Project	Demographic Served	Description of Program/Project (from grant applications)
<b>Eagle County Government (Department of Human Services)</b>	Flexible Funding and Coaching	Single mothers; Eagle (Eagle County)	The Eagle County Department of Human Services recently piloted programs to ease the cliff effect for individuals transitioning out of eligibility for the Colorado Works and Colorado Child Care Assistance Programs. This grant will support a pilot of individualized coaching and flexible financial supports to positively impact outcomes for single mothers exiting public assistance and to help DHS build knowledge about empowering women for workforce and life success, including economic self-sufficiency, while also enabling them to simultaneously advance the well-being of their children. The participating women will have coaches to help build their executive functioning skills and up to \$1,200 in flexible funding to support identified goals.
<b>Emergency Family Assistance Association, Inc. (EFAA)</b>	Job Uptake for Motivated Parents Program	Low-income women; Boulder County	Originally piloted as the Internships to Careers for Motivated Moms program with support from WFCO in 2015, the renamed Job Uptake for Motivated Parents (JUMP) program connects participants with work-based learning opportunities in partnership with Workforce Boulder County and a full range of supports through EFAA. EFAA provides participants with basic needs supports, food, housing, resource referrals, and encouragement and problem-solving support to overcome hurdles to program completion. Additionally, EFAA provides up to \$1,000 in direct financial assistance to help address needs for employment, such as transportation, interview clothing, and child care support. This grant will support women's participation in the JUMP program.
<b>Florence Crittenton Services of Colorado (Flo Critt)</b>	Boosting Employability for Teen Mothers Project	Teen mothers/ young children; Denver (Denver Metro Area)	Florence Crittenton Services is beginning a three-year initiative to identify, incorporate, and share best practices to help pregnant and parenting girls increase their employability and probability of earning livable wages within three to five years of high school graduation. The Boosting Employability for Teen Mothers Project includes three integrated components: development of core skills and employment training, support for navigating the road to employment, and holistic, wraparound support that helps teen mothers provide and care for their children while completing education and training.
<b>Mi Casa Resource Center</b>	Career Development Program	Latina/ low-income women; Denver (Denver Metro Area)	Mi Casa's career development program has demonstrated success in moving women into careers that offer livable wages by engaging women in career pathways and providing training and wraparound supports. This grant will help Mi Casa provide individualized services for participants to ensure their success through foundational skills training, progress in career tracks, job search, and employment. Participants are primarily prepared for and supported in entry into careers in the financial services industry and have access to training for small business development, healthcare, and construction careers.
<b>OneMorgan County (OMC)</b>	Educational and Occupational Advancement of Women	Newcomer/immigrant women; Morgan County	OneMorgan County fosters community cohesion in Morgan County, a rural community with a high proportion of refugee and immigrant residents. Designed to jump start the educational and occupational advancement of women, this grant supported newcomer working mothers with stipends to offset lost wages to allow them to attend Morgan Community College full-time, along with support and career guidance. The participants will serve as role models, ambassadors, and mentors to inspire and support the next group of scholars, with the goal of cultivating a new culture whereby women's contributions are fully valued, supported, and sustained through the capacity building of local women leaders. Community partners have demonstrated a commitment to the project's success: Morgan Community College will cover participants' tuition, Colorado State University faculty will supervise graduate students to design

Organization	Name of Program/Project	Demographic Served	Description of Program/Project (from grant applications)
			the education support and career guidance manual, and Fort Morgan Cultures United for Progress will provide additional financial support.
<b>Project Self Sufficiency of Loveland-Fort Collins (PSS)</b>	Selfpower Program	Single mothers; Larimer County	The Selfpower program helps single parents overcome barriers to completing the postsecondary education needed to earn a living wage. Participating families are supported through personalized intervention with a highly skilled advisor in a strengths-based program focused on growth. The program includes detailed career planning focused from the beginning on self-sufficiency wages, supports for children's success, resources and navigation support for educational completion and job search, as well as ongoing support once participants enter employment. This grant will invest in continuation of Project Self-Sufficiency's model.
<b>Pueblo Community College and Pueblo Community College Foundation</b>	DualStar Project	Low-income women Pueblo County	The DualStar Project is focused on engaging women and girls in exploring and pursuing STEM education and careers that offer livable wages. This partnership between Pueblo Community College (PCC) and Pueblo Community College Foundation (PCCF) supports women into STEM careers in several ways. The grant-funded project includes 1) encouraging women already enrolled in PCC's Health Information Technology program to build on that credential to pursue Cyber Defense Education, for which PCC was recently federally designated as an excellent provider of education in the growing cyber security industry and 2) engaging women STEM majors in the PCC Presidential Leadership Program (PLP) as mentors to women enrolled in the Health Information Technology program.

## Grantee Suggestions for WFCO's Future Grantmaking

Finally, grantees were briefed that WFCO was in the process of its strategic planning and wished to hear from grantees about WFCO's future grantmaking - what WFCO should consider doing the same and what they might consider changing or improving for future grantmaking.

### What WFCO may wish to consider doing the same in its future strategic grantmaking

Grantees voiced appreciation for WFCO's **supportive and flexible grantmaking** and said that the foundation should continue operating in this refreshing way. WFCO was described as supportive, adaptive, responsive, communicative, and "a true partner." Additionally, grantees highlighted:

- **WFCO's easy grant application and renewal process** that is straightforward, accessible, and simple; this was especially appreciated among small organizations with limited capacity.
- **WFCO's flexibility** with how grant funds are used and the trust in grantees with how they will use funds (particularly during COVID)
- **The reasonable evaluation**, which has been adapted to meet grantee needs flexibly
- **WFCO's bold centering of equity in grantmaking**, choosing an intersectional approach, selecting diverse grantees, and taking up policy positions

A strength in WFCO's current grantmaking that a majority of grantees indicated should be replicated in the future was **funding diverse DS and PA organizations from around the state**, as it deepens understanding of the issues and the ecosystem of services and solutions. This type of funding keeps both sides of the work (on-the-ground and policy) informed of each other's progress and efforts and allows for surfacing both direct service and policy levers that are needed for positive change. Some PA grantees voiced appreciation for funding and supporting policy advocacy grantees as funding for policy and advocacy work is not always a funding priority among foundations. In addition, a few of the DS grantees from around the state appreciated being plugged into policy efforts, as more typically DS grantees in the Denver metro area are the ones involved in this work.

Further, the **multi-year funding commitment** was seen as key, as it provides budgetary and programmatic stability while fostering relationship building among the cohort of grantees. Many grantees also highlighted **the learning community** and community of practice was as a real strength of WAGES that should be replicated in the future. In particular, the equity trainings and purposeful convenings were appreciated; the ability to hear from other grantees about DS and PA work; 'lateral links' to other organizations; relationship-building that was fostered; and the co-creation of cohort learning priorities. Two grantees highlighted the **site visits** from WFCO, as they are a great opportunity to connect with community, better understand programs/organizations, and get more of the "story" or qualitative picture that can be lost from just reporting numbers. One grantee suggested WFCO should continue its **focus on women**, as few grants have this priority.

"Continue being a progressive organization that is people-centered and that takes an intersectional approach to oppression. The Women's Foundation of Colorado are thought leaders.

- Policy Advocacy Grantee

## What WFCO may wish to consider doing differently in the future around its strategic grantmaking

Many grantees said that there was **nothing** WFCO should change, as they should just keep doing the great work that they are doing. When providing constructive feedback, several grantees discussed the tension between **balancing grant requirements with the funding amount** as something for WFCO to consider in the future. Although the funding was appreciated, some grantees struggled with participating in the learning community and evaluation, as it did not feel like an efficient use of limited funds. In order to maximize funds for programming, one grantee described wearing a "second hat" to run their WAGES program (meaning they worked on grant requirements on top of their normal responsibilities).

Various grantees also described ways in which to **enhance the cohort learning community**, such as:

- Keeping the number of convenings contained, as an unintended effect of moving to virtual meetings was that the cohort began convening more frequently, which could be challenging (i.e., zoom fatigue).
- More peer-to-peer learning could be beneficial, such as grouping CEOs together, program managers together, etc. in shared learning around similar priorities.
- More around collective action - While some appreciated the shared learning environment, others suggested focusing more on collective action or planning to move work forward collaboratively.
- Consider more the direct service work during shared learning, as much of the focus has been on policy.
- Keep a mix of in-person and virtual convenings in the future/post-COVID. WFCO may wish to consider how to support organizations with limited technology capacity as well for virtual participation.
- Consider more deeply the diversity of grantee organizations and implications on convenings, cohesive strategy development, etc.
- Think more about the diversity of the grantees so that activities, conversations, small group work, etc. are relevant for all organizations.

**Grantmaking can also be enhanced for inclusivity** in different ways according to grantees. For example, grantees raised: allowing grantees to include faith-based organizations as grantee partners; incorporating more rural organizations and making the application process more accessible to rural organizations that may not have dedicated grant writers; considering letting organizations apply in Spanish; considering more diverse views in policy setting, as players in this space tend to be from privileged identities, which shapes priorities differently (e.g., white, middle-class, able-bodied, etc.); and funding more than one DS grantee in a region, as it makes collaborations and partnerships more feasible.

**More qualitative focus to the evaluation** such as sharing impact through stories, videos, etc. This is particularly helpful because change takes time (e.g., gaining a livable wage) and focusing on quantitative outcomes like that can erase the ways in which program participants can still benefit from services and improve their lives and that of their families. Ideas for qualitative data included submitting a video to share grantees' stories and grantee interviews to share progress.

**More intentionality around partnership relationships** between grantees. Examples included intentionally setting things up for deeper relationships between grantees (e.g., pairing grantees

together and rotating every three months so that grantees switch and partner with different grantees); considering partnership grants where one grantee is handling the workforce training while another the basic needs such as housing, etc.; and establishing more towards the beginning of the grant what the shared policy priority will be as it took a while to get there on WAGES.

A couple of grantees raised **more flexibility with funds**, such as using funds for general operational support (while committing to working on identified priorities), and/or there could be some responsive grantmaking/discretionary funds set aside for immediate needs (e.g., cohort identifies a need for communications expertise to tell the story for a ballot measure that comes up as a priority).

Reflections raised by sole grantees included:

- Doing more site visits
- Retaining the focus of WFCO's strategic grantmaking in the future relatively the same/similar to WAGES, as it makes nonprofits nervous when foundations change the trajectory of funding through strategic planning processes
- Consider adding another year to WAGES because of the "lost COVID year"

# Appendix C: References

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