The Colorado Health Foundation™

New Report Details How Funders Can Influence Policy through Unconventional Investments

DENVER, CO – The Colorado Health Foundation today released a new white paper explaining the Foundation's decision to create and endow Healthier Colorado, a 501(c)(4) political organization that is free to engage in lobbying and elections. This innovative investment is an example of a critical tool funders can use to influence public policy and to advance their missions.

The Foundation's Board decided to transition from a public charity to a private foundation in 2011. Under federal rules of the new tax status, the Foundation was no longer able to lobby for or against specific pieces of legislation. Through a thoughtful and transparent process with external partners, Foundation leadership considered how to continue its long track record of engaging in policy and advocacy through a unique opportunity: to form a separate and independent 501(c)(4) organization that would focus on health policy advocacy, lobbying and grassroots political activism in the state.

Established in 2013, this new political nonprofit began with $15 million in seed funding from the Foundation – over the span of three years – and a mission to build grassroots support for health policy. To date, Healthier Colorado has had significant success. It has rallied Colorado residents in support of legislation allowing local farmers to sell nutritious crops to school food programs. It has partnered with a coalition to improve nutrition standards at the 2,000 licensed child care centers caring for 100,000 Colorado children a year. Most notably, on

Election Day in 2016, they helped to secure a sugary beverage tax in Boulder, Colorado.

According to Colorado Health Foundation Senior Director of Policy, Kyle Legleiter, “Healthier Colorado’s nimbleness and fearlessness in taking on powerful health policy targets was exactly what the Foundation and its advocacy partners had hoped for in backing the formation of a 501(c)(4) organization. Healthier Colorado has expanded – and will continue to expand – the playing field for health improvement in the state.”

The white paper, Creating a Healthier Colorado, outlines the Foundation’s transition to private foundation tax status and evolution of policy engagement, the process behind the formation of 501(c)(4) organization and the advocacy work of Healthier Colorado to date. It showcases how funders have the opportunity to support high-profile advocacy and lobbying organizations while staying within the legal confines of a public charity tax status.

Read our blog, white paper and Healthier Colorado’s companion white paper for additional information on how this innovative approach is working to ensure Coloradans have a strong health policy voice.

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