

COMMUNITY

News for the Greater Good of Linn County



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A COMMUNITY THAT COMES TOGETHER:

A Message from our President & CEO

So far in 2025, I've been inspired by the dedication and resilience of our community. In a time of change and uncertainty, our mission remains steadfast: to strengthen our community through philanthropy.



What moves me the most is the way our community comes together with determination, generosity, and care. Whether it's nonprofits navigating ways to fulfill their missions, donors making a meaningful impact, or leaders convening to address challenges and coordinate responses, our collective efforts make a difference. Our community's ability to show up with unwavering commitment gives me great hope for our future.

The Community Foundation has begun implementing our new strategic plan: A Greater Tomorrow. Developed with your invaluable input, this plan will guide our work over the next five years, building on 75 years of partnerships that have made a lasting impact. We look forward to continuing to connect, collaborate, and learn with you.

Thank you for your engagement in our community. Together, we're creating a greater tomorrow.

Karla

Karla Twedt-Ball
President & CEO

NAVIGATING CHANGE

How the Local Nonprofit Sector is Adapting

When an executive order abruptly froze federal funding in late January, some local nonprofits faced new challenges and difficult decisions. While that executive order has been rescinded, significant uncertainties remain, and a recent Community Foundation survey of nonprofits showed potentially dire impacts for nonprofits and those they serve.

Federal grants and contracts enable local nonprofits to provide a range of services in our community, such as affordable housing development, meals for seniors, and support for people with disabilities. The disruption, reduction, or discontinuation of federal funds may force nonprofits to lay off case workers, discontinue programs, and potentially cease operation entirely, according to the survey.

"Nonprofits in Linn County are an essential part of our community," said Karla Twedt-Ball, President & CEO of the Community Foundation. "Cuts in federal support have an impact beyond nonprofits – this affects our entire community, and especially the most vulnerable among us."

Catherine McAuley Center (CMC), a refugee resettlement agency, was forced to lay off more than 40% of its staff because of the freeze. The agency suddenly did not have funds to support the refugees who had already arrived in Iowa.

"We honored the commitment the US government made when they resettled people by making sure rents, utilities, and basic needs were paid for out of our pocket," said Anne Dugger, Executive Director. "We have been raising funds to help alleviate these costs and to keep our doors open—we lost roughly 60% of our budget within ten days."

To help fill this gap, the Community Foundation awarded CMC a \$25,000 grant to support refugees. The grant was distributed from the Community Investment Fund, which awards grants that catalyze action and contribute to long-term sustainability.

"We're glad to be able to help Catherine McAuley Center meet this immediate need," said Joe Heitz, Vice President of Community Impact. "But the truth is, needs are going to increase, and nonprofits will turn to philanthropy to help fill that gap. There are sure to be more challenges in the months ahead."



David Karpick, Employment Services Director at Willis Dady Homeless Services, works alongside Nick to prepare a mattress for recycling. Nick works in the mattress recycling program and has been a resident of the Permanent Supportive Housing program for four months. This federally funded housing program provides vital support for individuals working toward stability and independence. "Nick has a very bright future," David says. "This program is critical to helping him achieve his goals."

The Community Foundation's survey found that for 31% of local nonprofits, federal grants and contracts make up 20% or more of their annual budgets. Ten percent of organizations said federal funds make up 60% or more of their budgets. Nearly all organizations expressed concern over potential changes to federal spending and how those changes may impact revenue streams.

"We lost roughly 60% of our budget within ten days."

Anne Dugger
Executive Director, Catherine McAuley Center

"The largest disruption we have seen so far is the fear of the unknown from staff and clients," said Alicia Faust, Executive Director of Willis Dady Homeless Services. "Should there be a freeze or cancellation in federal funding, we would need to consider the pause or elimination of our federally funded programs."

Federal funds support some of Willis Dady's core homeless services, like the emergency shelter and the rapid rehousing program. Major disruptions to nonprofit funding streams can mean that even organizations and programs that don't receive federal funds are at risk.

"We don't receive direct federal funding, but essential services such as Meals on Wheels and USDA food for our pantry depend on government support," said Nicole McAlexander, Executive Director of Southeast Linn Community Center in Lisbon. "Any cuts to these programs would directly impact the neighbors who rely on our services."

While the community has so far stepped up to help fill the gap at local human service agencies, in the long term this may divert philanthropic dollars from other nonprofit sectors.

"Even for those of us who can honestly say, 'we're ok for now,' there is great anxiety and added strain," said David Janssen, CEO of BruceMore. "Beyond jobs and programs, the real loss is in the impact nonprofits make in people's lives. The clients, patients, audiences, and neighbors will feel this."

The uncertainty surrounding federal policy and funding also means that more significant impacts on our community may still lie ahead. The Community Foundation continues to monitor the challenges local organizations are facing and work with philanthropists to respond to community needs.



Britton and Erin Langdon

BUILDING THEIR LEGACY

Britton and Erin Langdon Give Back

You might say that Britton and Erin Langdon are builders by nature. In 2013, the couple relocated to Cedar Rapids—Erin’s hometown—for Britton’s work in construction management. By then, Erin had extensive experience in growing and leading lean nonprofit organizations.

At Modern Companies, Inc., Britton was tasked with creating a software system to coordinate design and prefabrication operations. As it turned out, much of the industry had a similar need. The project was spun off into a new company and sold seven years later, allowing the Langdons to establish a donor-advised fund. For a young family passionate about building sustainable organizations and thriving communities, this was an exciting opportunity.

Tracking Community Needs

Like most people in Linn County, Britton and Erin are all too aware that community needs can change in an instant. With a donor-advised fund, they can support ongoing work and still be prepared to respond to those changes.

“Cedar Rapids has had its ups and downs, and we want to stay nimble in our giving so we can respond to unexpected needs,” Erin said. “But we also want to support long-term sustainability and innovation in the nonprofit sector, especially for organizations trying new approaches but struggling to secure traditional funding.” Securing funding for new programs, projects, or approaches can be challenging for nonprofits.

“We want to stay nimble in our giving so we can respond to unexpected needs

Erin Langdon

Though the couple prioritizes human service organizations that focus on unmet needs, giving through a donor-advised fund has allowed Britton and Erin to grant to diverse organizations.

“We have relationships with several nonprofits,” Britton said. “The ability to spread out our giving and support more organizations is a great opportunity.”

Through grants from their fund and volunteering as board members, the Langdons have supported Foundation 2 Crisis Services, Theatre Cedar Rapids, CSPA, and YPN, among others.

A Thoughtful Approach

Erin has spent her entire career in the nonprofit sector. From serving as the interim CEO of Make-A-Wish of Oklahoma, to her current role as Chief Operating Officer at Foundation 2 Crisis Services, she has seen the inner workings of a wide range of nonprofit organizations. While growing up, Britton saw how active his parents were in their church and international missions. This knowledge and experience inform their giving.

“As a nonprofit leader, I pay close attention to how organizations use their funds,” Erin said. “Of course, agencies need some overhead to operate, but we do like to ensure the dollars are being used wisely.”

While Erin has the experience needed to make such informed decisions, Britton points out that giving through the Community Foundation can make the process easier.

“It can be tough these days to know what is real and what isn’t,” he said. “Having a place like the Community Foundation is a great resource to make sure you’re putting your money where you know it’s going to be spent well.”

Looking Ahead

After two years of granting from their fund, the Langdons are excited about the future of their giving. Because it is endowed, the fund will continue to grow and allow them to support local nonprofits in perpetuity. Giving through the Community Foundation allows the Langdon’s to take advantage of the Endow Iowa, which offers a 25% state tax credit.

“As our children get older, we look forward to conversations about granting and what impact that can have for a nonprofit,” they said. For now, they’re enjoying building something that will serve the community for many years to come.

“We’re invested in the Cedar Rapids community,” Erin said. “We’re grateful for the opportunity to establish this fund and give back.”

Endow Iowa Tax Credit Program Faces Possible Elimination

Established in 2003 by the Iowa Legislature, the Endow Iowa tax credit program offers taxpayers a 25 percent state income tax credit on contributions made to endowed charitable funds through qualified community foundations like ours. However, the Iowa Economic Development Authority has proposed ending this program by the end of 2025. We remain committed to monitoring legislative developments and advocating for the continuation of this important program that supports charitable giving in our state. If you wish to take advantage of Endow Iowa tax credits, we encourage you to make your gift and apply for credits early. Eligible gifts must benefit one or more charitable causes in Iowa.

A GREATER TOMORROW

Planning for the Future

In 2024, the Community Foundation embarked on a journey to create a new strategic plan that will guide our work over the next five years. Creating an organization that truly serves everyone requires hearing from everyone – so we started by listening. Through five unique surveys and three focus groups, we gathered valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities shaping our community. We learned what we’re doing well, where we can improve, and how we can continue to be trusted partners for nonprofits and philanthropists.

The feedback also affirmed something we’ve always known: Linn County is home to generous people who are committed to shaping a brighter future.

Our new strategic plan will steer our work over the next five years. Titled *A Greater Tomorrow*, the plan provides direction and ambitious goals, while remaining flexible and responsive to the community’s changing needs. We will continue awarding grants, supporting donors, and engaging and convening the community. At the same time, we will broaden our reach by engaging more intentionally with people of color, ensuring our work represents and strengthens the entire community. We will also strengthen our connections with rural communities, making sure every corner of Linn County feels supported. This allows us to serve the Linn County of today and positions us for the Linn County of the future.

Our strategic plan has four focus areas:

- **Greater Future**- Elevate and invest in efforts that prepare our community for a strong future.
- **Greater Presence**- Expand relationships, awareness, visibility, and partnerships that support the entire community.
- **Greater Impact**- Grow our impact by helping donors, nonprofits, and community partners strengthen our community through philanthropy.
- **Greater Foundation**- Enhance the Community Foundation’s operations to better serve the community now and for generations to come.

In addition, we will work toward increasing our unrestricted Greater Good Funds and boosting our annual funding distributions to the community.

“This plan positions us for another 75 years of building partnerships and serving Linn County,” said Michelle Niermann, Board Chair of the Community Foundation. “We are excited to take these next steps toward an even brighter, more equitable future for everyone in our community.”

To learn more or view the full plan, scan the QRCode or visit www.gcrf.org.



Pictured in front row (left to right): John Blackcloud, Ana Clymer, Lizbeth Salas Landa, Dominique Brown, Tabitha Downing, , Mecca Samuels
Back Row (left to right): Savanna Snead, Faith Robinson, Jacqueline Hunter, Alicia Haan, Ashley Turner, Saadat Ahmadi
Not Pictured: Renan Gonzalez Machado

Thrive Cohort Enters Fourth Year

On March 6, the Thrive Cohort launched its fourth year with an inaugural gathering for new participants. Throughout the year, members will engage in networking, relationship building, and professional development.

“The Community Foundation strives to help build a strong local nonprofit sector,” said Carrie Walker, Vice President of Learning. “Thrive is one way do this, as it helps close the racial leadership gap and cultivates more diverse organizations.”

2025 Participants:

- Saadat Ahmadi, *Catholic Charities of Dubuque - Cedar Rapids Office*
- John Blackcloud, *Kids First Law Center*
- Dominique Brown, *Washington High School*
- Ana Clymer, *Creative Corridor Center for Equity (C3E)*
- Tabitha Downing, *Horizons, A Family Service Alliance*
- Renan Gonzalez Machado, *Waypoint*
- Alicia Haan, *Foundation 2*
- Jacqueline Hunter, *African American Museum of Iowa*
- Faith Robinson, *Families Helping Families of Iowa*
- Lizbeth Salas Landa, *YPN*
- Mecca Samuels, *The Arc*
- Savanna Snead, *AbbeHealth Aging Services*
- Ashley Turner, *Catherine McAuley Center*

Empowering Nonprofits Through Learning Events

In 2025, the Community Foundation has already hosted two impactful learning events at the Cedar Rapids Public Library, bringing together nonprofit professionals and board members. On January 31, over 100 nonprofit leaders gathered to explore grant opportunities available this year. On March 12, over 90 professionals and board members attended the screening of *UnCharitable*, a thought-provoking documentary about philanthropy and the outdated constraints often placed on nonprofits. The film is inspiring organizations to rethink how they can drive meaningful change in our communities. For learn more about upcoming learning opportunities, nonprofit peer groups, or available grants, visit www.gcrf.org.

GRANT IN ACTION

Advancing Culturally Informed Healthcare

In response to racial disparities in health outcomes, in 2022 Linn County Public Health (LCPH) convened a Health Equity Work Group.

“The original goal of the work group was to understand how racism impacts mental health in our community,” said Anne Carter, Health Equity Program Manager at LCPH. “We also wanted to explore ways our healthcare system can provide culturally informed care and promote social belonging.”

As in much of the nation, racial disparities persist in Linn County in a wide range of categories. Inequitable policies and practices have led to disparate outcomes in what are known as the social determinants of health—the non-medical factors that affect a person’s health and quality of life. These can include income, education, housing, social support networks, and access to food, among other things.

While disparities in these categories are certainly cause for concern, their impact on health and wellbeing can be shocking. Black adults in Linn County are almost twice as likely as their White peers to experience 14 or more poor mental health days in a month. Those born in rural Linn County or suburban neighborhoods can expect to live some 15-20 years longer than those born in Cedar Rapids’ core, historically redlined neighborhoods—despite those areas being nearest to healthcare facilities.

“In order to help our community be healthy, we need to learn from community experiences and use that learning to influence change in our organizations.”

Lori Weih,
Director of Community Engagement,
UnityPoint Health

Gathering Community Input

The group was initially composed of those best positioned to make improvements to the local healthcare system—UnityPoint St. Luke’s, Mercy Hospital, and the Eastern Iowa Health Center. To ensure the work group’s goals aligned with actual community needs, residents with lived experience were quickly added to the roster. Members share a hope for a healthier future for Linn County.

“I joined this group because I believe racial equity needs to be a priority of anyone committed to economic, political, and social justice,” said Slayton Thompson, a longtime community leader. “The next generation will face these issues, so we need to respond to these difficulties now in a futuristic way.”

To help develop shared language and mutual understanding, the work group uses the Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation framework, which focuses on systemic change at the local level. Of course, a framework for engaging in these challenging conversations is not enough. A \$25,000 Program Support Grant in the spring of 2024 supported training, research, and ongoing participation.

“Last fall we held a two-day workshop led by the Racial Equity Institute,” Anne said. “It was an intensive dive into structural racism, its history, and how it shows up here in our community.”

To further that understanding, the group partnered with Empowered Solutions Collective and students from Coe College, Mount Mercy University, and the University of Iowa to conduct a series of focus groups. Input from community members, healthcare professionals, and social workers will help guide the work group’s efforts going forward. This spring, a community survey will gather broader community input.

Looking Ahead

Moving forward, the Health Equity Work Group aims to use its strong collaboration to find actionable solutions and promote culturally informed healthcare. The group is currently exploring an innovative peer-to-peer model for helping people overcome adversity, and participating hospitals and clinics remain committed to the self-reflection needed for meaningful change.

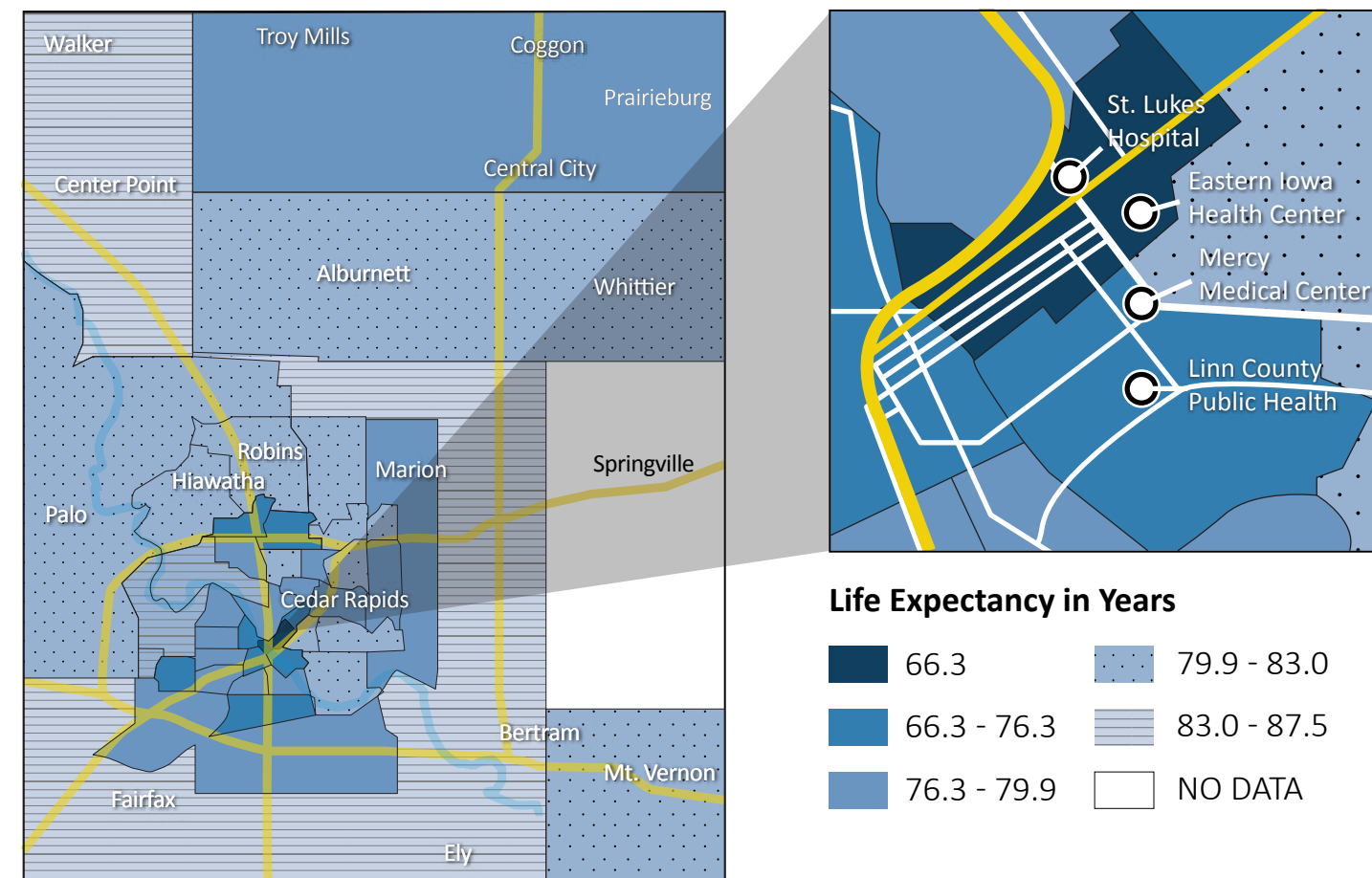
“In order to help our community be healthy, we need to learn from community experiences and use that learning to influence change in our organizations,” said Lori Weih, Director of Community Engagement at UnityPoint Health.

“Partnering and learning in this way can have a profound impact. When we work together as a community, we can ensure everyone receives exceptional care.”

While there is much to be done, the group is optimistic about the direction they’re taking.

“I’ve seen firsthand how the lack of access to healthcare and mental wellness impacts students,” said Cymone Green, a work group member and Equity in Student Success Coach at Kirkwood Community College. “Acknowledging racism as a public health crisis allows us to take meaningful steps toward equity and lasting change in our community.”

Life Expectancy at Birth by Census Tract - 2022
Linn County, Iowa



A CAREER OF SERVICE

Jean Brenneman Prepares for Retirement



After nearly two decades at the Community Foundation, Jean Brenneman is preparing for the next chapter of life. Her tenure has been marked by tremendous growth, community resilience, and a steadfast commitment to financial stewardship. Before her retirement begins on May 5, 2025, we asked Jean to reflect on her time as Chief Financial Officer.

Q: You joined the Community Foundation in 2007. What was the organization like then?

A: The organization had six employees and I was the only finance team member. The year I started, William Quarton passed away and left \$35 million to the Community Foundation. It remains the largest gift in our history and really kickstarted a period of growth for the organization. Today, the organization has 21 employees, including five people on the finance team overseeing finances and operations.

Q: What are some of your fondest memories from your time here?

A: What I like about the Community Foundation is the people I work with and the community I work for. Over the years, I have formed deep connections, both within the organization and throughout the community. It has made my work all the more fulfilling.

Q: You managed the Community Foundation's finances through a period of incredible growth. What are you most proud of in the last 18 years?

A: I'm proud of the team we have here—a group of people who not only care about their work but also about each other.

Seeing the tangible impact of our work is always rewarding, especially in times of crisis like the 2008 flood and the 2020 derecho. I also love being out in the community and seeing signs or programs that say, "Supported by the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation." It's a reminder of the real difference we're making.

On the finance side, I'm proud to have helped establish and grow the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investment pool. This helped align investments with the Community Foundation's values. I am also proud of our work in helping to establish the award-winning MICRO program in 2015 which continues to provide financial support for local small businesses.

Q: What's next for you?

A: I'm looking forward to more time for travel, gardening, and playing pickleball. I will also be working part-time for a company that provides outsourced accounting services for nonprofit organizations.

Cedar Rapids Casino Advances, Becoming a Partner in Nonprofit Funding

In February, the Iowa Racing and Gaming Commission approved a gaming license for Linn County, paving the way for a new casino near downtown Cedar Rapids. While the project still faces hurdles, a groundbreaking ceremony has already taken place, and Cedar Crossing is expected to open at the end of 2026.

Per Iowa law, companies that operate casinos must share their license with a Qualified Sponsoring Organization (QSO). These nonprofits receive a portion of the casino's gaming revenue to reinvest in the community. The Linn County Gaming Association (LCGA) serves as the QSO for Cedar Crossing.

"We look forward to having a new funding partner to help meet the needs of our community," said President & CEO Karla Twedt-Ball. "Community foundations throughout Iowa have developed good relationships with their QSOs, and we have appreciated the communication we have had with Cedar Crossing representatives over the years."

"Conservatively, we expect to have at least \$6 million annually available for granting," said Anne Parmley, President of LCGA. "Right now, we're learning from other organizations and starting to create our processes. When funds become available in mid-2027, we'll be ready to grant that into the community as efficiently as possible."

Previously, as a non-gaming county, Linn County received a portion of the state's gaming tax revenue. That money—about \$150,000 each year—was distributed through the competitive Linn County Grants, administered by the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation and overseen by a committee of volunteers. The LCGA intends to fund this grant program at a similar level going forward.

"It is important to us to maintain this grant opportunity for local nonprofits and to collaborate with funders that have been doing this work for a long time," Anne said. While a lot is yet to be decided, Anne says that the LCGA will keep its criteria broad and respond to community needs as they arise.

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Where philanthropy multiplies for the
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LOOKING FOR A CAUSE OR NONPROFIT TO SUPPORT?

The Community Foundation's website features the **Nonprofit Giving Center** — a dedicated hub that connects nonprofits' needs with donors eager to make a difference.

You can also explore the **Nonprofit Calendar**, which highlights upcoming events and activities to support local organizations.

Visit gcrf.org today!

STAY CONNECTED! Follow us for news, updates and stories about the impact of philanthropy in Linn County.

