



Creative Commonwealth Initiative

A TEN-YEAR PARTNERSHIP OF BARR AND COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS TO ELEVATE ARTS AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION ACROSS MASSACHUSETTS

The Creative Commonwealth Initiative took form as the Barr Foundation sought to extend its arts programming beyond Boston. In 2017, Barr began investing in five community foundations as partners in this journey. Their leadership and commitment to boosting equitable, diverse arts and creative expression in the regions they serve led to three additional community foundations joining the Creative Commonwealth partnership in 2023.

Barr establishes long-term alliances with community foundations to increase resources for local arts ecosystems across the state. This strategy advances the goal of Barr’s Arts & Creativity program, which is to elevate the arts and enable creative expression to engage and inspire a dynamic, thriving Massachusetts.

WHY COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS?

Community foundations are cornerstone institutions in their respective regions. These place-based philanthropies have deep local knowledge, trusted relationships, and capability to help infuse arts and creativity into civic life. They can convene organizations across sectors, bring information and insights to policymakers, raise public awareness of key issues and opportunities, attract donors to generate new funding, and spur collaborations that promote more equitable, sustainable regional arts ecosystems.

Barr and its Creative Commonwealth partners believe that arts and creativity are vital to thriving, engaged communities—bridging divides, enriching lives, and fueling economies. Each partner embraces diversity and is growing its capacity for inclusive and just practices. The geographies they serve are characterized by a density of arts organizations, including African, Latinx, Asian, Arab, and Native American nonprofits, and are home to significant immigrant populations. Progress in these regions can in turn help the statewide creative sector grow its relevance, resources, and resilience.

PARTNERS & GEOGRAPHIES

Includes year of initiative entry

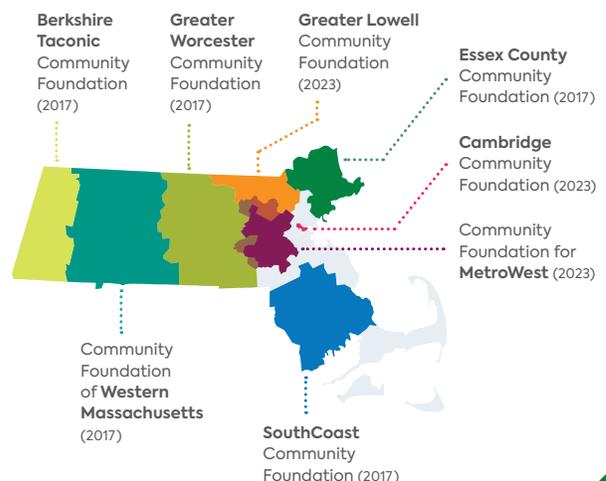


Image above: A New Bedford basketball court transformed into a community gathering place through public art. Image courtesy SouthCoast Community Foundation.

INITIATIVE PURPOSE AND DESIGN

The Creative Commonwealth Initiative aims to impact both the Massachusetts arts field and Massachusetts philanthropy. The initiative focuses on achieving two long-term outcomes:

- ▶ Diverse arts and creative expression are visible, integrated, valued, and supported in communities across Massachusetts.
- ▶ Community foundations strategically and effectively advance a shared commitment to strengthen resources for arts and creative expression across Massachusetts.

To reach these outcomes, CCW has evolved into a ten-year initiative. An initial cohort of five community foundations started in a planning phase in 2017, leading to subsequent stages supporting their evolution as local leaders in arts. Three additional community foundations joined the initiative in 2023.



CCW is led by the Barr Arts & Creativity program team, staffed by a consulting team with extensive experience in arts and the U.S. community foundation field, and designed through a collaborative process involving Barr and the participating community foundations. This co-designed initiative incorporates a mix of Barr supports:

- ▶ **Grants** to fund the local arts initiatives created by each community foundation, and to address internal capacity-building priorities in each organization
- ▶ **Individualized strategy coaching** for each community foundation provided by members of the CCW consulting team
- ▶ **Cohort-wide learning and knowledge sharing**—including periodic convenings as well as ongoing networking and interaction among peer groups of chief executives, program leads, and donor development and communications staff

Barr supports align with the program and development strategies forged by each community foundation team. The five initial cohort members each generated a Theory of Change to articulate and guide its arts and creativity work.

As the initiative moves into its sustainability phase, community foundations are building their resilience as adaptive leaders; amplifying their voices, connections, and influence as arts champions; investing in ways to strengthen the structures and activities that enable arts and creativity to flourish in their regions; and cultivating new donors and long-term funding sources to increase financial assets for arts.

Learn more: <https://www.barrfoundation.org/arts-creativity/creative-commonwealth>