

Healdsburg Forever

Helping Nonprofits from a Foundation of Trust

By Laurie Wachter

When COVID-19 changed our world, it also changed how Healdsburg Forever, a regional affiliate of the Community Foundation Sonoma County, has raised and granted funds to nonprofits serving the Healdsburg and Geyserville area communities since 2003.

“When COVID hit, we had to pivot from the open, competitive grant application process we had always used,” says Dave Ring, who leads the Grants Committee with fellow board member Claire Burdett. “It was incumbent on us to figure out a grantmaking strategy and approach that would concentrate larger grants on the organizations that would have the maximum impact on the most vulnerable people in our community.”

Two fundamental shifts allowed the team to step up to these unprecedented community needs.

Trust

The first change was to rely even more on the relationships the foundation had already built. The well-established Healdsburg Forever Grants Committee has worked with a network of nonprofits serving Healdsburg and Geyserville for many years. They based decision-making on a knowledge base developed over years of listening to and learning from nonprofit applicants. A written summary of knowns and unknowns about community needs shaped an internal conversation about how to maximize impact. Then one or two team members would talk to each proposed recipient in depth and come back to share what they learned.

Fortunately, as Dave points out, “We’ve been doing this together for a while. It requires a certain mindset to make a proposal and then be willing to go along with the group decision. It takes a lot of trust.”

In 2020, Healdsburg Forever delivered two rounds of emergency grants targeted to nonprofits providing essential safety net services to Latinx and socioeconomically-disadvantaged households. The foundation traditionally

ran an open-application competitive process, where nonprofits submit grant proposals for review by the committee. But by November, the Grants team realized it needed to find a faster, more efficient way of working. Their solution was to adopt a new trust-based approach to granting funds.

“By trust-based,” Dave explains, “we mean not telling the nonprofits what to do, but rather approaching it more collaboratively. We asked them, ‘Here’s what we think might be a big unmet need in the community. What do you think?’ Sometimes it would be affirmed, and sometimes it would go off in another direction. But we ended up drawing on both our and the nonprofits’ knowledge bases.”

The Grants Committee also decided not to impose reporting requirements. Instead, they talk with nonprofits monthly about their progress, reviewing data the nonprofit already collects.

“Dave allowed that process to morph from a short-term to a long-term strategy when the emergency need of COVID intensified and grew in longevity,” says Claire. “In March, people thought we’d be dealing with broader issues by now,” Claire adds. “Yet here we are almost a year later, still working on basic needs. In the Spring, our primary concern was food insecurity. Now, it’s things like how to help those experiencing homelessness. Because of COVID guidelines on social distancing, shelter space has been cut by 70%.”

“Things changed and unfolded in a way that was not predictable,” Dave agrees. “We’re on our third round of emergency discretionary grants. We did the first round very quickly by making some educated guesses. Now we’re dealing with challenges like parents who work outside the home but have children at home — the specifics of when and how schools will open changes each week. The vaccine situation changes every week, too — how to get vaccines into the community and get people to come and be vaccinated.”

The Community Impact Fund

The second major shift was creating the Community Impact Fund.

“This year has been different from all others,” says Carol Beattie, Healdsburg Forever Board Chair. “The Community Foundation Sonoma County inspired us with a matching challenge of \$150,000, which gave us greater autonomy and allowed us to reach beyond our usual community outreach approach. It really moved the needle on who we are, what we do and how we do it. Because of COVID, we couldn’t hold events, so we had to do it through pure fundraising and outreach. By the same token, this year was very different in how we granted funds to nonprofits. It was wholly emergency-based. We gave \$142,000 in two different time frames to the most vulnerable based on their COVID needs.

“When we say COVID,” Dave notes, “we’re using that as shorthand for all the ripple effects of the pandemic. It isn’t just health, but also employment and housing and education for kids. It’s a big ball of wax.”

“It’s COVID disruption,” says Claire.

“The Community Impact Fund is not completely about COVID,” Carol emphasizes. “It’s also for health and all types of natural disasters.”

“The matching grant allowed us to communicate a compelling reason to donate,” says Claire. “One of the steering committee’s goals was to broaden the number of people who donate to





Healdsburg Forever. Barbara Lannin wrote the letter, and we mailed it out to 1000 people. Plus, everyone on the Board made a lot of personal calls — and not only to major donors. We always rely on our big donors but wanted to broaden our reach. Those \$100 donations made a big difference.”

Their outreach worked. Close to 100 donors responded, an increase of at least 20%, allowing Healdsburg Forever to achieve — and exceed — the \$150,000 needed to receive the matching \$150,000 grant from the Community Foundation Sonoma County. The team was thrilled to surpass their fundraising goal in just 6 ½ weeks at the end of the year, raising \$360,000 to fund the most critical needs.

“The Grants Committee, led by Dave and Claire, is composed of a body of thoughtful, engaging, hard-working members,” says Carol. “They brought this round of “trust-based” grants in a short time through due diligence and thoughtful discourse. The Healdsburg Forever board listened, learned and voted on its recommendations.”

Healdsburg Forever’s Community Impact Fund focused larger grants to key nonprofits that provide critical services to the most vulnerable in our communities. These grants will revive essential programs that have run out of funds and establish the foundations for a better way to help people through crises like COVID and the wildfires. The Healdsburg and Geyserville communities will feel the positive impact of these six grants for years to come.

Healdsburg Forever Grants \$300,000 to 6 NonProfits

Corazón

Healdsburg Forever’s largest single grant ever, \$125,000, will restart Corazón’s direct financial assistance program for people affected by COVID, which had exhausted its funds with over 100 families still on its waiting list. Households facing financial crisis will receive up to \$2,500. This grant aligns with the Healdsburg Forever Board’s goal to “move the needle” where it matters most.

A smaller portion of the grant will enable Corazón to cover associated operating costs and implement a case management system to address root causes, paving the way for these families to face the future on a more stable footing.



Redwood Empire Food Bank

Demand for Redwood Empire Food Bank services has increased threefold since the pandemic and the fires. The cost of food and distribution have also grown, while volunteers have declined. Healdsburg Forever’s grant will result in meeting an urgent need for food assistance to families impacted by COVID-19 in Healdsburg and Geyserville, enabling them to serve over 1800 additional households.



Alliance Medical Center

This grant will help Alliance Medical ramp up quickly as vaccine supply grows to educate and vaccinate the often vaccine-hesitant Latinx community that represents 65% of Sonoma County Covid cases, as well as staff and uninsured patients. This grant provides Alliance with some much-needed financial flexibility as the local vaccine effort evolves.



“We are very grateful for the funding from Healdsburg Forever over a number of years and especially the new grant for assisting us in an unrestricted way with our vaccination program. Our eye is on vaccinating as many of the 13,000 mostly lower-income residents we serve as expeditiously and equitably as possible. 70% are LatinX, and many aren’t computer literate or able to access the internet and often speak only Spanish. We have undertaken a massive effort to call people to get them to enroll, and the grant will help with this outreach.” Board Chair Susan Lentz

Legal Aid of Sonoma County

Evictions are happening now despite the Federal and State moratoriums and are expected to surge in 2021. This grant will make Legal Aid accessible and deliver bilingual eviction prevention and tenant stabilization services in the expensive Healdsburg and Geyserville housing market.



Reach for Home

The City of Healdsburg declined to fund the Reach for Home Winter Shelter, which provides protection from the elements for some of the homeless population when it is cold or wet. This grant will fully fund the Winter Shelter to help overcome COVID capacity restrictions and help tenants with rent and utilities.



Reach for Home
Housing for People. Skills for Life.

A matching grant for Camp HBG 2.0

The Healdsburg School District considers Camp Healdsburg an essential program that enables parents to work and earn income while supporting socialization and learning for students up to grade 5. This grant will help Corazon and the City of Healdsburg Recreation Department reach their fundraising goal for the spring semester, which was \$90K short before this matching grant, and provide these critical services for 90 children and their families.