



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

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**CFWM Innovation Grantees tackle issues of housing, hunger and educator diversity
\$333,000 of funding granted to further propel three “outside the box” projects**

SPRINGFIELD, MA – The Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts’ (CFWM) Innovation Grant Program has awarded a total of \$333,000 to three changemaking nonprofits organizations to continue creating innovative solutions around these critical issues facing our region. CFWM’s Innovation Grant Program was launched in 2016 to encourage nonprofits to develop and execute novel ideas in partnership with other entities, as well as allow organizations to construct inventive solutions with measurable impact.

In January of 2018, CFWM awarded first year funding to **Five Colleges Incorporated, The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts and Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity** to implement innovative projects that were refined and tested during a planning period in 2017. Throughout 2018, the organizations delved into executing their visions to begin making real change in their specific area of focus.

Five Colleges, Inc. was awarded \$142,000 and will continue to develop the [“Paradigm Shift”](#) initiative. This initiative is focused on creating a more diverse teacher workforce in Western Massachusetts by helping para-educators of color overcome obstacles to obtaining licensure to become teachers in area schools. The 25-member organizations that make up the Paradigm Shift Coalition have laid the groundwork for breaking down barriers that para-educators face in becoming licensed teachers, including identifying the steps involved in obtaining licensure, helping enroll para-educators in courses in local colleges, and providing mentoring and tutoring for MTEL tests. The coalition has also been able to offset costs associated with these steps to help make it affordable. **During their first year, they were successful in recruiting 13 para-educators from Holyoke, Springfield and Amherst to take part in the initiative. The goal of this initiative is to help 20 para-educators of color attain the licensure needed to become licensed teachers by 2020.**

The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts was awarded \$97,000 and will spend their second year expanding their [Food Insecurity Screening and Referral Initiative](#) that conducts and tracks food insecurity screening and social service referrals at the Holyoke Health Center and their Chicopee location. With a simple in-person questionnaire, **the initiative screens for food insecurity at adult and pediatric practices, and then connects patients with food assistance resources—and, equally important—referrals to additional resources that patients may need, such as housing, employment,**

education, etc. The Food Bank is actively working to expand this work to other health centers in the region.

Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity was awarded \$94,000, and will continue with a second year of their [“Big Enough: The Small Home Revolution in Western Mass”](#) initiative, which aims to launch more individuals and families into the middle class by empowering them to become first-time owners of small (less than 1000 square feet), simple, affordable, energy-efficient homes that they ideally could purchase in the \$50,000 price range. Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity’s work brings together partners such as local banks to conceive creative financing, cities to implement new zoning regulations, and builders to design small, innovative and energy-efficient housing concepts. **The first year of funding allowed for three low-income families and one individual to become homeowners in Hampshire County, a dream that likely wouldn’t have been possible within the current housing market.**

About the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts

Founded in 1990, the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts administers a charitable endowment consisting of over 600 separately identified funds (\$173 million) serving the three counties bordering the Connecticut River in Western Massachusetts (Hampden, Hampshire, and Franklin counties). For more information about the reach and impact of the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, visit <http://communityfoundation.org>.