

CITIZENS NYC

A National Model for Empowering
Community Leaders to Build More Connected,
Resilient and Healthier Neighborhoods

PRESENTED BY SIEGEL FAMILY ENDOWMENT

We are a foundation focused on understanding and shaping
the impact of technology on society.



About Siegel

Siegel Family Endowment employs an inquiry-driven approach to grantmaking, informed by the scientific method and grounded in the belief that philanthropy is uniquely positioned to address complex societal challenges. Rapid technological change has reshaped how we live, work, and learn, transforming the global economy and redefining access to opportunity—from schools and workplaces to our built environment. To meet these shifts, we support technology that serves the public interest, including the tools, skills, and systems people need to engage with and shape a rapidly evolving world. Siegel Family Endowment was founded in 2011 by David Siegel, co-founder and co-chairman of financial sciences company Two Sigma.



Our Focus on Community-Driven Innovation

We believe that innovation—whether it is technologically or organizationally driven—can happen anywhere, in any industry, region, or community. However, the conditions that support innovation are not accessible to everyone. We seek to support and elevate local innovators with good ideas for how to improve communities, especially those that exist in our own backyard.

About Grantee

With a half century of service under its belt, [CitizensNYC](#) is one of the most experienced micro-funding organizations in the country. It provides micro-grants and capacity-building support to New York City neighborhood leaders who are making their communities more connected, resilient, and healthier. In 2025, CitizensNYC received more than 2,000 applications and awarded 334 grants, reaching every City Council district in New York City. CitizensNYC offers *Community Leaders Grants and Neighborhood Business Grants* of up to \$5,000, workshops and convenings, and other support for neighborhood leaders to implement projects in their communities. Larger Collaborative Impact Grants enable multiple grantee partners across each borough to collaborate on projects to address community needs. Successful grantee partners can apply to serve as Elliott Fellows, advising prospective and current grantees. CitizensNYC acts as a bridge-builder between neighborhood leaders and city agencies; between grassroots initiatives across the city; between neighborhood groups and potential partners; and between hyperlocal funding initiatives around the country.



**CITIZENS
COMMITTEE
FOR NEW
YORK CITY**



Bronx Sunshine Garden and Love Wins NYC are among the hundreds of hyperlocal groups that CitizensNYC supports throughout New York City.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Local leaders know their communities well; they are well-poised to develop creative solutions to entrenched challenges.** Micro-grant organizations can help nurture this potential, bolstering an important source of leadership when local or national governmental agencies are unable to respond to crises. Micro-grant organizations also serve as important champions for this local leadership in conversations with government and philanthropic funders.
- **Philanthropic organizations can make an outsized impact by incorporating micro-grants within their approach.** Different communities will develop different projects, create different partnerships, and require different capacity-building opportunities. Even so, a range of communities—whether urban or rural, conservative or liberal—can benefit by embracing a similar process of entrusting resilience-building to local communities.
- **The power of micro-grants is extended by providing capacity-building services and opportunities for connection.** These capacity-building efforts are especially effective when they come from the network of grantees themselves. Philanthropic organizations can create fellowships, organize convenings, and make introductions to partner organizations in order to nurture and share the hyperlocal knowledge and skills that community leaders bring.

Executive Summary

In the mid-1970s, New York City faced a fiscal crisis. With no federal funding forthcoming, City agencies were decimated. Basic services—from trash pickup to law enforcement—were severely curtailed. Residents grew increasingly worried about the future of their city. But rather than give into despair, New Yorkers turned to one another for support. It was a defining moment in New York City history, recently memorialized in the documentary *Drop Dead City*.

To spur and support this new spirit of civic activism, Citizens Committee for New York City—now known as [CitizensNYC](#)—was founded by U.S. Senator Jacob Javits and *Newsweek* Editor-in-Chief Osborn Elliott during the fiscal crisis.

The organization [began](#) with a full-page ad in *New York Magazine* and other publications. The ad entreated New Yorkers to volunteer in order to save their city. Over the next few years, thousands of New Yorkers responded to the ad's call. Some tutored students. Others created community gardens. All were committed to responding to the needs that they saw in their neighborhoods.

Fifty years later, CitizensNYC remains committed to the bottom-up approach to strengthening neighborhoods that defined its early years. CitizensNYC CEO Julie Shapiro says, “The beginning of the organization was tapping into what's special about New Yorkers, and how New Yorkers think about caring for each other and for their neighborhoods. That spirit is something that we've carried forward.”

But CitizensNYC is no longer simply a call-to-action or a project to organize volunteers. Today, CitizensNYC [provides micro-grants](#) to neighborhood leaders who have innovative ideas for responding to needs in their communities. The organization has developed a constellation of capacity-building programs, convening opportunities, and a network for New Yorkers to become levers for change in their own communities. CitizensNYC supports [projects](#) as varied as community gardens, multigenerational theater projects, beekeeping initiatives, land trusts, youth leadership councils, and many

We need 10,000 "greedy, heartless" New Yorkers to work for 5 years. For free.

Time's running out:
No more school crossing guards. 28 day care centers closed. 13 night schools closed. 100,000 children's eye tests cancelled. Senior citizen recreation programs cut back drastically.

The list could go on and on. And it will. Unless we use our last and strongest asset: *Us.*

WE CAN SAVE OUR CITY

Half the country seems to think we're too selfish to even try.

Half the country is *wrong*. We just happen to be the toughest, most resourceful and (in a pinch) the *best* people in the world.

Londoners during the Blitz? Berliners behind the Wall? Not bad. Magnificent, in fact.

Can New Yorkers in the Crisis measure up? We think so.

In fact, if we work together, we can do more than simply fill the gaps in our vanishing essential services. We can keep some of these services from disappearing forever. And, in the process, we are likely to find a growing pride in ourselves. And our city.

A citywide volunteer army is forming right now to do what needs to be done. We're asking you to join it.

EVEN 3 HOURS A WEEK WOULD MEAN A LOT

We're asking you to help fight a Crisis. Not to start a career.

The work is part-time. Half a day a week for some jobs. Three to five days a week for others.

What kind of jobs? They range from answering phones to tutoring kids.

Most of the work is for weekdays. Some is for nights or weekends.

TO HELP CALL THE MAYOR'S VOLUNTARY ACTION CENTER: 566-5950

There are people at that number, weekdays, from 9 to 5, waiting for your call. And there are thousands of jobs waiting, too. Give us some of your spare time. Get some friends. Your parents. Your retired neighbor. And join in.

We also have some specialized jobs that need to be filled. For more information, call the following numbers:
Auxiliary Police (for uniformed street patrol): 793-2727.
School Volunteers (for one-to-one tutoring): 563-5620.
Hospital Volunteers (for patient-work and paper-work): PL-4-1080.
Social Services (for work with the young and old): 790-3514.

We may be broke but we'll never be broken.

I'm a New Yorker fighting the Crisis. Ask me how.

CITIZENS COMMITTEE FOR NEW YORK CITY
Osborn Elliott, Chairman, Dennis Allen, Executive Director
345 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10022

© Citizens Committee for New York City, Inc. 1976

Full page ad from 1975 calling New Yorkers to service as part of CitizensNYC's founding

others throughout the five boroughs. It offers grantees workshops on everything from grant-writing to partnering with city agencies.

Like New York City in the 1970s, many communities across the country currently face dire fiscal situations. In addition, federal funding remains uncertain in many locales. CitizensNYC offers a model for community resiliency and strength even at a time of crisis. Shapiro says, “We’re at a moment nationally where there is increasing recognition of the power of local leadership.” CitizensNYC shows how grantmaking organizations with deep roots in the community can activate and empower that local leadership.

CITIZENSNYC PROFILE

Christina Delfico

Founder of iDig2Learn



CHRISTINA DELFICO, a champion for local land, air, and water restoration programs, still shakes her head in wonder that she was able to bring two New York City high school students to a private event featuring Jane Goodall, the late, legendary primatologist and anthropologist. “These young people who were on the career track in the environmental sciences had the day of their life, and I had the day of my life watching them have the day of their life,” Delfico recalls.

Delfico’s encounter with Goodall did not happen by chance. It was part of the annual, large-scale international conference [Climate Week](#), during which Delfico’s pioneering work as the founder of [iDig2Learn](#) was featured as part of a plenary event hosted by Deloitte in collaboration with CitizensNYC. The event included a short film and panel discussion about iDig2Learn’s creation of New York City’s first “pocket forest,” [which was planted on Roosevelt Island](#). In that project, iDig2Learn brought community members together to plant 1,500 baby trees very close together in accordance with the Japanese Miyawaki method to promote faster growth. The pocket forest creates a root system and fungal network that accelerates growth and absorbs

excess water, lessening the potential for flooding.

The SUGi-funded [Manhattan Healing Forest](#) on Roosevelt Island is a milestone project, one of the largest that iDig2Learn has spearheaded, but its spirit of community-building and locally-rooted solutions has been the essence of all of iDig2Learn’s activities from its earliest days.

iDig2Learn began over a decade ago when Delfico recruited students to uplift an underutilized youth center courtyard garden. “We planted and grew food, and learned about it, and watered, and cared for things that were smaller than ourselves. And we had a really great time,” Delfico recalls. “I thought, ‘Wow, if this works out, I could do this all the time.’”

For the last 13 years, Delfico has been doing just that. iDig2Learn now has educational relationships across the five boroughs, including a pollinator garden with high school students in Fresh Meadows, Queens and Williamsburg, Brooklyn; a summer engagement program at Socrates Sculpture Park; green roofing projects at schools; a mommy/daddy toddler nature and garden group; and many large-scale annual events. Through all of its activities, iDig2Learn aims to build community and improve local environmental conditions by allowing New Yorkers to interact with the natural world around them.

Delfico says that CitizensNYC has been a big part of iDig2Learn’s story.

In iDig2Learn’s early days, Delfico received a small grant from CitizensNYC to fund a project to plant donated daffodils in a giant bed in front of the local grocery store. That event led Delfico to realize that she was working on something bigger than isolated projects to beautify this corner or that courtyard in her neighborhood. “I was starting to realize that this is for all ages. There’s a hunger in New York City

to touch land, to have permission to make something more beautiful, and then to walk by it every day and know that you did it,” she says.

Delfico says that CitizensNYC’s support made her more confident in pursuing new projects. “I don’t think that iDig2Learn would be in existence without those first few grants,” Delfico says.

CitizensNYC’s capacity-building programs were equally important to the funding. Both the workshops that Delfico participated in and the relationships that she developed with other grantee partners have helped to guide Delfico’s work. “When you’re sitting in those workshops, you’re also sitting around the table with 20 other people that are doing the same thing in all five boroughs,” Delfico reflects. “You’re in a room guided by CitizensNYC, but also supported and feeling that you’re part of a group of people trying to do something good in their neighborhood.”

Now, that support is coming full-circle. As a seasoned community leader, Delfico now acts as a mentor to those who are just getting started.

Meanwhile, Delfico’s own ambitions for what iDig2Learn could become have been exceeded. “Our dream with iDig2Learn was for young people and the young-at-heart to reconnect and reap all the benefits of health and relaxation and calming and feeling good from being in green spaces, being in nature. Seeing a butterfly. Eating a fresh tomato that had no pesticides. You grow it, you eat it, you feel happier. That’s what we wanted. And it’s happening,” Delfico reflects. “I’m just thrilled and feel very supported.”

iDig2Learn is a project of Open Space Institute, Inc., a nonprofit 501(c)3 public charity which serves as its fiscal sponsor. Please follow iDig2Learn on Instagram: @iDig2Learn.

Core Elements: What Makes the Program Work?

CITIZENSNYC is a place-based organization, made up of diverse New Yorkers and deeply intertwined in the fabric of New York City's neighborhoods. Yet CitizensNYC's work is also deeply relevant and instructive for a variety of communities. The organization's success hinges on three elements: elevating local leaders, supporting an entire ecosystem of community leaders that is bigger than the sum of the parts, and responding directly to community-identified needs at the moment.

Elevating Local Leaders

Residents of one neighborhood bemoan the eyesore of an empty lot on the corner. Residents on another block scramble to find alternatives after an afterschool tutoring program closes. Residents in another neighborhood wonder where they will get fresh produce now that the bodega on the corner is shuttered.

Block-by-block, New Yorkers face different challenges. Hyperlocal leaders are not waiting for policy solutions but are taking action to address the problems they see. They are often the first to see and feel the impacts of challenges that then rise to national and sometimes global levels.

CitizensNYC recognizes that the residents who identify their hyperlocal challenges are also uniquely positioned to develop creative approaches for addressing those challenges. Residents can work together to transform the vacant lot into a community garden. Elders can share their wisdom and experiences while tutoring young people. Community members can build a chicken coop to supply fresh eggs to families in their neighborhood.

“We go to church basements and parks and schools—all the places that people congregate. We look for community leaders who are working to make their communities healthier, more resilient, and more connected,” Shapiro says.



Bee University NYC, a CitizensNYC grantee partner, engages youth in urban beekeeping, offering hands-on experience with live honey bee colonies while fostering leadership, environmental stewardship, and pathways to green careers.

These projects are not theoretical; they're happening in neighborhoods across New York City due to the dedication of local leadership and micro-grants of up to \$5,000 from CitizensNYC team members go out into New York's neighborhoods to find projects that could benefit from resources, and the leaders making change in their communities who have never applied for a grant before. “We go to church basements and parks and schools—all the places that people congregate. We look for community leaders who are working to make their communities healthier, more resilient, and more connected,” Shapiro says.

Even a small investment goes a long way toward sustaining projects that can

be transformative for entire blocks or communities and in opening doors for additional funding from other sources. Shapiro says, “We're very often the first funder. That does so much for a new grantee partner in demonstrating support and confidence in the work that they do.” Shapiro points to a number of examples of projects that have gone on to expand and become community anchors, including [iDig2Learn](#) and [Brooklyn Level Up](#).

Going Beyond the Grant

Over the years, CitizensNYC has devised new ways to help local leaders develop and to ensure that projects continue—and grow—after their micro-grants run out. CitizensNYC now provides a range of supportive services to its grantee partners. These services include capacity-building workshops, 1:1 coaching, technical assistance, and introductions to funders and partners. CitizensNYC curates these offerings in response to what grantees request. Recent workshop topics have included grant writing, social media, coalition-building, and navigating city bureaucracy.

CITIZENS NYC PROFILE

Allyson Martinez

Founding Executive Director,
Brooklyn Level Up (BKLVLUP)



ALLYSON MARTINEZ, an attorney and real estate broker, was community-minded long before she co-founded [Brooklyn Level Up \(BKLVLUP\)](#), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit community development corporation serving the East Flatbush, Flatbush, and Flatlands neighborhoods of Brooklyn—an area known as “the Flats.” Martinez prided herself on her good relationships with local business owners. She helped to organize community events. Martinez even served as co-chair of the land use and re-zoning committee of her neighborhood community board.

But during the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Martinez began to feel that she needed to do more. “We were seeing the fraying of the social network,” Martinez explains. “Vaccines were being given away but we couldn’t get seniors access to those vaccines. They were not able to fight tooth-and-nail to get appointments.” In response, Martinez worked with friends to develop a database of interested seniors and an appointment notification system to match seniors to those appointments.

That project led to others. Those efforts included supporting rides for seniors to get to COVID-19 vaccine

appointments; “Vax and Relax” clinics and testing events at local restaurants; toolkits for small restaurants managing social distancing; and fairs to share housing resources with neighborhood residents.

These projects required funding, leading Martinez and other organizers of what eventually became BKLVLUP to successfully apply for small grants from a variety of organizations and city agencies. The benefit of those early grants extended beyond the money collected. “It validated the work that we were doing,” Martinez says. “It showed us that other New Yorkers could see that what we were doing had value.”

Microgrants from CitizensNYC were particularly impactful for BKLVLUP’s development. “CitizensNYC offered an opportunity to do capacity-building along with the funding. They had grantee sessions where we could hear what other groups were working on and thinking about,” Martinez says. “To this day, I always tell groups that are starting that a small grant from CitizensNYC allows you to test out your ideas and build community around them. It’s nearly impossible to find funding when you’re not a 501(c)(3), but a CitizensNYC grant opens those doors and gives you support as you grow.”

BKLVLUP has taken full advantage of the doors that CitizensNYC opened. It now operates an entrepreneurship collective to support local small business owners and a community land trust for affordable housing and commercial space, among other initiatives. All of these efforts are designed to deepen community and to give voice to residents who are not often asked to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

“The work changes, but the grounding factors are being hyperlocal and intentional about knowing this community, and trying

to build a database of resources and spaces for and with that community in order to allow them to stay here and be well,” Martinez says.

For example, BKLVLUP developed a paid youth internship program and community education program called From the Ground Up that pays youth to help residents in East Flatbush understand their property’s soil health and how to protect themselves against dangerously high levels of lead in the ground. The project involves a cultural preservation component in which BKLVLUP is documenting what plants and produce local residents are growing and why, as well as collecting community recipes. These soil testing, documentation, and environmental education programs—undertaken with a variety of partners, including Brooklyn College (CUNY)—form the cornerstone of other planned projects to address the effects of climate change on the neighborhood.

Martinez and her colleagues have learned a lot about community engagement and partnership in hyperlocal contexts over the half decade since BKLVLUP began as a vaccine appointment matching effort in the Flats. Now Martinez will have a formal chance to spread this knowledge with others as one of the first Elliott Fellows at CitizensNYC. In this year-long paid appointment, Martinez will advise and coach prospective and current CitizensNYC grantee partners, alongside her ongoing work leading BKLVLUP.

“CitizensNYC is like a community lab where you can try things and have the support of resources and people. The Elliott Fellowship takes that support one step further,” Martinez says. “The work that we’re all working on is so big it can’t be done by just one person or one group. You have to build relationships. CitizensNYC helps to create those connections.”

Shapiro says that such capacity-building efforts are as much about building community and relationships as they are about skill development. It was that insight that led CitizensNYC to develop two new programs to augment their micro-grant programming: the [Elliott Fellowship](#) and [Collaborative Impact Grants](#).

Elliott Fellows—named in memory of CitizensNYC co-founder Osborn Elliott—are grantee partners who've been successful in their work and now serve as advisors to current and prospective grantee partners. Shapiro says Elliott Fellows become part of a “virtuous cycle” in which grantee partners who have outgrown eligibility for funding continue to contribute to the network through advising both emerging leaders and CitizensNYC staff, and the fellowship in turn provides them an opportunity to continue to learn and grow.

Shapiro explains that Elliott Fellows help CitizensNYC do its work more effectively. “We wanted to stay engaged with our grantees, stay in relationship with them.” Shapiro says. “We wanted to give them an opportunity to continue to build and practice their leadership skills. They're in a position to be able to give back. They're closer to the work than we are and they can keep us honest by giving us guidance about the best ways to do this work.”

Collaborative Impact Grants support multiple grantees in a single borough in developing a project together. Like so many of the workshops that CitizensNYC offers, the idea for Collaborative Impact Grants came from grantee partners themselves. Shapiro says, “They were voicing a desire to partner and collaborate with peers as opposed to competing for slim opportunities for funds.”

A Model for Empowering Local Leadership

CitizensNYC's grantee partners develop homegrown solutions to the challenges that they are confronting on their blocks. CitizensNYC was—and continues to be—responsive to local conditions, whether it was in launching Unity Grants to support grassroots emergency relief efforts after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, or offering Hurricane Relief Grants in the wake of Superstorm Sandy.

But CitizensNYC's model for building an ecosystem of neighborhood leaders who are individually and collectively strengthening their communities is one that can be applied in many places. That model includes offering a full suite of supports for nurturing local leaders; creating opportunities for ongoing leadership and collaboration among grantees and partners; seeking out leaders from

diverse backgrounds and communities within a locale; and building bridges between neighborhoods, local government, private funders and other community institutions.

CitizensNYC has pioneered structured approaches for these goals that can be adopted by other locales. For example, CitizensNYC has developed and refined applicant engagement strategies and applicant evaluation systems that are ready for adoption and implementation elsewhere. These systems allow CitizensNYC to reach out to thousands of prospective applicants each year, to objectively evaluate applications in a systematic way, and to collect relevant data without placing undue burdens on applicants and grantees.

CitizensNYC also serves as a vital bridge between city agencies and neighborhood leaders. Through a unique \$75 million master contract with the City of New York, CitizensNYC partners with city agencies in large-scale efforts to ensure that critical resources quickly reach local leaders driving change. Over the past three years, CitizensNYC has partnered with seven city agencies to identify more than 500 local groups and distribute more than \$26M in funding for work on weather emergency response, youth civic engagement, job access, free childcare enrollment, and more.



The Canarsie Third Space Initiative received support through a CitizensNYC Collaborative Impact Grant to reimagine the historic Jerry Building on Rockaway Parkway as an outdoor cinema and community gathering space.

CITIZENSNYC PROFILE**Collective Impact Grant (Staten Island)**

Bobby Digi of the [Canvas Institute](#), Tariq Zaid of [Vodega](#) and [Community Activate](#), and Rufus Arkoi of Roza Promotions

BOBBY DIGI, Tariq Zaid, and Rufus Arkoi are pillars of the community in the neighborhoods on Staten Island's North Shore. Digi is the CEO and founder of a youth empowerment organization. Zaid operates multiple businesses, including a vegan deli and a skateshop. Arkoi works with African immigrants, particularly the elderly. The three men have known each other for years. But even though their paths had intersected at numerous community events, it was only recently that Arkoi, Digi, and Zaid began to work together on a project.

The impetus for their collaboration was a Collaborative Impact Grant from CitizensNYC, a grant that is designed to bring together community members within a borough to build organic, cross-sector relationships and more holistic projects.

With CitizensNYC's support, Digi, Arkoi, and Zaid sketched out an intergenerational program that would honor and respect community members' experiences and traditions, while also encouraging them to make healthy lifestyle choices. They settled on a series of community gatherings focused on making traditional foods with healthier ingredients than are often used.

CitizensNYC facilitated conversations that helped the three leaders craft a program that drew on each of their areas of expertise.

Zaid recalls, "All three of us were hearing a call from the community to address health and wellness, both youth and elders, but we came at it in different ways."

Digi adds, "In our dialogue and brainstorming, we were throwing different things together, and we saw that there was this healthy eating aspect. Then there were the questions of how we get the young folks and these legendary old folks involved." He continues, "CitizensNYC staff members were shepherding the conversation and guiding us to think about what the project would look like. How do we mesh this all together?"

Zaid adds, "A lot of activities and events in the community are segmented for an older demographic or a younger demographic. CitizensNYC gave us an opportunity to bring it all together."

Each member of the trio brought a particular expertise in developing the program. Zaid explains, "My role was to provide the health and wellness guidance. Bobby's role was to work with the youth for content capture. And Rufus was to gather and work with the 'ole'mas—the grandmas in the community."

All three organizers wanted to design a program that not only respected and involved the community, but that also elevated community members as co-collaborators and active participants. Elders in the community shared their recipes and worked with Zaid to substitute healthier ingredients when possible. Community members gathered to eat and reflect. Young people documented the experience.

Zaid was initially nervous about how well the community would respond. "I had to present it to a group of grandmas from Park Hill. I didn't want to be insulting and say that they were doing anything wrong in their cooking," he recalls.

"But studies show that some of these diseases that our community is experiencing are preventable with some lifestyle changes."

Zaid urged the grandmas in attendance to consider plant-based options, perhaps substituting organic jackfruit for beef, using grapeseed oil in place of processed oils, or using sodium-free bouillon cubes in place of regular bouillon cubes. Zaid recalls that a grandma in attendance shared that she used to work in a hospital emergency room and had seen many Black and Brown people admitted for health scares related to diabetes or high-cholesterol levels. She said, "You're right, we need to be eating healthier." Zaid said that that encounter calmed his nerves about the community's willingness to partner on the project. "We weren't lecturing them, we were showing them new ways of preserving their own food traditions," Zaid says.

"It was a beautiful process," Digi says, emphasizing that that beauty included both the formal program and the informal conversations and relationships that happened organically throughout the program. "It was beautiful to be in the kitchen and watch Tariq do his thing with the ole'mas, and have young people film it," Digi says. "There were so many conversations around food and learning. I heard young people asking the omas about roots and beans and what you could do with that."

Arkoi, Digi, and Zaid plan to expand their work together on health and wellness, intergenerational programming, and cultural preservation. As Digi puts it, "This work needs to continue. There's a need for education around healthy eating in our community." With the experience of the CitizensNYC Collaborative Impact Grant process under their belt, Digi and his colleagues are confident that they have a strong foundation to build on.

Impact

CITIZENSNYC has many roles in New York City and much to share on the national stage for funders and nonprofits looking to boost hyperlocal leadership. It is a grantmaker, dispensing over a million dollars a year in micro-grants to grassroots leaders in neighborhoods across New York City. It is a bridge between communities and institutions in New York City, dispensing funding from City agencies to neighborhood initiatives. It is a nonprofit, itself, responsible for securing funding from philanthropy and corporations. And crucially, CitizensNYC is also a model for how to empower and support local leaders in developing grassroots approaches for addressing local challenges.

CitizensNYC leaders say that it is important to recognize these multiple roles in developing ways of understanding and measuring impact.

“We think about [impact](#) with our grantees. Did we help them accomplish the change that they set out to tackle?,” Shapiro says. “But we are also interested in looking across our grantees to understand whether CitizensNYC is building an ecosystem of local leaders who are connected, resourced, and growing.” To understand this broader impact, CitizensNYC looks to a variety of sources:

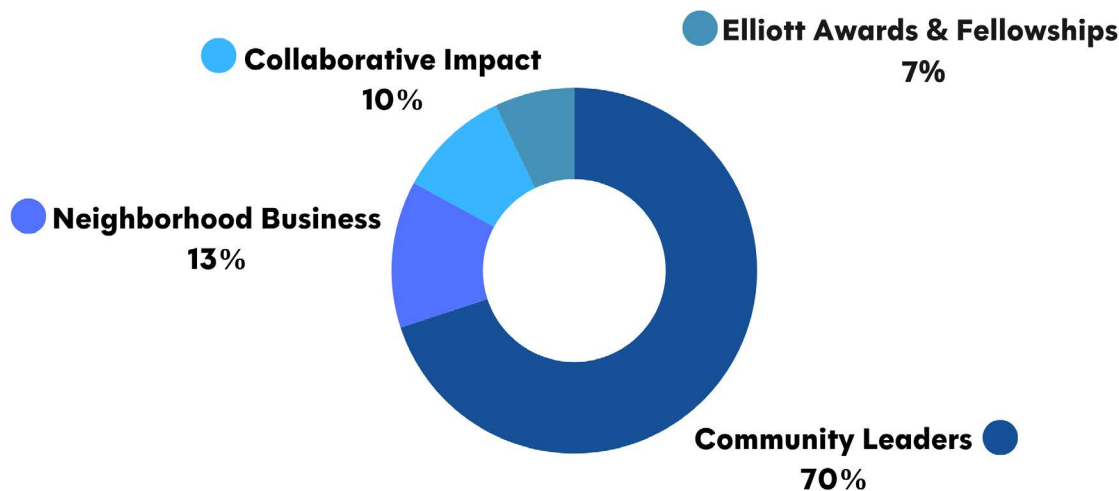
Grantee Impact: In 2025, CitizensNYC distributed over \$1.2M in funding for 334 grants across four grant programs: Community Leaders, Neighborhood Business, Collaborative Impact, Elliott Fellowships & Awards. In addition to the funding, CitizensNYC provided grantees with capacity-building workshops, 1:1 coaching and technical assistance, and connections to

funders, nonprofits, and other changemakers.

CitizensNYC collects reports from their grantees to understand how effective these efforts are. “We try to understand how many community members were reached and how many volunteers were engaged,” Shapiro says. “We also look at indicators of growth such as securing additional private or governmental funding or formalization as a 501(c)(3), their reach through social media, the development of new partnerships, and their reach in historically underserved communities in New York City.” CitizensNYC makes adjustments to its programs based on what it learns from this analysis.

Citywide Impact: CitizensNYC’s impact spans neighborhoods in every corner of the city. CitizensNYC funded 334 projects

CitizensNYC 2025 GRANTMAKING



Total: \$1,211,500

- **COMMUNITY LEADERS GRANTS - \$850,500**
- **NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS GRANTS - \$156,000**
- **COLLABORATIVE IMPACT GRANTS - \$120,000**
- **ELLIOTT AWARDS & FELLOWSHIPS - \$85,000**

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CITYWIDE IMPACT

In 2025, CitizensNYC funded 350+ projects across more than 100 neighborhoods, which collectively served 250,000+ New Yorkers.

Initiatives address a range of impact areas:

- Education and Youth Development (30%)
- Health and Food Security (28%)
- Economic Security (15%)
- Arts and Culture (15%)
- Environment and Climate (12%)



across 100 New York City neighborhoods and all five boroughs in 2025. These projects directly impacted 250,000 New Yorkers and addressed a range of issues, including arts and culture, environment and climate, and health and wellness.

Continued learning and collaboration:

After 50 years of iterating, piloting, and scaling, CitizensNYC has begun to explore partnerships with national and local organizations to generate interest and support for the micro-grant model as a way to build strong, resilient, and healthy communities.

“What we are doing here in New York City can work in a lot of places,” Shapiro says. “Efforts should come from local communities, but CitizensNYC can help to support the work and help launch local initiatives by sharing our systems, our approaches, our evidence, and our lessons learned.”

Next Steps

CITIZENS NYC invites a range of stakeholders to learn more about its work and to partner to strengthen communities from the ground-up:

- Community members in New York City can [learn more about how to apply](#) for micro-grants from CitizensNYC to strengthen their communities.
- Visit CitizensNYC’s [website](#) to learn more about its approach, the [projects](#) and leaders that it supports, to [sign up for the organization’s newsletter](#), and to see the [latest news](#) from the organization.
- Learn more and get in touch with CitizensNYC’s grantee partners by sorting grantees by borough, neighborhood, issue area, and program on CitizensNYC’s [interactive map](#).
- New York-based philanthropic foundations, corporations, and nonprofit organizations can learn more about CitizensNYC’s [institutional partners](#) and reach out to CitizensNYC Vice President of Development Nick Haynes at nhaynes@citizensnyc.org for more information about how to partner to invest in the city’s hyperlocal leaders.
- Staff members of New York City agencies can reach out to CitizensNYC Chief of Strategy and Operations Michael Hickey at mhickey@citizensnyc.org to learn more about how they can leverage CitizensNYC’s master contract with the the City to get funding out quickly to community groups.
- National philanthropic foundations, universities, corporations, nonprofits and other groups can reach out to CitizensNYC Vice President of Programs José Dobles at jdobles@citizensnyc.org to learn more about how they can adapt CitizensNYC’s model for their own communities.

To learn more and contact Siegel Family Endowment, visit www.siegelendowment.org