For fiscal year 2019, NextFifty Initiative awarded a total of $3,662,512 in new grants to 63 organizations, and provided $4,785,523 in funding for multi-year grants awarded in 2017 and 2018. Of the new grants funded in 2019, we awarded $3,502,405 through our bi-annual General Funding program with the remaining $160,107 serving immediate needs through Community Response funding. Total investments as of December 2019 were $224,500,000.

NextFifty Initiative funds projects, ideas, and innovations that improve the lives and capacities of those who are in their second 50 years. We partner with organizations that aspire to eliminate aging stereotypes, pioneer technologies that bring vibrancy to life after 50, and transform our world for generations to come.
Making Mental Health an Easy Connection

Despite major progress in recent years, the stigma of seeking mental health help still lingers in some circles. The smaller the town, the harder it can be to keep assistance private.

Every rural Colorado therapist has stories about clients parking their car a block away to avoid becoming the topic of their neighbors’ gossiping. Long distances and lack of professional help also limit older Coloradans’ options — the same isolation that people love means there isn’t a counselor on every corner.

Tri-County Health Network, a San Miguel County nonprofit in southwestern Colorado, teamed with NextFifty Initiative to make mental health connections easier. The network identified needed telehealth technology and recruited therapists who could deliver video-based sessions from offices on the Western Slope, in metro Denver, or as far away as Oklahoma. Clients go to private rooms in local libraries or link up from home.

Demand has built up to many dozens of clients, and most participants report they feel telehealth sessions are just as productive as in-person counseling.

Paul Reich, behavioral health programs manager for Tri-County, said one image from 2019 has stayed in his head: a couple started coming to sessions at a remote office to speak by video to a counselor in Montrose. They drove separately, came in separately. After a few weeks, Reich noticed, “they arrived together, and afterward it was fun to watch them walk out and drive away, together.”

LEARN MORE: TCHNETWORK.ORG

Colorado Works to Transform Health Care Colorado has received a $65 million State Innovation Model (SIM) award to integrate behavioral and physical health care for 80 percent of Coloradans by 2019, with the goal of reducing barriers to making mental health care available in a variety of settings.

Source: Colorado Health Institute, Mental Health in Colorado, Five Things to Know
In addition to tracking county type, we also track the intent or sector of each award given. This is the breakdown for new grants in 2019:

- **$300,000** benefit access grants (2 grants)
- **$1,035,569** community life grants (17 grants)
- **$25,000** education grants (1 grant)
- **$90,380** elder justice grants (1 grant)
- **$775,464** health grants (16 grants)
- **$609,583** housing grants (7 grants)
- **$136,000** multi-generational grants (3 grants)
- **$97,892** research grants (1 grant)
- **$282,724** social service grants (6 grants)
- **$266,375** technology grants (6 grants)
- **$43,525** transportation grants (3 grants)

Residents over 50 in Colorado’s rugged Teller County love their mountain homes. But in terrain stretching from the western shoulders of Pike’s Peak to the legendary gold-and-gambling town of Cripple Creek, they can often use a little help getting around, especially when living with disabilities that require a wheelchair.

Teller County Senior Coalition was running two wheelchair-capable vans regularly along the demanding roads, but their schedule was filling up. County older adults asked for medical trips, grocery stops and rides to the local senior center for fulfilling meals and activities.

The coalition teamed up with NextFifty Initiative and the Colorado Department of Transportation to gather funding for a third van, a vehicle that’s now navigating steep drives and curvy commutes so that older residents don’t have to wait days for their ride.

“We were really struggling to meet their demands,” said coalition Executive Director Katherine Lowry. “It’s a tremendous gift.”

Early in 2020, as worries about COVID-19 kept many susceptible residents at home the van service became a food delivery vehicle for more than 30 people a day, not to mention a nutrition lifeline for countless companion pets.

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**In Isolated Terrain, a Ride is a Lifeline**

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Aging is a given. How we think and talk about aging, though, can be transformed. Rose Community Foundation sought a partnership with NextFifty Initiative to take “Changing the Narrative” workshops across the state. Changing the Narrative is a campaign to change how Coloradans think, talk and act in both aging and ageism.

Rose Community Foundation works in metro Denver, while NextFifty Initiative supports programs around the state, making for an ideal partnership. Changing the Narrative conducts in-person workshops, and is adding online webinars, that point out how framing, words, photographs, advertisements and more can shape our views of older Coloradans for better or worse.

The workshops offer alternatives to tired phrases like “silver tsunami” or “senior citizens,” to reframe people over 50 as assets and contributors. As the workshops progressed, said Changing the Narrative’s Janine Vanderburg, instructors heard over and over again about ageism in the workplace, and how it was harming both individuals and the progress of the companies they worked for. When Changing the Narrative wanted to pivot workshops toward workplace aging issues, NextFifty Initiative’s flexibility was an important boost, Vanderburg said. “Their response was, ‘Go.’”

Changing the Narrative directly influenced more than 900 people in 2019, and countless more through positive media coverage across the nation. “We’re blown away by the response and the enthusiasm and the ripple effect it has had,” said Therese Ellery, senior program officer at Rose Community Foundation. That includes tangible results, with organizations changing names of programs to be more age-friendly, rewriting their collateral and speaking differently to the public. “We’re actually seeing it happen on the ground.”

Staying Flexible While Changing the Narrative

LEARN MORE: CHANGINGTHENARRATIVECO.ORG

Learn more about ending age discrimination by visiting the Reframing Aging Quick Start Guide and Changing the Narrative in Colorado sites.
Tools to Link Older Coloradans to Social Supports

Knowing whether you might qualify for social supports like SNAP food benefits, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act or Low-Income Energy Assistance (LEAP) can feel like an unsolvable mystery. Many older Coloradans either give up or never even try. Collectively, Americans leave more than $60 billion on the table in crucial social service benefits by failing to apply, depriving themselves but also their surrounding communities of an important economic boost.

That mystery can be untangled. Benefits Data Trust (BDT), a Philadelphia nonprofit, partnered with NextFifty Initiative throughout 2019 to test long-researched tools and language to ease people over 50 through the overly complex benefits process. BDT works in three main channels: promoting direct signups, advising state and local leaders on reforming their systems, and gathering data to influence national policy in the direction of consumer ease and social benefit.

“We’ve helped return millions of dollars of benefits back to people who need them,” said BDT chief executive Trooper Sanders.

In training county social services and consumers themselves, BDT builds online tools providing clear steps and more inviting language. BDT has learned to reduce confusion by layering phrases such as “SNAP food assistance, formerly known as food stamps.” Behind the scenes, BDT has worked with Colorado and other states to link various forms of benefits data so that people can see quickly that if they already receive SNAP or LEAP, they might also qualify for Medicaid, or vice-versa.

Signup methods have gotten better, but are still too complex. BDT and NextFifty Initiative can see, though, that the new tools make an impact: with a goal of directly signing up 3,500 adults in the year, they actually connected nearly 4,200 older adults in Colorado.
Helping Caregivers Learn New Approaches

One of NextFifty Initiative’s primary, long-term goals is to break down unhelpful stereotypes about older Americans, and whenever possible replace them with something that can advance us all.

We partnered with the Validation Training Institute in 2019 because they do just that, challenge assumptions about people living with age-related dementia and offer concrete ideas for families stretched thin by caregiving. At one Colorado training session sponsored by the NextFifty Initiative grant, caregivers learned techniques in diffusing angry outbursts or repetitive behaviors that wear on families. After the session, a family member said, “I’m not afraid to be with her no matter what she’s dealing with or doling out.”

Others said that the Institute’s core value of “validating” rather than deflecting or contradicting loved ones’ perceptions had made their home lives less stressful and more successful. “It has made a huge difference in my relationship with my care recipient,” one workshop participant said. “I can meet her on a different level than any of the people around her. I truly feel connected and at peace.”

The Validation Training Institute intends to hone its training based on feedback and expand to more states in the future.

LEARN MORE: vvalidation.org

- Approximately 43.5 million people provide unpaid caregiving services to Americans of all ages, 60% of whom have a long-term health condition.
- As a group, caregivers provide $500 billion in economic value.
- 60% of caregivers are women; the average age of caregivers is 49, although 1 in 4 caregivers is part of the millennial generation.
- Caregivers derive satisfaction from better understanding their care recipient’s condition(s) and assuring the care recipient is well cared for; they experience a sense of purpose as a valued member of the care team.

From Our Leadership

This was a year of change and impact as NextFifty Initiative continued to support efforts towards improving the lives of older adults and their caregivers. We experienced growth and evolution, from a change in executive leadership, to the addition of staff and a board recruitment effort, to the creation of new funding opportunities. 2019 also marks the second year of our grant making; it’s gratifying and enlightening to look back at the wonderful projects and organizations we funded this year, and the impact they are having on our communities.

We learned in 2019 what it means to be adaptable as we listened to feedback from Rural Philanthropy Days participants regarding the needs of their communities. We created the Community Response Fund to offer financial support for projects that did not fit within our General Funding Guidelines. We hosted our first “Convene, Converse, and Connect” gathering of grantees to share experiences, solutions, and offer avenues to connect, network, and identify opportunities for collaboration. We cohosted a training of national funders interested in learning about Changing the Narrative and how they could implement the Reframing Aging Initiative in their own communities (please see page 5 for more details on Changing the Narrative).

We’re excited about what 2020 holds for NextFifty Initiative. This year presents new funding opportunities: the 2020 Census Outreach Fund, the COVID-19 Response Fund and our Collective Impact Challenge Grant (CICG). The COVID-19 Response Fund is our effort to support newly-challenged organizations in these extraordinary times. As we continue to encourage collaboration and the removal of silos in an effort to find solutions for issues related to aging, the CICG is our effort to encourage cross sector collaboration and leveraging of resources. Within our organization, we look forward to growing our team, exploring new partnerships and methods to promote collaboration and thought leadership exchange, and embarking on a new strategic planning process in the Fall.

We appreciate your commitment to improving the experience of aging for generations to come and are thankful for your support of NextFifty Initiative.