

Project aimed at 'rebuilding trust' after Charlotte protests boosts 20 charities

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Protestors block an intersection near the Transit Center as they march uptown in Charlotte, NC on Wednesday, September 21, 2016. The protestors were marching and rallying against CMPD officer Brentley Vinson's fatal shooting of Keith Lamont Scott on Tuesday evening at The Village at College Downs apartment complex in the University City area. JEFF SINER JSINER@CHARLOTTEOBSERVER.COM

A community fund established at United Way last fall in response to the civil unrest in uptown Charlotte has begun giving out money to charity programs that are dealing with the community's social and financial ills.

United Way of Central Carolinas and Foundation For The Carolinas announced \$481,517 in Unite Charlotte grants for 20 local nonprofits and neighborhood organizations today.

Led by initial grants from Wells Fargo and Duke Energy, the fund supports programs and organizations focused on community healing, rebuilding trust and creating opportunities in Mecklenburg County.

Grants ranged from \$2,500 to \$25,000, and were focus on programs in such areas as: job creation and entrepreneurial training for formerly incarcerated individuals; addressing gentrification of minority neighborhoods; and building trust between communities and police and justice systems. "After listening to people affected by Charlotte's lack of opportunity, Unite Charlotte is investing in ideas (that) address the community's issues in innovative ways," said a statement from Sean Garrett, United Way's executive director.

“Our region's challenges go back generations, so there is no quick fix, but it's a path forward in creating new solutions.”

Grant requests were submitted by 226 organizations, officials said. The applications were evaluated by a 12-member committee consisting of leaders from the faith, education and business communities, as well as community-based organizations and donors.

"Dealing with the issues of September forced us outside the box," said a statement from committee member Brandon Neal, a senior counsel for Wells Fargo. "We're planting seeds in neighborhoods that may have been overlooked in the past. We're also encouraging the grant recipients to collaborate strategically for a larger impact than they could achieve on their own."

Unite Charlotte's financial backers include Wells Fargo (\$250,000), Knight Foundation (\$150,000), Duke Energy (\$100,000), Walmart Foundation (\$50,000), Elevation Church (\$25,000), Foundation For The Carolinas (\$25,000), Charlotte WILL (\$10,000) and Clariant (\$10,000).

"We saw it as a strategic investment to help...address critical social and economic challenges in our community," said Jay Everette, Wells Fargo's senior community relations manager. "True social change takes time, but investments like these can be a great catalyst for driving meaningful first steps to address underlying and systemic issues like racism, access, equity and inclusion."

One outcome of United Way's community outreach around the Unite Charlotte fund was a request by 10 organizations to participate in a workshop called Dismantling Racism, facilitated by Race Matters for Juvenile Justice. The intensive two-day training helps participants understand and address systemic racism.

Unite Charlotte was conceived at the same time as Charlotte's Statement of Commitment, which publicly acknowledged racism's role in September's unrest. Given that, the 12-member committee agreed the workshop gets to the core of why the fund was created. The committee voted to invest \$195,270 for a Dismantling Racism workshop for 630 participants, a racial equity impact analysis and two, 2-day Resist Racism workshops for 80 local high school and college students.

Additional Unite Charlotte grants are expected to be deployed after second-round applications open this summer. In the interim, United Way and Foundation For The Carolinas will work with applicants from the first round who had promising ideas but didn't meet all the grant requirements.

Among the group's that received money:

Camino Community Development Corp., \$25,000	Refugee Support Services, \$13,310
City Start-Up Labs, \$25,000	Roots in the Community Market Foundation, \$2,500
CrossRoads Corporation, \$25,000	Southside Rides Foundation, \$25,000
Greater Charlotte LOC, \$5,000	The Light Factory, \$13,300
Janelle Dunlap, \$2,500	The Third Place, \$24,000
Justice Initiatives, \$10,000	Transcend Charlotte, \$5,000
Mecklenburg County Youth Coalition, \$18,137	West Boulevard Neighborhood Coalition, \$25,000
North End Community Coalition, \$10,000	West Side Community Land Trust, \$15,000
North End Partners, \$2,500	Young Black Males Leadership Alliance, \$25,000
Profound Gentlemen, \$15,000	Race Matters for Juvenile Justice, \$195,270

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