

# CIRCLE

## Two-Year Follow-Up

From Small Drops to Lasting Ripples:  
Findings from the 2025 Follow-Up Study



# Why **CIRCLE** Matters



# CIRCLE

was the “drop in the water”  
that set change in motion.

Reached all  
**64 COUNTIES**  
with short-term,  
equity-focused solutions.

One-time, flexible  
dollars invested in  
**226 PROJECTS**  
statewide.

**GAVE SPACE TO  
COMMUNITIES**  
for innovation during  
and after the pandemic.

# Purpose of the Follow-Up

*“The CIRCLE Grant was more than just financial support, it was a catalyst for permanent, systemic transformation”*

*– CIRCLE Grantee, ECE program, Denver County*

## **WHAT ENDURED?**

Which projects, practices, and outcomes lasted beyond June 2023?

## **WHY?**

What barriers and facilitators shaped sustainability?

## **WHO BENEFITS?**

Impacts at the individual, organizational, community, and system levels.



Methodology Snapshot

# RIPPLE EFFECT MAPPING

tracked how small changes spread outward across levels and time.

- SURVEY:** 136 grantees (62% response)
- RIPPLE EFFECT MAPPING:** 14 directors
- INTERVIEWS:** 13 directors



# Continuation at **2 YEARS**



**NEARLY HALF**  
(46%) of original projects are  
**STILL ACTIVE.**

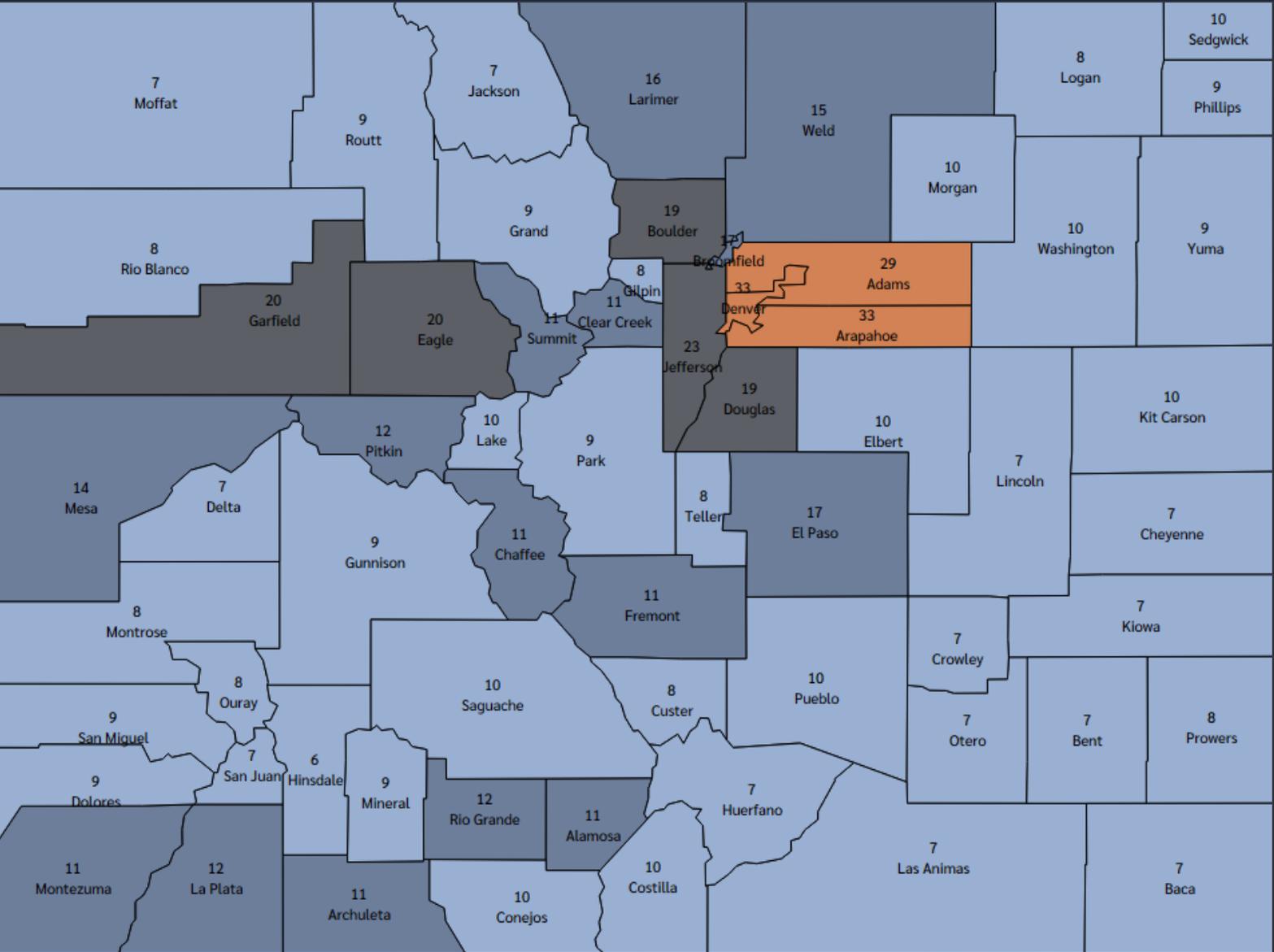


**OVER 53,000**  
additional children, families,  
and educators have been  
reached since the grant closed.

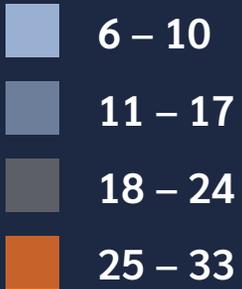


of survey respondents  
**SUSTAINED**  
their CIRCLE-funded work.





Number of  
**SUSTAINED  
 PROJECTS**  
 serving county (n=103)



Profile of a

# SUSTAINER

Community-  
Rooted  
Centers &  
Non-Profits

Moderate-Sized  
Awards  
\$26k-\$50k  
\$101k-\$150k

Metro Denver  
&  
SW Rural Hubs

Workforce  
&  
Access

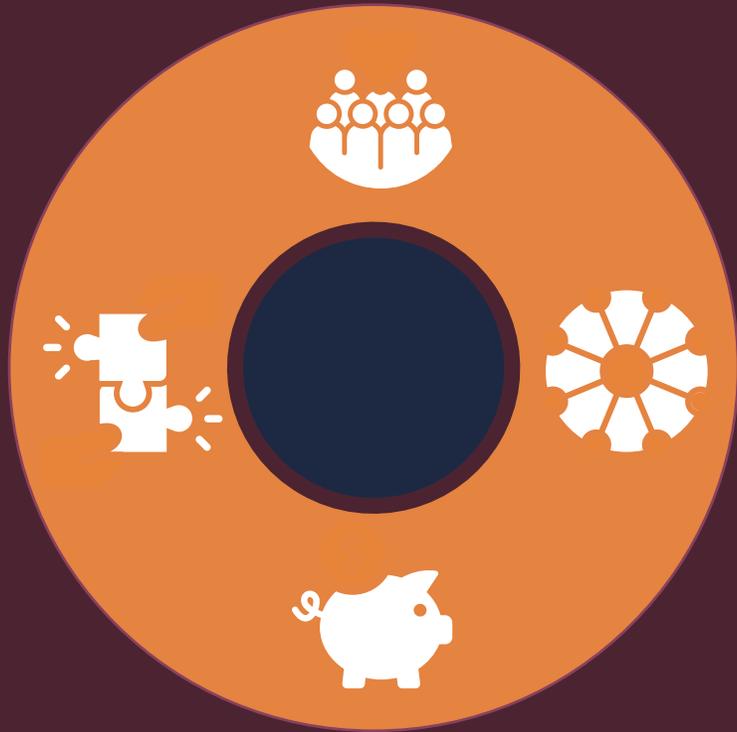
Flexible Care  
+ PT Staff

Embedded &  
Diversified

Serves  
Preschool,  
ECE Pros,  
Infant/Toddlers

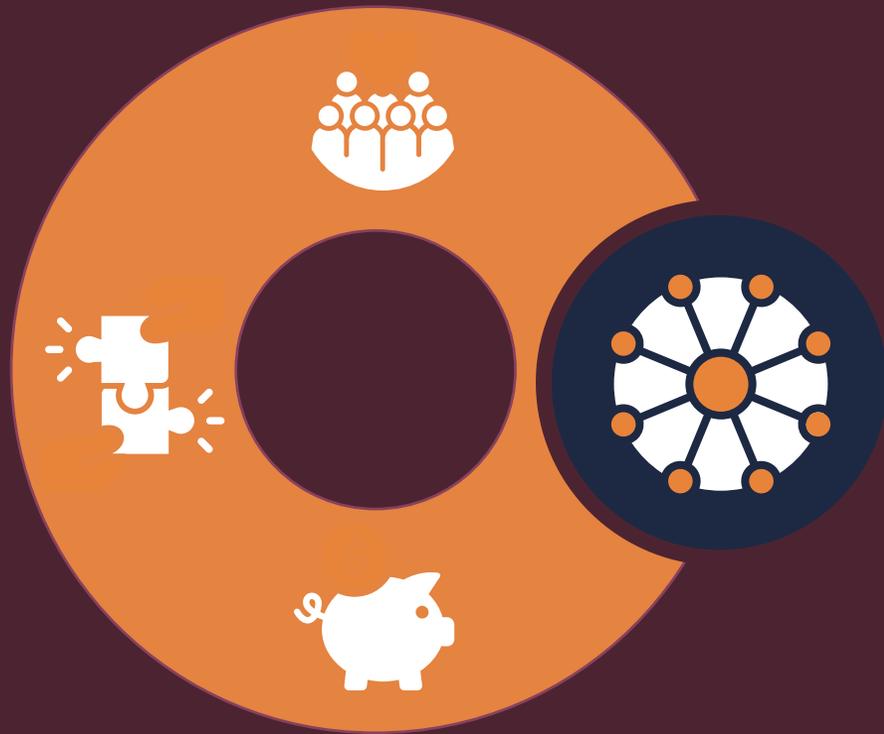
Growing  
Footprint





# 4 Core Strategies that stick





## 4 Core Strategies that stick

### Embedding Within Existing Structures

The most common approach, used by 68% of sustainers, involved folding CIRCLE activities into regular budgets, staffing plans, or service routines.





## 4 Core Strategies that stick

### Securing Additional Funding

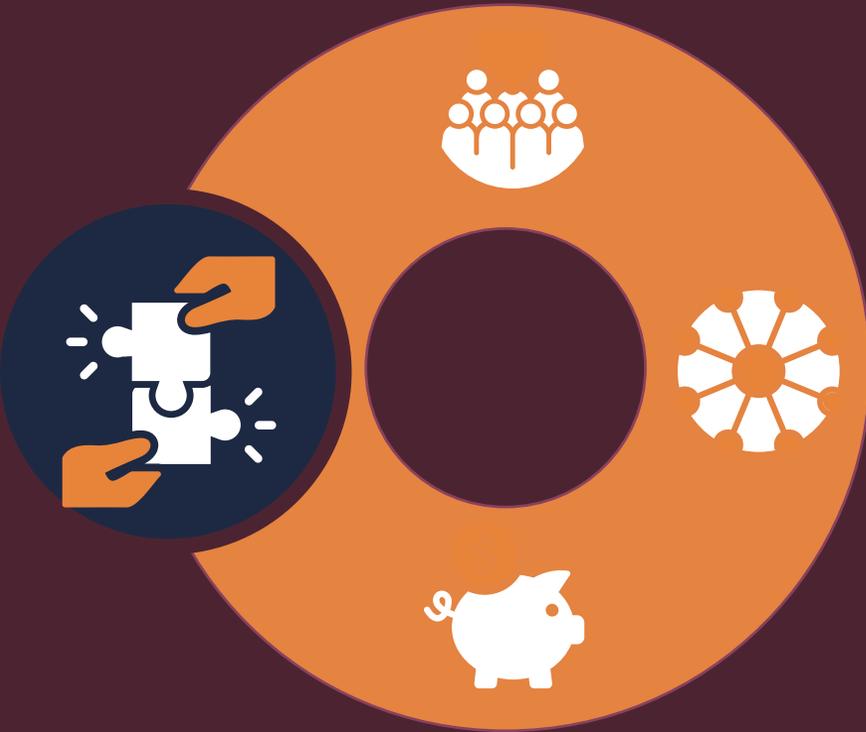
Used by 40%, this included bringing in new grants or revenue streams.

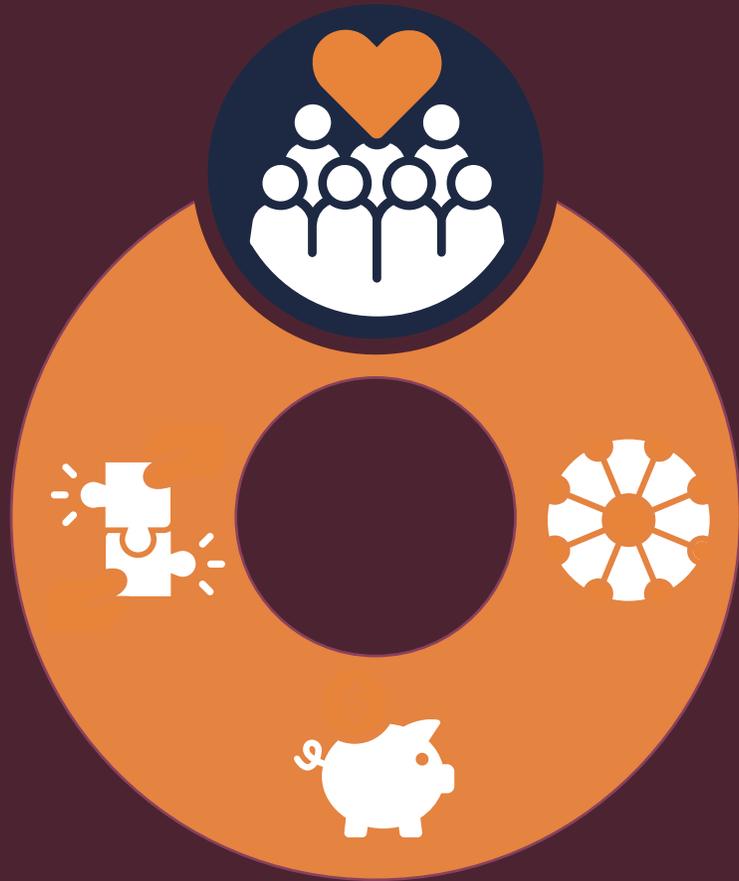


## 4 Core Strategies that stick

### Establishing Formal Partnerships

Selected by 35%, often through memorandums of understanding (MOUs) or joint ventures that helped share resources or responsibility.





## 4 Core Strategies that stick

### Leveraging Community Support

22% of sustainers tapped in-kind help, volunteers, or local fundraising efforts.





## **EMBEDDING**

creates stability

## **LAYERING**

expands reach



Ripple Effect

# IRIPPLE PATH

start with people

grow into assets

shift policy





## **INDIVIDUAL**

85% report child, family, or staff gains.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL**

75% saw shifts in operations, mindset, or capacity.

## **COMMUNITY**

66% reported collaborative programs and service growth.

## **SYSTEMS**

~50% pointed to new policies, statewide tools, or public investments.



# Community Capitals in Action

## **HUMAN & SOCIAL CAPITAL**

New skills, networks, family advocacy

## **BUILT & FINANCIAL CAPITAL**

Outdoor classrooms, apprenticeship registries, blended funding pools

## **CULTURAL & POLITICAL CAPITAL**

Bilingual practice, new rule changes



# Equity in Motion

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## **LANGUAGE JUSTICE**

Interpreter stipends,  
bilingual CDA cohorts,  
multilingual libraries

## **FINANCIAL INCLUSION**

Micro-loans, tax-credit  
coaching to reduce  
educator stress

## **SMART INFRASTRUCTURE**

Mobile classrooms,  
nature-play yards,  
substitute-matching app

## **POLICY VOICE**

CIRCLE data used in  
hearings, councils,  
and task forces



# Lessons for Funders

## **GROWTH BEATS SURVIVAL**

Over half of sustainers expanded services.

## **RELATIONSHIPS UNLOCK RESOURCES**

Local and philanthropic dollars flowed through trust.

## **GLIDE-PATH**

Support 12–24 months after grants can make the difference.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Partnerships build momentum (65% cite as top resource).



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **FUND A SHORT RUNWAY POST-GRANT**

to lock in roles and scale success.

## **PAIR DOLLARS WITH DEMAND-DRIVEN TA**

for fundraising, data, and collaboration.

## **FUND BY RIPPLES, NOT THE CALENDAR—**

support projects when they demonstrate outward impact.

## **KEEP THE INNER RINGS STRONG**

(relationships, language access, embedded coaching)  
so outer ripples can grow.



CIRCLE proved that  
small drops can make

# **DURABLE RIPPLES**





# COLORADO'S CHALLENGE NOW:

Carry those ripples all the way to shore



**STABLE EDUCATORS**



**RELIABLE CARE**



**BETTER STARTS FOR CHILDREN STATEWIDE**





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# About Us



Marzano Research is a women-owned small business and Certified Benefit Company dedicated to working with educators and system leaders to learn, evolve, and thrive. Based in Denver, CO and Portland, OR, we offer sophisticated education research and consulting capabilities with a collaborative, small-business approach.

**Addressing our partners' challenges and priorities through:**

