Collaborators Consulting Group

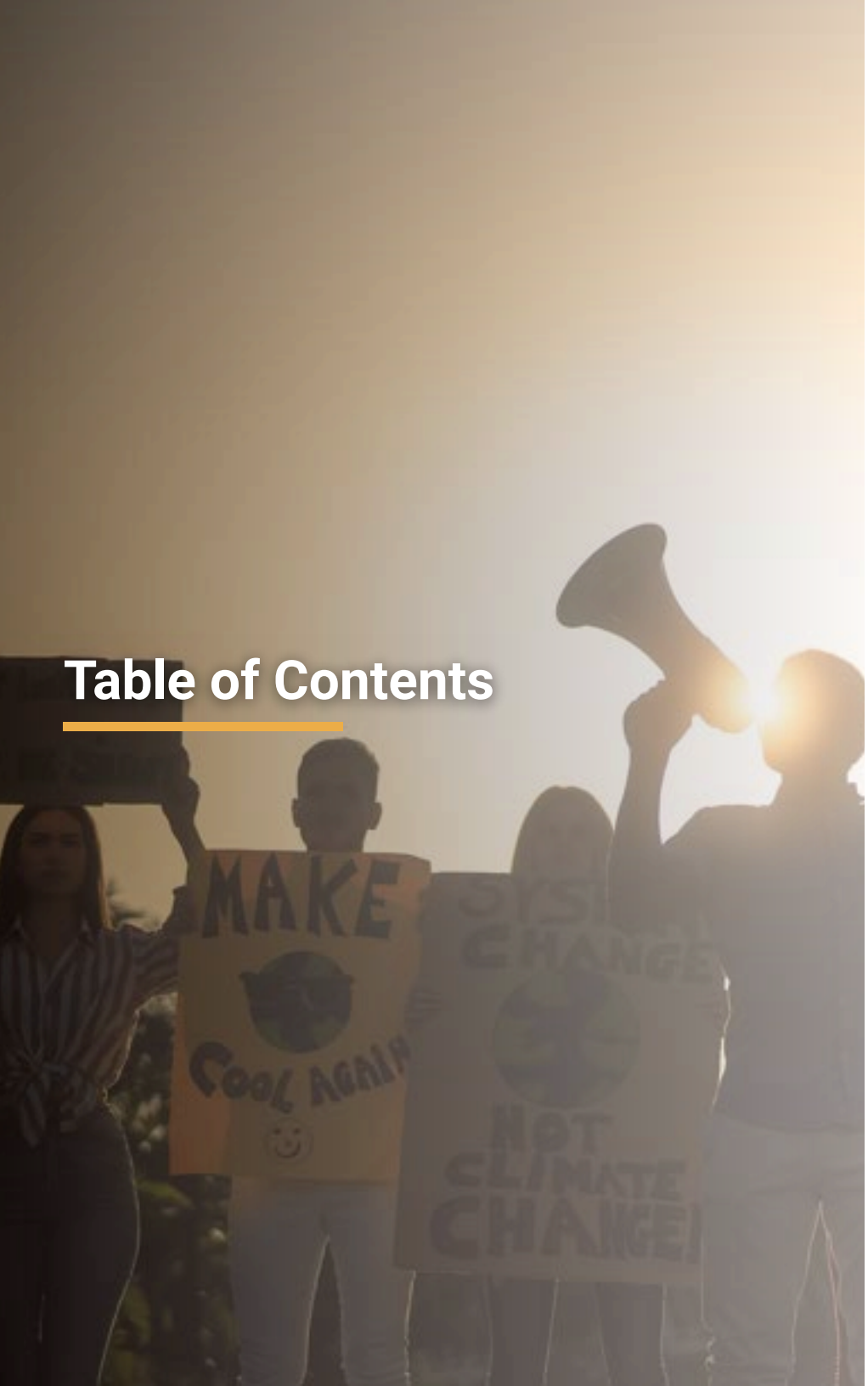
EPSA
Engagement, Power, & Social Action Research Team

Allegany Franciscan Ministries
A Member of Trinity Health

Rooted in Relationship, Growing Toward Justice

Evaluation Activities and Key Learnings from the First Year of the Climate Justice & Care for Creation Initiative FY25

August 2025



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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Evaluation

The 2024–2025 evaluation of the Climate Justice & Care for Creation (CJCC) initiative was designed to generate early insights that could inform strategy, strengthen relationships, and support shared learning across Allegany Franciscan Ministries, its grant partners, and the broader climate justice ecosystem in Florida. Rather than measuring outcomes or assessing performance, the evaluation focused on understanding how the initiative is taking shape, how Allegany's values are being experienced, and what early patterns, needs, and opportunities are emerging. The work was grounded in a developmental, utilization-focused approach and guided by Allegany's commitment to learning first.

Background on the CJCC Initiative

Launched in 2024, the CJCC initiative is Allegany Franciscan Ministries' first formal investment in climate justice. The initiative supports organizations working at the intersection of extreme heat, climate gentrification, housing, and coalition-building.

In its first year, Allegany awarded over $1.28 million in flexible grants to 31 organizations across Florida, with a focus on groups led by and serving Black, Indigenous, Latinx, LGBTQ+, immigrant, and differently abled communities.

CJCC is rooted in the belief that those most affected by climate injustice are also best positioned to lead change. The initiative emphasizes relationship-centered philanthropy, spiritual grounding, and systemic equity.

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation was guided by the Trust-Based Framework for Learning & Evaluation in Philanthropy, which includes three interconnected learning frames:

- **Learning Frame A: Accountability** – How are Allegany's values showing up in practice, and how are they experienced by grant partners
- **Learning Frame B: Decision-Making** – How well is Allegany supporting its nonprofit partners in achieving their goals
- **Learning Frame C: Long-Term Impact** – How is the initiative contributing to systemic change over time

This year's evaluation focused primarily on Learning Frames A and B, offering insights into values, relationships, grantmaking practices, and partner progress. At the same time, it helped establish a strong foundation for future work under Learning Frame C by identifying early signs of momentum and opportunities to improve data collection around outcomes and ecosystem-level impact.

Each learning frame includes a set of key evaluation questions, which are explored in detail in the full report.

Data were collected through surveys, in-depth interviews with grant partners, document and meeting review, and observation. Data collection and analysis were systematic and intentional. Qualitative data were thematically coded in Dedoose using a hybrid approach that combined deductive codes aligned with the evaluation questions and inductive codes grounded in partner experiences. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using SPSS to support triangulation and highlight patterns across the cohort. The evaluation prioritized accessible methods that elevated partner voice and supported real-time learning.

Key Findings

Allegany's values are widely felt and deeply appreciated
Grant partners consistently described Allegany as values-aligned, relationship-centered, and courageous in its funding approach. They felt seen, trusted, and affirmed, often in contrast to more transactional funder relationships.

Flexible funding enabled adaptation, responsiveness, and real progress
Partners used CJCC funding to strengthen internal capacity, deliver direct support, and advance advocacy efforts. All partners reported making progress toward their goals, and many exceeded expectations despite limited resources and challenging conditions.

Trust was built and sustained through consistency, care, and responsiveness
Strong relational practices, including regular communication, flexibility, and personal engagement, helped build trust over time. A few newer partners noted challenges connecting, which highlighted the importance of clear onboarding and consistent staffing.

Non-financial supports were meaningful but not always accessible
Partners appreciated offerings such as wellness grants, convenings, and visibility opportunities, but some were unsure how to access them or learned about them too late. Many expressed a desire for (more) access to peer learning, funder connections, research expertise, communications guidance, and evaluation support.

Short-term, modest grants limited the scope and scale of what was possible
While partners valued the initial investment, many noted that the grant size and timeline limited their ability to plan long-term, scale strategies, or fully document results. Several had to pause or reduce parts of their intended work.

Cross-Cutting Insights

Across the findings, a central theme emerged: values-based philanthropy is not only possible, it is working. Allegany's commitments to care, equity, and trust are being experienced in meaningful ways. At the same time, partners are asking for deeper, more consistent support, not only to sustain their work but to help build a more connected and resilient climate justice ecosystem across Florida. Strategic clarity, increased resourcing, and intentional infrastructure will be important for building on this foundation.

Looking Ahead

As the initiative enters its next phase, the evaluation will begin preparing for deeper inquiry under Learning Frame C, which focuses on long-term outcomes and systemic impact. This will involve more consistent and systematic documentation of grant partner activities, outputs, and outcomes, along with clearer tracking of Allegany's broader ecosystem-building strategies. These efforts will help assess how CJCC is contributing to durable, community-rooted change.

At the same time, the evaluation will continue to monitor values alignment and relational trust under Learning Frame A, and work to strengthen learning systems under Frame B. The foundation established in this first year, grounded in trust, care, and strategic flexibility, positions the initiative to deepen its impact, expand its reach, and support long-term climate justice efforts across Florida.

Recommendations

Grantmaking Approach	• **Continue** offering flexible, relationship-centered grantmaking that trusts partners to define success • **Consider** increasing the size and duration of grants to better match the scale and complexity of climate justice work • **Ensure** that supplemental supports, such as wellness grants, convening invitations, and visibility opportunities, are accessible to all organizations that want or need them
Support Beyond the Check	• **Offer** targeted non-financial supports that reflect the full range of needs expressed by grant partners, and ensure these opportunities are clearly communicated and equitably available • **Tailor** capacity-building and technical assistance to reflect the specific needs and identities of diverse organizations • **Maintain** the spirit of care, responsiveness, and relationship that partners have come to value in Allegany's approach
Evaluation and Learning	• **Strengthen** shared expectations around documentation of grant partner activities, outputs, and outcomes • **Respond** to specific learning and evaluation needs by supporting partners with optional and accessible tools and resources • **Clarify** what constitutes meaningful progress or learning within the initiative so that partners feel supported in interpreting success
Partner Experience and Equity	• **Prioritize** differentiated support for smaller, newer, and grassroots organizations • **Adapt** onboarding and communication processes to support continuity, especially during staff transitions or initiative growth • **Ensure** equitable access to convenings, learning spaces, and storytelling opportunities across the full cohort
Field Leadership and Ecosystem Strategy	• **Continue** modeling values-based, courageous philanthropy in a politically challenging environment • **Explore** opportunities to align with other funders, intermediaries, and climate networks in ways that expand support for partners and reduce duplication • **Leverage** Allegany's credibility and platform to amplify partner stories, strategies, and solutions across the field

"Praised be You, my Lord,
through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit
with colored flowers and herbs."

Canticle of the Creatures
St. Francis of Assisi

Introduction

Background on the Climate Justice & Care for Creation Initiative

The Climate Justice and Care for Creation (CJCC) initiative is a long-term strategic effort launched in 2024 by Allegany Franciscan Ministries (Allegany) to address the effect of climate change on communities of color and other historically marginalized communities and to protect people and our common home.

Allegany acknowledges the ongoing marginalization and disenfranchisement of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ populations, and people with disabilities, and the disproportionate impact of climate change on these communities.

For Allegany to create meaningful change, their efforts prioritize these groups, their neighborhoods, leaders, and geographies. Climate justice advocates for solutions that address the disproportionate climate impacts on people of color, women, people with disabilities, people who are economically poor, and those who live in under-resourced neighborhoods and communities.

Focus Areas and Strategic Priorities for Cycle 1

May 2024–June 2025

The launch of the CJCC initiative in 2024 marked Allegany's first formal investment in climate justice. Grounded in an initial theory of change, Allegany identified a set of preconditions - early, necessary shifts - that they believed would help lay the foundation for long-term climate justice outcomes in Florida. These preconditions informed the strategy for the first grant cycle.

Cycle 1 grants were meant to focus on three priority areas that align with the early preconditions in the theory of change:

1. Educate workers, employers, and the community about the effect of extreme heat on people who work outdoors
2. Educate people about climate gentrification and how it affects low-income communities and communities of color
3. Develop coalitions that address the effect of extreme heat or climate gentrification

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Description of CJCC pulled from Allegany Franciscan Ministries Climate Justice and Care for Creation Grants FY25-Proposal

Each of these focus areas reflects a strategic entry point for building the capacity, connection, and awareness needed to advance climate justice over time. Equity was central to the initiative, with an emphasis on supporting organizations led by and serving BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and differently abled communities.

Rather than making large investments in a few organizations, Allegany deliberately chose to fund a broad and diverse cohort of partners with relatively modest grants. This was a strategic decision rooted in several key considerations. First, Allegany aimed to move resources quickly into the field to begin addressing urgent climate justice issues. Second, as a new funder in this space, Allegany viewed the initial year as an opportunity to get to know the landscape of climate justice actors in Florida (i.e., who was doing the work, in what ways, and where).

This learning orientation was supported by the work of the initiative's Learning & Evaluation Team (L&E), who authored this report. In the year leading up to and throughout the initiative's first year, the team conducted a statewide landscape analysis and social network mapping process. These efforts were intentionally designed to align with Allegany's strategy and values.

The landscape analysis helped ensure this grant opportunity reached a wide range of organizations already engaged in climate justice work. Meanwhile, the network mapping was designed to inform future-year investment decisions by identifying where key actors were working, how they were connected, and where there were both hubs of activity and gaps in capacity or connection.

By issuing a call for Letters of Intent (LOIs), Allegany cast a wide net to surface a range of organizations and projects. The goal was not only to fund good work, but to listen and learn alongside partners in order to refine and sharpen their approach in future years. This intentional "wide funnel" approach was intended to lay the groundwork for deeper philanthropic relationships, more targeted investments, and a more informed strategy over time. In future cycles, these targeted investments were expected to take the form of larger grants to a smaller number of key climate justice actors positioned to drive systemic change.

This initial phase was designed as both an investment and a learning opportunity, setting the stage for deeper, more strategic action in subsequent years of the initiative.

Overview of the First CJCC Cohort

The inaugural cohort launched in May 2024 and included **31** grant partners working across Florida to advance climate justice. Over the **~one-year grant period**, Allegany awarded a total of **$1.28 million** in funding, with grants ranging from **$2,500** to **$130,000**. While the competitive process offered awards ranging from $10,000 to $40,000, some pre-existing partners received larger grants, and a few others received smaller amounts via Allegany's impact grants fund. On average, partners received approximately **$40,046** to support work aligned with the initiative's key focus areas: extreme heat, climate gentrification, housing, and coalition building.

Grant partners were largely concentrated in the Miami, Orlando, and Tampa areas, with one based in North Florida.

Grant partner projects and strategies varied widely and included education and advocacy, direct service, cultural organizing, policy engagement, and movement infrastructure.

See Appendix A for a complete listing and more information on FY25 grant partners.

Grant Period

May 2024 — June 2025

31
Grant recipients

$1,281,500
Total funds distributed

Distribution of Funds

Min	Average	Max
$2,500	$40,046	$130,000

Geographic Representation

Grant partners were primarily located across Central and Southern Florida and tended to be clustered in the greater Miami, Orlando, and Tampa areas. One partner was located in North Florida (Gainesville). While these partners collectively served all Florida counties, the top counties served by grant partners were Miami-Dade, Hillsborough, and Orange Counties.

Climate Justice Focus Areas

- Extreme Heat
- Pollution
- Climate Gentrification/Housing
- Extreme Weather/Storm Intensity
- Flooding

Interventions & Strategies

- Community Eduction /Raising Awareness
- Community Organizing
- Policy Advocacy
- Civic/Community Engagement
- Community Building & Leadership Development
- Mutual Aid/Disaster Response
- Direct Services

Evaluation Partnership: From Strategic Support to Strategic Learning

Collaborators Consulting Group

Before the formal launch of the CJCC initiative, Collaborators Consulting Group (CCG), in partnership with the Engagement, Power, and Social Action (EPSA) research team from the University of Miami, was engaged as Allegany's learning and evaluation (L&E) partner to support early strategy development and decision-making. In this foundational phase, we conducted literature reviews, supported the development of an early-stage theory of change, and began mapping climate justice actors across Florida. By identifying who was doing what, where and with whom, we aimed to inform Allegany's investment strategy. This work was not evaluative in nature but designed to help lay the groundwork for an initiative rooted in community context and systems understanding.

When Allegany launched the first cohort of CJCC grant partners in 2024, our role shifted to focus more directly on evaluation. We worked with Allegany to select a learning framework that aligned with their values and approach, and supported them in identifying focus areas for evaluation.

Together, we co-developed a set of key evaluation questions and designed feasible, values-aligned methods for answering them. Throughout this process, we prioritized minimizing the burden on grant partners while ensuring the information gathered would be useful for reflection and decision-making.

This report presents findings from the first year of formal evaluation activities and reflects the broader purpose of our partnership, to support shared learning, adaptation, and equity-centered strategy over time.

Acknowledgement of Communities & Partnerships

We offer our deep gratitude to the CJCC grant partners, whose time, energy, and expertise have not only driven powerful climate justice efforts in their communities but also strengthened this evaluation. We recognize the many demands these partners face, and we are especially thankful for their openness in sharing experiences and insights throughout the learning process. We also honor the communities they serve, who often bear the greatest burdens of climate change and environmental injustice, yet remain at the forefront of resilience, advocacy, and solutions.

We are equally grateful to the leadership and staff of Allegany for being true collaborators. Their curiosity, humility, and commitment to shared learning have shaped every aspect of this work. We also thank the Allegany Board of Directors for their interest, thoughtful input, and willingness to engage deeply with this evolving initiative.

This report reflects the collective efforts of many. It was developed by members of the evaluation team, including Collaborators Consulting Group and the Engagement, Power, and Social Action Research Team at the University of Miami. We are honored by the trust extended to us and grateful for the opportunity to support this work in partnership.

Purpose & Key Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of this first year of the CJCC evaluation was to generate early insights that could inform strategy, strengthen relationships, and support shared learning among Allegany staff, grant partners, and the broader climate justice ecosystem.

Guiding Principles

The evaluation is grounded in Allegany Franciscan Ministries' commitment to learning first, accountability and stewardship, and transparent communication about results and impact. It also reflects CCG's approach to evaluation as a participatory, equity-driven, and utilization-focused process.

Evaluation Focus Areas

Guided by the *Trust-Based Framework for Learning & Evaluation in Philanthropy**, the evaluation prioritized partner voice and relational accountability. Specifically, the evaluation focused on two key areas of learning. First, it explored how Allegany's values are being embodied and experienced in practice, with particular attention to trust-building, relational dynamics, and values alignment.

Second, it documented what grant partners are doing with CJCC funding, what challenges they encountered, and what is working well on the ground in their projects and communities. It also examined how Allegany's support structures contributed to or constrained progress toward project goals.

The findings are intended to inform reflection and decision-making by Allegany staff, surface opportunities for adaptation and alignment, and strengthen shared understanding across the CJCC community. Because CJCC represents an emerging strategic priority for Allegany, this first year of evaluation also lays the groundwork for further developing (and refining) both their external and (emerging) internal theory of change, designing metrics for initiative strategies, and establishing a long-term learning and reporting system for capturing impact.

*A Trust-Based Framework for Learning & Evaluation in Philanthropy: 3 Strategies to understand your impact through trust-based learning. This framework was created by the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project in partnership with the Center for Evaluation Innovation.

What This Year's Evaluation Was Not Designed to Do

This year's evaluation was not intended to assess outcomes or measure impact. While it documents progress made by grant partners during the first year of implementation, it does not evaluate the effectiveness of individual projects or campaigns.

As described above, the intention was to understand how the initiative is taking shape, how values are being experienced, and what early patterns and tensions are emerging.

In keeping with Allegany's commitment to learning first, the evaluation emphasizes reflection over judgment and is meant to guide thoughtful adaptation rather than performance assessment. This first phase of evaluative work is laying the groundwork for future exploration of long-term outcomes and impact, which is the focus of the third learning frame in our evaluation framework (see below).

- ✗ Assess outcomes or systemic impact
- ✗ Evaluate the effectiveness of individual projects or campaigns
- ✓ Understand initiative development
- ✓ Understand how values are experienced
- ✓ Identify early patterns and tensions that emerged
- ✓ Lay the ground work for future exploration

Learning & Evaluation Framework

Evaluation of the Climate Justice & Care for Creation initiative is guided by the *Trust-Based Framework for Learning & Evaluation in Philanthropy*, which emphasizes learning that is grounded in values, relationships, and mutual accountability. Rather than centering on proof of impact alone, the framework invites reflection on how well funders are showing up in alignment with their values, supporting partners in meeting their goals, and contributing to long-term, systemic change. It prioritizes partner voice, responsiveness, and the lived experience of trust.

This approach is organized around three learning frames: **Accountability**, which explores how Allegany's values and relationships are experienced by grant partners; **Decision-Making**, which supports strategic choices that strengthen the nonprofit ecosystem; and **Long-Term Impact**, which considers how funding contributes to systemic change over time.

Learning Frames:

2024-2025 Key Evaluation Questions

Each learning frame includes its own set of key evaluation questions (KEQs) co-developed by Allegany and the L&E Team to ensure relevance and usefulness for both reflection and strategic decision-making.

Learning Frame A: Accountability

- KEQ A1: In what ways does the Climate Justice & Care for Creation initiative embody Allegany's values?
- KEQ A2: How are grant partners experiencing these values?
- KEQ A3: (How) Has Allegany built trust and relationships with grant partners? What factors increase and/or decrease grantee partners' trust in Allegany? What does trust look like to partners?
- KEQ A4: What do grant partners value most about their partnership with Allegany?

Learning Frame B: Decision-Making

- KEQ B1: What is the nature of support provided to grant partners?
- KEQ B2: How are grant partners using grant funds? What has been accomplished with those funds?
- KEQ B3: To what extent were grant partners able to make progress in achieving their goals?
- KEQ B4: What role has Allegany played in helping grant partners achieve their goals? What actions of Allegany have served as deterrents to achieving goals?
- KEQ B5: What more can be done to help grant partners achieve their goals?
- KEQ B6: What lessons have been learned in regards to grant-funder relationships and grant partners' individual projects/programs?
- KEQ B7: In what ways, if any, have grant partners' thinking shifted/evolved/changed regarding how to accomplish CJ change goals?

Learning Frame C: Long-Term Impact

- TBD FY26+

Methodology

Data Sources & Method of Collection

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data were systematically collected through multiple methods to support a well-rounded understanding of the first year of the initiative and grant partner experiences.

Primary Data

Climate Justice Stakeholder Survey (CJSS - B) (August–November 2024)

CJSS was administered online via Qualtrics but a structured interview format was also offered to increase accessibility

In-depth Interviews (May–June 2025)

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, recorded with permission, and transcribed

Meeting Notes

An L&E team project coordinator attended partnership meetings and recorded notes

Observations

The L&E team served as participant-observers

Secondary Data

Allegany & CJCC Artifacts

Websites

Grant Materials

Application Forms

Grant Partner Proposals

Who Participated

28 out of 31 grant partners and **13** non-grant partners completed the 2024 Climate Justice Stakeholder Survey (CJSS-B)

25 out of 31 grant partners participated in end-of-year interviews

How Data Were Analyzed

Qualitative Data

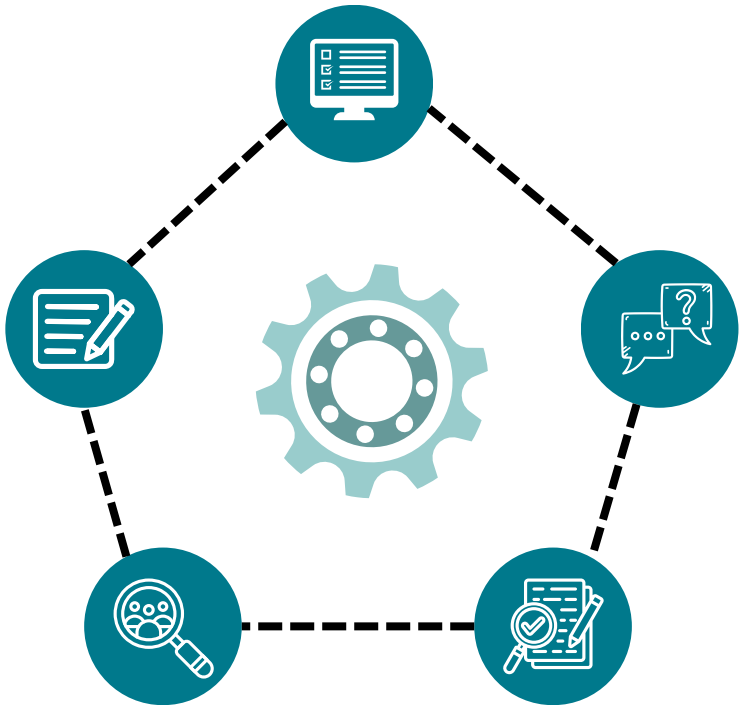
Qualitative data were analyzed using a general thematic approach. The evaluation team used Dedoose to support a systematic coding process, applying a hybrid strategy that combined deductive codes aligned with the key evaluation questions and inductive codes that emerged directly from participants' language and experiences. Codes were then grouped into themes through an iterative process of discussion and refinement. The team also looked across organizations to identify areas of commonality and variation.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. This included calculating frequency distributions, averages, and response patterns across organizations. These findings were used to contextualize and complement the qualitative themes, and to highlight areas where survey insights aligned with or diverged from interview narratives. For closed-ended questions that grant partners responded to twice, first in the CJSS-B and second in the end-of-year grant partner interviews, summary data such as frequency distributions and averages were descriptively compared across the two time points. These were not analyzed to assess change over time, but rather to explore general response patterns between the two time points, and should not be interpreted as changes over time.

Triangulation Across Data Sources

To strengthen the credibility and depth of the findings, the evaluation used triangulation. This means that insights were drawn from multiple sources, including **survey data**, **interviews**, **documents and artifacts**, **meeting notes**, and **general observational data** to examine how different perspectives confirmed, complemented, or added complexity to one another. For example, data from the Climate Justice Stakeholder Survey helped identify what organizations believe builds trust with funders, while interview data captured how trust was actually experienced throughout the grant period. This layering of data provided a more nuanced understanding of what is working, what needs attention, and how Allegany's values are showing up in practice.



Considerations for Interpreting the Findings

As with any evaluation involving funder–grant partner relationships, there are limitations and contextual factors that may have influenced the data collected and how findings should be interpreted. The following considerations are important for understanding how themes in the next section were shaped.

Power dynamics and funding context: Allegany is the funder of the initiative, and many participating organizations were navigating a politically restrictive and economically challenging environment at the time of data collection. Interviews were conducted while grant partners were awaiting decisions about future funding. Although participants were informed that Allegany would not have access to interview transcripts and that responses would not influence funding decisions, some organizations may have shaped their responses with the hope of maintaining a strong relationship with the funder.

Cumulative relationships with Allegany: Many interviewees had prior relationships with Allegany that extended beyond the CJCC initiative. As a result, their reflections often drew on broader experiences with the Allegany, not just their engagement with CJCC. While this context adds richness to the data, it may blur distinctions between the current initiative and earlier funding relationships.

Variation in participation in evaluation activities: Not all grant partners engaged equally in the evaluation process. Some completed the survey but did not participate in interviews, and others engaged more deeply in qualitative conversations than others. This uneven participation may have influenced the range and depth of perspectives represented in the findings.

Uneven access to CJCC initiative activities: Several key findings draw on shared experiences at CJCC events such as the SWOT Summit and Board Retreat. However, not all grant partners were able or invited to participate in these gatherings. As a result, some insights reflect the experiences of a more engaged or strategically selected subset of the network, which has implications for how broadly certain reflections or takeaways should be interpreted.

With these considerations in mind, the following sections present and discuss key findings from the evaluation of Cycle 1 of the CJCC initiative. Insights are organized by learning frame and its associated key evaluation questions and reflect the experiences, perspectives, and priorities shared by grant partners throughout the evaluation process.

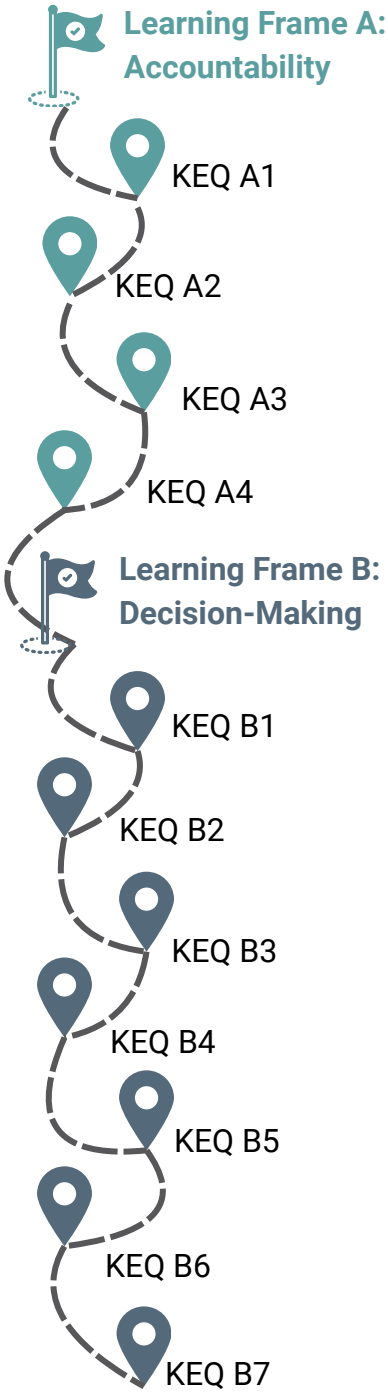
Zen Break

We want to acknowledge that this is a long report, and by this point, you've already covered a lot of ground. So before diving into the next phase of the story, we invite you to take a brief Zen Break.

This is a great moment to pause, stretch, and refill your coffee, or simply enjoy a moment of delight. Research shows that looking at images of baby animals can actually improve focus, support sustained attention, and reduce stress. So go ahead and give yourself permission to slow down for a minute. May we offer a photo of a bunny, puppy, or kitten?

When you're ready, the next section picks up with an overview of evaluation findings. Let's get back to learning!

Findings By Learning Frame



Given the interconnected nature of the evaluation's learning frames, some findings appear across multiple questions and are intentionally revisited to reflect their cross-cutting significance.

Learning Frame A: Accountability

The first set of key evaluation questions explore how Allegany's values are experienced and expressed through the Climate Justice & Care for Creation initiative. It examines both the perceptions of grant partners and how values are embedded in the initiative's design, strategy, and grantmaking practice.

KEQ A1: In what ways does the Climate Justice & Care for Creation initiative embody Allegany's values?

Allegany grounds its work in a set of core values that include reverence, justice, stewardship, integrity, safety, and a commitment to those experiencing poverty. These values reflect the organization's Catholic and Franciscan heritage and serve as guiding principles in both strategy and relationship-building. In interviews with CJCC grant partners, many of these same values surfaced through their reflections and lived experiences. Partners consistently described Allegany as a funder that leads with trust, care, spiritual grounding, and a strong sense of justice. The following section presents key themes drawn from qualitative analysis, illustrating how Allegany's values are experienced by grant partners and how they are perceived to be embodied in the CJCC initiative. The section concludes with a broader examination of how these values are reflected in initiative materials and how they align with the principles of Trust-Based Philanthropy. Some areas of tension are also discussed, where values and practices may not fully align.

Allegany's Values

Reverence: We honor the sacredness and dignity of every person.

Justice: We foster right relationships to promote the common good, including sustainability of Earth.

Stewardship: We honor our heritage and hold ourselves accountable for the human, financial and natural resources entrusted to our care.

Integrity: We are faithful to who we say we are.

Safety: We embrace a culture that prevents harm and nurtures a healing, safe environment for all.

Commitment to those experiencing poverty: We stand with and serve those who are experiencing poverty, especially those most vulnerable.

Grant Partners' Understanding of Allegany's Core Values

Grant partners identified a wide range of values they associate with Allegany, including justice, environmental stewardship, equity, faith, inclusion, engagement, dignity, care, trust, partnership, collaboration, compassion, and humanism. Many reflected that these values resonate deeply with the communities they serve. Several participants also connected these values to Allegany's Franciscan roots and spiritual foundation.

Some grant partners were familiar with Allegany's values because of past partnerships. Others, particularly newer partners, expressed some uncertainty about the full scope of Allegany's values but still recognized them through their experiences. For those with longer relationships, there was a shared sense that Allegany's values have been consistent over time. These partners also observed important shifts, such as Allegany's embrace of climate justice work, which they viewed as a meaningful evolution.

> *"When we first were funded by Allegany, climate was not part of their portfolio."*
>
> *"Seeing them move from no climate to including climate has been huge. It's something we've been trying to do with a lot of our funders."*

This shift was not perceived as a departure from Allegany's mission, but as a deepening of its commitment to justice.

"It was in climate justice, I mean. Nobody writes for justice. And to be able to put that front and center in your title—that tells you where you stand, because justice comes from a position of love."

Survey data collected early in the grant period helps contextualize the values partners later attributed to Allegany. Most grant partners reported being familiar with Allegany's values, and organizations overall expressed moderate familiarity with the principles of Trust-Based Philanthropy. When asked what they most value in a funding partner, respondents emphasized trust and transparency, alignment of mission and values, flexibility and support beyond funding, commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and long-term partnership. These same values appeared frequently in interviews, suggesting that what partners most hope for in a funder closely mirrors what they experienced in their relationship with Allegany.

Most Important Values in a Funding Partner

- Trust and transparency
- Mission and Values Alignment
- Flexibility and Support Beyond Funding
- Commitment to Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
- Collaboration and Partnerships
- Long-Term Commitment and Sustainability
- Autonomy and Respect for Independence

How Grant Partners Experienced Allegany's Values through the CJCC Initiative

Grant partners consistently shared that Allegany is not simply a funder, but a values-driven partner whose approach to climate justice reflects a deep commitment to people, community, and Earth. Through the initiative, Allegany's values are experienced as more than abstract principles. Partners see them in action across funding processes, relationships, and the initiative's overall design.

> *"Allegany practices what they preach as an organization. Their values are a lens across their grant applications, across the way they communicate with grantees, across the way they show up in community."*

Trust was named as one of the most powerful ways Allegany's values are embodied. Many grant partners described feeling seen, supported, and believed in, which they rarely experience in other funding relationships.

"One of the big ways they embody their values is that they really trust their partners. And I think that is worth its weight in gold. I know that they carefully vet and work with people that they believe in, but just the fact that they say, 'We believe in this work' is very, very inspiring and motivating. That's how they show up for me."

For some, this alignment was also deeply personal and mirrored the values of their own organizations.

> *"I think they completely align with us, because we also consider our organization a humanist organization."*

Others reflected on how the initiative connects Allegany's spiritual roots with its ecological and justice commitments.

> *"They're interested in the climate work, and I think what it means to approach this from the lens of caring for creation."*

> *"Allegany is Franciscan in its principles, and that has a lot to do with animals and the Earth and the poor, and uplifting and taking care of all of them through stewardship. I think those values are very apparent in their concentration on climate justice, because climate justice affects all of those things. And the justice piece is especially important, because climate change affects communities that are more vulnerable or marginalized."*

Alignment Between Stated and Experienced Values

A comparison of Allegany's stated values and those described by grant partners reveals a strong alignment, both in principle and in lived experience. Allegany formally names reverence, justice, stewardship, integrity, safety, and a commitment to those experiencing poverty as core values. Grant partners echoed many of these same values in their interviews, often without prompting or formal knowledge of their value statements, describing Allegany as rooted in justice, care, dignity, inclusion, environmental stewardship, and trust.

Concepts such as dignity, environmental stewardship, equity, trust, and relational care surfaced repeatedly in descriptions of how Allegany engages with its partners and shows up in the work. Even when partners did not name Allegany's values verbatim, they expressed a deep appreciation for how these values were reflected in the way Allegany builds relationships, structures funding opportunities, and shows up in community. For example, the value of *reverence* - honoring the sacredness and dignity of each person - resonates clearly in partners' observations of Allegany's trust-based approach and respectful engagement.

What emerged most clearly is that grant partners experience Allegany's values not as aspirational statements, but as consistent, embodied practices. Allegany's reverence for people and commitment to justice were seen in its trust-based approach, its willingness to grow into climate work, and its respect for community knowledge. The value of stewardship came through in the initiative's focus on ecological well-being and thoughtful resource investment. Partners noted that Allegany's relationships felt grounded in integrity, and that the organization consistently acts in alignment with what it says it believes. This coherence between values and behavior has strengthened trust and set the stage for deepened impact across the initiative.

How Allegany's Values Show Up in Strategy and Practice

Across multiple dimensions of the Climate Justice & Care for Creation initiative, Allegany's values are not only stated but actively embedded in design, decision-making, and implementation. Document review, evaluation team observations, and partner reflections reveal strong alignment between Allegany's values and the practices guiding the initiative's launch and operations.

Values Embedded in Strategy, Design, and Process

The initiative's purpose, framing, and funding structure reflect Allegany's longstanding commitments to justice, stewardship, and reverence. The decision to enter the climate justice space through a spiritual and equity lens, rooted in Catholic and Franciscan traditions, signaled a deepening of Allegany's mission rather than a shift away from it.

Justice and Equity in Framing and Priorities: The CJCC strategy explicitly defines climate justice as a response to structural inequities that increase climate vulnerability for marginalized communities. The initiative centers BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Indigenous, disabled, and economically marginalized people, directly aligning with Allegany's stated commitment to justice and those experiencing poverty.	*"This strategy focuses on groups historically excluded from decision-making and disproportionately affected by the climate crisis."*	Embodying Justice, Reverence, and Commitment to Those Experiencing Poverty
Stewardship and Integrity through Listening: CJCC priorities were shaped by listening to over 200 Floridians through community conversations, expert consultation, and environmental scans. This iterative, community-informed approach reflects a commitment to stewardship - not just of financial resources, but of community knowledge.	*"The current strategy is a result of what we heard through community conversations, environmental scans, and partner interviews."*	Embodying Stewardship, Integrity, and Reverence
Reverence and Trust in the Application Process: The two-stage application process included sample questions, optional verbal submissions, and relationship-centered check-ins. Language across materials emphasized learning with communities rather than extracting outcomes.	*"Applicants may submit a proposal in writing or share verbally with Allegany staff."*	Embodying Reverence, Safety, and Trust
Spiritual Framing and Cultural Safety: The initiative integrates Care for Creation as a sacred call - connecting ecological concern with social justice and healing. This framing resonated deeply with partners, especially those also rooted in faith or holistic traditions.	*"Care for Creation is a spiritual call that connects concern for the poor with ecological well-being."*	Embodying Safety, Reverence, and Stewardship

Many of these practices also reflect principles of Trust-Based Philanthropy (TBP), such as simplified applications, relationship-centered funding, and flexible reporting expectations. Allegany's values, particularly reverence, justice, stewardship, and integrity, closely align with TBP's emphasis on humility, co-creation, and shared power. Partners noted that Allegany "practices what they preach" and that funding relationships felt personal, non-transactional, and grounded in mutual respect.

Areas of Partial Alignment and Tension

While the initiative's structure broadly reflects Allegany's values, several areas of partial alignment or tension emerged. These do not diminish overall alignment but highlight opportunities for continued reflection and adaptation.

Stewardship vs. Short-Term Grant Size: Grant amounts were modest for the vast majority of partners with a grant period of about a year. While helpful for initiating work, several partners noted that this level of support may feel misaligned with the scale and complexity of systemic change being asked of them. Without sustained or multi-year investment, Allegany's stewardship may be constrained in practice.

"We expect to award 10–20 grants ranging from $10,000 to $40,000."

Tension between Stewardship and Scale of Investment

Integrity vs. Gaps in Evaluation Guidance and Support: Allegany's commitment to co-learning and flexible reporting was widely appreciated and reflects its values of trust and reverence. However, the absence of clear guidance or expectations around how grant partners should capture lessons learned, document progress, or engage in evaluation raised concerns for some. While the intent was to reduce burden - a thoughtful stance, especially given the modest size of grants - this approach also created a tricky dynamic. Without dedicated support or structured expectations, some organizations may not have fully seized the opportunity to use evaluation as a tool for internal learning and continuous improvement. Moreover, the initiative lacked a shared vehicle for grant partners to exchange lessons with one another, limiting the potential for collective insight. In short, a values-aligned desire to be flexible and non-intrusive may have inadvertently undercut the initiative's learning goals.

"Grantees will be asked to share lessons learned and updates via written or verbal reports."

Tension between Integrity/Trust and Gaps in Evaluation Infrastructure

Despite these few tensions, the overall alignment between Allegany's values, initiative strategy, and partner experiences remains strong. The CJCC initiative stands out as a model of values-based philanthropy that weaves spiritual grounding, community accountability, and systemic change into a cohesive approach. As one partner summarized:

> *"I feel like Allegany, more than any other funder we have, really has said, 'You're getting funded by us—this is not just an exchange. This is not transactional.'"*

What We Learned: Bringing Values to Life in the CJCC Initiative

The evidence suggests that Allegany is not only clear about its values, but that those values are deeply felt and recognized by its grant partners. Through both relational practices and intentional design choices, the CJCC initiative is widely perceived as a reflection of Allegany's core commitments to reverence, justice, stewardship, integrity, and care for those most impacted by systemic inequities. Grant partners described these values not as abstract ideals, but as principles consistently enacted through communication, funding processes, and community engagement.

While a few areas of tension emerged, these do not diminish the broader perception that Allegany is striving to live its values in thoughtful and evolving ways. In this first year, CJCC has shown that a values-based approach to philanthropy is not only possible, but powerful. It lays a strong foundation for continued trust, mutual learning, and deeper alignment in future cycles of the initiative.

KEQ A2: How Are Grant Partners Experiencing These Values?

While KEQ A1 focuses on how Allegany's values are reflected in the design and strategy of the CJCC initiative, this question centers on how those values are experienced in practice through the day-to-day interactions between Allegany and its grant partners. The findings below emphasize the relational nature of Allegany's engagement, highlighting how trust, care, and dignity are not only stated values but are actively felt and affirmed by those closest to the work.

How Allegany's Values Show Up in Strategy and Practice

Grant partners consistently described Allegany as a funder that makes them feel seen, respected, and deeply valued, not just for the work they do, but for who they are. This experience was rooted in the way Allegany staff interacted with partners: with humility, presence, and attentiveness. Many participants noted that Allegany's values, drawn from its Franciscan foundation, were clearly practiced rather than performatively stated. Partners felt that their autonomy and identities were honored, and that Allegany's support extended beyond professional expectations to include personal and organizational well-being.

> *"Allegany practices what they preach as an organization, and their values are a lens across their grant applications, across the way they communicate with grantees, across the way they show up in community."*

For many, this translated into tangible moments of care and inclusion, from the provision of wellness grants to small, thoughtful gestures that acknowledged their humanity.

> *"They listened, they heard, and they responded."*
>
> *"...they're faith based, but they're not pushing that. They're not requiring you to. I respect that very much."*

One partner reflected on how Allegany's care for staff well-being prompted new internal conversations about sustainability:

> *"The wellness grant that they offered during the process is a new way of thinking about our organization. Like, oh—taking care of your staff. Just very meaningful to me as someone who's been doing this work for almost 20 years, and is very tired."*

Others shared how they felt fully accepted without having to mask parts of their identity:

> *"As an LGBTQ organization, there's a lot of spaces that we show up in where there's a level of masking we have to do. From the conversations we had in Zooms and the interview process, we didn't have to water ourselves down at any point. That to me brought a lot of light. It made me happy."*

Another participant recalled Allegany's care for physical and emotional safety:

> *"When I attended everything with Allegany, they made sure that I got there safe. They checked in on me before and after. Did you make it home? Do you need a ride? We can get you Uber or we can carpool. Even in the car —put on your seatbelt. Part of the way of making sure that I was safe as a person, when we talk about justice, was making sure that my voice as a trans person was in those spaces."*

These moments reveal how Allegany's values are not only named but embodied, helping partners feel affirmed, cared for, and safe in relationship.

Beyond Transactional Support

Grant partners frequently emphasized that their relationship with Allegany felt relational rather than transactional. They described a funder that recognizes the people behind the work and cultivates partnerships grounded in care, empathy, and mutual respect. This was experienced not only through grants, but through consistent check-ins, values-aligned conversations, and shared humanity.

> *"They do a really good job of making those connections between their values, their mission, and their intentions."*

Even informal interactions were experienced as supportive and easeful, further reinforcing trust and relationship.

> *"It's very easy to just meet and chat with everybody and go, 'oh, here's an update. What do you think about that?' It's just easier when you have a personal relationship to have that conversation."*

Only one participant shared that a recent staff transition had temporarily disrupted their sense of connection. This comment underscores the importance of continuity in relationship-building and suggests that Allegany's relational approach is deeply tied to the consistency and presence of its team members.

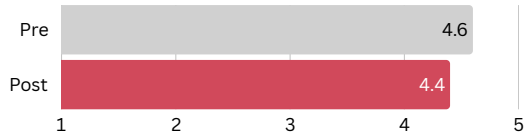
What We Learned: Experiencing Values Through Relationship

Grant partners' reflections make clear that Allegany's values are not only embedded in strategy, but deeply felt in relationship. Partners described feeling seen, respected, and genuinely cared for, both personally and professionally. These experiences were shaped by consistent communication, humility, attentiveness, and the ability to show up authentically in partnership. Allegany's support extended beyond funding, creating a sense of safety, affirmation, and shared purpose that partners do not often experience in philanthropic spaces. While continuity in staffing was noted as an important factor in sustaining this kind of relationship, the overall picture is one of a funder whose values are not performative, but lived in practice. The findings underscore that values such as reverence, care, and trust are experienced most powerfully in the small, everyday ways Allegany chooses to show up in relationship. These findings reinforce and deepen themes raised in KEQ A1 and create a foundation for KEQ A3, which explores how trust is built and sustained between Allegany and its grant partners over time.

KEQ A3. (How) Has Allegany Built Trust and Relationships with Grant Partners?

This question explores how trust is built between funders and grant partners, drawing from two key data sources: the Climate Justice Stakeholder Survey, administered early in the grant period, and in-depth interviews conducted at the end of the year with CJCC grant partners. The survey provided insight into what organizations believe fosters or erodes trust in funder relationships, while the interviews revealed how those dynamics played out in their actual experiences with Allegany. Together, these data sources offer a nuanced view of how trust is understood, practiced, and perceived in the context of the CJCC initiative.

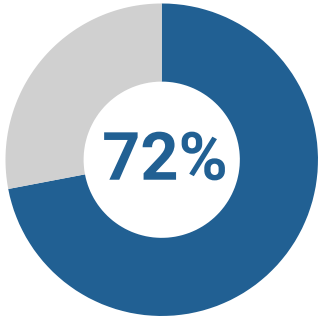
Trust Stayed High



Trust in Allegany started strong and remained high at the end of the year.

By the end of the grant period, partners also reported feeling trusted by Allegany (4.4 out of 5).

Exceeded Expectations



of grant partners said Allegany exceeded their expectations as a grant partner.

Overall Satisfaction

4.8 / 5

The average satisfaction rating was 4.8 out of 5, reflecting deep appreciation for Allegany's relational approach.

These results reinforce what was shared qualitatively: trust is both a value and a practice in Allegany's partnership model.

Perspectives from the CJSS: What Builds or Erodes Trust

In the CJSS, both grant and non-grant partners identified several key factors that build trust between funders and grassroots organizations:

Conversely, respondents shared that trust can be undermined by:

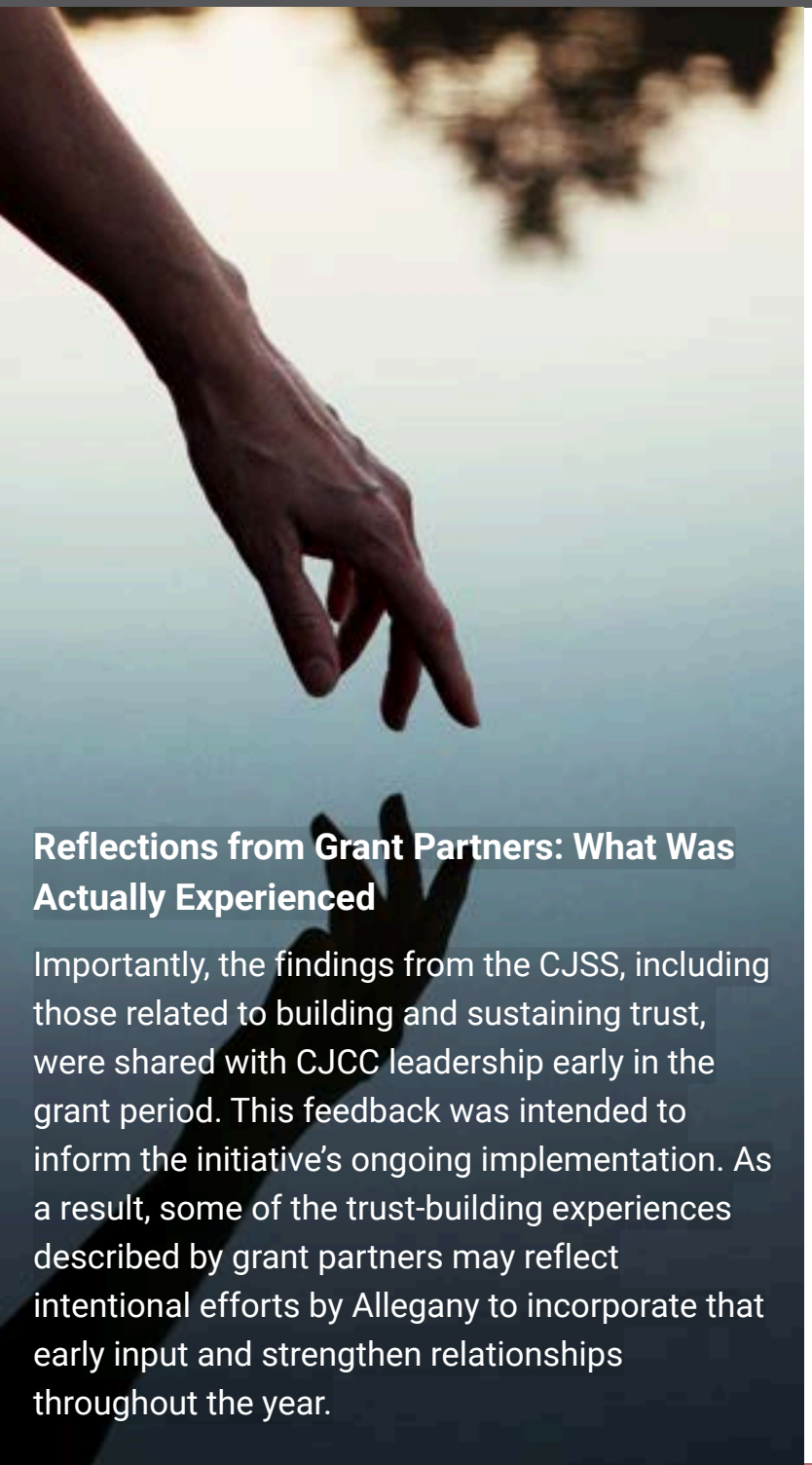
Factors that Build Trust

- **Open and transparent communication**
- **Flexibility and adaptability in funding structures and timelines**
- **Sustained support and long-term commitment**
- **Personal connection and relationship-building**
- **Empowerment and respect for grant partner expertise**

Factors that Erode Trust

- **Misalignment of goals and expectations**
- **Onerous administrative or reporting requirements**
- **Lack of communication or slow follow-up**
- **Rigid funding structures that limit adaptation**
- **Perceived bias favoring larger or more established organizations**

These insights provide a field-informed framework of what climate justice actors consider essential for trust-based funding relationships, especially in politically and economically challenging contexts like Florida.



Reflections from Grant Partners: What Was Actually Experienced

Importantly, the findings from the CJSS, including those related to building and sustaining trust, were shared with CJCC leadership early in the grant period. This feedback was intended to inform the initiative's ongoing implementation. As a result, some of the trust-building experiences described by grant partners may reflect intentional efforts by Allegany to incorporate that early input and strengthen relationships throughout the year.

Trust Through Respectful Partnership and Cultural Allyship

Grant partners reported a high level of trust in Allegany, often describing it as foundational to their partnership. For many, this trust deepened over time through repeated interactions, follow-through, and a demonstrated alignment between Allegany's words and actions. Partners emphasized that Allegany's posture of trust showed up not only in how they communicated, but also in how they structured support. This included flexible timelines, minimal reporting, and genuine collaboration. These experiences reinforced the sense that Allegany saw its partners not as recipients of charity, but as co-leaders and trusted experts.

> *"Allegany tries to be very supportive and also tries to be quite transparent."*
>
> *"I think there's a lot of mutual trust there."*

Several grant partners pointed to the consistency of long-term support as a key trust-building factor. Receiving multiple grants, including ones outside of the CJCC initiative, contributed to a sense that Allegany was invested in their mission and willing to accompany them through change and uncertainty.

> *"I think we have three grants so far, plus this one that we just got. It feels like there is an ongoing investment. We believe in what you're doing, and we'll be by your side regardless of whether you fulfill every goal, as long as there's progress."*

Others described trust emerging through more informal, relational moments. They appreciated being invited into early-stage conversations, consulted on funding strategies, and welcomed as full participants in shaping the initiative.

> *"They invite you to a conversation about a funding opportunity because they want to hear from you. They see themselves not just as funders, but actually as part of an ecosystem."*

Cultural allyship emerged as a significant theme. Several organizations serving LGBTQ+, BIPOC, and immigrant communities shared that Allegany's faith-based identity never felt exclusionary or imposed. Instead, they felt free to show up as their full selves, which deepened their trust and sense of safety.

> *"We didn't have to water ourselves down at any point. That brought a lot of light. It made me happy."*
>
> *"Self-determination, like giving us the creativity and the space to actually build tools to help us change our community. That's what trust looks like."*

This trust was not only expressed through language, but also reinforced through practices such as flexible deliverables, timeline adjustments, and a non-punitive attitude toward delays.

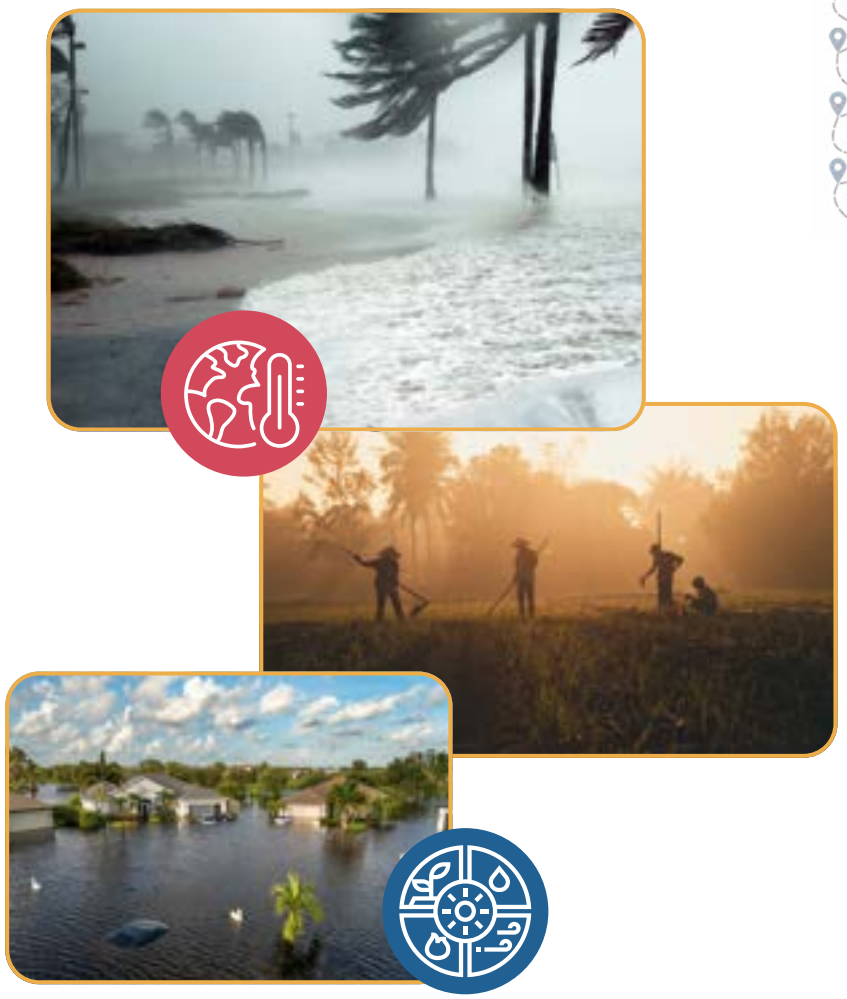
> *"The trust came in immediately. They trusted us that we would still get it done, even though we were not doing it in the timeline that we originally gave them. That allowed us to be self-determined to build what we think is necessary for our community."*
>
> *"Extremely considerate and comprehensive in how they try to support the nonprofits."*

Gaps in Communication and Transparency Undermine Trust

While trust was the dominant experience, a few partners noted areas where it was slower to develop. These instances were most often tied to staff transitions or newer relationships where direct contact with Allegany was still limited.

> *"I would say four out of five, just because I don't really have a concrete contact."*
>
> *"We're so new in the relationship. They've invited us to apply to other grants. That in itself implies a level of trust, but it's hard to say what it really is."*
>
> *"We were happy with the spaces provided to us, but maybe more communication would have built more."*

These reflections suggest that while Allegany's orientation is deeply relational, maintaining trust requires consistent communication and continuity. This is especially important for newer organizations or during periods of organizational change.



What Partners Asked For, and What They Got

The CJSS survey findings and the interviews with grant partners reveal strong alignment in what builds trust between funders and grant partners. As presented above, survey respondents named five key practices as essential to trust-building: open and transparent communication, flexibility and adaptability, sustained support and long-term commitment, personal connection and relationship-building, empowerment and respect for grant partner expertise.

These same elements were consistently reflected in the interviews. Grant partners experienced Allegany as flexible, responsive, and relational. Many felt trusted to lead their work without micromanagement or restrictive requirements. They valued how Allegany adapted to partner timelines, communicated consistently, and showed humility in cross-cultural engagement. The trust-building practices survey respondents hoped for were often, in fact, realized.

Where divergence appeared, it tended to center on the challenges of consistency in staffing and early relationship-building. While long-time partners had deep, trusting relationships with Allegany staff, newer grant partners were more likely to express uncertainty about who to contact or how to engage more deeply. This reflects a known tension in scaling relational models of philanthropy, where the depth of trust can be influenced by staffing transitions or limited relational touchpoints.

The comparison of survey and interview findings reveals substantial alignment between what organizations believe builds trust and what Allegany actually delivered through the CJCC initiative:

What Orgs Said Builds Trust	What Partners Experienced
• Open and transparent communication	• Regular check-ins, responsive staff, personal follow-ups
• Flexibility and adaptability	• Timeline shifts, open-ended deliverables, low administrative burden
• Relationship-building and continuity	• Multi-year connections, phone calls, informal support
• Respect for lived experience and expertise	• Deference to community-led solutions, freedom to design interventions

Areas of difference or partial alignment include:

- **Personal contact and continuity:** While many partners had strong connections with Allegany staff, newer grantees or those affected by staffing changes reported difficulty establishing that same relational trust.

- **Structural clarity:** A few newer partners were unclear about how to navigate the relationship or what level of trust had been established, suggesting a need for clearer onboarding or handoffs during transitions.

What We Learned: Building Trust in Practice

Findings from both the Climate Justice Stakeholder Survey and end-of-year interviews point to strong evidence that Allegany has built meaningful, trust-based relationships with its grant partners. Trust was not only present at the start of the initiative, it was actively reinforced and, in many cases, deepened over time. Partners consistently described Allegany as flexible, transparent, and relational, emphasizing how trust showed up in both funding structures and everyday interactions.

This trust was shaped by clear practices: minimal reporting burdens, responsiveness to shifting timelines, personal outreach, and a genuine respect for community expertise. Grant partners felt seen and supported, not managed - an experience that stood in contrast to many of their other funding relationships.

At the same time, a few partners, especially those newer to Allegany or impacted by staffing changes, reported that trust was still developing or harder to establish. These reflections highlight the relational nature of trust: it requires ongoing investment, consistent communication, and strong onboarding processes to ensure all partners feel equally supported. Overall, trust has emerged as both a defining feature of Allegany's philanthropic identity and a tangible outcome of how the CJCC initiative was implemented. As the initiative grows, Allegany is well-positioned to build on this foundation by continuing to strengthen the structural and relational conditions that allow trust to flourish.

KEQ A4: What Do Grant Partners Value Most About Their Partnership with Allegany?

Grant partners consistently described Allegany as one of the most values-aligned and supportive funders they have worked with. What they value most is not a single feature, but rather the combination of Allegany's accessibility, relational approach, and bold commitment to justice in a restrictive climate. Partners repeatedly contrasted Allegany with more transactional or detached funders, and highlighted its responsiveness, consistency, and equity-driven practices as key factors that set the organization apart. The following themes explore the specific aspects of the partnership that partners most appreciate.

A Standout Fundership Grounded in Values and Courage

Many participants described Allegany as fundamentally different from other philanthropic institutions. They emphasized Allegany's accessibility, responsiveness, and relationship-centered approach as distinguishing characteristics. Partners spoke about open and timely communication, genuine care for the people behind the work, and follow-through that reflects the organization's stated values. In particular, they admired Allegany's steady support for climate justice, especially in Florida's shifting and politically challenging environment.

> *"I think what's neat about Allegany is they are hanging on to all those things while others are pivoting away from it."*
>
> *"They care enough about the people who are doing the work. That really speaks volumes about how much they care, and how they put their programming where their beliefs and values are—especially with philanthropy going through all the shifts and changes because of the political climate."*

Several participants saw Allegany as a model for the sector, particularly because of its courage in holding the line on equity and climate work.

> *"I feel like Allegany is really standing in that and actually leading the way. They didn't clam up after November 5. They stayed in conversation, still accessible, still talking about the funding opportunities. They didn't start asking us weird questions like, 'Does it have to be youth of color?' That shows that as an institution, they actually are what they say they are."*

Crisis-Responsiveness and Adaptive Support

Grant partners also valued Allegany's ability to respond quickly and compassionately to changing circumstances. Several mentioned receiving immediate assistance during community crises or natural disasters, as well as being granted timeline flexibility and permission to shift strategies without bureaucratic hurdles. Allegany's willingness to fund general operating expenses, in contrast to narrowly scoped project grants, was seen as especially significant for under-resourced communities navigating complex challenges.

> *"The fact that they'll fund general operating expenses is unique. The application wasn't very complicated either. They just understand what we're doing."*
>
> *"The fact that we can shoot an email and receive a response. The fact that they will be there to answer questions and help us further the work."*

Others described Allegany's adaptability as essential to their ability to meet community needs in real time.

> *"The grace and the trust—they allowed us to shift the timeline. They shifted like we shifted. They were cool with it. It was very smooth. Like water. Agile. That's something community organizations like ours need, and we don't often get."*

One participant contrasted Allegany with government funders and emphasized how important it was to have a funder who not only gives money, but builds relationship and trust.

> *"I think Allegany has been one of my most favorite funders. They're able to see what we do as an organization. As a trans organization, we often just get money but are never invited into spaces or asked about our work. Allegany communicates with me. They check in. They bring me into conversations. That's one of the reasons we don't do state funding—we want to be able to speak on the issues that impact us and the people we support."*

Campus Organizer Sophie Sheppard and student leader Kiarra Williams speaking at the Eckerd College Fall 2024 Kick-off meeting.

Equity in Grantmaking

Across interviews, grant partners described Allegany's grantmaking process as a practical expression of equity. They praised the organization's willingness to fund general operating expenses, reduce administrative burden, and minimize rigid reporting requirements. These practices allowed organizations to spend more time on mission-driven work and less time navigating red tape.

Participants also appreciated Allegany's holistic approach, which included non-monetary support, inclusive learning opportunities, and regular check-ins. This consistency and intentionality deepened partners' sense of being valued and affirmed.

> *"They really do a good job of making those connections between their values, their mission, and their intentions."*

Several participants suggested that Allegany's model could serve as a template for other funders

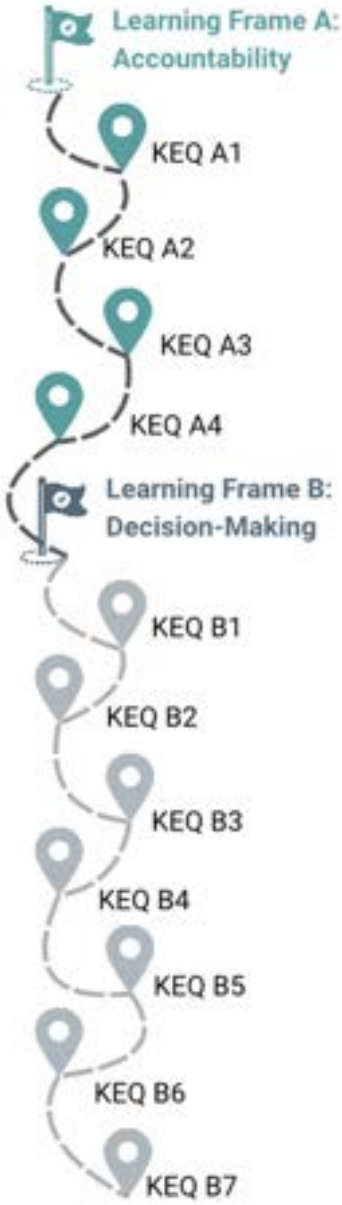
What We Learned: Partners Value Allegany's Courage, Consistency, and Care

Grant partners deeply value Allegany's relational approach, steady commitment to justice, and ability to show up in moments of uncertainty and change. What they valued most was not a single feature, but a combination of practices rooted in consistency, courage, care, and equity. They see Allegany not just as a funder, but as a true partner who listens, responds, and evolves alongside them. These findings reinforce the trust-building dynamics described in KEQ A3 and highlight why Allegany's approach stands out as a rare and respected model of equity-centered philanthropy.

Learning Frame B: Decision-Making

While Learning Frame A focused on how Allegany's values are embodied and experienced in relationships, Learning Frame B shifts attention to how those relationships translate into support for impact. This frame asks whether Allegany is effectively helping grant partners achieve their goals and how it is contributing to the broader ecosystem of climate justice work. It invites Allegany to see their role not only as supporters of individual organizations but as catalysts for a thriving, equitable nonprofit sector. The following findings address seven key evaluation questions related to the type and quality of support provided, the use and outcomes of grant funding, the barriers and facilitators to progress, and the ways in which partners' thinking and strategies have evolved over time.

As a reminder, many grant partners participating in this year's evaluation have received prior funding from Allegany, outside of the CJCC initiative. As a result, their reflections often draw on cumulative experiences with the organization over time, not solely on their engagement with the CJCC initiative or its current leadership. While this broader perspective offers valuable insight into Allegany's long-standing values and practices, it also means that some findings reflect a general orientation toward Allegany as a funder rather than isolated experiences within the CJCC initiative.



KEQ B1: What is the nature of support provided to grant partners?

This key evaluation question explores both the financial and non-financial support Allegany provided to CJCC grant partners in the first year of the initiative. Understanding the type, quality, and perceived value of this support helps illuminate how Allegany is showing up in practice and what elements are most meaningful to partners as they pursue their climate justice goals. Findings are drawn from a review of grant related documents and artifacts, end-of-year interviews with grant partners, and survey responses from the CJSS.

Financial Support

Between May 2024 and June 2025, Allegany provided financial support to 31 CJCC grant partners, distributing a total of $1,281,500 in funding. Grant amounts ranged from $2,500 to $130,000, with an average award of $40,046. This funding structure aimed to support a wide range of strategies aligned with the CJCC initiative's goals and to meet partners where they are in their climate justice work.

Although Allegany is more than a provider of money, as will be discussed in the sections that follow, it is still a philanthropy whose primary role is to make financial investments in communities and organizations. For that reason, the amount, structure, and strategic intent behind those investments carry significant weight. Questions about whether the funding provided was sufficient for partners to carry out their work and achieve intended goals will be addressed later in this section.

Beyond the Check

Meeting and Evolving Beyond Expectations for Non-Financial Support

While Allegany's central role is to provide financial resources, many CJCC grant partners experienced support that extended well beyond funding. Early in the grant period, the Climate Justice Stakeholder Survey (CJSS) asked organizations what they hoped for in a funding relationship. Their responses identified three core expectations:

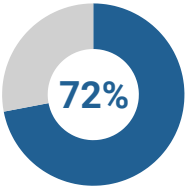
Networking and relationship-building:
Opportunities to connect with peer organizations and funders

Capacity-building and technical support:
Resources to help strengthen internal systems and infrastructure

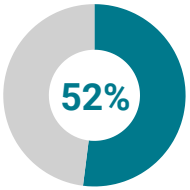
Consistent communication and advocacy:
Transparency, accessibility, and championing of grant partner work

Anticipating likely challenges early on, grant partners also emphasized a desire for close collaboration, operational funding, and connections to other funders to help them meet broader, long-term goals.

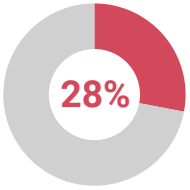
By the end of the year, CJCC grant partners reflected on what they actually received. In the end-of-year interviews:



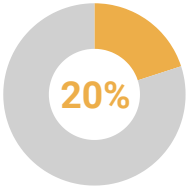
received convening or networking support



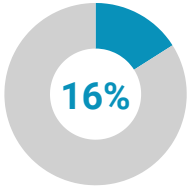
received wellness grants



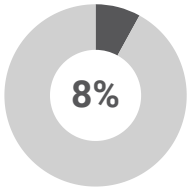
received other forms of support



received advice or strategic input



noted visibility or amplification support



received technical assistance

These results show that Allegany most strongly delivered on partners' desire for connection and care. The in-person retreat hosted by the Learning and Evaluation team in partnership with Allegany stood out as a major highlight. Partners described it as a rare opportunity to reflect, restore, and build relationships across Florida's climate justice field.

> *"By being in community with other organizations, it feels less lonely in the work we're doing."*
>
> *"It's very cool. I didn't know foundations cared so much."*

Other supports, such as wellness grants and a list of organizations doing climate justice work (compiled by the L&E team), were also appreciated. The list helped seed new partnerships and increase field-level visibility.

> *"Now we're partnering with four new climate justice nonprofits."*

Learning and Evaluation: Capacity Present, but Support Still Needed

The CJSS also explored grant partners' needs and capacities related to learning and evaluation. While organizations reported moderate to high capacity to conduct evaluation on their current grant (3.83 average on a 5-point scale), they also named several specific support needs:

- **Training and mentorship** to improve evaluation design and use
- **Data and knowledge management systems** for tracking and organizing results
- **Culturally responsive approaches** to ensure alignment with community values

Despite this interest and existing capacity, only a small percentage of grant partners (8%) reported receiving technical assistance during the first year. This highlights an important gap: while Allegany's emphasis on co-learning and flexibility is values-aligned, some partners may need more structured support to engage meaningfully in evaluation or to use learning for internal growth.

What We Learned

Allegany's support for CJCC grant partners went well beyond writing checks. In the first year of the initiative, they showed up in ways that reflected its values, particularly in offering connection, care, and flexibility. Most grant partners received some form of non-financial support, with convening, wellness, and relationship-building emerging as the most common and appreciated. These offerings aligned closely with what partners said they hoped for early in the grant cycle.

At the same time, gaps remained. Technical assistance was the least accessed form of support, even though many organizations expressed a need for evaluation capacity-building, knowledge management, and culturally responsive learning approaches. Several organizations demonstrated strong evaluation capacity and interest but lacked the resources or clarity to engage in evaluation in ways that would support their own learning or benefit the broader field.

This suggests a tension between Allegany's strengths and its evolving role. Their commitment to non-burdensome, trust-based philanthropy was widely appreciated. But the absence of clear expectations or structured support for reflection and evaluation may have unintentionally limited some organizations' ability to capture lessons, improve over time, or share insights with others in the CJCC network.

Looking ahead, Allegany has an opportunity to build on its strengths by offering more tailored evaluation support, clearer guidance, and additional resourcing, especially for those partners eager to reflect, learn, and adapt. These efforts could help deepen impact not only at the organizational level but also across Florida's broader climate justice ecosystem.

KEQ B2: How have grant partners allocated their CJCC funding?

CJCC grant funds were primarily used to strengthen staffing and organizational infrastructure, provide direct support to communities, and advance advocacy goals. The flexible design of the funding allowed each partner to align expenditures with their local priorities and capacities, resulting in highly varied but deeply intentional use of funds.

Strengthening Staff Capacity and Internal Infrastructure

A majority of grant partners shared that the bulk of their funding supported internal staffing and organizational capacity. For some, the grant allowed them to hire new organizers or retain essential team members. Others used it to provide stipends for student fellows or early-career staff who were advancing on-the-ground efforts. One organization explained,

> *"The money from Allegany has allowed us to expand the work… we're about to hire a third organizer, which will really help us train more leaders and get more people out."*

This investment in people was critical to sustaining the momentum of community organizing, education, and outreach. As another partner put it,

> *"The majority of the funds… principally go to pay our staff, which organizes and then the staff conducts meetings, trainings, events, seminars, workshops."*

The grant also enabled participation from younger leaders, with one organization noting,

> *"The grant helps us fund those stipended students and full-time, usually early career staff, to work with colleges and universities across the state."*

Delivering Tangible Community Resources

Many organizations used CJCC funds to directly support community resilience through tangible goods and materials. These included disaster kits, first aid supplies, translated safety information, and locally designed education tools. Often, these efforts were developed with accessibility and cultural responsiveness in mind, and implemented in partnership with other local groups.
One partner explained,

> *"A hundred percent of the funding… went into buying the generators and the care packages and supporting the housing for people, the temporary shelters." Another noted, "It's primarily been the translation… getting that organized."*

For several partners, these programmatic investments were integrated with other uses, such as stipends for tenants or funding for local events.

Advancing Advocacy and Community Voice

CJCC funds also supported local advocacy, civic engagement, and policy change efforts. Several partners used the flexibility of the funding to stay nimble in dynamic political environments and to experiment with creative, community-informed tools. One group developed interactive games and outreach strategies, explaining,

> *"We've created different kinds of games for people to play… Anything that we can do to make our outreach fun and engaging and organic… that's where our funds have been invested."*

Another shared how the funding helped them build political momentum:

> *"We won some pretty significant commitments, especially from a specific County Council member who's never cooperated… we definitely have influenced elections in the past."*

For others, regular public meetings became a key strategy, allowing them to convene community members around solarization, housing justice, and alternative climate models.

What We Learned

Grant partners used CJCC funding in strategic, community-centered ways. While many focused on internal staffing and organizational health, others prioritized direct aid or community-based advocacy. Across the board, partners emphasized how the flexibility and trust embedded in Allegany's funding approach empowered them to respond quickly to local needs, experiment with new strategies, and invest in long-term change. These investments not only supported immediate implementation but also laid the foundation for systems-level shifts in Florida's climate justice landscape.

KEQ B3: To what extent were grant partners able to make progress in achieving their goals?

Setting the Stage

While all 31 CJCC grant partners were working to advance climate justice in Florida, their project goals varied significantly in scale, focus, and structure. On average, organizations identified **3.5 goals** each, with a **range of 1 to 7**. These goals reflected a broad spectrum of strategies, including direct services, public education, narrative change, advocacy, and coalition-building.

An analysis of partner-reported goals revealed two primary orientations:

Output-Oriented Goals focused on producing tangible deliverables or completing specific activities. These included workshops, translated materials, disaster kits, media content, and the hiring of organizers. These goals were generally more concrete and easier to track over a short grant period.

Outcome-Oriented Goals aimed to create change in awareness, leadership, systems, or policy. Examples included increasing climate literacy, building grassroots leadership, shifting public policy priorities, or strengthening coalitions. These goals typically required deeper investment and longer timeframes.

Approximately 55 to 60 percent of goals were output-oriented, while 35 to 40 percent focused on outcomes. A smaller number blended both. Organizations with stronger evaluation systems were more likely to articulate outcome-level goals, while others used outputs as a way to move toward broader change.

It's important to note that not all partners had formal evaluation systems in place to track goal progress. At the beginning of the grant period, only 52 percent of organizations reported having a clear evaluation plan, and many encountered challenges with implementation. As such, all reported progress should be interpreted as self-assessed, shaped by each organization's internal metrics and context.

A full list of grant partner-reported goals and their self-assessed progress can be found in Appendix A.

Progress Toward Goals

Despite the diverse range of goals and varying levels of evaluation capacity, all grant partners reported making progress:

100% of organizations somewhat met at least one goal

95.8% completely met or exceeded at least one goal

54.3% exceeded at least one goal

50% reported completely meeting or exceeding all of their stated goals

This level of achievement is especially notable given the complex conditions under which partners were operating. Only **47.5%** of organizations said that the amount of funding was sufficient to fully plan, implement, and evaluate their work, and **33.3%** reported that the grant timeline was not long enough to accomplish their goals. Still, many partners showed clear momentum, particularly those who were able to focus their resources, adapt quickly, or leverage existing infrastructure.

Navigating Challenges and Adapting in Real Time

At the start of the initiative, grant partners identified several anticipated challenges in the Climate Justice Stakeholder Survey. These included:

Political Landscape: Concerns about hostile policies and rhetoric targeting climate work

Logistics and Resources: Persistent gaps in staffing, capacity, and budget

Participation Fatigue: Overextended communities facing frequent requests for engagement

Collaboration vs. Competition: Navigating alignment and avoiding duplication in a resource-scarce environment

[6]Progress toward goals was reported directly by grant partners and reflects their own self-assessments. These ratings offer valuable insight into how organizations perceived their achievements but should be interpreted with some caution. Monitoring and evaluation capacity varied across the cohort, and implementation timelines, staffing, and documentation practices were not consistent.

These anticipated barriers became real challenges during implementation. Many partners experienced disruptions caused by hurricanes, staff transitions, limited outreach capacity, or fear within immigrant communities.

One organization shared how they had to adjust their curriculum delivery after realizing their audience was less familiar with climate topics than expected:

> *"They were not familiar with the climate space... so we needed to switch the order in which we delivered the classes."*

Another noted how internal turnover slowed their work:

> *"About midway through the project, we had to pivot and hire somebody new... and unfortunately that stalled the work a little bit."*

Others described creative adaptations made necessary by external conditions:

> *"Our community felt targeted and overall in danger... it still shows how amazing and trusted our promotoras are that they were still able to reach so many people."*

Even with these challenges, many partners expressed pride in their ability to stay aligned with their goals:

> *"You don't go in the first time and it works like magic... but we made it work."*

Goal and Project Evolution

Flexibility in funding and reporting played a significant role in allowing organizations to adapt and adjust as needed. This was especially important as goals and projects evolved over time.

42.9% of organizations said that one or more of their goals changed during the project

60% said that their overall project evolved in important ways

Partners repeatedly emphasized how Allegany's trust-based approach gave them the space to make real-time decisions based on what they were seeing and hearing on the ground. Reporting was non-punitive, communication was accessible, and pivots were allowed without penalty.

Partners shared,

> *"We had to switch the order in which we delivered the content... and that ended up being the right call."*

> *"The funding was pivotal... but it wasn't enough to meet the demand. We had to get creative."*

This type of adaptability helped organizations stay grounded in their values while still making tangible progress.

What We Learned: Meaningful Progress Despite Challenging Circumstances

CJCC grant partners made meaningful progress toward their goals, even while facing considerable challenges. All organizations made some progress, and half fully met or exceeded all of their stated goals. These results demonstrate the power of flexible, trust-based funding to support real movement, even when external conditions are unstable or difficult.

The nature of each organization's goals played a role in shaping both implementation and perceived success. Output-oriented goals were more likely to be completed within the grant period. Outcome-oriented goals were often more ambitious and complex, and while harder to measure, many organizations still made meaningful strides toward them.

The biggest enablers of progress included clear community relationships, space to adapt, and Allegany's flexible funding model. Still, not all organizations had the time, resources, or evaluation capacity needed to track outcomes or scale impact. Only half said their grant was sufficient to fully implement and evaluate their work, and one in three reported that the grant timeline was too short.

Looking ahead, Allegany is well-positioned to support deeper impact by pairing continued flexibility with stronger supports for evaluation and reflection. With these resources in place, future cycles of CJCC could build on this year's success and help partners move further along the path from outputs to systemic change.

KEQ B4: What Role Has Allegany Played in Helping Grant Partners Achieve Their Goals? What Actions of Allegany Have Served as Deterrents?

Grant partners overwhelmingly described Allegany's approach as instrumental in helping them move their work forward, both through its financial contributions and its relationship-based way of working. At the same time, partners also highlighted a few challenges that limited the full realization of their goals, including capacity constraints and minor communication gaps. The themes below reflect both the value of Allegany's flexible and relational approach and areas where adjustments could further support grant partners' progress.

Flexible and Supportive Funding Structures Enabled Meaningful Progress

Allegany's flexible grantmaking approach was repeatedly cited as one of the most important enablers of progress. Grant partners appreciated that they could allocate funds toward personnel, where many funders impose restrictive limits. The ability to cover staffing helped organizations maintain continuity and carry out their work more effectively. Grant partners also pointed to streamlined reporting requirements and Allegany's openness to adapting timelines when unexpected delays arose.

In a state where grant partners are contending with political volatility, environmental crises, and limited capacity, these features were not just appreciated but essential.

As one grant partner explained,

> *"I think it's great that Allegany allows that a portion of these funds be allocated toward personnel costs." Another shared, "Usually the timeline is set for around some of these project-based fundraising [models that] don't really align with the reality of my life and the life of my organization… but Allegany has been very graceful with us."*

Partners also spoke positively about the grant process itself, describing it as significantly less burdensome than other funders. One said simply,

> *"I've found the process relatively easy… not complaining at all. It's pretty uncumbersome compared to others."*

Resource Gaps and Communication Glitches Hindered Full Goal Achievement

While many grant partners emphasized the helpfulness of Allegany's support, some also noted limitations. A number of participants shared that the scale of resources provided did not fully match the scope of their ambitions or the complexity of the work. As one partner put it,

> *"It was definitely enough for the year… was like a nice bonus. Didn't quite cover the last six months."*

This concern was mirrored in quantitative data: nearly **53%** of grant partners said the funding amount was not sufficient to fully plan, implement, and evaluate their projects.

In addition, a handful of partners described minor communication challenges that created confusion or barriers. One shared,

> *"I got this email, 'hold the date, we're having this summit,' and then I sent out a note… 'Should I still hold the date?' Oh, no, you've been uninvited. What did I do wrong?"*

Others described not knowing who to reach out to or feeling disoriented by staff transitions. While these instances were relatively few, they illustrate how lapses in clarity or continuity, even small ones, can affect grant partner confidence and planning.

Relationship-Based Engagement Strengthened Grant Partner Capacity and Confidence

The most frequently praised aspect of Allegany's role was its relational way of working. Grant partners described Allegany staff as consistently present, responsive, and genuinely invested in their success. This human-centered approach built trust and created space for more open communication, flexibility, and support. Several partners named individual Allegany staff members who attended meetings, sat on panels, and stayed in close contact throughout the grant period.

One participant noted,

> *"They are so quick to respond. They're so quick to help us if we ever need anything… a lot of philanthropic [foundations], sometimes it's too detached."*

Another described Allegany's steady presence in their work:

> *"They're always checking in. They're always making sure that we're staying on track. And it's a beautiful thing… deeply invested in the outcomes."*

Grant partners also emphasized how being seen and supported in this way gave them the confidence to raise challenges and ask for adjustments. "Just to listen—really listen to what we were going through… and giving space and time to understand what that meant was an example of support," one participant shared.

This relational approach appears to have played a central role in helping grant partners navigate uncertainty, adapt their strategies, and stay grounded in their goals.

What We Learned: Meaningful Support, With Room to Grow

Allegany played a significant role in helping grant partners move their climate justice work forward during the first year of the CJCC initiative. Partners credited Allegany's flexible funding, relational approach, and willingness to adapt as key supports that made their work possible and meaningful. At the same time, limited funding and a few communication challenges created barriers for some organizations, particularly those seeking to sustain and scale their work. Together, these findings reinforce the importance of pairing flexible, trust-based practices with adequate resources and clear, consistent communication.

KEQ B5: What More Can Be Done to Help Grant Partners Achieve Their Goals?

Grant partners offered clear and compelling suggestions for how Allegany can continue to support their climate justice work more effectively. Their recommendations included both financial and non-financial support and reflected a strong desire for greater continuity, infrastructure support, connection, and inclusivity. Across qualitative interviews, survey responses, and early stakeholder data, partners emphasized that sustainable impact requires more than just a grant. They called for a combination of multi-year funding, inclusive convenings, tailored technical assistance, and deeper connectivity to people and systems with power and resources. The themes below reflect the convergence of what partners shared during interviews and what they reported in closed-ended survey responses.

Multi-Year and Sustained Funding Structures to Deepen Impact

Many grant partners shared that while their one-year grants allowed them to make meaningful progress, the scope and duration of funding limited their ability to create lasting change. Several described how the short timeframe constrained planning, hiring, and the deep relationship-building that climate justice work requires.

One grant partner explained,

> *"I think one year is sufficient for us to have accomplished quite a bit, right? That is informative for us and for the funder… But I think multi-year commitments are preferable, because there's not much you can do in a year."*

Others reflected on the uncertainty and fragmentation that can come from short-term or one-off grants. One organization said,

> *"If we could know ahead of time and it could be like, let's say, 3 years at 40… that looks different than 40 for separate things."*

Another added, "We gotta build on this. We gotta get into these counties and it just wasn't enough resources for us to get in there and truly make an impact."

Quantitative findings echoed these reflections. While two-thirds (66.7 percent) of grant partners said the length of the grant was sufficient to meet their goals, just under half (47.5 percent) said the amount of funding was adequate to fully plan, carry out, and evaluate their work. This gap suggests that time may be workable for some, but the scale of resourcing still limits broader or systemic work.

Expand Non-Financial Supports that Build Capacity and Connection

Grant partners consistently expressed a desire for expanded supports beyond funding. In particular, they emphasized the importance of opportunities to connect with other organizations, access research expertise, and receive tailored technical and evaluation assistance. Several also called for more inclusive and community-specific support, especially organizations working within Latinx, immigrant, or smaller grassroots contexts. One partner noted,

> *"We could see the benefit in having more regular opportunities to connect with the other grantees, to discuss challenges, solutions, materials."*

Another said

> *"I'm always going to say connections to other funders." Several mentioned that being linked to technical or research resources could help stretch limited staff capacity. One explained, "I just see research expertise and being able to be connected… it helps minimize our workload and go straight to the source."*

Partners also underscored the importance of differentiated support based on organizational size, mission, or community focus. As one put it,

> *"Some of the things that are really applicable to other organizations aren't as applicable to us."*

Another added,

> *We work a lot in the Hispanic community… it's not a community that gets tapped in very easily. A lot of funds are directed towards African Americans, and a lot of the environmental movement is white."*

These qualitative insights were reinforced by both the CJSS and end-of-year interview data. In the stakeholder survey, the most desired supports included connections to other funders (82.1 percent), access to climate justice resources (60.7 percent), and opportunities to convene with peer organizations (53.6 percent). End-of-year interviews reflected similar trends, with 60 percent of respondents naming funder connections and 48 percent citing convening and networking as supports they would like to receive.

What We Learned: Going Further, Together

Grant partners want to go further. They see Allegany as a funder that is deeply committed to climate justice and community-centered values, and they believe that deeper, more sustained support is both possible and necessary. To maintain momentum and amplify impact, partners are calling for more consistent and longer-term funding, richer opportunities for connection, access to technical and research expertise, and inclusive practices that reflect the unique needs of their communities.

Together, these findings suggest that helping partners achieve their goals will require more than a one-size-fits-all approach. What is needed is a commitment to differentiated support, relationship continuity, and ecosystem-building, all of which are well-aligned with Allegany's values and the goals of the CJCC initiative.

KEQ B6: What Lessons Have Been Learned in Grant-Funder Relationships and Project Implementation?

As grant partners implemented their projects over the past year, they surfaced valuable insights related to both their relationships with Allegany and the design and delivery of their own climate justice efforts. These lessons underscore the central role of trust, communication, and community education in effective partnership and program implementation. Partners reflected on what helped them navigate complexity, adapt their strategies, and engage their communities more meaningfully.

Centering Education and Community Empowerment Strengthens Impact

Grant partners emphasized that community education was not simply a strategy, but a necessary foundation for their climate justice work. Many encountered a lack of public awareness or persistent misinformation about climate-related issues, and noted that building understanding was essential before policy advocacy or behavior change could take root. To meet this need, partners adapted their messaging, simplified complex topics, and connected climate justice to the lived experiences of their communities. In doing so, they helped move people from passive awareness to active participation.

In several cases, the success of educational efforts was made possible by trusted relationships with community members. For organizations working with immigrant populations or politically vulnerable groups, building trust and safety was a necessary precondition for engagement.

> *"Some people were like, 'Oh, I didn't know that I could do this… I didn't know I could attend a town hall meeting.' We're finding that people truthfully didn't know what was happening or why it's happening or what they can do about it. Our presentation helped bridge that gap."*

> *"We were able to create awareness… because they felt like they could trust what we were saying. Sometimes people trust what auntie or grandma says, and that's not always right. I think we were also able to combat a lot of those [misperceptions]—'I heard this in the news…'—and help people really understand what the bill actually said."*

Proactive Communication Strengthens the Grant Partner-Funder Relationship

Partners also shared lessons about navigating challenges and adapting their projects. Central to these reflections was the importance of open and timely communication with Allegany. Several described moments when they hesitated to reach out, while others shared that existing relationships gave them the confidence to connect, ask questions, and propose changes. In these instances, Allegany's responsiveness and flexibility made it easier for partners to adapt their work in ways that honored both their original goals and current realities.

> *"With the relationship we have with Allegany, we know that they're there. If we need them, we can reach out."*
>
> *"Our CEO reached out. And again, the response was immediate… not a problem."*
>
> *"We already had that sort of establishment of comfort. We felt more comfortable reaching out to them—and it helps everybody."*

These experiences reinforce earlier findings about the relational nature of Allegany's approach. When trust and understanding are present, grant partners feel empowered to share challenges openly and work collaboratively toward solutions.

What We Learned: Communication, Trust, and Community Ground the Work

This year's experiences surfaced several lessons that will continue to shape how grant partners approach their projects and their relationship with Allegany. Climate justice work is most effective when grounded in culturally relevant education, delivered by trusted messengers, and connected to the daily lives of communities. At the same time, the success of this work often depends on open, ongoing communication between funders and grantees. When those lines are strong, partners are better equipped to respond to obstacles, adapt strategies, and stay aligned with shared values. These lessons not only reflect the realities of this year's work, but offer guidance for sustaining and strengthening partnerships in the years to come.

KEQ B7: In What Ways, If Any, Has Grant Partner Thinking Shifted Regarding How to Achieve Climate Justice Goals?

As climate justice efforts unfolded over the past year, many grant partners reflected on meaningful shifts in their understanding of what is required to create change. These shifts were influenced by practical experience, evolving community needs, and the realities of operating in a politically hostile environment. Together, their reflections offer valuable insight into how strategies and approaches are adapting in the face of complexity, urgency, and risk.

Climate Justice Is Urgent, Complex, and Deeply Interconnected

Many partners shared that the initiative deepened their awareness of the long-term nature and complexity of climate justice. What once may have felt like an abstract or policy-driven goal now felt more rooted in the everyday realities of their communities. One partner emphasized,

> *"For this work to be successful, it's longitudinal… we are committed to this work for the long haul."*

The interconnectedness of issues came into clearer focus as well. One organization noted,

> *"So it's health justice, it's economic justice, it's climate justice, it's labor justice… workers of color, immigrant workers, who are being sacrificed in a labor regime that extracts as much value as they can until they're rendered disposable."*

Another described how even small daily disruptions, like "my child's soccer field flooded," could be traced back to broader climate issues. Partners increasingly used tangible, personal examples to make climate impacts feel more relatable. One said,

> *"What do you remember paying for utilities last year? What are you paying now?" as a way to engage people in climate conversations beyond just hurricane season.*

Political Pressures Are Reshaping Community Engagement

Partners across the state reported that Florida's political environment has created new constraints on how they engage their communities. In some areas, fear and surveillance have made open dialogue more difficult. One partner explained,

> *"We had challenges attracting attendees to presentations. These difficulties were mainly tied to immigration-related concerns."*

Another added, "Our own law enforcement are now deputized ICE agents, so the people we were going to trust to protect us are the ones that can turn us in." Others noted how fear of political retaliation affects how they present their work, including concerns that "if you were running climate-related programs, you could lose your 501(c)(3) status."

Some even described shifting their own communications strategies across different funders.

"Are we now finding ourselves, when we write grants—not to Allegany, but others—having to change our language?" one partner asked.

Resilience and Strategic Adaptation in the Face of Setbacks

Despite these barriers, many grant partners described adapting with resilience. Some made deliberate changes to how they frame their work to avoid political backlash. One organization shared,

> *"We named it [the program] 'resiliency,' because the governor uses that word… we wanted to be able to talk to anybody."*

Others incorporated more culturally resonant approaches, such as using local events to distribute information.

> *"We incorporated health fairs," one partner explained, adding that they "distributed flyers about climate change and gentrification in Miami-Dade County."*

This strategic adaptation often came with tough choices. As one organization put it, "Do you want to be righteous, or do we want to be effective? How do we be strategic and continue the work and not let the rhetoric and messaging get in the way?"

Partners also relied on trust within their communities to navigate challenges. One reflected, “We just kind of had to pivot in the delivery of how we got the information out… the trust we had in these spaces kind of allowed us to overcome that by like 25 percent.”

Allegany’s Role in Supporting Local Action and Field Resilience

Partners were clear that Allegany’s support has been instrumental during a difficult time. Several noted the importance of their continued investment, especially when other funders have pulled back. “Allegany has a role to play,” one partner said, “we need investing heavily in local efforts and building local capacity.”

Another encouraged Allegany to lead by example, explaining,

> *“Leading that effort to show other funders that this work can still be done… even when people are scrubbing websites to get rid of the word equity.”*

Some partners expressed a desire to build on the current momentum. “We are hoping to work on coalition-building and local policy if we can get the support,” one shared, “both on networking and funding.”

What We Learned: Thinking Evolves Under Pressure and With Support

Over the past year, grant partners have continued to evolve their thinking in response to the dynamic conditions surrounding their work. There is growing recognition that climate justice must be approached holistically and anchored in the lived experiences of communities. Organizations are adapting their strategies to remain both safe and effective, even as political pressures intensify.

At the same time, many are holding onto hope, resisting isolation, and working to build more resilient, community-centered approaches to change. Allegany's role as a steady, values-aligned funder has helped partners remain in the work and navigate these shifts with clarity and care.

Zen Break

We're almost at the finish line! You're doing great, and we truly appreciate your commitment to learning as evidenced by the fact that you've made it this far in the report.

This is another great moment to pause, stretch, and refill your coffee, or simply enjoy a moment of delight. Research shows that looking at images of baby animals can actually improve focus, support sustained attention, and reduce stress. So go ahead and give yourself permission to slow down for a minute. May we suggest a photo of a baby panda, duckling, or tiny goat?

When you're ready, the next section picks up with some reflections on what has emerged. Let's get back to learning!

Reflections on What Emerged

This year's evaluation was intentionally designed using a developmental and utilization-focused lens. In contrast to traditional evaluations that assess performance against predefined indicators or outcomes, this first-year effort prioritized learning, adaptation, and values alignment. No formal benchmarks were established for grant partner performance or philanthropic success, and that was by design. Instead, the evaluation centered questions about how the initiative is taking shape, how values are being experienced, and what early signals of promise, challenge, and complexity are emerging.

That said, this learning-focused approach still supports strong evaluative judgment. Based on what we heard, observed, and analyzed across multiple data sources, we can confidently speak to the value and merit of the Climate Justice & Care for Creation initiative in its first year.

The evidence suggests that the initiative is:

- Rooted in clearly articulated and widely affirmed values
- Meeting partners where they are while pushing the philanthropic field forward
- Sparking momentum in a critically under-resourced landscape
- Building trust, relationships, and capacity in ways that lay the groundwork for deeper, more sustained change
- Supporting meaningful progress among partners, even though many reported that current funding levels were insufficient to fully meet their climate justice goals

What follows is a synthesis of insights that cut across all evaluation questions and learning frames. These reflections offer a view into what's working, what's shifting, and what the initiative is helping to reveal.

Cross-Cutting Threads: Implications for Strategy, Relationships, and Practice

1. Trust-Based Philanthropy Creates the Conditions for Bold Work

CJCC demonstrated that when funders lead with trust, flexibility, and relational care, grant partners are more able to innovate, take risks, and respond in real time to community needs. Trust was not an aspiration, it was a felt experience that shaped the conditions of the work itself.

Implications:

- Strategy: Flexible investments foster agility in dynamic conditions
- Relationships: Trust accelerates alignment, accountability, and learning
- Practice: Minimizing administrative burden can be a strategic accelerant rather than a compromise

2. Climate Justice Work Is Intersectional, Local, and Evolving

Partners approached climate justice as inseparable from housing, labor, immigration, health, and cultural identity. Many were already doing this work, even if it was not labeled as such. The CJCC funding gave language, visibility, and affirmation to these interconnected strategies.

Implications:

- Strategy: Funding strategies must be designed for intersectionality, not issue silos
- Relationships: Recognizing prior work builds trust and supports continuity
- Practice: Evaluation and storytelling must reflect complexity rather than reduce it

3. Resilience Requires Both Relational and Structural Support

Allegany's relationships were widely praised, but partners also called for more structural support, including technical assistance and (more) opportunities to connect and convene. Many also emphasized that current grant sizes and timelines do not match the scale or complexity of the work they are being asked to do. Relationships opened the door, but infrastructure and adequate resourcing are needed to move through it.
Implications:

- Strategy: Ecosystem investment requires both heart and scaffolding
- Relationships: Stronger onboarding and more access to shared spaces will deepen trust
- Practice: Multi-year and larger grants, especially for deeply rooted and under-resourced organizations, are critical for continuity and scale

4. Political Conditions Are Forcing Strategic Adaptation

The political climate in Florida has introduced new risks, both rhetorical and legal, for many organizations. Partners described adapting messaging, engagement strategies, and even language choices to remain both safe and effective.
Implications:

- Strategy: Philanthropy must anticipate repression and resource resilience
- Relationships: Candor, continuity, and presence matter most in moments of risk
- Practice: Courageous, visible support from funders strengthens the field's backbone

Tensions That Demand Navigation

This work is powerful, and it is not without its tensions. Some surfaced repeatedly across the evaluation:

- **Urgency vs. capacity:** Communities need climate justice solutions now, but partners are often underfunded, overstretched, and responding to crisis conditions

- **Flexibility vs. clarity:** Many partners valued the space to define their own outcomes. Still, some expressed a desire for more structured support and clearer expectations and support, especially around evaluation and cross-learning

- **Visibility vs. risk:** Sharing success can build momentum. However, in a hostile climate, public exposure can carry real danger for frontline organizations

These tensions are not contradictions to resolve. They are realities to acknowledge, plan for, and navigate with care.

What's Working, What's Emerging, What Needs Attention

What's Working

- Allegany's values are felt, not just stated, and they are showing up in action
- Flexible funding unlocked innovation, trust, and rapid responsiveness
- Convenings and peer relationships reduced isolation and sparked new momentum, for those that had the opportunity to participate
- Partners made real progress toward self-defined goals, despite significant challenges

What's Emerging

- Many partners are deepening their understanding of climate justice as long-term, systemic, and interconnected
- Momentum is building in policy advocacy, coalition-building, and narrative change
- There is growing interest in using evaluation for internal learning, not just funder accountability
- Strategic adaptation is becoming a survival skill that partners are embracing with creativity and care

What Needs Attention

- Many partners reported that the size and duration of current grants were not sufficient to meet the scale of their goals. Increased, multi-year funding will be essential to sustaining momentum and growing impact
- Evaluation capacity-building and shared learning platforms are underdeveloped relative to interest
- Newer or smaller organizations need more intentional onboarding and differentiated support
- Political risks are real and require sustained, strategic funder accompaniment

Questions We Carry Forward

This first year of evaluation focused on Learning Frames A and B from the CJCC Learning & Evaluation Framework. Frame A explored how Allegany's values are being embodied and experienced in practice. Frame B examined the nature of support provided to grant partners, how funds were used, and what progress was made toward grant goals. Together, these learning frames helped surface critical insights about relationships, strategy, and implementation during the initiative's early phase.

As we look ahead, the evaluation will begin laying the groundwork for Learning Frame C, which considers if and how CJCC contributes to long-term systemic change. This does not mean stepping away from Frames A and B. Trust, care, and responsiveness will remain essential to the initiative's identity and effectiveness. And there is still important work to do in Frame B, particularly in developing more systematic ways to track implementation, outputs, and emerging outcomes across grant partners.

To prepare for Frame C, the evaluation will need to more consistently document both grant partner activities and Allegany's field-level strategies, such as its funding model, convenings, and supports for ecosystem development.

These data will help us begin to understand how CJCC may be contributing to lasting change across Florida's climate justice landscape. Over time, this approach will allow for more rigorous exploration using methods like contribution analysis and outcome harvesting.

Importantly, the foundation laid in Year 1 gives us confidence that the conditions are right for this next phase. We have strong evidence that Allegany's relational approach is not only working, but deeply valued. Going forward, we recommend continuing to monitor values alignment and relational trust under Frame A, while building out a more structured strategy for tracking implementation and evaluating impact across Frames B and C.

In doing so, we carry forward several important questions:

- What kinds of systemic change are CJCC grant partners helping to advance, and how are those changes taking shape across communities, coalitions, and policy efforts?
- How are Allegany's strategies influencing the broader climate justice ecosystem, and where are new opportunities to leverage its role?
- What kinds of supports are most critical for frontline organizations navigating the dual burden of climate disruption and political repression?
- How can the evaluation stay rooted in equity and learning, while also producing credible evidence of impact?
- What does it look like to evaluate climate justice work in ways that are both accountable and affirming?

These are questions not just for Allegany and its partners, but for the philanthropic field more broadly. The year ahead offers an opportunity to explore them together with greater depth, rigor, and care.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are organized into five thematic categories and grounded in findings from this year's evaluation. They reflect what grant partners shared through surveys and interviews, as well as observations and insights from the evaluation team. Each recommendation is intended to support Allegany's continued alignment with its values, reinforce relationships, and strengthen the Climate Justice & Care for Creation initiative as it moves into its next phase.

1. Grantmaking Approach

Continue offering flexible, relationship-centered grantmaking that trusts partners to define success, strategy, and spending.

Grant partners consistently praised Allegany's flexible, low-burden funding model, which allowed them to stay grounded in their values, adapt their approaches as needed, and lead the work in ways that made sense for their communities. This approach not only supported trust but also enabled partners to use funds responsively, aligning spending with real-time needs, evolving strategies, and community-defined goals.

Consider increasing the size and duration of grants to better match the scale and complexity of climate justice work.

While appreciated, one-year grants modest in size were often described as insufficient to fully implement, evaluate, or sustain impact. Larger and longer-term investments could support deeper systems change and greater stability.

Ensure that supplemental supports, such as wellness grants, convening invitations, and visibility opportunities, are accessible to all organizations that want or need them.

While these offerings were widely appreciated and seen as valuable, opportunities were too limited to meet demand. As a result, not all interested partners were able to participate or benefit. Ensuring that these supports are equitably available, or that scalable alternatives exist, can reinforce equity, deepen engagement, and ensure broader access to the initiative's relational and restorative benefits.

2. Support Beyond the Check

Offer targeted non-financial supports that reflect the full range of needs expressed by grant partners, and ensure these opportunities are clearly communicated and equitably available.

Partners expressed a desire for connection to peer organizations, introductions to other funders, access to research expertise, climate justice materials, communications support, and communities of practice. Providing and clearly communicating these supports can strengthen field capacity and reinforce Allegany's care-centered approach.

Tailor capacity-building and technical assistance to reflect the specific needs and identities of diverse organizations.

Some organizations expressed interest in support related to communications, evaluation, or digital infrastructure, while others emphasized the need for culturally relevant tools and guidance. Tailored offerings can ensure supports are both accessible and affirming.

Maintain the spirit of care, responsiveness, and relationship that defines Allegany's approach.

Partners shared that Allegany made them feel seen, affirmed, and respected as whole people, not just grant recipients. This relational dynamic is central to Allegany's identity and widely regarded as a source of strength.

3. Evaluation and Learning

Strengthen shared expectations around documentation of grant partner activities, outputs, and outcomes.

While many partners made meaningful progress, inconsistent documentation and lack of guidance around evaluation limited opportunities for collective learning. Establishing clear and flexible expectations will help prepare for future evaluation efforts.

Respond to specific learning and evaluation needs by supporting partners with optional, accessible tools and resources.

Grant partners named several priorities, including mentorship or training in evaluation, support for data and knowledge management systems, and culturally responsive evaluation practices. Offering support in these areas can enhance internal learning while contributing to broader evaluation goals.

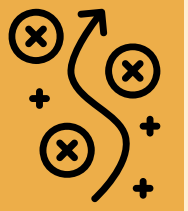
Clarify what constitutes meaningful progress or learning within the initiative.

Some partners expressed uncertainty about how to interpret success under CJCC, especially in the absence of performance metrics. Reinforcing that learning, experimentation, and adaptation are valued outcomes can reduce ambiguity and strengthen alignment.

4. Partner Experience and Equity

Prioritize differentiated support for smaller, newer, and grassroots organizations.

Several organizations, particularly those newer to Allegany or operating with limited capacity, shared that they were unsure how to navigate funder relationships or access supplemental supports. Differentiated guidance and touchpoints can help ensure that all partners feel equally supported.



Adapt onboarding and communication processes to maintain continuity during staff transitions or initiative growth.

Partners emphasized that trust is relational and built over time. Some noted disruptions or confusion during staff transitions, suggesting a need for proactive communication and handoffs.

Ensure equitable access to convenings, learning spaces, and storytelling opportunities.

Some partners expressed disappointment at not being included in certain events or unsure how participants were selected. Transparent processes can support trust and equity as the initiative evolves.

5. Field Leadership and Ecosystem Strategy

Continue modeling values-based, courageous philanthropy in a politically challenging environment.

Grant partners repeatedly named Allegany as a rare and reliable supporter of climate justice, equity, and community-rooted work in Florida. This consistency was seen as bold, principled, and deeply needed.

Explore opportunities to align with other funders, intermediaries, and climate networks to extend the reach of CJCC.

Some partners expressed a desire for more strategic connections across the field and shared frustration with duplicated efforts or siloed funding. Coordination and collaboration could enhance both impact and efficiency.

Leverage Allegany's platform to amplify partner stories, strategies, and solutions.

Several partners asked for help gaining visibility, influencing public discourse, or sharing their models with others. Allegany's credibility and relationships position it to play a meaningful role in lifting up the voices and leadership of its grant partners.

Participatory SWOT Summit

"We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and, in the process, heal our own—indeed, to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty, and vulnerability."

-Dr. Wangari Maathai,
Environmentalist and Nobel
Peace Prize Laureate

Appendix A