

BTCE

Spring 2024

NEWS

Together we can make
life here even better

Community Connections

Career Readiness Programs
Arts Enrichment at the Wassaic Project
Portraits of Generosity: Deb Lans
Ceramics at the Art Garage
Report to the Community 2023

Berkshire
Taconic
Community
Foundation

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Message from Leadership



One of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation's strengths is our ability to connect people and organizations with shared interests and commitment to improve their communities. In these pages, we see examples of the results of these connections. The programs featured provide opportunities for young people to explore career paths and experience the creative process, building bridges across common interests and diverse perspectives.

BTCF supports our donors and over 100 grants and scholarship committees in connecting to organizations and initiatives in the region. In this edition, we profile one of our donors, Deb Lans, who works with the community foundation to support early literacy and land conservation in Columbia County through her donor advised fund.

We also report on the foundation's results in 2023, including over \$17 million in grants and scholarships for organizations and local students. This is possible because of the generosity of donors, skillful work of our staff, and talents shared by our countless volunteers. These stories illustrate how philanthropy, expressed in contributions of many kinds, is making our communities stronger. Thank you for joining us on this journey of connection and collaboration. Together, we can continue to build a brighter future for all.



Peter Taylor, *President*

NORTHWEST LITCHFIELD COUNTY

Art Garage

Art Garage is an after-school studio open to Housatonic Valley Regional High School students who wish to make art. Local artists run the studio and offer guidance. The students pictured here are middle school students at the Art Garage during a free summer enrichment program designed to be a bridge to high school. BTCF's Fund for the Northwest Corner has supported the summer program since its inception, and it will run for its third summer in 2024, offering kids not only arts, but plenty of outdoor activities, too.



Students in the 2023 BETA Summer Program.
Photo courtesy of the
Berkshire Innovation Center.

Berkshire
Innovation
Center

REGIONAL

From School to Work: Career Readiness Programs Grow

Amid the ongoing trend of youth departing the region, employers confront a workforce shortage, emphasizing the crucial need to support the transition from education to employment. In 2023, BTCF awarded close to \$450,000 towards career-readiness initiatives, facilitating 176 internships and 339 student career exploration activities, ranging from resume workshops to career fairs.

BTCF is fortunate to have strong partnerships with local organizations that enhance our community's future through youth career readiness programs, and support for their work comes from a variety of BTCF funds.

The Career Readiness Project at Railroad Street Youth Project (RSYP) provides young people in southern Berkshire County the chance to explore career and vocational pathways through apprenticeships, mentoring, and internships. In 2023, the career programs served over 50 students with support from our South Berkshire County Fund.

Their apprenticeship programs run 6 to 8 weeks in collaboration with local businesses. The students meet weekly as a group to receive hands-on lessons in various fields. In 2023, RSYP provided Culinary, Language Exchange, Naturalist, Wellness, Ceramics, Fitness, and Radio apprenticeships. Eli Mamousette, an apprentice at Berkshire Community Radio said, "This

apprenticeship pointed me to a door I didn't even know was open. Hosting a radio show is something most people don't realize they can just do. The RSYP apprenticeship program made it far more attainable."

RSYP also offers a program called Railroad Street Youth Student Empowerment (RYSE), which is a 5-day, 40-hour intensive summer "boot camp" that guides young people in a focused exploration of post-high school options with comprehensive skill-building for career and college planning.

The Berkshire Innovation Center (BIC) hosted 18 students in their BETA Summer Program, now named the Future Innovators Summer Session. With support from BTCF's Community Fund, the 6-week session for high school sophomores offers a comprehensive curriculum covering entrepreneurship, 3D printing, CAD, leadership, and communication, with site visits to local companies. Weekly presentations and a final showcase, themed "Unnecessary Inventions" in 2023, blend design, engineering, and imagination.

BIC also welcomed eleven participants to the Innovation Interns program, which provides high school students with credits and summer pay for college students. The interns take on projects with BIC member firms, from established companies like Berkshire Health Systems to startups like SolaBlock. "Companies are in search of talent to help drive

their missions forward, and future leaders to carry the torch. Our students will be those leaders,



RSYYP 2024 culinary apprentices.

and the work we do right now is shaping the next generation,” said Ben Sosne, Executive Director at BIC. In 2023, BIC welcomed over 600 area students of all ages to its facility in Pittsfield and with the completion of a new workspace, BIC Works @ MassMOCA, in North Adams, they expand access to even more students in northern Berkshire County.

Greenagers provides programs that get teens and young adults involved in environmental conservation, sustainable farming, and related trades, like horticulture, masonry, arboriculture, and carpentry. Greenagers offers educational programming, as well as paid employment opportunities, which serve as many youths’ first job, teaching financial literacy basics like managing bank accounts and paychecks. Two core programs, Pathways to the Trades and Youth Stewardship Employment, allow participants to gain skills and job experience in a supportive environment. With funding from our South Berkshire County Fund, the Pathways to the Trades program engages students in building trades education and trades projects in the community. The Youth Stewardship Employment program employs about 70 youths annually in trail, farm, or building crews, lasting from 4 weeks to 8 months. The crews maintaining conserved lands in Great Barrington and beyond. “I’ve surprised myself in my ability to lead others effectively, and contribute to the smooth running of a crew,” said Issy McMahon, a Trail Crew member in 2022 who was promoted to Assistant Crew Leader in 2023, a role she returns to for summer 2024.

The MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board (BWB), operates the region’s state-funded Connecting Activities initiative that provides essential career development experiences to all youth in the

K-12 public school system. The BWB has longstanding 20-year partnerships with all the region’s public school districts, providing career awareness, exploration, and immersion opportunities to students through their established Post-Secondary & Career Teams and Career Readiness Models. Examples of these experiences include career fairs, company field trips, job shadowing, internships and career pathways. The South Berkshire County Fund has provided additional resources to the BWB for the past five years to support the career readiness initiatives within the South County school districts. In the 2022-23 school year, the BWB and the South County school districts facilitated 117 internships across various sectors and provided over 1,000 students with career awareness experiences empowering students to explore diverse career paths.

The North East Community Center (NECC) serves as a vital hub for community resources in northeast Dutchess County. Supported by BTCF’s NEDCorps initiative and the Northeast Dutchess Fund, NECC’s teen programs prioritize the school-to-work transition. They establish trade apprenticeships and employment certifications in various fields like electric, plumbing, IT, and farming. NECC collaborates with local schools, including Webutuck, Dover Plains, Pine Plains, and Millbrook Public Schools, providing career counseling and internship placements. The program helps address barriers to opportunities at an individual level, fostering inclusion and improving access to programs. In 2023, NECC supported 22 young people with an array of school-to-work services, including education on resume-building, interview preparation, and other foundational workforce skills that help ensure a smooth entry into employment.

In Columbia County, N.Y., initiatives like Career Connections at **Columbia-Greene Community College** and Crafting for Money at the **Hudson Area Library** offer diverse career-readiness opportunities. In 2023, Career Connections enabled high school juniors to pursue tuition-free professional development or credentials, preparing them for college. Programs ranged from EMT Training to Product Development, with several students subsequently enrolling in college. Crafting for Money engaged around 200 young entrepreneurs, providing business tools and vending experience. Both initiatives, supported by our Fund for Columbia County, are enhancing school-to-work pathways for many young people across the county. ■

NORTHEAST DUTCHESS COUNTY

Wellspring of Creativity: Arts Education at The Wassaic Project

Nestled in the hamlet of Wassaic, New York, the **Wassaic Project** is both an art organization and an engine of community revitalization. It is situated in two historic former agricultural buildings, Luther Barn (1875) and Maxon Mills (1954) that were restored in 2005 in a local historic preservation effort. In 2008, the Wassaic Project (WP) found its home there, launching the first annual summer arts festival, which had 500 attendees. Since then, WP has provided cultural programming at little or no cost to over 45,000 community members and visitors.

Today, Maxon Mills, a former grain elevator, is a seven-floor art exhibition space, and the Luther Barn boasts art studios, a wood shop, a print shop, and the Maker Space for after-school programs. Under the co-directorship of Eve Biddle, Bowie Zunino, and Jeff Barnett-Winsby, the programs have become a **cornerstone of the community**. BTCF's Northeast Dutchess Fund has supported the Wassaic Project since 2009.

In 2019, the Wassaic Project, with the Cary Institute of Ecosystems studies, conducted assessments of arts and science education opportunities for area students. The assessment, which was supported by BTCF's Community Leadership Fund, resulted in the creation

of WP's after-school art programs. The free programs are known as the **Varsity and Junior Varsity Art Clubs**. Modeled after school sports teams, the Clubs are designed to retain participants throughout middle school and high school. The team structure places the arts in a new light, which is not solely focused on individual artists, but on building a long-term creative community.

The Art Clubs launched remotely in 2020 during the pandemic, and despite the challenges of virtual learning, the program gained momentum. Now it is an in-person offering where students gather at least twice a week during the school year in the Maker Space. In this creative oasis, students have two hours to delve into their creative projects with a well-equipped art studio at their disposal and guidance from education coordinator Jill Winsby-Fein.

WP brings together students from local public schools in northeast Dutchess County as well as those in nearby Litchfield County, Connecticut. Local private school and home school students also join the Clubs, and this diversity has become an important dimension of community-building. "We're **bringing people together across socio-economic divides**," said Winsby-Fein. "It's encouraging to watch kids from private and public schools become friends as they discover their similarities."

As Art Club students complete high school, they are encouraged to view WP as a resource. Whether providing career or general life guidance, WP is a steadfast ally for students' personal and creative development. "We've heard, unsolicited from several kids, that they feel safe here . . . **it's a creative home**," said Winsby-Fein. ■

Art Club students in the Maker Space.



Philanthropy in Our Backyard: A Portrait of Giving in Columbia County



Deb Lans is passionate about helping her community. When she moved to Columbia County full-time in 2017, she began deepening her volunteer work with local nonprofits to better understand the community and meet new people. It was through her involvement with nonprofits that she first encountered Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation. She has found that connecting with BTCF has been a great way to learn even more about the local nonprofit landscape and get an in-depth perspective on the region.

A Family Tradition

Lans traces her philanthropic roots to her family's tradition of giving. "My grandmother set up a small, private foundation, and when she passed away, my mother, brothers, and I took it on," said Lans. This tradition continues to unite Lans and her siblings, who live outside of Columbia County. Each year, they discuss the issues and organizations they will support through the family foundation, whether for their respective communities or a shared purpose.

Nonprofits Collaborate for Solutions

Childcare, early literacy, health care, the environment, and housing are causes that Lans supports through her Donor Advised Fund at BTCF. "There are lots of wonderful local organizations addressing these issues... It's actually incredible. Yet, they don't always rise to the surface."

One of the nonprofits Lans has supported is Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood (GHPN), which has a focus on early literacy. GHPN also addresses a variety of other community needs. The nonprofit

strengthens support networks throughout Hudson by advocating for change and finding connections between issues like legal system reform and direct support to families. Lans recognizes that in a rural setting, it is important to support solutions that help overcome site-specific barriers. "It's our backyard. It's a fantastic county, and yet, there's plenty of need. Rural counties have challenges that are different from urban settings."

Land conservation is a central issue in Columbia County, which has abundant natural landscapes and farmland that is falling out of use. Thoughtful approaches to land use and development become critical: "How these landscapes are preserved versus the needs of the community is crucial, and it's tricky to balance all the factors." Lans, a member of the President's Council at the Columbia Land Conservancy, points out, for example, that the conservancy's expertise in land assessment can be put to good use for site evaluation for housing initiatives. "The Land Conservancy is actively working with affordable housing groups to meld the needs of the communities."

Contributing & Connecting

Lans also serves the community as a member of the Board of Trustees for Columbia Memorial Health where she was Board Chair during the height of the pandemic. And as a contributing writer for the local news outlet, The Columbia Paper, Lans skillfully links national issues, like childcare, water quality, and housing affordability, to the dynamics of the local community. Lans says, "When organizations can build bridges between needs and connect the dots for people experiencing similar things even in the same county, that can be very powerful." ■

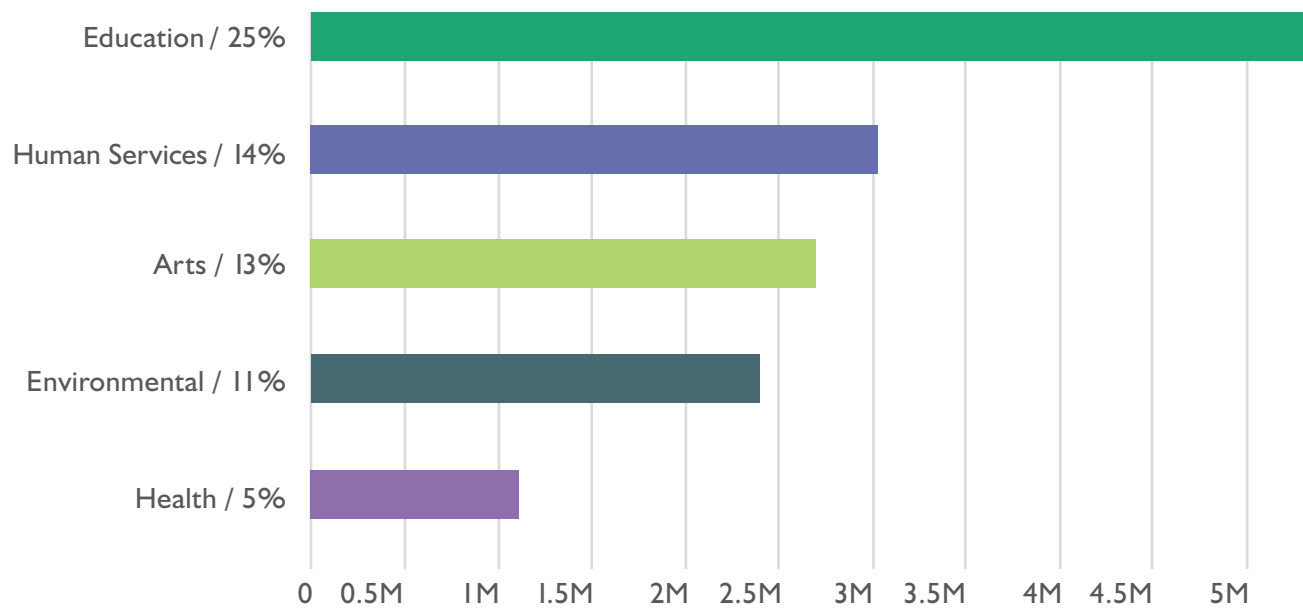
Report to the Community 2023

In 2023, Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation saw strong investment performance and growth in our total assets. The data points in this report tell the story of our community connections “by the numbers.” The relationships behind the data are comprised of the many donors, volunteers, professional partners and advisors, and nonprofits throughout the region who we are fortunate to work with throughout the year.

BTCF BY THE NUMBERS

\$13 million Total gifts and bequests	\$17.5 million Total grants, scholarships and distributions	\$230 million Total assets	
3,758 Grants to nonprofits and individuals	274 Scholarships to students	3,242 Gifts and bequests	28 New funds

GRANTS BY INTEREST AREA



INVESTMENT REPORT 2023

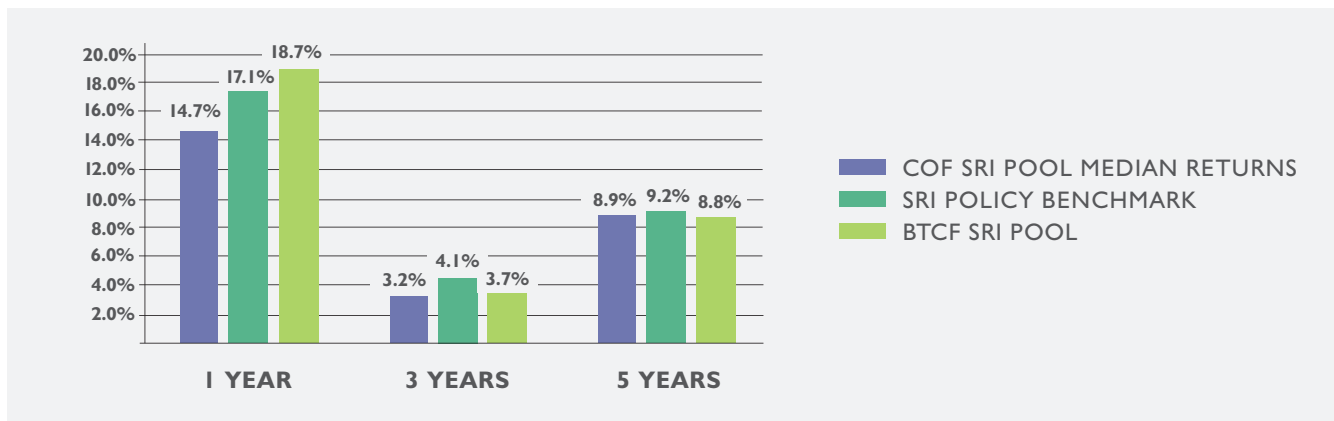
Generous donors have entrusted their philanthropy to Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation since 1987. Strong investment performance amid changing economic times is a hallmark of our program. We take seriously our responsibility to steward resources with prudent, long-term strategies that maximize grantmaking and preserve and grow philanthropic capital for the future.

MANAGED POOL



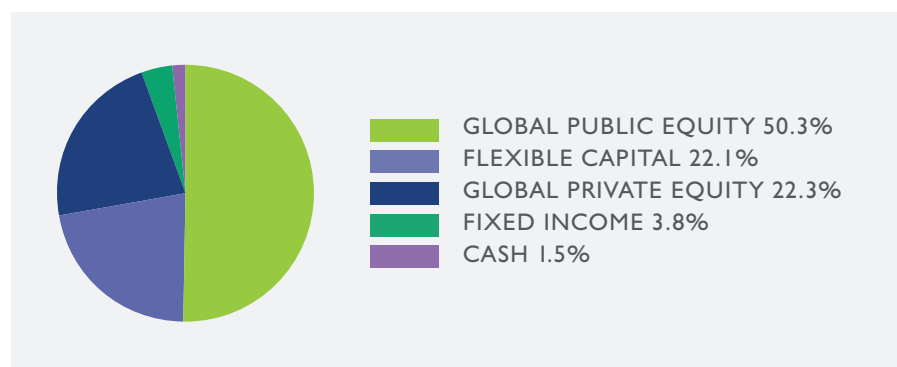
Most funds at BTCF are invested in the Managed Pool, a well-diversified global portfolio that produces consistent and stable growth with moderate risk. Our committee of investment professionals works with Prime Buchholz to manage the fund. The Managed Pool underperformed the top quartile of Community Foundations our size in the year ended 12/31/2023, and outperformed our peers by 1.4% to 2.8% over longer time periods.

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT POOL



Since 2009, BTCF has provided donors the opportunity to direct their fund's investment in vehicles aligned with their values and those of the Foundation. The SRI Pool exceeded its policy benchmark and CF SRI Pool returns for 2023, and it trails the benchmark over longer time periods. SRI returns rebounded following lagging performance during the first three quarters of 2023.

ASSET ALLOCATION



INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

BTCF's investment program is guided by a group of board and community members with extensive experience in institutional investments who together provide a broad range of expertise in different asset classes and employ top investment managers in each class.

Appointed by the foundation's board of directors from its members and others in the community, the Investment Committee meets at least quarterly to set long-term strategy, review performance, rebalance the portfolio, meet with current and prospective managers, discuss market conditions, and establish overall manager-specific benchmarks.

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 Thaddeus Gray, CFA
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 Thomas Quinn
 Daphne Richards
 Carol Flaton*

*BTCF board member

For more detailed investment information, please visit BerkshireTaconic.org/Investments.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023

ASSETS

Cash and cash equivalents
 \$3,992,003

Investments
 \$224,202,019

Other assets
 \$1,684,739

TOTAL ASSETS

\$229,878,761

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Grants payable, accounts payable and other liabilities
 \$1,569,579

Funds held for nonprofit organizations
 \$58,380,164

TOTAL LIABILITIES

\$59,949,743

Without Donor Restriction
 \$50,758,863

With Donor Restriction
 \$119,170,155

TOTAL NET ASSETS

\$169,929,018

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

\$229,878,761

Note: Unaudited figures.

New Funds in 2023

We are grateful to partner with all the fundholders who established new funds in 2023.

Bigger Than a Breadbox Fund
CCS Class of 1968 Fund
Foist Family Perseverance
Scholarship Fund
Friends of AMHS
Class of 1969 Fund
HVRHS Endowed Alumni Fund
Julia A. Smith Scholarship Fund
Kiwanis Club of Sheffield
Scholarship Fund
New Americans Fund
New Americans Legacy Fund

New World Fund
People's Pantry Endowment Fund
Robin and Richard Dee
Designated Fund
Roeliff Jansen Community
Library Fund
Ruth & Nicholas Boraski Fund for
the Christian Center of Pittsfield
Sharon Land Trust Board
Designated Endowment Fund
Sharon Land Trust
Indian Mountain

Sharon Land Trust
Mary Moore Fund
Sharon Land Trust Preservation
and Stewardship Fund
The Marlene Brody Fund
The Steiner School Fund
The Steiner School
Tuition Assistance
Vincent Stannard
Memorial Scholarship
Williamstown Youth Center -
David Rempell Fund

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We thank the legacy donors who have made the commitment to strengthen the future of our region and have chosen us as the vehicle for their generosity.

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Regional Roundup: Spring 2024 Grantees

On the cover: Jill Winsby-Fein and
Bowie Zunino at the Wassaic Project.



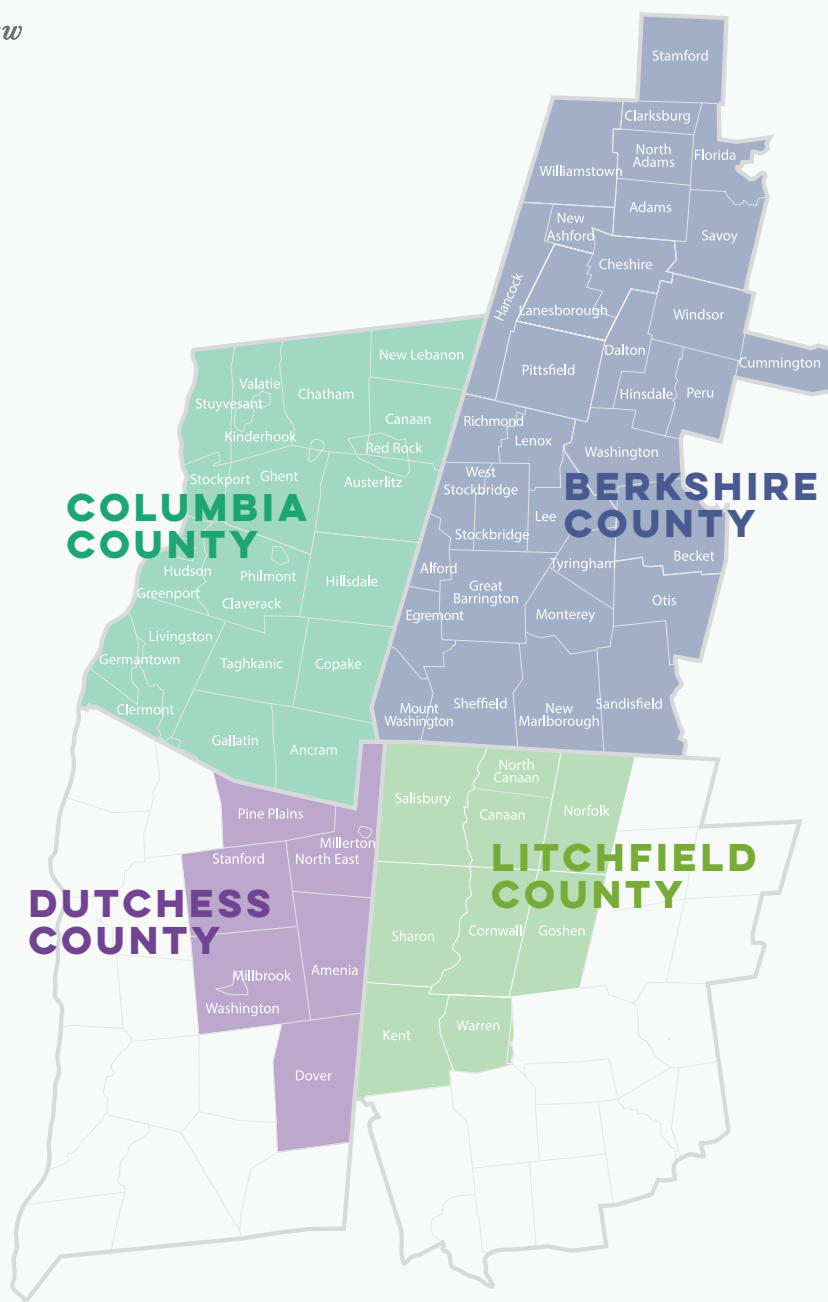
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Fund for Columbia County Expands Its Impact with First-Time, Flexible Funding

The Fund for Columbia County awarded \$180K to 40 nonprofits, including flexible funds for general operating support. The Fund designated \$40K for Neighbor-to-Neighbor grants and \$25K for Planning and Technical Assistance.

Northeast Dutchess Fund Expands Grantmaking by over \$31K in 2024

BTCF's Northeast Dutchess Fund has awarded \$254,350 to 29 nonprofits, representing an increase of over \$31K this year. Funding includes six first-time grantees, expanding the network of partners. \$19K was also provided for Planning and Technical Assistance.



South Berkshire County Fund Supports Career Readiness

Railroad Street Youth Project and MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board received renewed funding from the South Berkshire County Fund for 2024 projects.

Arts Build Community
granted over \$400,000 to Berkshire arts organizations in support of new programs, education, technical assistance, and resident leadership.

Fund for the Northwest Corner Contributes to Launch of New Community Wellness Center

Community Health and Wellness Center opened in May 2024 in North Canaan. The center fills a crucial gap in healthcare services in the region. BTCF has contributed \$155K, which includes \$40K from FNWC to support physician recruitment, strategic planning, and development.