

# A Strategic Guide to Civic Advocacy in Denver: Pathways to Impact

## Introduction: The Imperative for Advocacy in a Dynamic City

Denver stands as a testament to modern urban dynamism, a city experiencing rapid growth that brings both opportunity and significant strain. This expansion has created a complex web of social, economic, and environmental pressures, manifesting in challenges that define the city's contemporary landscape. Among the most acute of these is a housing crisis, with the Denver market leading the nation in appreciation, rendering the metro area increasingly unaffordable for a substantial portion of its workforce. This economic pressure is a single, powerful example of the broader challenges—from social equity to environmental sustainability—that necessitate a robust, sophisticated, and multi-faceted advocacy ecosystem. The city's progress is intrinsically linked to the ability of its citizens and institutions to address these challenges head-on.

This report serves as a strategic roadmap for individuals, corporations, and foundations seeking to engage effectively with this vital ecosystem. Its purpose is to move beyond a simple directory of organizations and instead provide a comprehensive analysis of the advocacy landscape, its key policy battlegrounds, and the most effective pathways for engagement. The goal is to empower stakeholders to move beyond surface-level support, such as occasional volunteering or undirected donations, toward strategic action that can contribute to meaningful, systemic change. By mapping the key players, analyzing their campaigns, and detailing a "how-to" guide for impactful participation, this document aims to be an indispensable resource for anyone committed to forging a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient future for the Mile High City.

## Section 1: The Denver Advocacy Landscape: A Thematic Analysis

The network of advocacy organizations in Denver is a complex and interconnected ecosystem. To understand how to best support these efforts, it is essential to first map the landscape. This section analyzes the primary sectors of advocacy, identifying the key players, their core objectives, and the critical interdependencies that define their work. The landscape can be broadly categorized into three thematic areas: the pursuit of justice and equity, the mandate for environmental sustainability, and the work to secure the foundational needs of the community.

### 1.1 The Pursuit of Justice: Civil Rights and Social Equity

This foundational sector of Denver's advocacy landscape is composed of a broad and diverse coalition of organizations working to dismantle systemic barriers, protect fundamental rights, and provide support for the city's most marginalized communities. Their work spans a wide spectrum of activities, from high-stakes legal defense and policy reform to grassroots community organizing and direct services.

#### **Key Players and Their Focus:**

- **Broad Civil Liberties:** The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Colorado is a central pillar in this domain. It engages in litigation, public education, and legislative advocacy across a vast array of issues, including voting rights, immigrant justice, LGBTQ+ equality, criminal legal reform, and reproductive freedom. Its work often involves challenging laws and policies in court and advocating for new protections at the state capitol.
- **Racial and Social Justice:** Mile High United Way explicitly identifies structural racism as a powerful force inhibiting community progress and has established a Social Justice Fund to invest in programs focused on equity and social justice. It works alongside a network of partners, including organizations like Black Lives Matter 5280 and Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), which concentrate on grassroots mobilization, education, and direct action to confront racial injustice.
- **Immigrant and Refugee Rights:** Denver is home to a dedicated network of organizations supporting its immigrant and refugee populations. The Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) works to build a unified statewide voice through civic engagement and advocacy for humane public policies. The Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN) and the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund (DILSF) are critical providers of free legal services for individuals facing deportation and other immigration-related legal challenges.
- **LGBTQ+ Equality:** The Center on Colfax and One Colorado are two of the most prominent institutions serving Denver's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender population. They provide essential community support services, advocate for non-discrimination policies, and create safe, inclusive spaces for community building.
- **Disability Rights:** AdvocacyDenver and Disability Law Colorado are at the forefront of protecting the human and civil rights of people with disabilities. They provide direct legal representation, individual and systemic advocacy, and work to influence public policy to ensure full inclusion and participation in the community.

A crucial characteristic of this sector is the deep interconnection between these seemingly distinct areas of focus. The partner lists of major organizations reveal significant overlap; for example, the ACLU of Colorado lists partners that focus on homelessness (Colorado Coalition for the Homeless), immigrant rights (CIRC, RMIAN), and LGBTQ+ rights (The Center, One Colorado). This demonstrates a sophisticated understanding within the advocacy community that social issues are not siloed. A person's identity—be it their race, immigration status, sexual orientation, or disability—often compounds the challenges they face in other areas of life. Issues like housing insecurity, lack of access to healthcare, and entanglement with the legal system disproportionately affect people of color, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Therefore, what might appear to be "housing advocacy" is often, at its core, also "racial justice advocacy." For those looking to provide support, this interconnectedness means that impact in one area can create positive ripple effects across others. Supporting an organization like The Center on Colfax is not just about advancing LGBTQ+ rights; it is also about addressing the unique challenges related to homelessness and health disparities experienced by that specific community.

## 1.2 The Mandate for Sustainability: Environmental and Climate Advocacy

Denver's environmental advocacy sector is a mature and dynamic ecosystem characterized by

a strategic division of labor. It includes organizations that focus on high-level policy and political action, groups that engage in hands-on restoration and community projects, and grassroots mobilizers who build public support for environmental protection.

#### **Key Players and Their Focus:**

- **Political and Policy Power:** Conservation Colorado is a primary driver of political action in the state's environmental movement. Its mission is explicitly focused on building political power through organizing, advocacy, and elections to advance policies on climate action, water security, public lands protection, and environmental justice. This organization works to elect pro-environment candidates and hold them accountable once in office.
- **Community-Based Action:** Groundwork Denver exemplifies the "boots-on-the-ground" approach to environmentalism. It partners directly with local communities, particularly in lower-income neighborhoods, to execute tangible projects like planting trees, improving parks, cleaning up rivers, and promoting energy efficiency. A key focus is its Youth Green Leadership program, which aims to develop the next generation of environmental leaders from within the communities it serves. Similarly, Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) mobilizes residents to create and sustain a network of over 190 community gardens, directly linking environmental stewardship with food security and community building.
- **Conservation and Wildlife:** A significant portion of the sector is dedicated to the preservation of Colorado's natural heritage. Organizations such as Denver Audubon, Rocky Mountain Wild, and The Nature Conservancy of Colorado focus on protecting biodiversity, conserving critical habitats, and advocating for the protection of wildlife from the impacts of climate change and pollution.
- **Corporate and Grassroots Platforms:** The role of corporate-supported activism is demonstrated by platforms like Patagonia's ActionWorks, which serves as a digital hub connecting individuals with local environmental groups, volunteer opportunities, and active campaigns in the Denver area. This model helps amplify the work of smaller, grassroots organizations and provides an accessible entry point for citizen engagement.

The strategic dynamic within this sector can be understood as a complementary relationship between the "inside game" and the "outside game." Organizations like Conservation Colorado play the "inside game," working within the political system to influence legislation, secure funding, and create a favorable policy environment. In contrast, groups like Groundwork Denver and DUG play the "outside game," building broad community support through visible, tangible projects and volunteer mobilization. These two approaches are symbiotic. The community goodwill, public education, and tangible results generated by the "outside game" build a powerful constituency and create the political will necessary for the policy changes sought by the "inside game." Conversely, policy wins—such as increased municipal funding for parks or water conservation programs—provide the critical resources that enable the on-the-ground projects to succeed and scale. A strategic supporter of environmental advocacy in Denver understands this dynamic and might choose to support both approaches simultaneously—for example, by donating to Conservation Colorado to influence legislation while also volunteering with Groundwork Denver to implement the very types of projects that legislation would fund. This creates a powerful, mutually reinforcing cycle of change.

### **1.3 The Foundation of Community: Housing, Homelessness, and Basic Needs**

This sector addresses the most acute symptoms of urban inequality in Denver, focusing on the fundamental human needs of shelter, food, and stability. The work is characterized by a combination of direct service provision to meet immediate needs, systemic advocacy to address root causes, and a web of public-private partnerships. A defining feature of this sector is the recognition that housing, health, and food security are inextricably linked.

#### **Key Players and Their Focus:**

- **Housing and Homelessness:** The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) is a comprehensive leader in this space. It provides a full continuum of care that includes housing, healthcare, and supportive services, serving over 22,000 people annually. Crucially, CCH pairs this direct service with high-level policy advocacy, working to shape local and federal legislation to create lasting solutions to homelessness. Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver offers a specific solution pathway by focusing on affordable homeownership. Its advocacy efforts target policies that make homeownership more accessible, such as zoning changes to allow for denser housing types, down payment assistance programs, and the creation of statewide resources for affordable housing.
- **Food Security:** Metro Caring exemplifies a dual-pronged approach to hunger. It meets the immediate need for nutritious, culturally relevant food through its free fresh-foods market, while simultaneously building a community movement to address the "root causes" of hunger through education and organizing. Denver Food Rescue operates with a model centered on health equity and sustainability. It recovers surplus fresh food from donors and, using a fleet that includes e-bikes, delivers it directly to a network of community-led No Cost Grocery Programs. This approach not only reduces food waste but also empowers communities to manage their own food distribution systems.
- **Broad-Based Support and Community Hubs:** Mile High United Way serves as a major convener and funder in this sector. It advocates for a comprehensive set of legislative priorities covering homelessness prevention, housing stability, access to food, early childhood education, and free tax support services. By investing in a wide network of partner organizations and running its own programs, it acts as a critical hub for coordinating efforts and directing resources to address a spectrum of basic needs across the community.

## **Section 2: The Nexus of Policy and Action: Major Advocacy Fronts**

To effectively support advocacy in Denver, it is crucial to understand the specific policy debates and active campaigns that are shaping the city's future. These are the battlegrounds where organizations are translating their missions into concrete action, engaging with government, the private sector, and the public to drive change. This section provides a granular analysis of the most significant of these advocacy fronts.

### **2.1 The Crisis of Shelter: Confronting Housing Insecurity and Homelessness**

The struggle for affordable and stable housing is arguably the most pressing issue facing Denver today. The crisis is defined by a simple but devastating economic reality: soaring housing costs that have far outpaced wage growth. Both the Colorado Health Foundation and

the Denver Chamber of Commerce have identified the high cost of housing as a top-tier problem for the state and city. This economic pressure forces a growing number of residents, including a large portion of the city's workforce, to make impossible choices between paying for housing and affording other necessities like food, healthcare, and childcare.

In response, a complex, multi-sector approach has emerged to tackle this "wicked problem." The City and County of Denver established the Department of Housing Stability (HOST) as its lead agency, tasked with creating policy, investing public resources, and partnering with community organizations to address the full spectrum of housing needs. HOST's programs provide direct assistance, including rent and utility help, eviction legal services, and access to the shelter system.

This governmental framework operates in tandem with a vibrant nonprofit advocacy sector. Organizations like the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless and Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver have developed clear and sophisticated legislative priorities. Their advocacy pushes for systemic changes, such as the creation of statewide funding streams for affordable housing, reforms to local zoning and land-use codes to allow for more diverse and dense housing types (like accessory dwelling units, or ADUs), and the regulation of predatory lending and real estate practices that harm low-income families.

The private sector has also become a key player. The Downtown Denver Partnership, a business-led organization, founded the Denver Business Coalition on Homelessness to bring the resources and leadership of the business community to the table. This coalition focuses on funding innovative solutions, conducting research on best practices from other cities, and, critically, "cocreating policy" with the city and community partners. Adding another layer of depth, academic institutions like the University of Denver's Homeless Advocacy Policy Project (HAPP) contribute essential research, such as their report on the economic and social costs of criminalizing homelessness, which provides a crucial evidence base for advocating policy change.

The dynamic interplay between these three sectors—public, private, and nonprofit—is the defining characteristic of the fight against homelessness in Denver. It is not a simple top-down or bottom-up effort but a complex, multi-directional negotiation. HOST explicitly states that its role is to "partner with organizations" , while the Business Coalition aims to "cocreate policy with community" , and CCH's Advocacy Network seeks to shape "public policy". Progress depends on the ability of these sectors to collaborate, challenge, and influence one another. For a citizen or foundation looking to make an impact, this reality demands a sophisticated strategy. One could advocate for HOST to adopt a policy solution proposed by CCH, while simultaneously supporting the Business Coalition's fund for innovative pilot projects. This demonstrates an understanding that pressure and partnership must be applied across all three sectors to move the needle on this complex issue.

## 2.2 Forging a Just City: Campaigns for Systemic and Legal Reform

Beyond addressing immediate needs, a critical advocacy front in Denver involves challenging and reforming the underlying legal and political systems that can perpetuate inequity. This work is often led by legal advocacy groups and focuses on high-impact strategies such as strategic litigation, ballot measure campaigns, and legislative change at the state and local levels.

### **Key Campaigns and Issues:**

- **Immigrant Justice:** In the face of shifting federal policies, local and state-level advocacy has become paramount. The ACLU of Colorado has been actively litigating against the federal government's use of the Alien Enemies Act to detain and deport individuals,

successfully securing a temporary restraining order and a preliminary injunction to block its use in Colorado. Simultaneously, the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) is championing the creation of a statewide legal defense fund to ensure that no one has to face detention and deportation proceedings without legal representation.

- **Reproductive and Marriage Freedom:** Recognizing the potential for federal rights to be rolled back, advocates are working to solidify protections within the Colorado Constitution. The ACLU is actively supporting two key ballot measures: Amendment 79, which would codify the right to abortion, IVF, and birth control into the state constitution, and Amendment J, which would officially repeal the now-defunct but still-present ban on same-sex marriage. These campaigns aim to create a firewall, insulating these fundamental rights from future political shifts at the national level.
- **Voting Rights and Democratic Integrity:** The "We Are the Vote" campaign, led by the ACLU of Colorado, is a direct response to what it terms "extremism" that threatens civil liberties. This nonpartisan campaign mobilizes voters to engage with both candidate races and ballot initiatives, providing voter guides and education on the civil liberties implications of various policy proposals.
- **Criminal Legal Reform:** The ACLU's Campaign for Smart Justice is a long-term effort to reform Colorado's criminal legal system. It targets a range of issues, including ending racial profiling, reforming overly harsh sentencing laws, and advancing the decriminalization of homelessness. AdvocacyDenver also engages in policy advocacy around criminal justice, focusing on how the system impacts people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- **Governmental Process Reform:** In a unique and sophisticated campaign, the Colorado Health Foundation is advocating for reforms to the state's own rulemaking procedures. The goal is to make these opaque policymaking processes more equitable, inclusive, and racially just, disrupting what is often an "insiders' game" and ensuring that communities who are most affected by policy decisions have a meaningful voice in their creation.

## 2.3 Sustaining the Mile High City: The Fight for Environmental Protection

Environmental advocacy in Denver is focused on translating broad goals like "climate action" and "sustainability" into concrete policy victories and then holding public officials accountable for their implementation. This involves work at the state legislature, city hall, and in direct community engagement.

### Key Campaigns and Issues:

- **Water Security:** As a headwater state, water is a perennial and critical issue for Colorado. Both the Denver Chamber of Commerce and Conservation Colorado are heavily invested in finding and implementing solutions to ensure the state has enough water for future generations. A major focus of this advocacy is ensuring the full and effective implementation of the Colorado Water Plan, a statewide framework for managing water resources.
- **Public Lands and Wildlife:** Advocacy efforts are consistently aimed at protecting Colorado's vast public lands from the harmful impacts of pollution and climate change. This includes advocating for policies that conserve wildlife habitat, support effective conservation management, and ensure that these natural spaces remain accessible to all communities.

- **Local Ordinances and Urban Sustainability:** Demonstrating the power of targeted, local campaigns, the Downtown Denver Partnership has successfully advocated for several key ordinances that directly impact the urban environment. These victories include the city-wide fee on single-use plastic and paper bags and the "Breathe Easy" ordinance, which prohibited smoking on the 16th Street Mall to improve public health and create a more welcoming environment. These successes show that significant environmental progress can be made at the municipal level through focused advocacy.

## Section 3: A Citizen's Guide to Impact: Pathways for Engagement

Understanding the advocacy landscape and its key policy fronts is the first step. The next is taking action. This section provides a practical, "how-to" guide for meaningful involvement, detailing the various pathways through which individuals and groups can contribute their time, resources, voice, and energy to support advocacy efforts in Denver. The core argument is that "helping" is not a single act but a strategic process of engagement, and that impact can be maximized by aligning one's contributions with specific organizational needs and personal strengths.

### 3.1 The Gift of Time: Strategic Volunteering and Skilled Service

Volunteering is a powerful and direct way to support advocacy, but its effectiveness can be greatly enhanced by moving beyond general support to strategically aligning one's time and skills with the specific needs of an organization. Denver's nonprofit sector offers a wide spectrum of volunteer models.

#### Models of Volunteering:

- **Direct Service and Hands-On Support:** This is the most visible and often most tangible form of volunteering. It involves directly participating in the delivery of services or the execution of community projects. Examples are abundant across Denver and include serving meals to those experiencing homelessness at the Denver Rescue Mission , helping to build affordable homes with Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver , sorting and packing food at Food Bank of the Rockies , participating in park and river cleanups organized by groups like The Greenway Foundation , and tending to community gardens with Denver Urban Gardens.
- **Skilled and Pro Bono Service:** This model involves leveraging one's professional expertise to provide high-value support that an organization might not otherwise be able to afford. Mile High United Way's "United for Business" program, for instance, connects professionals with women- and minority-owned businesses to provide free one-on-one consulting in areas like accounting, marketing, and legal support. Another prime example is the Tax Help Colorado program, where volunteers receive IRS training to provide free tax preparation assistance to low-income families, helping them secure crucial refunds like the Earned Income Tax Credit. Legal professionals can offer pro bono services through organizations like Disability Law Colorado or the Colorado Lawyers Committee.
- **Advocacy and System Navigation:** Some of the most impactful volunteer roles involve helping others navigate complex and often intimidating public systems. A leading example is becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) through Denver CASA. After extensive training, CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to advocate for the best

interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect, serving as a consistent and caring presence for a child in the welfare system. Similarly, the Denver Parent Advocates Lending Support (DPALS) program recruits volunteers with personal experience in the child welfare system to support and guide parents who are new to the system.

- **Organizational and Board Service:** For those interested in governance and long-term strategy, serving on a nonprofit's committee or Board of Directors is a critical form of skilled volunteering. Organizations like the Denver Children's Advocacy Center actively seek volunteers with expertise in areas like finance, marketing, and law to serve on their committees and board. Recognizing the need for qualified board members, organizations like Spark the Change Colorado even offer specific training programs to prepare individuals for effective board service.

To find these opportunities, individuals can utilize several comprehensive online portals. Platforms like VolunteerMatch offer extensive listings searchable by cause and location. The City and County of Denver maintains its own volunteer opportunities page , as does Mile High United Way through its Volunteer United platform. Additionally, most major advocacy organizations have dedicated volunteer sign-up pages on their websites, providing the most direct path to engagement.

### 3.2 The Power of the Purse: Philanthropy and Financial Support

Financial contributions are the essential fuel that allows advocacy organizations to operate, innovate, and sustain their work. Donors in Denver have a range of options that allow them to make strategic choices aligning their financial support with their specific goals and theory of change.

#### Mechanisms for Giving:

- **Direct Donations to Nonprofits:** The most straightforward method of support is a direct financial contribution to an organization. This provides flexible funding that can be used for general operations, specific programs, or emerging needs.
- **Strategic Philanthropy via Community Foundations:** For donors who wish to support a cause area without needing to vet dozens of individual nonprofits, community foundations like The Denver Foundation and Rose Community Foundation offer a powerful, curated approach. These foundations establish specific, high-impact funds, such as The Denver Foundation's Black Resilience in Colorado (BRIC) fund, which supports Black-led and Black-serving organizations, or Rose Community Foundation's Policy and Advocacy Fund, which is dedicated to advancing systemic change. These funds pool resources from multiple donors and leverage the foundation's expert grantmaking staff to direct support where it can be most effective.
- **The 501(c)(3) vs. 501(c)(4) Distinction:** Understanding the legal status of a nonprofit is a critical component of strategic philanthropy, as it determines both the tax-deductibility of a donation and the scope of the organization's political activities.
  - A **501(c)(3)** organization is a public charity or private foundation. Donations to these entities are tax-deductible. Their work is focused on charitable, religious, or educational purposes, and they are strictly limited in the amount of lobbying and political activity they can conduct. The Conservation Colorado Education Fund is a prime example of a 501(c)(3) that focuses on education and research.
  - A **501(c)(4)** organization is a "social welfare" group. Donations to these entities are **not** tax-deductible. In exchange, these organizations are permitted to engage in unlimited lobbying and political campaign activity, including supporting or opposing

candidates for office. Conservation Colorado's main organization and the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado are both 501(c)(4)s, allowing them to be powerful players in elections and legislative battles. A strategic donor must decide whether they prioritize a tax deduction or the ability to directly fund political and legislative advocacy.

- **Economic Advocacy:** A broader form of financial support involves the conscious decision to patronize and invest in local businesses that align with one's values. Mile High United Way explicitly promotes supporting minority-owned businesses as a direct way to build community wealth, foster equity, and contribute to a more just local economy.

### 3.3 The Voice of the People: Civic and Political Advocacy

Direct engagement with the political process is one of the highest-leverage forms of advocacy available to every citizen. It is the mechanism through which public will is translated into public policy. Denver offers numerous channels for this type of direct engagement.

#### Actionable Steps:

- **Track and Influence Legislation:** Advocacy organizations make it easy for citizens to become citizen lobbyists. Groups like the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless and Mile High United Way publish their legislative priorities each year. By signing up for their "Action Alerts" or e-mail lists, individuals receive timely notifications about key bills and are provided with simple tools to contact their elected representatives and voice their support or opposition.
- **Participate in Public Meetings:** The City and County of Denver provides a high degree of transparency through its Legistar site, which maintains a public calendar of all City Council and committee meetings, complete with agendas and, eventually, minutes. This allows citizens to monitor the work of key committees, such as the "Safety, Housing, Education & Homelessness Committee," and to participate in the "General Public Comment Session" held before City Council meetings, providing a direct forum to address policymakers.
- **Utilize Formal Petition Processes:** For issues related to land use and development, Denver's City Charter provides citizens with a powerful tool: the "Protest Petition." If a proposed rezoning is met with a valid protest petition signed by the owners of at least 20% of the surrounding land area, the threshold for City Council approval is raised from a simple majority (seven votes) to a supermajority (ten votes). The city provides a detailed customer guide explaining this process, empowering neighborhoods to have a stronger voice in development decisions.
- **Engage with Ballot Initiatives:** Colorado's system of direct democracy allows citizens to vote directly on policy through ballot initiatives. Advocacy groups like the ACLU of Colorado provide detailed, nonpartisan voter guides that analyze the civil liberties implications of these measures, empowering voters to make informed decisions on complex issues ranging from reproductive rights to criminal justice reform.
- **Join an Advocacy Network:** For those seeking a more structured and supported way to engage, joining an advocacy network is an excellent option. Organizations like CCH's Advocacy Network, CIRC's digital network, and the ACLU's People Power program provide training, resources, and organized opportunities for citizen lobbying, voter registration drives, and other forms of grassroots political organizing.

### 3.4 The Strength of Community: Education and Grassroots Mobilization

Building an informed, engaged, and mobilized citizenry is the foundational work upon which all successful advocacy movements are built. This involves creating opportunities for public education, fostering a sense of shared purpose, and providing accessible entry points for community involvement.

#### Engagement Opportunities:

- **Attend Educational Events:** Many Denver organizations host public events designed to raise awareness and deepen understanding of complex social issues. The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless hosts a regular Education Series featuring expert panels. The Women's Foundation of Colorado holds "Advocating for Impact" trainings to equip citizens with advocacy skills. Metro Caring offers classes and workshops on the root causes of hunger and food insecurity.
- **Participate in Community-Building Initiatives:** City-led programs can also foster a culture of engagement. The Mayor's "Give5 Mile High" initiative is a citywide call to action, encouraging residents to volunteer at least five hours per month to strengthen community bonds and address local challenges through collective service.
- **Monitor Community Calendars:** Staying aware of upcoming rallies, fundraisers, community forums, and cultural events is key to being an engaged citizen. Valuable resources for this include the City and County of Denver's official events directory , the Downtown Denver Partnership's community engagement calendar , and local media outlets like *Westword*, which maintain extensive event listings. Online platforms like Eventbrite also list a wide variety of justice- and advocacy-related events in the Denver area, including social justice book clubs, workshops, and panel discussions.

## Section 4: Strategic Directory of Denver Advocacy Organizations

The following directory provides a consolidated overview of key advocacy organizations operating in the Denver metropolitan area. The table offers a quick-reference guide to the advocacy ecosystem, allowing users to identify organizations by focus area and see their primary channels for engagement. Following the table, annotated entries for select organizations provide deeper insight into their missions, programs, and specific ways the public can offer support, linking directly to the engagement pathways detailed in Section 3.

**Table: Denver Advocacy Ecosystem: Key Organizations and Engagement Channels**

| Organization Name       | Primary Focus Area(s)  | Website  | Phone Number   | Primary Engagement Pathways                                 |
|-------------------------|--|--|----------------|---|
| <b>ACLU of Colorado</b> | Civil Rights, Immigrant Justice, LGBTQ+, Voting Rights, Legal Reform | <a href="http://aclu-co.org">aclu-co.org</a>               | (303) 777-5482 | Donate (c4), Policy Action Alerts, Volunteer, Public Events |
| <b>AdvocacyDenver</b>   | Disability Rights,   | <a href="http://advocacydenver.org">advocacydenver.org</a> | (303) 831-7733 | Donate (c3), Policy   |

| Organization Name                                 | Primary Focus Area(s)   | Website                | Phone Number   | Primary Engagement Pathways  |
|---|---|------------------------|----------------|--|
|   | Education, Policy Advocacy                                    | g                      |                | Action Alerts, Membership, Volunteer                                     |
| <b>The Bell Policy Center</b>                     | Economic Mobility, Equity, Policy Research                    | bellpolicy.org         | (303) 297-0456 | Donate (c3), Policy Research   |
| <b>The Center on Colfax</b>                       | LGBTQ+ Community Support, Advocacy, Health                    | glbtcolorado.org       | (303) 733-7743 | Donate (c3), Direct Volunteering, Public Events                          |
| <b>Colorado Coalition for the Homeless</b>        | Homelessness, Housing, Healthcare, Policy Advocacy            | coloradocoalition.org  | (303) 293-2217 | Donate (c3), Policy Action Alerts, Direct Volunteering, Community Ed.    |
| <b>Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC)</b> | Immigrant & Refugee Rights, Legal Services, Policy Advocacy   | coloradoimmigrant.org  | (303) 922-3344 | Donate (c3), Policy Action Alerts, Volunteer, Know Your Rights Trainings |
| <b>Conservation Colorado</b>                      | Environmental Policy, Climate, Water, Public Lands, Elections | conservationco.org     | (303) 839-9866 | Donate (c4), Donate (c3), Policy Action Alerts, Community Engagement     |
| <b>Denver Food Rescue</b>                         | Food Security, Health Equity, Sustainability                  | denverfoodrescue.org   | N/A            | Donate (c3), Direct Volunteering (Food Recovery), In-Kind Donations      |
| <b>Denver Urban Gardens (DUG)</b>                 | Food Security, Environmental, Community Building              | dug.org                | (303) 292-9900 | Donate (c3), Direct Volunteering (Gardening), Community Ed.              |
| <b>Disability Law Colorado</b>                    | Disability Rights, Legal Representation, Advocacy             | disabilitylawco.org    | (303) 722-0300 | Donate (c3), Legal/Skilled Volunteering                                  |
| <b>Groundwork Denver</b>                          | Environmental Justice, Community Action, Youth Leadership     | groundworkcolorado.org | N/A            | Donate (c3), Direct Volunteering (Restoration), Youth Programs           |
| <b>Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver</b>       | Housing, Homeownership, Policy Advocacy                       | habitatmetrodenver.org | (303) 534-2929 | Donate (c3), Direct Volunteering (Construction),                         |

| Organization Name  | Primary Focus Area(s)                                    | Website             | Phone Number   | Primary Engagement Pathways                                      |
|--|--|---------------------|----------------|--|
|  |  |                     |                | Policy Advocacy  |
| <b>Metro Caring</b>                                      | Food Security, Anti-Hunger Advocacy, Nutrition Education | metrocaring.org     | (303) 860-7200 | Donate (c3), Direct Volunteering, Community Ed., Policy Advocacy |
| <b>Mile High United Way</b>                              | Equity, Education, Housing, Basic Needs, Community Hub   | unitedwaydenver.org | (303) 433-8383 | Donate (c3), Skilled & Direct Volunteering, Policy Advocacy      |
| <b>Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN)</b> | Immigrant & Refugee Rights, Legal Services               | rmian.org           | (303) 433-2812 | Donate (c3), Pro Bono Legal Volunteering                         |

### Annotated Organizational Profiles

#### Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH)

- **Mission & Programs:** CCH works collaboratively to prevent homelessness and create lasting solutions for families and individuals at risk. Its model is nationally recognized for integrating housing, healthcare (at its Stout Street Health Center), and supportive services. In 2023 alone, CCH provided services to 22,434 people and reported that 99% of individuals in its permanent supportive housing remained stably housed after one year.
- **How to Help:**
  - **Philanthropic Support:** As a 501(c)(3), donations are tax-deductible and support the full continuum of care.
  - **Civic & Political Advocacy:** CCH's Education and Advocacy Team is highly active at the state legislature. Individuals can join their Advocacy Network to receive legislative reports, action alerts on specific bills, and participate in events like Day at the Capitol.
  - **Strategic Volunteering:** CCH has opportunities for both groups and long-term individual volunteers. Groups can assemble care kits or assist with special projects, while individuals with specific skills can support programs like Recuperative Care and Vocational Services.
  - **Community Education:** CCH hosts a regular Education Series to inform the public about the causes of and solutions to homelessness.

#### Conservation Colorado

- **Mission & Programs:** Conservation Colorado is a political advocacy organization focused on protecting the state's environment. It works to secure a healthy environment by driving policies and electing leaders that advance climate action and environmental justice, with specific campaigns focused on public lands, water security, and climate policy.
- **How to Help:**

- **Philanthropic Support:** This organization offers a clear choice for strategic donors. Donations to the main Conservation Colorado entity, a 501(c)(4), are *not* tax-deductible but directly support political work and candidates through its Small Donor Committee. Tax-deductible donations can be made to its 501(c)(3) arm, the Conservation Colorado Education Fund, which supports non-political educational work.
- **Civic & Political Advocacy:** The core of Conservation Colorado's work is mobilizing citizens. Individuals can sign up for action alerts to contact legislators on critical environmental bills and engage in their election-focused organizing to build political power.
- **Community Education:** The organization hosts events and produces guides and reports to educate the public on key environmental issues facing the state.

## Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver

- **Mission & Programs:** Habitat addresses the housing crisis by focusing on the creation of affordable homeownership opportunities. Beyond building and repairing homes, the organization is a significant policy advocate, working to create a more favorable environment for affordable housing development.
- **How to Help:**
  - **Strategic Volunteering:** Habitat offers a wide range of volunteer roles. Individuals can participate in hands-on construction and home preservation, or volunteer in their ReStores. Group volunteer opportunities are also available for corporate or community teams.
  - **Civic & Political Advocacy:** Habitat encourages supporters to become advocates for housing affordability. This includes signing up for advocacy alerts, contacting policymakers, and supporting policies related to zoning and land use reform, access to credit, and the preservation of affordable housing stock.
  - **Community Engagement:** Habitat hosts numerous events, including Homeownership Info Sessions for potential applicants and fundraisers like the Edgewater Music Festival, which directly support its mission.

## ACLU of Colorado

- **Mission & Programs:** The ACLU of Colorado is the state's leading defender of civil rights and civil liberties guaranteed by the Constitution. It works on a broad range of issues through litigation, legislative advocacy, and public education, with strategic imperatives in racial justice, immigrant justice, and Indigenous justice.
- **How to Help:**
  - **Civic & Political Advocacy:** The ACLU provides numerous ways to take action. This includes signing petitions on national campaigns like "Shut Down the ICE Detention Machine" and receiving local action alerts to influence state legislation. Their "We Are the Vote" campaign provides detailed ballot guides to inform voters on civil liberties issues.
  - **Philanthropic Support:** As a 501(c)(4), donations to the ACLU of Colorado are not tax-deductible but directly fund its aggressive advocacy and legal challenges.
  - **Strategic Volunteering:** Individuals can sign up to become an ACLU of Colorado activist to support local campaigns and community organizing efforts.

- **Community Education:** The ACLU provides extensive "Know Your Rights" materials on topics ranging from encounters with law enforcement to protesters' rights and students' rights.

## Denver Food Rescue (DFR)

- **Mission & Programs:** DFR is a health equity organization that addresses food insecurity and food waste simultaneously. It uses a sustainable model, relying heavily on volunteers and e-bikes, to recover surplus fresh food and deliver it to a network of 21 community-led No Cost Grocery Programs (NCGPs).
- **How to Help:**
  - **Strategic Volunteering:** DFR's model is volunteer-driven. The primary opportunity is participating in "Food Recovery Shifts," which involve picking up surplus food from a donor and delivering it to an NCGP partner. These shifts are short (1-2 hours) and flexible. Group volunteer opportunities are also available to support NCGP partners with sorting and distribution.
  - **Philanthropic Support:** As a 501(c)(3), donations are tax-deductible and have a direct, measurable impact (e.g., "\$100 provides 17 nutritious meals").
  - **In-Kind Donations:** DFR's "Fresh Food Connect" program allows local gardeners to donate their surplus garden produce directly to the cause.

## Conclusion: Forging a More Equitable and Resilient Denver Through Collective Action

This report has mapped the intricate and deeply interconnected landscape of civic advocacy in the Denver metropolitan area. The analysis reveals a sophisticated ecosystem of organizations and individuals working tirelessly to address the profound challenges born from the city's rapid growth and systemic inequities. The primary advocacy fronts—the pursuit of justice and equity, the mandate for environmental sustainability, and the stabilization of community through housing and basic needs—are not separate domains but interwoven facets of a single, collective effort to shape the city's future. While the challenges are significant, the evidence clearly shows that Denver possesses a passionate, skilled, and determined advocacy sector capable of driving meaningful change.

"Helping Denver advocacy" is not a single act but a strategic process of engagement. The pathways to impact are varied and accessible to all. They can be summarized by the application of four key assets:

- **Time:** Strategic volunteering, which moves beyond general help to the application of specific skills—whether in a courtroom, a boardroom, a community garden, or at a construction site—provides invaluable human capital to these organizations.
- **Treasure:** Strategic philanthropy, which understands the critical difference between funding direct services and funding political change, allows donors to align their resources with their theory of impact, fueling the entire ecosystem.
- **Voice:** Direct civic and political advocacy—from testifying at a City Council meeting to tracking legislation to making an informed vote on a local ballot measure—is a high-leverage activity that translates public will into public policy.
- **Community:** The act of participating in education and grassroots mobilization—attending a workshop, joining a rally, or simply engaging in informed dialogue—builds the shared

understanding and collective power that is the bedrock of any successful social movement.

The future of Denver will be determined by the ability of its citizens to engage with this ecosystem. By understanding the key players, the critical policy debates, and the diverse pathways for involvement, every individual, corporation, and foundation has the power to move from bystander to active participant. Through informed, strategic, and sustained collective action, the people of Denver can forge a city that is more just, more sustainable, and more resilient for all who call it home.

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