

Vital Connections (Vital CxNs)

FOUNDED: 2020

CURRENT ORGANIZATION BUDGET: \$1,016,893

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Boston presents a paradox—a city rich in activism, organizations, and world-class healthcare, yet grappling with persistent inequities rooted in historical disinvestment and structural racism. Although Boston is a renowned healthcare hub, its outcomes remain inequitable because the system does not align with the needs of all its people. Despite abundant resources, BIPOC and low-income residents suffer disproportionately from chronic diseases and shortened life expectancies. For example, life expectancy in the Back Bay is 92, compared to only 69 in Roxbury.

Vital Connections exists to better coordinate Boston's diverse community health ecosystem* by shifting power to those closest to its challenges. The organization believes the fragmented healthcare system can be repaired through vital connections among neighbors, community organizations, sectors, and social resources. Its community-responsive approach identifies true needs and links existing services and programs to create impact. Vital Connections measures success by aligning the health ecosystem to serve historically disinvested communities and empowering them to spearhead transformative solutions. Its community-led systems change model is recognized as a national best practice for advancing health equity by the National Network of Public Health Institutes.

Two Year Goals

- **Hire** additional project managers and community leaders to sustain and grow collaborative initiatives
- **Hire** a systems integration lead to deepen partnerships and expand contracts that bridge systems of care with community-based grassroots efforts
- **Invest** in partnerships for leadership training and workforce development to equip community stewards with skills that boost employment and economic mobility
- **Optimize** evaluation framework to demonstrate readiness for replication and scaling, driving broader impact

Investment Opportunity

Vital Connections seeks a \$3M investment over two years to evaluate and scale its systems-change model, strengthening Boston's community health ecosystem. By expanding capacity, growing its network of collaborative initiatives, and integrating systems care with community stewardship, Vital Connections will demonstrate the power of connection. A tiered evaluation will measure health equity outcomes, ecosystem improvements, and community capacity growth, refining and scaling the model to drive evidence-based systems change and advance health equity for all.

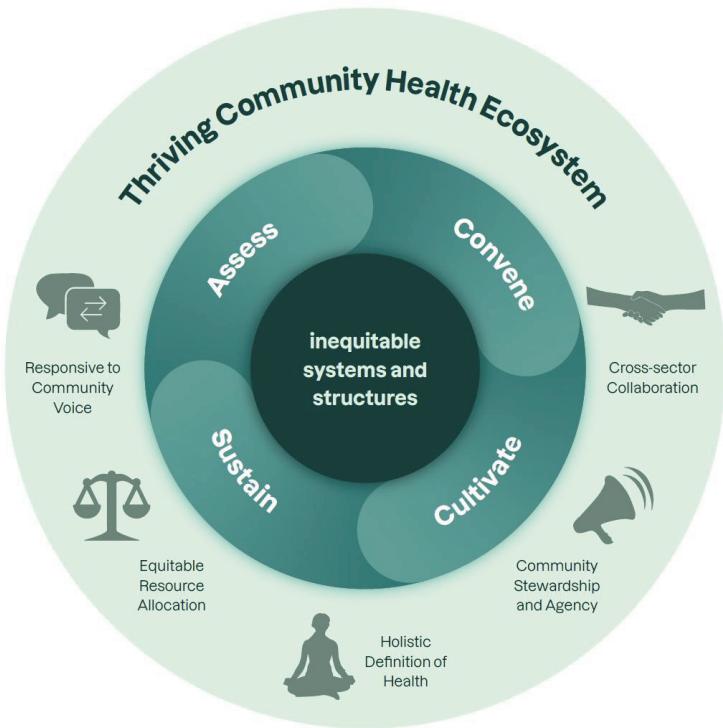
Ways to Invest

- \$150K to hire a systems integration lead or project manager to expand capacity
- \$100K to maintain existing initiatives or address a new community-identified health equity need
- \$75K to develop a scalable evaluation framework
- \$50K to fund a cohort of 15 community peer-to-peer advocates
- Offer expertise in PR, HR or Development

* Vital Connections defines the "community health ecosystem" as the network of healthcare providers, organizations, leaders, and residents collaborating to improve health outcomes.

Vital Connections Community-Led Systems Change Model

Advancing Health Equity for All



Building Vital Connections

Vital Connections unites residents, organizations, and systems of care to address community health priorities and drive meaningful change. Together, Vital Connections meets on-the-ground needs while demonstrating the potential of long-term, community-led systems transformation. Its nationally recognized Community-Led Systems Change Model mobilizes grassroots efforts, convenes cross-sector partnerships, cultivates community-driven solutions, and invests in data-driven, locally sustained health infrastructure. This model transforms conditions rooted in inequitable systems and structures that undermine the community health ecosystem. It includes four stages:

- **Assess** community assets and needs to respond to health equity challenges while building on existing resources
- **Convene** across silos to generate strategies using existing resources to ensure a collaborative and efficient health ecosystem
- **Cultivate** community-centered solutions with investments in community stewardship
- **Sustain** a community-driven health ecosystem through integrating systems and institutional investments

To date, Vital Connections has applied its model through various initiatives to address clinical-community partnerships, food access, COVID 19, maternal health and mental health. Additionally, the organization has invested \$100,000 in community partnerships and facilitated 19,000 health connections across its initiatives.

Clinical-Community Partnerships: Community Health Hubs unite leaders, organizations and clinical care to expand access to health and social resources in trusted community spaces.



Food Access: The Neighborhood Food Action Collaborative (NFAC) is a cross-sector network building a more equitable food ecosystem in Boston. With over 50 community members and 30 organizations, NFAC streamlines food resource coordination and is supported by community leaders, the City of Boston, major healthcare systems, and the Boston Public Health Commission. In 2024, Vital Connections supported the NFAC to distribute 305,000 pounds of food, including diverting 116,000 pounds from landfills.

Maternal Health Equity: In partnership with the New Commonwealth Fund, Vital Connections is co-creating solutions to strengthen Boston's maternal healthcare by partnering with trusted hubs to spread awareness of diverse birth options and align services with community needs.

Mental Health Equity: By partnering with mental wellness providers, community organizations, and community member peer advocates, Vital Connections is overcoming barriers to mental wellness and connecting residents to community-based care.

"It shouldn't be this hard if you have a community wanting to help their own community. After meeting Vital Connections, we finally secured reliable food for those in need."

— Carrie D., NFAC Community Member

Leadership & Governance

Executive Director Ariel Childs brings insights from 15 years of experience building health equity programs for a large Boston healthcare system, which lacked the clinical-community connections needed to improve outcomes. At Vital Connections, she is committed to the upstream, community-first solutions that can help repair fractures in community health infrastructure and overcome silos in care. The staff and eight-member board are accountable to and reflective of the community Vital Connections serves through several deliberate efforts to ensure representation, transparency, and authentic partnership with the community.

Financial Stability

Vital Connections demonstrates strong financial stability with significant revenue growth from \$627K in 2023 to a projected \$1.25M in 2025, and a goal of reaching \$1.65M by 2027. Vital Connections manages expenses proportionately and has diversified funding sources.

Consistent financial growth and planning help ensure sustainable support for Vital Connections' initiatives.

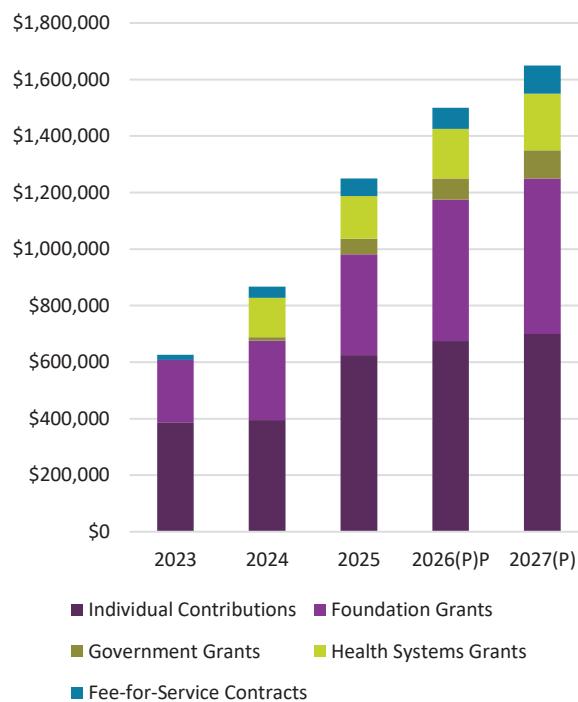
KEY INVESTORS

- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation
- City of Boston
- Life Science Cares
- Mass General Brigham
- National Network of Public Health Institutes
- New Commonwealth Fund
- Thoracic Foundation

KEY PARTNERS

- ABCD
- Boston Public Health Commission
- City of Boston Office of Food Justice
- Epiphany School
- GenUnity
- Mass General Brigham
- Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition
- Union Capital

Revenue by Source





Success Story

REBECCA

Born and raised in Hyde Park, Rebecca grew up helping elderly and non-English-speaking neighbors.

When COVID hit, she began volunteering at food pantries and joined the Neighborhood Food Action Collaborative (NFAC). She quickly built strong relationships within NFAC, and a year after joining, Rebecca's NFAC peers recognized her leadership potential and nominated her as a community leader for the collaborative. She co-led meetings, liaised with the community, and supported food distribution.

Initially hired temporarily, her leadership secured her a permanent position with Vital Connections, stewarding the organization's food access efforts. As a community leader, Rebecca's growth continued, and in 2024, she earned her Community Health Worker certificate.

For Rebecca, leadership means building connections, understanding challenges, and sharing knowledge to create real solutions.

Program Performance and Organizational Health

Vital Connections' evaluation system tracks performance, network sensitivity, partner satisfaction, initiative growth, and impact metrics. Below is a summary of the key measures Vital Connections monitors to assess its impact.

	FY 2025	FY 2026(P)	FY 2027(P)
Program Performance			
# of community residents paid to steward health equity strategies, resulting in increased power shifted to community leaders and residents	50	70	90
# of strategic partners engaged in collaborative health equity initiative	100	115	135
# of community members who receive health services, resources, or information via a Vital Connections clinical initiative	1700	2000	2500
Organizational Health/Capacity-Building			
Full and part-time staff	9	11	13
Board members	9	11	13
Implement impact measurement model with fidelity	Launch	Synthesize	Optimize model
Total Revenue	\$1,250,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,650,000

Social Impact

Vital Connections' impact is seen in a thriving community health ecosystem that drives equitable health outcomes. This is achieved through its Community-Led Systems Change Model, which involves co-designing solutions with affected communities. By shifting power to community members, fostering cross-sector collaborations, and ensuring effective and efficient resource flows, Vital Connections aims to create a sustainable and equitable health ecosystem in Boston.

Below is the summary of the social impact that Vital Connections aspires to have in the next two years.

Indicator	Current Numbers	2027(P)
% of strategic partners reporting an improved connection to the community	80%	90%
% of ecosystem stakeholders reporting an improved connection to each other	64%	85%
% of community members reporting a gain in leadership skills*	82%	95%
% of overall revenue generated from healthcare and/or systems-level institutions, indicating systems integration with community-based health equity	20%	30%

* Metric applies to the NFAC community members. Will be tracked across initiatives in future years.