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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Knight Foundation Fund at Central Carolina Community Foundation Awards \$280,512 in Grants to Advance Cultural Vibrancy and Civic Engagement in Columbia

Columbia, S.C. – March 16, 2026 – The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Fund at Central Carolina Community Foundation awarded \$280,512 to six organizations spearheading projects that strengthen cultural vibrancy and civic engagement across Columbia. These grants continue a decades-long commitment to Columbia from Knight Foundation, which established a donor advised fund at Central Carolina Community Foundation in 1993, and since then, has invested more than \$4.4 million in Columbia. 26 cities are a part of the Knight Foundation's investments in communities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers.

"These grants recognize that a strong community is built through connection and participation," said Columbia Mayor Daniel J. Rickenmann. "By investing in arts, culture, and civic engagement, Knight Foundation is helping Columbia strengthen its role as a cultural anchor for the Midlands while creating more opportunities for residents across our region to engage, connect, and take pride in their community."

The projects selected for 2026 funding reflect Knight Foundation's intentional focus on cultural vibrancy, community connectedness, and civic engagement.

Grantees for Cultural Vibrancy Projects:

- **City of Columbia:** Funding supports activation, programming, and safety as the City of Columbia opens a \$25M renovation project of Finlay Park. The historic downtown park is undergoing a comprehensive revitalization, preserving its history for past generations while featuring modern amenities for future generations. The goal for the park is to help reconnect Columbia's beautifully diverse community in a clean, safe, 18-acre space.
- **Columbia Museum of Art:** The Columbia Museum of Art is hosting two seasons of programming on Boyd Plaza (Spring 2026 and Fall 2026), continuing to activate the downtown public space. During these program seasons, they have a special focus on engaging and providing access to art and creative activities for older adults (ages 65+), a rapidly growing population in South Carolina that often faces multiple barriers to community participation.
- **One Columbia for Arts and Culture:** One Columbia for Arts and Culture is leading a multidisciplinary arts series, hosted at the historic Ensor Kennan House, that strengthens Columbia's vibrancy by bringing people together through shared artistic experiences. This series blends music, visual art, culinary arts, and poetry into immersive events that foster collaboration, broaden participation, deepen civic pride, and connect the community in north Columbia.

- **South Carolina Humanities:** South Carolina Humanities is launching a pilot Capacity Building Program in Richland County to strengthen arts and culture organizations with plans to expand across the Midlands. The initiative provides organizational assessments, training, and collaboration to boost leadership, funding, and sustainability, fostering creativity and community connections.

Grantees for Civic Engagement Projects:

- **CivicLex:** Richland County Library is partnering with CivicLex in Lexington, KY, to expand CivicLex into South Carolina. CivicLex is an organization that is building a program to support the adaptation of its civic health model in communities across the country, providing tools, training, and assistance to organizations working to strengthen civic trust and participation.
- **SC Women in Leadership:** SC Women in Leadership is enhancing its digital platform, MatchBoard, which digitizes and streamlines the process for government boards and commissions to connect with their citizens. They are also improving their marketing and better harnessing a network effect to increase civic engagement.

“Thriving communities are built when people feel connected to one another and to the places they share,” said Lilly Weinberg, Senior Director for Community Impact at Knight Foundation. “These projects reflect Columbia’s strong civic and cultural leadership, and we’re proud to partner with the City of Columbia, Central Carolina Community Foundation, and many local organizations to create more opportunities for residents to gather, participate, and shape the future of their community.”

For more information about Knight Foundation’s work in Columbia and beyond, please visit <https://knightfoundation.org/>.

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About Central Carolina Community Foundation

Central Carolina Community Foundation connects and mobilizes people and resources to strengthen our community. The Foundation partners with donors to turn their passions into meaningful impact through charitable funds, strategic giving, and support for nonprofit organizations across the Midlands and beyond. Through grants, partnerships, and community leadership, the Foundation advances solutions that address the region’s most pressing challenges. Founded in 1984, Central Carolina Community Foundation has awarded more than \$305 million in grants and is home to more than 500 charitable funds totaling over \$275 million.