



Authors-In-Schools In Springfield, Massachusetts

A grant proposal for
\$200,000 to fund the
extension of Wondermore
into Springfield, MA

SUBMITTED TO THE WAGNER
FOUNDATION FUND

PREPARED BY EMILY BEVACQUA

DECEMBER 19, 2019



Wondermore
1647 Beacon St, Suite 5
Newton, MA 02468
(617) 287-8901

December 19, 2019

Charlotte Wagner
Wagner Foundation
500 Boylston Street, 24th Floor,
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

Dear Ms. Wagner,

On behalf of Wondermore in Boston, Massachusetts, a nonprofit dedicated to creating life-long learners and readers in children, I am writing to you to respectfully request a grant in order to extend our Authors-In-Schools program to Springfield, Massachusetts.

Springfield, Massachusetts currently resides in an area where there is an insufficient amount of high-quality, affordable books for low-income families to obtain. Areas in which this is a problem are called book deserts. Book deserts typically have a small number of bookstores and a high demand of the few resources available in libraries. Because of the strain put on these facilities, book deserts have a huge impact on the success of a child throughout both their educational life and their life as an adult. Prior to starting school, it is crucial for a child to be read to daily. It greatly affects their school-readiness as well as their behavior. Once at school, reading promotes a healthy growth in vocabulary skills and social skills. A child who is well-read learns many important life lessons and formulates aspirations for their future. By providing children in book deserts the opportunity to read, Wondermore's goal is to inspire children to love reading through the connection made with creators of children's literature in which they interact with their stories, the lessons told, and the creative process of writing.

In order to help the children in Springfield, I am seeking a fund of \$200,000 to extend our successful Authors-In-Schools program to schools in this area. Authors-In-Schools currently provides the opportunity for undeserved children in the Boston-area to meet creators and work on curriculum-based activities relating to their stories as well as take a copy of their book home. Basing the program off of this branch, we want to see how successful it can be in Springfield in order to decide if a permanent branch of Wondermore should be established there. With the hopes of receiving funds from the Wagner Foundation again, we want to contribute to the solution of book deserts not only in Boston, but eventually throughout the state. Thank you for your time and consideration. If any questions arise, feel free to contact myself or our Executive Director Rebecca L. Coll.

Sincerely,
Emily Bevacqua

Table of Contents

Statement of the Problem.....	3
Books Deserts	3
Importance of Reading.....	3
Opportunities to Read	4
Springfield, Massachusetts	6
Statement of Request	6
Description of Proposed Work	7
Objectives and Goals	7
Methods and Practices	8
Schedule	10
Evaluation	10
Description of the Available Facilities	11
Qualifications of Personnel.....	11
Leadership.....	11
Board of Directors.....	12
Emily Bevacqua, Principle Investigator	13
Budget	14
Summary.....	14
Benefits to Contracting Agent	14
Comparison to Similar Projects	15
Urge to Action.....	15
Bibliography.....	17

Statement of the Problem

Books Deserts

Throughout the country, large cities are segregated into neighborhoods of high-income and low-income families. The isolation of wealthier families to one area means the majority of good parks, libraries, and schools are all located together. This has a large impact on the availability of quality resources to low-income families. Since the funding higher-income families provide to the area are allocated to the neighborhoods of the wealthy, the low-income neighborhoods are not getting the funds to have numerous libraries, parks, and schools. This creates an inadequate amount of quality resources that promote children's positive growth and development for low-income families (Neuman and Moland).

A child's growth and development rely heavily on the number of books present in their life. Due to this segregation of income, the shortage of resources results in an insufficient number of quality printed books available which prevents them from gaining the skills they need prior to starting school (Neuman and Moland). Areas where books are scarce are defined as book deserts. More specifically, a book desert is a location where printed books and reading material in general are hard to attain, especially if a person does not have access to a car or any transportation ("What is BOOK DESERT"). Low-income neighborhoods in cities like Washington D.C., Detroit, Boston, and Springfield are all book deserts. Book deserts greatly affect the children living there and their development.

Importance of Reading

Research shows that many children struggle to become readers, however, families have a huge impact on their child's success. In order to help a child be ready to read in school and

succeed once attending school, a household should have many books in their home (“Frequently Asked Questions”). Access to print resources in a child’s life shows “both an immediate and long-term effect on their vocabulary, background knowledge, and comprehension skills” as well as strong impacts on their goals and job aspirations for them as adults (Neuman and Moland). Due to the insufficient resources in low-income neighborhoods, children living in these areas have access to fewer books and other reading materials putting them at a disadvantage compared to children living in high-income neighborhoods (Neuman and Moland).

As neighborhoods with poverty rates of 40% or more increase throughout the decade, more children in these areas are underprepared and have more difficulty in school. Kindergarten children from households with limited resources have reduced knowledge in letter recognition, sounds, colors, and numbers as great as 60% less than the children raised in middle-class homes (Neuman and Moland). Having conversations with children and hearing stories read aloud play a significant role in school readiness. Those “who are read aloud to at home develop a stronger vocabulary, more background knowledge, better expressive and receptive language abilities, and strong phonological awareness than those children who are not well-read-to” (Neuman and Moland). In addition, a new study called “Reading Aloud, Play and Social-Emotional Development” found that reading with children helps control behaviors like aggression, hyperactivity, and difficulty with attention. Since children who are raised in poverty are also at a higher risk of behavior problems, having access to print books is important to help children in low-income neighborhoods (Klass).

Opportunities to Read

Many researchers have found that the more books in a household, the more likely a child will succeed. According to a 20-year study led by Mariah Evans through the University of

Nevada, Reno, being raised in a house with books in the home increases the level of education of a child by 3.2 years (University of Nevada, Reno). This is due to the fact that children who are read to everyday know many more words and understand how books work compared to those who don't ("Frequently Asked Questions"). This fact alone provides a solution to book deserts: in order to help children in low-income communities, there needs to be an increase of books available for them to bring into their households.

There are several ways a child can receive a book to bring home. One way is that their parents' can buy them a book in a store, however, the simple fact that they live in a book desert hinders this option. Often times there are no bookstores in a book desert and if there are, they are used bookstores or dollar stores with poor quality books (Neuman and Moland). If this is the case, a parent can buy their child a book online. This may seem like the best option; if there are no stores, simply go online. On the contrary, not everyone has access to the internet. In fact, only 46% of low-income families with children below the age of 8 have internet access in their house compared to 86% of middle-income families. Many low-income families "remain under connected, with mobile-only access and inconsistent connectivity" (Neuman and Moland). This leaves low-income families with one last option: libraries. Libraries, whether it is a local library or a school library, provide children with the opportunity to bring a book home. Although, there still are some limitations when it comes to libraries. Most of the time, libraries have limited funding and hours. Because of this, demand can often exceed the capacity which results in a strain on library resources. In addition, some parents may feel hesitant to take out a book from the library in fear of having to pay a late fee if they do not return it on time. If all of the options to obtain a book while in a book desert have their faults, how are children supposed to get their hands on a book?

Springfield, Massachusetts

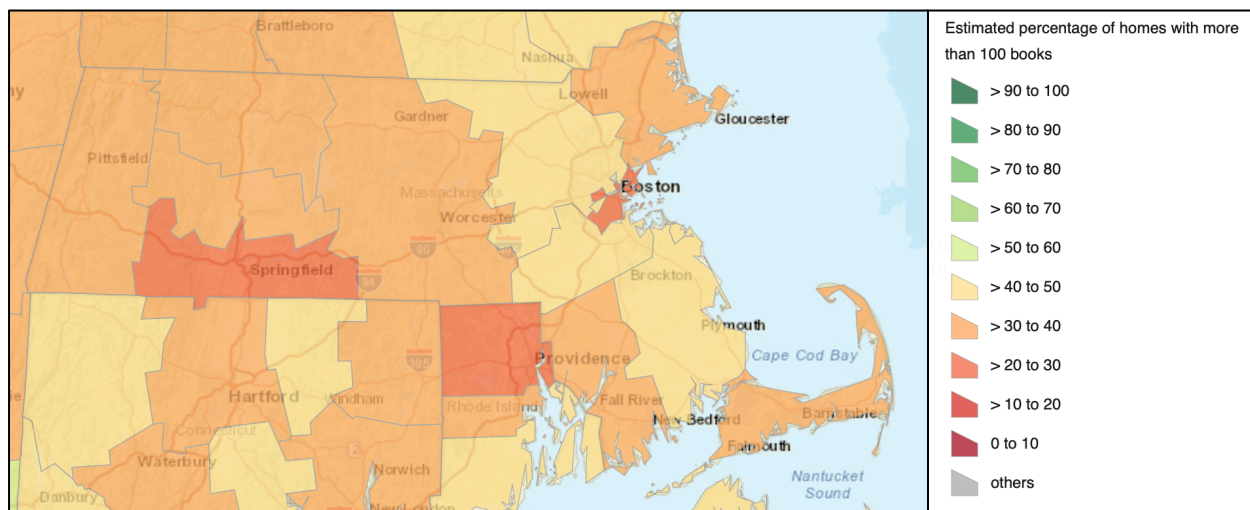


Figure 1 (“Global Book Desert Map”)

Springfield, Massachusetts currently resides in a book desert as can be seen in *Figure 1*. If children want to own a book, their parent must buy one online or go to the three used bookstores located in Springfield. Although there are libraries, based on a google search, the average hours of the twenty libraries suggested are from 1PM until 5PM. These limited hours provide only a short window for a parent to take their child to the library after school; if they themselves aren’t working a 9 to 5 job.

Statement of Request

Wondermore is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization who aims to “nurture curiosity, enrich curriculums, and inspire a love of good books” by providing the opportunity for creators and students to interact with each other (“Wondermore” [*Wondermore*])). They do this through their sole program, the Authors-In-Schools Program, where authors and illustrators of children’s books and undeserved K-8 students in the Boston-area explore new ways that engage the children with reading and writing. Each visit is catered to the class’s curriculum and allows the

creator to meet and work with students while sharing their journeys. In addition, each child leaves the school day with a copy of the creator's book. This is an opportunity not only for students, but also for the teachers too. Teachers learn new ways to teach children while also learning about the creator's path to a successful career. The goal is to motivate children to be better readers and writers. This is exactly what Springfield, Massachusetts needs.

Wondermore's Authors-In-Schools would expose K-8 children to books and stimulate better reading patterns. This isn't going to make the book desert miraculously go away, however, it will help children learn to love reading and have access to more books. More projects would be needed to continue to diminish the desert, however, this is the first step. There seems to be a gap between children and books in Springfield and I believe we can help build a bridge to connect that gap. The Wagner Foundation would provide the opportunity for Wondermore to expand their successful program out of the Boston-area to Springfield.

Description of Proposed Work

Objectives and Goals

The Authors-In-Schools program provided to Boston allows children in underserved communities the opportunity to explore reading and learning in a creative way. As of last year, Wondermore was able to inspire 2,889 students, donate 1,835 books, visit 134 classrooms and hold 28 creator visits ("Wondermore" [*Wondermore*]). Our goal is to take this successful program and use it as structural basis to create a similar opportunity for children in Springfield. As shown in *Figure 1*, Massachusetts has two areas where less than 20% of homes have more than 100 books: Boston and Springfield. By focusing on another area where there is a shortage of books, Wondermore can take a step towards achieving their goal of creating "a world in which

all children have the opportunity to see themselves in the books they read and are inspired to become lifelong learners” (“Wondermore” [*Wondermore*]). In order to achieve this, Wondermore would use the funds provided by the Wagner Foundation to organize 130 classroom visits over the course of one year. Since this is a new area to be exploring, our goal is to visit 130 classrooms in order to have an accurate comparison of our program between the two cities. We will visit as many of the 60 public schools that we can, focusing on the K-8 grades. By doing so, our goal is to inspire children to love reading and learning while also providing books for them to take home in Springfield.

Methods and Practices

In order to complete our goals, Wondermore will use their extensive list of authors to bring creators to each of the schools. During a visit, the creator will work with multiple classrooms of a specific grade. Each visit will be catered to the curriculum of that grade in order to capitalize the time spent. For example, Innosanto Nagara visited P.A. Shaw Elementary School on November 26th, 2019. The children had “been acting out plays about freedom fighters and learning about people that fought for change” in their classes prior to his visit (“P.A. Shaw”). Before Innosanto visited, the classes read his book *A Is For Activists, Counting on Community*, and a few other books written by him. This led to a productive discussion with Innosanto “about activism, the importance of community, and why people sometimes break the rules to make things better” and also stimulated many questions from the students about what it’s like being an author and illustrator at the same time (“P.A. Shaw”). A similar process would occur for schools in Springfield. Wondermore would look at the school’s curriculum and find an author that best fits what they are currently discussing in class.

Each creator visit would look different depending on the grade that is visited. For example, kindergarteners once worked with author/illustrator Carme Lemnescates to create collages using paint, pressed leaves, and twigs in a design similar to the style of her book, *Tree*. This would not be productive for older grades; they would require a more in-depth project. For example, when Lesa Cline-Ransome visited Trotter and Winship Elementary schools, students prior to her visit worked with their librarians to find old video clips and audio recordings of the people Lesa writes about in her biographies (“Wondermore” [Facebook]). This teaches children the important skill of research and using resources to create projects. In addition, it also brings to life the stories they read about allowing the children to engage with the topic in a new way. Other possible ideas for older grades could be a more traditional discussion of the creator’s book. For example, when Zetta Elliott visited Davis Elementary and McCormack Middle School, she engaged in a discussion of overcoming challenges like those in her book *Birds*. She also talked about the strong characters and blending of realism and supernatural in her other book *Ships of Souls*. Another possibility of what a visit would look like would be a combination of a creative project and formal discussion. This occurred with second graders who researched endangered species and then created mixed media of animals inspired by Brendan Wenzel and his book *Hello, Hello*. The ultimate goal is to have the children become inspired by these visits and what they do during them. The effect can simply be seen in the reaction of the children like when “we spotted a third-grader quietly and intently taking detailed notes and writing down questions for author/illustrator Innosanto Nagara about why he chose to be an activist” (“Wondermore” [Facebook]).

Schedule

There are approximately 180 days in a school year for students in Massachusetts (Mhayden). This requires that we should have one creator visit about 4 classrooms a week in order to reach our goal of 130 class visits. This can be done either by having four classes in one school visit with the creator throughout the day or visit two classes at two different schools that are close in proximity. This decision would be made based off of the compatibility of the curriculum of the grades and the visiting creator's book. We would schedule one visit for a younger aged classroom (K-3) and one visit for older aged (4-8) so each school has the opportunity to provide as many children of different age groups with this fun experience and with the books they get to take home after.

Evaluation

When it comes to evaluating the success of Wondermore in Springfield, there are a few options to look at. First, during the creators visit, we would look at the participation of the children and how they are reacting to the creator's activity. By looking at the participation level and enthusiasm, we can see if the children in Springfield enjoy having a creator visit. Second, would be to compare the number of books given out to children in Boston to those in Springfield. This would tell us if we are reaching enough children in the community. Finally, we would look at the feedback given from the schools we visit. Often times schools reach out to Wondermore after the visit to let us know how the children are feeling a few days following the event. This would tell us how well-perceived the visits are. After one year, Wondermore would take these factors into consideration in order to decide if a permanent branch in Springfield is the next move for our nonprofit.

Description of the Available Facilities

There are 60 public schools in Springfield, Massachusetts. Each of our visits would take place in as many of these schools as possible. Our creator's and children need a space where they can interact and participate in the activity planned. Ideally, we would work either in the specific classroom that we are visiting or in the school's library if we are visiting more than one class at a time. By having a close interaction with the creators, children can feel connected to them in a personal way.

The organization of these events would occur in Wondermore's office located at 1647 Beacon St, Suite 5 Newton, MA. The coordination of the event and most of the communication will be done by phone or email, therefore the only travel needed to Springfield is to the schools once a week. If the program is successful meaning that both children and schools are benefiting and enjoying the visits, Wondermore will find a location to permanently station an office in Springfield as well as Boston in order to cut travel time for our workers.

Qualifications of Personnel

Leadership

In order for this project to succeed, we need to have a dedicated staff willing to take on some extra work. I believe Wondermore's three leaders are more than willing to extend the program to help children throughout Massachusetts.

Executive Director Rebecca L. Coll is highly qualified for this job. She has more than fifteen years of experience in nonprofit leadership. Prior to joining Wondermore in 2014, she worked at the Wharton School in Philadelphia developing her program management skills. She also worked at Vermont Commons School in South Burlington, VT as trustee and board chair

where she became efficient in fundraising. In addition, working as a graphic designer in Washington D.C. gave Rebecca the crucial communication skills which she utilizes today (“Wondermore” [*Wondermore*]).

Sitting as the Program Director of Wondermore is Pam Yosca who recently joined this year. Bringing her skills and connections from bookselling and publishing, Pam is a great addition to the team. Her most recent job before joining was working as a school librarian which provides Wondermore with an inside scoop to schools’ curriculums (“Wondermore” [*Wondermore*]).

The last member of Wondermore’s leaders is Kerstin Thommes who is the Director of Operations. Having background in accounting and budgeting as well as fundraising for non-profits, she is the woman behind all the numbers for Wondermore. In addition, Kerstin has experience as an ESL teacher and German Language teacher. This allows our nonprofit the views of a teacher when organizing our activities (“Wondermore” [*Wondermore*]).

Board of Directors

Officers:

- President: Leah Daly – Director of Governance and ERM at Santander US
- Treasurer: Justin Kesselman – Attorney at Posternak Blankstein & Lund LLP

Directors:

- Aimee Bryant – Attorney at Nutter McClennen & Fish LLP
- Christina Dawson – Attorney at Nutter McClennen & Fish LLP
- Rachel Foster – Runs North America Field Marketing at Fuze
- Susan Goodman – Author and Professor at Lesley University

- Chelsea Johnson – Attorney at the MIT Investment Management Company
- Colin Johnson – Early Childhood Educator and Consultant
- Eilene Klaiman – Board Member and Coordinator of the English as a Second Language Program for the Needham Community Council
- Shilpa Kulkarni – President of New England Marathi Mandal
- Scotty McConnaughey – Senior Vice President of U.S. Equities at Aberdeen Standard Investments
- Maura O’Toole – Library Coordinator for Boston Public Schools
- Kim Parker – Assistant Director of Teacher Training at the Shady Hill School

Emily Bevacqua, Principle Investigator

As an English major who is passionate about reading, my goal for a future career is to put as many books as I can into a child’s hands, whether it be by publishing quality books as an editor or by working with Wondermore to give out physical copies of books. I hope to encourage children of society to read more and I want to utilize my analytical and critical thinking skills to help accomplish this goal. I have worked on a student-run literary journal called *Jabberwocky* for the last two years in addition to tutoring at my university’s writing center. Balancing my time between these two experiences as well as studying as a full-time student has taught me time management skills as well as communication skills. In the summer months I have worked as a camp counselor for the last three years. I will combine my planning and organizing skills I’ve gained from *Jabberwocky* and my attention to detail and collaboration skills I’ve learned from tutoring with my knowledge of children and what they like to do in order to successfully extend Wondermore into the Springfield area.

Budget

Funding provided by the Wagner Foundation will be used to pay for the different expenses of this project. First, approximately \$75,000 will be set aside for salaries, personal benefits, and professional fees for our leaders. Next, about \$50,000 will be used to pay for the cost of the visiting creator's time, travel and hotel while staying in Springfield. The specific cost of each author may vary depending on how much they charge for their time and how far they are traveling. In order to provide each child in the schools we visit with a book, \$25,000 will be used on books alone. The remaining \$50,000 will be used for building costs and utilities in the Boston office, travel of our workers to Springfield, and a contingency fund.

Summary

Benefits to Contracting Agent

The Wagner Foundation works with communities in four focus areas: health equity, economic mobility, institutional fairness, and cultural transformation. Under the focus area of cultural transformation, it is believed that “encouraging creativity is essential for our collective well-being” since “imagining and shaping our future is an inherently creative act” (“Wagner Foundation”). Children are our future. Who they become as adults relies on how they grow up and without the creativity sparked from books and the arts in general, they cannot imagine and shape a future. Since the Wagner Foundation strives to encourage, enable, and teach creativity, the Authors-In-Schools program aligns with this vision. We will be encouraging the children of Springfield to read more often by enabling them with the skills and books provided at each event. We will be expanding the already successful program Wondermore provides which the Wagner Foundation has funded in the past. By giving children books to bring home to their

families, we are hoping to inspire children to read at home. In addition, the interaction we provide with the creators allows the students to feel like they can do anything in life; these people were once little second graders who grew up in a similar fashion to the students. We will be showing the students the possibility to where their lives could potentially go which will teach these children important life lessons about working hard and becoming passionate about the activities they love.

Comparison to Similar Projects

Wondermore's Authors-In-Schools program provides an intimate opportunity for children in low-income neighborhoods to interact with creators of children's literature. Although there are similar projects, each work in a different way. For example, the Author Visit Program provided by Scholastic requires the school to reach out to them in order to have one of their author's visit a school. The school must fill out a form and then email it to Scholastic in order to be considered. It takes up to 7-10 business days in order to hear a response from Scholastic and it is not guaranteed a visit from an author ("Invite an Author"). Another option that schools have is simply finding an author themselves. In an article called "Bringing Authors into Your Classroom," a school librarian talks about virtual author visits and how to set them up. This is another exciting opportunity for schools; however, some authors do charge for their time on the videocall which the school would have to pay for. Also, the online experience isn't as interactive as Wondermore's Authors-In-Schools program. Although both of these other projects are useful, Wondermore provides the school a guaranteed, free visit by a creator.

Urge to Action

Communities living in book deserts do not have the resources available to them to help the children in these neighborhoods. It is our job to provide them with equal access to a good

book as well as good libraries, bookstores, parks, and schools. Although we can't contribute to all these resources, we can start with equipping the students with a memorable experience and a book to take home. Children are dependent. They rely on the adults in their lives to shape them into intelligent beings with strong initiative to be successful in life. Without the help of the Wagner Foundation, Wondermore will not be able to help children in Springfield. We need to start to fix the problem of book deserts before the already increasing numbers of people living in low-income areas becomes too high, increasing the deficit of books available to children. Therefore, Wondermore's Authors-In-Schools program would not only benefit the children individually, but the community as a whole as well.

Bibliography

“Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).” *Unite for Literacy*, www.uniteforliteracy.com/corp/faq.

“Global Book Desert Map.” *Unite for Literacy*, www.uniteforliteracy.com/corp/esri.

“Invite an Author.” *Scholastic*, teacher.scholastic.com/products/tradebooks/inviteanauthor.htm.

Klass, Perri. “Reading Aloud to Young Children Has Benefits for Behavior and Attention.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 16 Apr. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/04/16/well/family/reading-aloud-to-young-children-has-benefits-for-behavior-and-attention.html.

Mhayden. “Student Learning Time.” *Massachusetts Law Updates*, 25 Aug. 2015, blog.mass.gov/masslawlib/legal-topics/student-learning-time/.

Neuman, Susan B., and Naomi Moland. “Book Deserts: The Consequences of Income Segregation on Children's Access to Print.” *SAGE Journals*, 5 July 2016, journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0042085916654525.

“P.A. Shaw Library Blog.” *P.A. Shaw Library*, 26 Nov. 2019, pashawlibrary.weebly.com/?fbclid=IwAR2CJWBczTlXzzQ4mrByiVmDg3r5mOf9SOwnkNhfwdw6Uc2pIYo96JbqmG4.

Platt, Rita. “Bringing Authors into Your Classroom.” *Edutopia*, George Lucas Educational Foundation, 26 July 2017, www.edutopia.org/blog/bringing-authors-classroom-rita-platt.

“Schools.” *Springfield Public Schools*, www.springfieldpublicschools.com/schools.

University of Nevada, Reno. “Books in Home as Important as Parents' Education in Determining Children's Education Level.” *ScienceDaily*, ScienceDaily, 21 May 2010, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/05/100520213116.htm.

“What is BOOK DESERT? What does BOOK DESERT mean? BOOK DESERT meaning, definition & explanation.” *YouTube*, uploaded by The Audiopedia, 20 June 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XRxQdUagUE>.

“Wondermore Inc.” *GuideStar*, www.guidestar.org/profile/04-2795274.

“Wondermore.” *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/WonderMoreBoston/?__tn__=%2Cd%2CP-R&eid=ARB0KMJnCcyAoiPzGUz_cFIQJjuUhbRWfFnEhjDWmTWzfp6ykug7gpu2FHD
SvjhFRndt_Z-iWJJHWrlB.

“Wondermore.” *Wondermore*, <http://www.wondermoreboston.org/>.

“Wagner Foundation.” *Wagner Foundation*, <https://www.wfound.org/>.