

Building
Excellence
Sustainability
Trust



A Capacity Building Project Serving Genesee County Nonprofits

What is the Flint Funders' Collaborative?

The Flint Funders' Collaborative is a working group of representatives from four leading philanthropies in Genesee County: the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, the C.S. Mott Foundation, the Ruth Mott Foundation and the United Way of Genesee County.

What is BEST?

BEST stands for: **B**uilding **E**xcellence, **S**ustainability and **T**rust. The BEST Pilot Project was based on a year of research that included a national review of capacity building initiatives, interviews and focus groups, a survey of local nonprofit perceptions and needs. It was established by the Flint Funders' Collaborative with contributions from each funder. Initially, the Community Foundation served as fiscal host. The Funders now have a formal Memorandum of Understanding and the United Way is the grantor for the ongoing BEST Project.

What is the purpose of the BEST Project?

The BEST Project is a strategic initiative to build the adaptive capacity of nonprofits in Flint and Genesee County. The two-phase project allows agencies, with the assistance of expert consultants, to conduct assessments of their current capacities and then apply for up to two years of major funding to strengthen long term effectiveness and sustainability.

In the first 3 years, BEST implemented an integrated, comprehensive pilot project to build the capacity of three key partners in the nonprofit sector: local 501(c)(3) organizations; providers of consulting and technical assistance; and the funders themselves. It combined strategies to assess the strengths of each of these interrelated groups, plus action steps to build excellence, sustainability, and trust within and among the key stakeholders. All aspects of the project were documented to capture what was learned, share results with key stakeholders, and make adjustments for the future. A second cohort was added in 2005.

What are the components and process of the two phases of the BEST Pilot Project?

Assessment Phase:

- Nonprofit organizations serving Genesee County undergo a thorough organizational assessment, which has proven to be a valuable opportunity independent of the capacity building phase.
- Nonprofit agencies interested in participating in the consultant-led assessment process are asked to submit an application. Members of the Flint Funders' Collaborative review all applications. Grant awards are made and monitored by the United Way of Genesee County.
- In most cases a team of two consultants coordinate the in-depth organizational assessment. Agencies select consultants from a vetted roster. Agencies are free to select outside providers, but they must successfully apply for membership in the BEST pool to receive project funds.
- The BEST Consultant Roster includes more than fifty consultants whose resumes and references have been screened and who have participated in a BEST training session and in-depth orientation.
- For approximately 4 months, consultants do a complete document review, internal interviews with Board and Staff members, and examine all management systems. They work closely with Board and Staff leaders and conduct at least one organizational retreat.
- During this period, the Center for Nonprofit Management in Nashville administers a quantitative survey on internal capacity and provides a customized analysis of the data for each agency.

- At the end of this process of affirmative inquiry, research and data collection, the consultant team prepares a confidential detailed report and recommendations for each organization, presenting it first to the leadership team, and then to the Board and Staff, usually at a combined retreat. They also prepare a two-page Executive Summary that outlines strengths and challenges and suggests priorities for a possible capacity building proposal.
- Although the detailed report is confidential from the funders, if the organization decides to apply for a Capacity Building Grant, the Executive Summary must be attached to the application.

Capacity Building Phase:

Nonprofit organizations that have completed the assessment phase may apply for additional funding.

- Capacity Building Proposal Applications are due within 2 months of completing the Assessment Phase. In the Pilot Project, 12 of the 15 organizations were awarded capacity building grants averaging \$35,000 per year for each of two years. Projects are highly customized to agency needs.
- Customized peer learning opportunities include workshops, peer mentoring and coaching.
- Workshop topics are chosen by the agencies. In most cases, sessions are accompanied by opportunities for one-on-one consultations.
- Components include whole system change efforts, Board development and strategic planning.

Are there eligibility criteria for participation?

Agencies must be classified as 501(c)(3) organizations, have a minimum budget of \$150,000 and 1.5 FTE staff members; maximum budget size is approximately \$5 million. Unanimous Board support is required for participating in the project.

How are nonprofit organizations selected?

- The members of the Flint Funders' Collaborative review all applications. The United Way signs all contracts and letters of agreement, manages funding and is the grantor for the project.
- Grant allocations are determined by proposal quality, case for support, project scope, degree of institutional commitment to capacity building, and potential for community impact.
- To ensure balance and maximize learning from the project, a mix of organizations are selected representing the community's Arts and Culture, Health and Human Services, and may include a collaboration from a single sub-sector (such as housing, child-focused agencies, etc.).

Does participation in the BEST pilot project affect eligibility for other program grants from members of the Flint Funders' Collaborative?

Organizations may apply for new or continuing funds from each of the funders to support programs and services that are not connected with their BEST Assessment or Capacity Building grants.

What is expected of an organization that receives a grant in the Assessment Phase?

Board and Staff must agree to invest substantial time needed to participate in specific components of the Assessment, including: internal survey; review of bylaws, policies, plans, financial reports and other documents; interviews and focus groups; workshops and presentations; internal and external surveys; project evaluation. Time required is approximately 2 days per month.

What is expected of an organization that receives a grant in the Capacity Building Phase?

Each organization is expected to: meet the objectives set forth in its own proposal on time and within budget; participate in peer learning opportunities; and, complete required internal and external assessments. The external performance assessment measures client perceptions; it is implemented before and after the capacity building initiative to determine what changes have occurred, if any. The original internal assessment tool is also re-administered to determine change. A confidential report for each is given to the agency; only an aggregate summary of findings is given to the Flint Funders' Collaborative.