

Building
Excellence
Sustainability
Trust



A Capacity Building Project Serving Genesee County Nonprofits

FAQ: BEST

What is BEST?

The BEST Project is a strategic initiative developed to build the adaptive capacity of nonprofits in Flint and Genesee County. **BEST** stands for: **B**uilding **E**xcellence, **S**ustainability and **T**rust. BEST was formed following a year-long research project that included a national review of capacity building initiatives, interviews and focus groups, and a survey of local nonprofit perceptions and needs. The three-year Pilot Project was launched following this fact-finding phase and continues to be sponsored by the Flint Funders Collaborative.

What is the purpose of the BEST Project?

BEST Project is a place-based initiative designed to meet the needs of nonprofits in alignment with the cultural, economic, political, and social realities of the local community. BEST has been tailored to help nonprofits in Flint and Genesee County build the capacities of their organizations through two implementation phases: an Assessment Phase and a Capacity Building Phase. To carry out this work, BEST aspires to develop new standards for technical assistance, new avenues for accessing and delivering help to nonprofits in Genesee County, new opportunities for leveraging additional philanthropic resources in the local community, and program activities that impact long-term sustainability and effectiveness of local nonprofits.

What is the Assessment Phase?

The Assessment Phase is the first of two phases in BEST. With the assistance of expert consultants, nonprofits serving Flint and Genesee County undergo a thorough organizational assessment to determine the current capacities of their organizations. Agencies select consultants from a vetted roster. In most cases, a team of two consultants coordinates the in-depth organizational assessment over a period of approximately 4 months. During this time, consultants undertake a complete document review, conduct internal interviews with Board and Staff members, and examine all management systems. The assessment process provides a valuable opportunity for organizations to look at their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of credible experts in nonprofit management who work closely with Board and Staff leaders to review findings. Assessment consultants are from outside Genesee County and have limited contact with the local nonprofit sector. This objective view of the agency has been a hallmark of BEST and has been found to be an effective approach to the assessment phase.

Concurrent with this activity, the Center for Nonprofit Management 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. This report is presented first to the leadership team and then to the Board and Staff, usually at a combined retreat. Consultants also prepare a two-page Executive Summary that outlines organizational strengths and challenges, and suggests priorities for a possible Phase II Capacity Building proposal.

Based on lessons learned from the first cohort, BEST added an external technology inventory and assessment to the assessment phase. Each agency received a comprehensive technology audit

complete with recommendations and cost estimates for hardware, software, security and back-up, server administration, and networking. The second cohort technology infrastructure varies greatly; in a few cases the technology consultants reported a real concern for the viability of their current systems. The final reports from the technology providers were comprehensive and feedback from agencies has been very positive.

Nonprofit agencies interested in participating in the consultant-led Phase I Assessment are asked to submit an application, which is subsequently reviewed by members of the Flint Funders Collaborative who make award recommendations. Grant awards are made by the Fiscal Host for the BEST Project, the United Way of Genesee County, and monitored by BEST staff.

What is the Capacity Building Phase?

Nonprofit organizations that have successfully completed the Phase I Assessment may apply for funding to carry out capacity-building work. Phase II Capacity Building proposal applications are due within 2 months of completing the Phase I Assessment. Nonprofits must submit the Executive Summary from their assessment with the application; they are not required to submit the detailed report, which may remain confidential to the organization.

In the 2003-5 cycle, 12 of the 15 organizations were awarded capacity building grants averaging \$35,000 per year for each of two years. Capacity-building work is highly customized to agency needs and may include area specific training and executive coaching. In addition to this tailored assistance, BEST provides group learning opportunities, including workshops with follow-up one-on-one consultations, peer mentoring, and executive coaching.