

**B**uilding  
**E**xcellence  
**S**ustainability  
**T**rust



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## A Capacity Building Project Serving Genesee County Nonprofits

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### FAQ: Evaluation

#### How is BEST being evaluated?

BEST has engaged the services of two nationally known organizations in separate evaluative processes: the TCC Group, formerly The Conservation Company; and the Center for Nonprofit Management (CNM). The work undertaken by TCC may be described as a meta-evaluation of the BEST Project: that is an evaluation of the whole initiative that will help us learn from all processes and elements that have gone into forming and implementing BEST. Included in this work are pre- and post-assessments for comparison and evaluation. CNM is conducting a survey-based formative evaluation with each nonprofit agency in order to enable both the nonprofits and the organizers of BEST to learn from their experiences.

#### Is it necessary to engage an evaluator in this work?

Yes! As a new initiative, the FFC and BEST staff felt it was very important to place learning at the center of our experience. Each evaluation provides us with perspectives that the organizers of BEST need to be effective in serving the community. The TCC evaluation contributes to our understanding of the cumulative effect of the initiative, which involves nonprofits, the consultants who work with them, the Flint Funders' Collaborative, project administrators, and the greater community. The CNM data provides a perspective on the effects BEST is having within each cohort of nonprofits through data from pre- and post-capacity building surveys.

#### What have you learned from these evaluations about BEST?

What we have learned and what we are still learning verifies the need for intentional capacity building with nonprofit agencies in the context of local realities. BEST is highly customized, expensive, and time-consuming, and it relies on careful attention to detail. BEST has data confirming the success of the BEST approach, and data that is inconclusive at this early stage. The evaluations help to show where improvements and adjustments are needed, as well as identify things that are important to the constituents of this project, things that need to continue to make the project a success.

For instance, by 2005 approximately two-thirds of BEST nonprofits reported increased communication and improved knowledge of capacity building throughout their organizations as a result of the Assessment Phase and capacity-building opportunities provided by BEST. Over half the executives reported improvement in their ability to make organizational decisions and solve problems as a result of this involvement. As one executive stated: "The capacity building has taught us what high-functioning, structured leadership looks like."

We have also learned that the project has been more resource intensive than anticipated, both in terms of funds and time. We learned that there is a need to encourage more partnerships and alliances across organizations; and to provide more information to consultants about the social and political environment in which Flint and Genesee County nonprofits work.

In response to these findings, BEST was able to include workshops on Fundraising, and on forming Partnerships and Collaboration for agencies. A special session on Flint for consultants and funders looked at challenges faced by residents and current responses underway to the specific needs in Flint for job creation and housing. BEST also learned that workshops alone do not ensure learning or application. The addition of follow-up, one-on-one consults after workshops was an early addition to the peer learning process.

