

Building
Excellence
Sustainability
Trust



A Capacity Building Project Serving Genesee County Nonprofits

FAQ: Flint Funders Collaborative

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. Initial discussions among these funders explored the possibility of establishing a jointly sponsored fund to build excellence, sustainability and trust in the Genesee County nonprofit sector. Discussions over the course of several months made it clear that a collaborative could do jointly what none of the individual funders could do as effectively alone. As a result, the BEST Project was formed to bring a combined and intentional focus to the needs of nonprofit agencies in alignment with community needs.

What issues spurred this collaboration?

Funders within the collaborative expressed mutual concerns about three related issues:

- the quality and focus of local grant proposals;
- the capacity of local nonprofit organizations to achieve their missions and meet critical community needs; and
- the long term impact and effectiveness of local grantmaking initiatives.

They recognized that helping nonprofits create greater alignment between organizational mission, grant dollars and community needs—including the impact on the local economy—could best be accomplished when funders themselves worked together to understand and support the needs of capacity building.

How did the funders conceptualize a BEST initiative?

All funders in the Collaborative credit their careful planning prior to launching BEST with building stronger relationships within the philanthropic community. As a result of this initial developmental stage, three value statements emerged that capture the unified vision and conceptual basis for the group's formation:

- We believe that healthy nonprofits are critical components of our democratic society; and that internally stable, effective nonprofit organizations are essential to achieving a high quality of life in Flint and Genesee County.
- We believe that building the long term capacity of key organizations in the local nonprofit sector is a worthy philanthropic investment that will have a positive, long term impact on the community.
- We believe that building capacity in people and organizations is the most effective when it begins by identifying existing strengths, creating a realistic plan for a preferred future, and then taking the first steps on that journey.
- We believe that collaboration is a key to effectiveness and that funders, consultants and nonprofits can do together what neither can do alone.

How is the Flint Funders Collaborative organized?

The Flint Funders Collaborative encourages participation from two representatives from each of the funding entities: a voting member and a delegate who can vote in the voting member's place. This group is called the Funders Advisory Council. One person is chosen from the voting members to serve as the FAC Chairperson for two years. At the end of two-years, the Chair rotates to another representative from one of the other four collaborating funders.

The United Way of Genesee County plays the critical role of grantor and Fiscal Host for the project. They contribute funds as well as receive funding from the other three funding partners. A memorandum of understanding spells out this role and other roles for the FFC.

How are decisions made about the program?

The Flint Funders Collaborative established governance procedures that:

- Review grant proposals and specify who can respond to grantee requests;
- Approve the annual BEST Project budget and set financial responsibilities for the fiscal agent; and
- Outline reporting responsibilities for the Lead Consultant and Director of Programs.

Key decisions are made through a collaborative process except when decision responsibilities have been delegated to a sub-group, or to an individual, such as to the Lead Consultant, Director of Programs, or to the Fiscal Host for financial decisions and oversight.

How much does each funder contribute to the resources needed for the program?

The amount each partner contributes to the pooled fund is determined by the abilities and responsibilities of the participating philanthropies. The size of the contribution to the funding pool has no bearing on membership responsibilities or privileges. All funding partners share equally in the decision making processes for the distribution of resources.

What do funders do in addition to making grants?

Representatives within the Flint Funders Collaborative work continuously to assure that the content and service delivery provided by BEST adheres to a high performance standard. Funders review the budget and make financial adjustments where needed to improve the program. They monitor staff and stay on top of the processes within each assessment and capacity building phase. They contribute both directly and indirectly to the technical assistance provided to organizations by assuring that nonprofits get the trainings and workshops they need. Representatives also participate actively in peer learning sessions with agencies, consultants and contract staff.

What effect has collaborating had on the way funders carry out their work?

Collaborating through BEST has brought the funding communities in Genesee County closer together. Funders report greater sharing of information, more opportunities to exchange ideas and lessons learned from programs outside of BEST, and being more intentional in their collective work within the community.

Is there funding available for the replication of BEST in communities outside Genesee County?

The Flint Funders' Collaborative focuses its resources on the communities it serves in Flint and Genesee County. Although the Collaborative encourages other communities to come together in similar ways to assist nonprofits, it does not currently contribute funding outside the BEST Project geographic area.