

Nonprofit Support Program

Evaluation briefs describe the goals of major programs and strategic initiatives, what we have learned through monitoring and evaluation, key conclusions and examples of impact.

EVALUATION CONDUCTED BY:

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TYPE OF EVALUATION:

Formative – utilizing interviews, NSP document review, and review of best practice capacity-building literature.

THE CHALLENGE: WHY IT MATTERS

Nonprofit agencies are essential partners in creating strong communities. Resource scarcity and higher demand for services makes it challenging for nonprofits to develop the capacity of their leadership, staff, and systems that will allow them to be more effective and sustainable.

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving (HFPG) fosters this crucial organizational development by providing a range of capacity-building services to more than 200 nonprofits in Greater Hartford through its Nonprofit Support Program (NSP). NSP services include assessments, grants, workshops, sequenced training, and consultant services. As part of its commitment to continuous learning and improvement, HFPG commissions evaluation every five years. The contents of this brief reflect the findings of the 2015 evaluation report.

EVALUATION FOCUS

- Evaluate existing NSP programs, services, and resources and assess their impact on grantees.
- Identify grantee needs as well as trends and best practices that can inform NSP programming.
- Identify areas of potential program improvements that can increase the potential for impact on NSP grantees.

KEY FINDINGS

Value:

- Grantees praised NSP’s “cafeteria menu” of in-depth technical assistance supports that employ a range of learning styles. Many noted that no other local or statewide funder offers comparable services.
- All of NSP’s programs were viewed as valuable. Programs that combined group learning with consultant support and funding offered additional benefit to participating organizations -- particularly in regard to implementing best practices.
- However in some cases, consultant matches were not well-aligned with nonprofits’ needs. Also, the pool of consultants does not sufficiently match the diversity of the community’s needs.

Perceived Impact:

- Many grantees reported that participation in NSP improved their community impact in terms of scale (number of programs offered and/or people served) and quality (e.g. improved client-centric approaches, constituent engagement, and/or program effectiveness).

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Programs and Grants:

- Organizational assessments improved participants' knowledge of how an organization should run and helped them better understand their own nonprofits' current situation.
- Technical Assistance Grants (TAGs) were helpful to grantees in implementing best practices. TAGs used for strategic planning were frequently cited as a critical step in organizational development – helping grantees to measure outcomes, raise funds, and plan for the future. However, some grantees struggled in the implementation phase.
- The Strategic Technology Program is an effective way to ensure nonprofits have technological investments that can best to support the achievement of their strategic goals. Funding that allowed organizations to purchase equipment, software, and other technology was particularly appreciated.
- Grantees reported stronger financial positions after participating in NSP's Financial Management Program citing greater internal accountability, staff financial understanding, board engagement, and financial transparency.
- Board Leadership Program participants reported improved board functioning including improved recruitment and retention of effective leaders, clearer delineation of roles, and enhanced fundraising capacity. However, consistently engaging board members in capacity-building efforts was a challenge for some nonprofits.
- The Building Evaluation Capacity Program is highly effective at simultaneously building knowledge and skills to support nonprofits ability to establish evaluation in their organizations. Ten of the 14 nonprofits participating in the Building Evaluation Capacity Program reported evaluation practices that are being institutionalized in their organizations.
- The Executive Transition program helped nonprofits manage leadership transitions -- a process about which they knew very little at first.
- The Executive Management Institute and other learning circles for executive directors were effective in strengthening participants' leadership capacities.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- NSP can assist nonprofits in becoming more adept consumers of consulting services, build the “bench strength” and diversity of the consultant pool, and develop the capacity of consultants to offer services responsive to nonprofits' needs.
- NSP can expand board member and board chair programming to support nonprofits' engagement of their boards.
- NSP should consider ways to better support strategic plan implementation, including adjustments to technical assistance grants to cover costs associated with plan operationalization.
- NSP can identify and support programs that foster emerging leaders, reinforce nonprofit bench strength, and encourage shared leadership models to promote sustainability.
- HFPG should look for opportunities to further invest in evaluation of NSP program outcomes to better understand the impact of its services on nonprofits and the communities they serve.