

# General Operating Support

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.

**RELATED GRANTMAKING:**  
\$4.5 million (through 2017)

**EVALUATION CONDUCTED BY:**  
TDC

**TYPE OF EVALUATION:**  
Formative – utilizing interviews, focus groups, administrative data, document review

## THE CHALLENGE: WHY IT MATTERS

The Hartford Foundation’s General Operating Support (GOS) grants help nonprofits enhance their infrastructure, respond to the needs of the community, take greater risks and create more innovative programming.

In 2013, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving began to offer unrestricted general operating support grants in response to grantees’ expressed need. The initial recipients of general operating support are listed in the table to the right.

GOS Grantees	Date of Award	Annual Budget at the Time of Award	Grant Amount Over Three Years
<b>Round 1: \$1,005,000</b>			
<b>The Bridge Family Center</b>	June 2013	\$7.6 million	\$375,000
<b>COMPASS Youth Services</b>	June 2013	\$2.1 million	\$300,000
<b>Jewish Family Services</b>	June 2013	\$4.1 million	\$330,000
<b>Round 2: \$484,500</b>			
<b>Hartford Food System</b>	Dec. 2013	\$450,000	\$109,500
<b>Mercy Housing and Shelter Corp.</b>	Dec. 2013	\$5 million	\$375,000

## KEY FINDINGS

The evaluation identified early indicators of the impact of the new grantmaking approach on both grantees and the foundation. Major findings include:

- All GOS grantees stressed that GOS is very valuable funding, and difficult to come by.
- All encourage the Foundation to continue to offer this funding, and expressed their desire to continue to access this important type of support.
- The significant flexible dollars provided by GOS appear to be contributing to grantees accomplishing their desired outcomes and solidifying their strong organizational infrastructures.
- Requiring board members of GOS grantee organizations to be engaged in the application effort has been successful. Board members remained engaged and involved in implementing and monitoring progress on strategic plans.
- Early indications are that GOS has also helped promote the financial health of grantee organizations, although this is still preliminary evidence about long-term outcomes.

## EXAMPLES OF IMPACT

- Organizations indicated that the availability of GOS was a factor in achieving or making significant progress toward the goals outlined in their strategic plans.
  - Grantees were able to build organizational capacity by hiring staff, developing a communications plan, updating a website, or launching a specific fundraising campaign.
  - Grantees noted that the rigorous GOS vetting process employed by the Foundation served as a “seal of approval” of their efforts and helped them to attract additional funding.
  - GOS provided start-up funding or a cushion not otherwise available, allowing grantees to consider newer or riskier projects. In other cases though, GOS funding helped with research that put expansion ideas on hold.
  - GOS grantees have generally experienced a surplus in the year in which they received their first GOS payment, saw an increase in their unrestricted net assets, increased or maintained their days of cash on hand, and have not taken on any new debt.
  
- GOS has influenced how the foundation thinks about the rest of its grantmaking.
  - More agencies are taking advantage of strategic planning as a way to prepare for GOS consideration and more foundation staff are asking for strategic plans as a basis for reviewing other types of grants, including project grants.
  - Elements of the application requirements for GOS have been incorporated into the regular grantmaking process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- The Foundation should give most, if not all, nonprofits in the region the option of applying for GOS or program support, with the same due diligence currently undertaken for GOS applicants.
- Financial criteria for GOS should be refined to be a bit less rigorous, while still excluding organizations with a structural deficit and/or significant and multiple annual deficits.
- The Foundation should consider tying GOS more explicitly to the provision of technical assistance and building the capacity of grantee organizations in need of such support.