

## The Leighty Foundation

*One in a series of case studies on funders investing in volunteer engagement.*

# Case Study: Colorado Springs Osteopathic Foundation Capacity Building Grant Making

The Colorado Springs Osteopathic Foundation's Executive Director and CEO, Doris Ralston, has worked on both sides of nonprofit organizations, as a grant seeker and as a grant giver. These experiences helped her identify that the Osteopathic general operating grants, which were in the range of \$5,000-\$15,000 a year, though extremely helpful, did not provide the ability to grow capacity in a significant way. She wanted to help a few nonprofits "move the needle."

Ralston went to the 12-member board of directors with the concept of providing a small number of high impact grants every few years. After in-depth research and feedback, the Board agreed to these grants in 2012. They added two larger capacity grants over a period of two years while continuing to award some smaller grants. For the first round of the multi-year grants, three nonprofit organizations were invited to each submit a proposal for three years of funding. Only one three-year grant was awarded in the first round. The grants had to demonstrate how they would leverage these funds to build organizational capacity. They also were required to explain how they would sustain program once this funding ended. Impact grants are not given out every year, rather they are staggered according to the Foundation's ability to fund. Grantees are required to submit annual progress reports on accomplishments against goals. Funding in the second and third years is predicated on completing the prior year's goals or acceptable changes through lessons learned.

The Foundation's multi-year grant awards are by invitation only. The second multi-year grant in the amount of \$50,000/year for three years was awarded to CASA, Court Appointed Special Advocates of Colorado Springs, for a volunteer engagement model called "Peer Coordinator". The concept was to develop a higher level of volunteer opportunity within the organization, where experienced volunteers mentor and support the new volunteers coming to serve at CASA. Through this model, CASA was able to exponentially expand its volunteer recruitment and its ability to support and supervise new volunteers. Ultimately, CASA staff and volunteers were able to serve many more abused and neglected children through this capacity building. The model nurtured deeper relationship building between the Peer Coordinators and the volunteers, thereby increasing retention, engagement, growth and was a win-win for everyone especially CASA's clients. Thanks to 22 Peer Coordinators, more abused or neglected children were served without having to exponentially increase CASA's staff or budget. The Peer Coordinator cases continue to outperform the cases that do not have a Peer Coordinator, indicating that the quality has increased with this new model. In the full year of 2015, Peer Coordinators served 255 children. If they had just been advocates, it is estimated that they would have only served 54 cases.

In 2016, the Colorado Springs Osteopathic Foundation invited three additional nonprofits to apply for the next round of capacity building grants.

The Colorado Springs Osteopathic Foundation Board of Directors and members are more engaged in the nonprofits they have funded and those they are considering funding in the future. In addition to vetting and selecting the recipients of the grants, they have assumed an additional challenge, that of providing something more than funding. They are volunteering for short term projects at various nonprofit organizations. The hope is to develop a greater understanding of the issues, clients served, and solutions. One other aim is that they will contribute financially as individuals or expand their volunteer involvement in the future.

Doris Ralston, Executive Director/CEO reports that the impact grants have not only helped the grantees, but transformed her board as well. "The board knows that there will be greater outcomes, even if the outcomes are not the outcomes they had planned on. They understand that \$5,000 to \$15,000 in general operating support is important," she continues, "but on a larger scale they know they can accomplish something specific which impacts the community significantly through the larger, multi-year impact grants." Furthermore, Ralston explains that these grants stretch and leverage resources for underserved populations in their community.