

A California Grant Maker Offers Local Charities Free Consulting Help

By Darlene M. Siska

DOOR OF HOPE, a nonprofit group that serves homeless families in Pasadena, Calif., needed help: Its donations had declined and the charity was in financial jeopardy.

So a year ago its executive director, Tim Peters, began meeting with a management consultant who has, so far, put Door of Hope on a more stable financial footing. The consultant has also begun to reconfigure the group's board, and has put in place an organizational plan to remake its staff, renovate its headquarters, and spur donations to expand the group's services. And all that was accomplished, Mr. Peters says, without the charity paying a cent.

Door of Hope, whose annual budget is approximately \$350,000, received the free assistance through the Flintridge Foundation, a family philanthropy in Pasadena, even though the charity isn't one of its grantees or grant applicants.

The foundation, established in 1985, has a history of providing charities with services to help them grow. Flintridge gives local organizations that serve children and families the opportunity to meet regularly with a consultant at little or no cost.

Nonprofit leaders can sign up to receive assistance in fund raising, board governance, strategic planning, personnel, and other management and financial matters. To continue getting advice, all the charity needs to do is prove it is making progress in meeting specific goals.

While few foundations offer help as extensive as that provided by Flintridge, efforts to provide more than grants appear to be on the rise, according to a report issued this month by the Foundation Center. (See article on Page 12.)

Belt Tightening

The Flintridge Foundation was established through the estate of longtime local residents Francis and Louisa Moseley. Mr. Moseley, an electro-mechanical engineer, made a fortune from design innovations that allowed him to take out more than 50 patents and from the sale in 1964 of one of his companies to Hewlett Packard.

The foundation has supported conservation, theater, and visual arts. It began offering charities consulting help in 2002 as the result of its own need for economy—its endowment suffered severe investment losses that year, says Lisa D. Wilson, manager of Flintridge's Community Services program.

"We had a nonprofit leadership program that had gone well, but was expensive to maintain," says Ms. Wilson. "We wanted to find something really meaningful but that was affordable and manageable."

The foundation's losses have grown so severe that it has ceased support of visual-arts programs, and plans to close two more of its four grant-making programs—conservation and theater—at the end of 2008.

The consulting effort, however,



BOB BISHA JR. FOR THE CHRONICLE

Via a program of the Flintridge Foundation, Belinda Madrid Teitel offered Tim Peters, of Door of Hope, free advice as his social-service charity sought to renovate its headquarters and boost its fund raising.

will continue and has undergone an expansion.

This year the foundation decided to offer charities two 45-minute consulting sessions a week, instead of just one, says Ms. Wilson.

Charities with budgets of less than \$1-million receive the consulting free, while groups with annual budgets of more than \$1-million and those outside the cities served by the foundation—northwest Pasadena and nearby Altadena, Calif.—are charged fees on a sliding scale of \$25 to \$125 per session.

For many years, Flintridge brought in consultants to speak to charities about their management challenges, and Ms. Wilson says that spurred the foundation's staff members to ask themselves, "What if we had an opportunity for charities to sit down and really meet some goals?"

The grant maker is spending \$50,000 on the program this year, says Ms. Wilson, an increase of \$20,000 from the previous year, to accommodate the two nights a week of the consultants' services. About 25 groups have consistently used the service over the years, she says, and "dozens have used it anywhere between one to five times, finished what they were doing, and moved on."

Making a Plan

Foundation staff members prefer to sit down with charity leaders to discern their goals before the charity managers meet with a consultant. Such screening, Ms. Wilson says, lessens the workload for the consultants and, therefore, saves money for the foundation.

Mr. Peters of Door of Hope began meeting periodically with a consultant, but he stepped up the frequency of his meetings when he began to see how much they were accomplishing.

"Initially, we were struggling financially, so we dealt immediately with emergency strategies of funding," he recalls. "And then, after we were able to accomplish financial stability, we looked at organi-

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zational structure. That got into board development and we worked on a 360-degree evaluation, as we evaluated the organization from the client, staff, and board perspectives."

In addition, Mr. Peters says, the consultant helped set up a board retreat to examine the results of the evaluation; from that experience, he says, the group developed and began putting in place an organizational plan. The plan calls for the group to restructure its staff, renovate its 109-year-old facility, and begin the search for money to build affordable, permanent housing for families who

graduate from Door of Hope's temporary housing.

Although the consultant brought up "organizational strategies that were things I knew before," Mr. Peters says, "it is very good to have a sounding board to give advice."

To keep the consulting services organized, the foundation provides consultants with information about each charity before they meet. Consultants in the program use a checklist to determine each charity's progress in meeting its goals, says Rodney D. Walker, a management consultant in Pasadena who has worked for the foundation for a year. He says that process streamlines the work he does for the charity and makes it easy to track the work of clients he may see only on an irregular basis.

Mr. Walker says a large majority of groups he sees are relatively new, "but don't have a developed capacity for all the work they want to do." He says he often finds that organizations are ready to move forward with program plans, but need help in formulating a fund-development strategy.

Spotting Vulnerabilities

Julia Parker, founder and administrative director of Teen Futures, a charity that works in Pasadena's public schools to reduce teenage pregnancy and encourage youth development, says she signed up for consulting about three years ago. She met a former Flintridge staff member at one of the foundation-sponsored informational brown-bag lunches on nonprofit-management issues and

says she got "enough advice from her to see we needed further advice."

Ms. Parker, whose group currently runs on an annual budget of \$186,000, says she at first didn't realize "what a weak position my group was in. We were under fiscal sponsorship with a mental-health agency for the previous seven years and had an advisory council that didn't give a lot of money and obviously didn't have any financial responsibility."

But when her group finally registered as a charity with the Internal Revenue Service in 2004, Ms. Parker says, her consultant, Belinda Madrid Teitel, of Draper Consulting Group, in Santa Monica, Calif., "told us we were in a very vulnerable position."

Ms. Teitel recalls that her mandate was to "help Teen Futures be an independent, free-standing, nonprofit organization, with a formal board and different sources of funding—that kind of thing."

Today, Ms. Teitel works with Ms. Parker and her program director on fund-raising approaches and also provides executive coaching on other issues that will help the organization become stronger.

At one point, to help orient board members concerning their responsibilities, Ms. Parker and Ms. Teitel decided to hold a one-day board retreat. Because the retreat was outside the scope of the work the Flintridge-paid consultants usually provide, Teen Futures sought and won a \$3,000 grant from the foundation to pay for Ms. Teitel's services. As a result of the retreat, Ms. Parker says, "we

Five Grant Makers That Offer Consulting Aid

Following are foundations that provide consultants' services to grantees and grant seekers through formal programs:

The Chicago Foundation for Women offers grantees walk-in consulting on selected days throughout the year.

The opportunities are posted on the foundation's calendar, and at the event, preregistered grantees can talk to experienced consultants to work on specific issues for 30 minutes.

The Erie Community Foundation, in Pennsylvania, makes an annual grant to the Nonprofit

Partnership, a membership organization created by the foundation to provide management services to local charities.

The partnership offers one free session to nonprofit organizations in the Erie area.

Nonmembers are expected to join if they are interested in further services, which include monthly group training sessions, learning circles (information-sharing groups for peers), special projects, an annual conference, and regular distribution of information on trends and resources. Extended or in-depth consulta-

tions are available for an additional fee.

The Flintridge Foundation, in Pasadena, Calif., provides local organizations that serve children, youth, and families the opportunity to meet with a professional consultant on a regular basis at little or no cost, as long as the nonprofit organization meets tangible goals while participating in the grant maker's program.

The San Diego Foundation offers up to 10 hours of free consulting to selected members of its Endow San Diego Nonprofit

Partnership. Costs for the Endow San Diego program are underwritten by the banking corporation Wells Fargo and the telecommunications-technology company Qualcomm.

The foundation retains a consultant in planned giving and endowment-building, and will be recruiting a consultant experienced in marketing within the next year to provide assistance to nonprofit organizations.

The UJA-Federation of New York offers the charities it supports pro bono consultation services in a range of manage-

ment areas. The federation recruits professionals with expertise in different management areas to provide assistance for specific projects for a limited period.

The support can range from two-hour consultations to a relationship of approximately one year.

The organization also allows charities to apply for grants to conduct a board self-assessment, enhance their branding, marketing, or fund raising, or to create or improve their own Web sites. —DARLENE M. SISKI

all saw that we needed ongoing help."

Ms. Parker reports that Teen Futures is making "slow progress."

Through attrition, her board has shrunk in half, down to nine members. But the support from the foundation and the consultant, she says, "has been wonderful, very helpful, positive—and, at the same time, we realize that we have a lot of work to do."

Ms. Teitel, who gives Flintridge a 25-percent discount for her services, says that "one of the greatest benefits of this model of consulting for charities is that nonprofit leaders—some of whom are volunteers and may have day jobs—can really move forward on what they are trying to achieve. Every visit, we focus on accomplishing something

particular. They have homework they need to do when they go, and when they come back, they'll be building on it. It's a great way to keep them on track and on the path to accomplishing things that may fall by the wayside, because they are so busy doing the work of the charity."

Bolstering Charities

As Flintridge's endowment continues to dwindle, the foundation is focusing on helping charities become better at managing their operations.

In addition to pursuing the Community Services program, Flintridge last year won a federal grant to help bolster the management of 27 groups in northwest Pasadena dedicated to combating gang violence and child abuse.

"The consulting program was something we started just to see if it would be helpful," says Ms. Wilson. "But I think people here really value it and it's become a huge part of the services we offer."

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