

STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS:
FOCUSED ON COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Capacity Building Grants

Cultivating Stability and Sustainability

Systemic change is only possible when the organizations that serve our community are strong. That's why we prioritize helping organizations to build and strengthen their capacity to carry out their work.

Foundation capacity building grants meet a wide range of needs. Each grantee is different: some need help with leadership development or succession planning, in order to foster stability amid transition. Some need assistance to ensure each board member fully understands the organization's structure and vision—and their individual role. And some have infrastructure needs, such as software solutions that will increase efficiency and streamline operations.

Our power is magnified through partnership. Collaboration enables us to accomplish goals that none of us could tackle alone.

By helping an organization to strengthen or increase its capacity, we are helping that organization to reach its full potential to serve the community, while also realizing our vision of systemic change.





Adaptive Sports Ohio Capacity Building Grant for Technology

Wooster-based Adaptive Sports Ohio enables individuals with physical disabilities to engage in recreational and competitive sports, both in schools and throughout the community. The organization was founded by a mom on a mission to help her son reach his full potential by ensuring he had access to the same opportunities as other student athletes. Thirteen years later, Adaptive Sports has grown; it now serves hundreds of athletes living in numerous Ohio counties.

Because the organization must manage so many different operational components, it relies heavily on software to help ease logistical challenges. Two particular tools are key:

- **Salesforce** is used to manage donor and athlete information, and to track the more than 1,700 pieces of equipment rented to athletes and used at numerous sites.
- **LeagueApps** is used to enroll participants and coordinate scheduling. The user-friendly interface allows athletes to register for practice sessions and competitions and report in real time whether they will attend.

Separately, each tool is important for operations. But to make the greatest impact, Adaptive Sports Ohio needed the programs to connect with each other. With Foundation support, the organization hired a web developer to create code that enabled these cloud-based tools to share information.

Communication between Salesforce and LeagueApps will dramatically decrease the amount of staff time devoted to data entry, enhance reporting and analysis, and aid in program improvement efforts. It also will help the staff communicate to all stakeholders in one click, eliminating several steps and ensuring the staff have the time they need to serve athletes and help them meet their potential.

Capacity Building Through Connection

Adaptive Sports Ohio Executive Director Lisa Followay had shared with Foundation staff that her organization uses its nonprofit status to access many free and highly discounted tools to manage numerous aspects of operations.

Many Foundation capacity building grant applicants had sought funding to purchase costly software, including donor management programs and point-of-sale tools that support events.

Foundation program officers initially connected individual organizations to Adaptive Sports Ohio to help them learn more. But the need continued to emerge.

It became clear that this was an opportunity to be innovative.

Foundation staff invited Lisa and her team to share their knowledge in an online presentation. Twenty representatives from 17 local organizations attended. The feedback was extremely positive. We thank all those who participated, and we're considering ways to provide similar opportunities in the future.

Early Childhood Education Alliance Professional Development

The Early Childhood Education Alliance (ECEA) is a collaboration of Alliance City Schools, the University of Mount Union, and the City of Alliance. This collaboration uses research-based best practices to ensure children are ready to reach their full potential in school.

Since 2008, ECEA has operated the Alliance site of the SPARK program, which sends home visitors known as *parent partners* into homes once a month to help parents get their young children ready for kindergarten. ECEA also helps Alliance's other early childhood programs enhance their quality and increase their capacity.

Many early childhood professionals have found it challenging to deal with increased mental and behavioral health concerns brought on by the pandemic. The Foundation has recognized this need and has stepped in to help.

Foundation support for ongoing professional development is helping the SPARK parent partners and Alliance's other early childhood professionals to better understand trauma and trauma-informed care, and is equipping them with strategies for addressing children's behavioral health needs. This will build the capacity of Alliance's early childhood system to better meet the needs of families for years to come.

Faith in Action of Western Stark County Organizational Assessment

For more than two decades, Massillon seniors have depended on Faith in Action for the transportation services that enable them to remain living independently. Trained, caring volunteers take the seniors shopping, to appointments, and on personal errands. Clients also benefit from regular check-ins, birthday cards, an annual resource fair, Thanksgiving dinner, and Christmas gifts. The continued independence and human connection can make all the difference to a homebound senior who might otherwise feel isolated and alone.

This very small organization has continued to serve its clients despite the considerable challenges of operating and raising funds during a pandemic. The Foundation believes that with some support, Faith in Action can reach its full potential. A Foundation-supported organizational assessment will yield a road map for organizational efficiency, make the board stronger and more prepared, and guide future communications efforts.

Greater Stark County Urban League Succession Planning

The Urban League offers a spectrum of programs, services, and outreach efforts that help Stark County's most vulnerable citizens reach their potential. Efforts focus on addressing five community needs: workforce development, education, health, housing, and social justice.

The organization has faced significant challenges in recent years, including several leadership transitions. As a result, programs and services have been affected. There's a sense of history here: the Urban League has faithfully served our community for over a century. Times of transition require support to ensure stability into the future.

Whenever we work in concert with other organizations toward a strategic goal, we are enhancing community connections to realize the Sisters' vision.

Since 2019, the current president and CEO has worked hard to stabilize finances and expand the capacity to provide high-quality programming. Now, she's shifting her focus to consider longer-term organizational stability. Foundation support for succession planning will equip the organization's next leader with the skills and strategies needed for success. This will position the Urban League to continue helping, guiding, and supporting our friends and neighbors in need, well into the future.

