

Nonprofit Focus Group Report

CONDUCTED BY: La Crosse Community Foundation

TIMELINE: March- April 2024

NUMBER OF FOCUS GROUPS: 8

INTRODUCTION

Focus Group Timeline

3/1/24 @ 2 pm – La Crosse Public Library – 6 attendees
 3/13/24 @ 2 pm – Franciscan Spirituality Center – 5 attendees
 3/18/24 @ 12 pm – Dahl Family YMCA – 8 attendees
 3/20/24 @ 10 am – Coulee Recovery Center – 8 attendees
 4/15/24 @ 1 pm – Dahl Family YMCA – 14 attendees
 4/17/24 @ 1 pm – Franciscan Spirituality Center – 8 attendees
 4/22/24 @ 1 pm – Dahl Family YMCA – 7 attendees
 3/1/24 - 4/30/24 Online Submissions – 9 participants

Participant Selection:

Participants self selected based on availability. The initial invitation went out to NPOs who have a relationship with LCF.

Scripts

Development of Scripts:
 LCF Impact Team
Transcribing of Focus Groups:
 LCF Grants Committee, LCF Staff
Analysis of Focus Groups Responses:
 LCF Impact Team

Limitations:

- Organizations that do not currently engage with LCF may not have been aware.
- Timing & capacity could have been factors in not participating.
- The unspoken power imbalance of a grantor and grantee could have impacted those attending or not attending.
- Mode of contact limited engagement (emails blocked/filtered as spam)

KEY QUESTIONS

1. What words come to mind when you think about La Crosse County's nonprofit sector?
2. What is something you feel pride in? What does the organization (you're associated with) do well?
3. What resources do you need to carry out your mission effectively?
Thinking about a time when you partnered with another nonprofit organization...
4. What did you bring to the partnership that made it successful? What did the partnering organization bring?
5. What made the partnership challenging? What were the "tension" points?
Thinking about a time when you felt ill-equipped to perform your duties...
6. What was missing? What would have made you feel better prepared?
7. If you could have the community's attention for 30 seconds, what would you tell them about working with a nonprofit organization in La Crosse County?

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

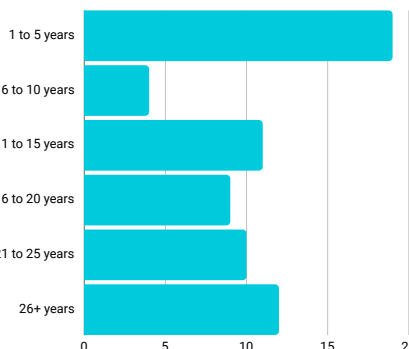
65 participants

*In person Focus Group: 56
 Online Submission: 9*

Average of **16.8 years** of engagement in NPO Community

Titles of Attendees

Directors: 56.3%
 Staff: 34.4%
 Volunteers: 9.4%



Impact Areas Represented

- Arts and Humanities: 6%
- Community Improvement: 20%
- Culture and Diversity: 2%
- Education and Scholarship: 7%
- Environment: 9%
- Faith: 6%
- Health and Human Services: 46%
- Recreation and Wellness: 2%

KEY FINDINGS AND THEMES

Words that come to mind to describe La Crosse County's nonprofit sector

Collaborative	Impactful	Redundancy
Dedicated	Robust	Siloed
Diverse	Engaged	Under Funded
Active	Overwhelmed	Under Marketed
Caring	Competitive	Overextended

In 30 seconds or less, what would you tell the community about NPOs in La Crosse County.

It is important to take action and support NPOs, as they fill gaps in city and state resources while contributing to the community and for-profit sector.

Working for NPOs can be both rewarding and challenging as the work is driven by passion, not wealth, however, NPO employees deserve to be paid a livable wage for their vital work.

NPOs rely on people power to carry out programs. Volunteer work shows commitment and gratitude. The work has expenses and all donations matter. Together, we can make a true difference.

Organizations take pride in...

- Prioritizing care for individuals and validating their experiences by focusing on mental health, education, and addressing gaps without duplicating services.
- Valuing partnerships, adaptability and volunteerism while making a lasting impact on lives.
- Creating collaborative space especially for youth organizations and promoting collaboration across faith differences.
- Serving a large number of people, providing support and connecting with communities with a passion for innovation and longevity.
- Prioritizing community needs, reducing stigma, and advocating for engagement and inclusivity.
- Removing hierarchy and creating a structure to promote creativity, individual work, autonomy and a strong communication flow.
- Creating equity and capitalizing on strengths from diverse team members, investing in our staff and promoting a service-led, compassionate, and responsive work culture.
- Preventing employee burnout and ensuring everyone is on the same page and carrying out the mission while offering ongoing professional development opportunities.

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Resources needed to carry out their mission effectively

Quality Training that Elevates Best Practices

- Sustainability
 - Succession Planning for long-term sustainability
 - Annual Governance Checklist
 - Strategic Planning
- Collaborative Trainings
 - Volunteer (recruitment and engagement)
 - Board Members (recruitment, orientation, and engagement)
 - Mediation with external partners
 - Effective Grant Writing and Story Telling
 - New to Nonprofit (organization and leadership training)
 - Technology
 - Marketing
 - Templates and Tools (reporting and procedures)
 - Effective fundraising strategies

Neutral Partner to Champion and Nurture Collaboration

- Nonprofit Community Organizational Collaboration
 - Communication
 - Volunteer Network and Management
 - Technology
 - Marketing
 - Staff Development
 - Health Insurance Benefits
 - Community Calendar and Hub for NPO Services (intentional collaboration)
 - Space for NPO's to Use Regularly
 - Businesses Willing and Able to Work and Partner with NPO (auditors)

Collaboration Successes and Improvements

Success

- Skilled professionals bring recognition, familiarity, and legitimacy as well as provide open communication, transparency, and shared goals.
- Clear communication and understanding of silos enables specific work to be completed while setting clear expectations and roles.
- Partnerships built through shared vision, mission, passion and openness to learn provided equitable partnering success.

Improvement

- Different visions for the outcome combined with a lack of direct communication can cause mission rub between organizations and ultimately lead to the loss of the original idea or mission drift.
- Big personalities and egos can lead to a lack of leadership or initiative needed to take charge and get the work started.
- Lack of flexibility and understanding of capacity makes cultural differences, project fatigue, hidden agendas and mission creep more prominent.

Enhancements

- Acknowledgement of the "Midwest nice" and the need for clear, transparent communication.
- Recognition of culturally appropriate services and training of inclusive culturally appropriate services.
- Mediation could have helped overcome previous challenges.

Suggestions

- List of area nonprofits with a brief synopsis would encourage collaboration among sectors.
- Encourage education of local elected officials to amplify the mission and promote collaboration.
- Provide access to neutral parties to help facilitate collaboration and mediation to create a collaborative business plan.

Revenue Development and Fiscal Management Opportunities

- Sustainability
 - General Operating Funds
 - Operating Endowments
 - Technology Improvements
 - In-Kind Access to Resources and Supplies
- Fiscal Management Opportunities
 - More Opportunities for fiscal sponsorship
 - Shared Resources
 - Bulk Expenses

Coordinated Advocacy Led by Local Community Leaders inclusive of all community voices

- Local and State Level
 - Affordable Housing
 - Healthcare
 - Childcare
- Among NPO Community
 - Shared Resources to support common goals and outcomes
 - Clear understanding and communication of organization roles
 - Promoting Diversity and Inclusion
 - Philanthropy network for nonprofits
- Within the Community
 - Respect and acknowledgement for the value of nonprofit work
 - Livable wages
 - Support of Mental Health Services and Recovery Housing
 - Reaching Young Professionals for boards and volunteers
 - Understanding Nonprofit Organization Work
 - Volunteer Opportunities
- With Donors
 - Education for donors on the importance of operating costs
 - Fair compensation for staff and investment in their strengths

Implications and Recommendations

LCF is committed to:

- Evolving the competitive grantmaking process that has been unveiled in May 2024.
 - Micro Grants offer opportunities for immediate funding for NPOs with the least access to capital.
 - Mini Grants and Standard Grants provide the traditional grant process with adjustments to increase the Mini Grant funding limit.
 - Capacity Building Program Grants pair multi-year funding with intensive and robust technical assistance, coaching and training for all leadership staff and board of directors.
- Sustainability through professional development, networking opportunities, community and donor education
 - Enabling NPOs the ability to be intentional in their hiring, training, governance and ongoing engagement between board and executives.
- Best Practice Support
 - Continuous partnerships that lead to more consistent internal practices, healthier board and executive relationships and overall decreasing turnover.
- Evolution of the Nonprofit Resource Center will include:
 - Networking | Competitive Grantmaking | Governance Support | Community Education and Engagement | Professional Development | Online Resource Library | Fiscal Sponsorship | Data Collection and Reporting