In 2016, the Foundation for a Healthy High Point (FHHP) made a bold new commitment to increase funding and other resources aimed at enhancing the skills and capacities of nonprofit organizations with shared missions to improve health and wellness throughout Greater High Point.

The Foundation for a Healthy High Point understands that it is not enough to fund effective programs. The nonprofit sector needs support to ensure programs are well run within highly-effective, sustainable organizations. As such, the Foundation partnered with the Guilford Nonprofit Consortium to assist with customized capacity-building efforts to strengthen non-profit organizations. As a collaborative of nonprofit organizations, the Consortium fosters mutual assistance and support within the nonprofit community to create a more efficient and effective sector.

What is Capacity Building?
Nonprofit capacity building refers to many types of activities that are designed to improve and enhance a nonprofit’s ability to sustain itself over time and achieve its mission. It is an investment in a nonprofit organization’s actions - operations, programs, finances, communications - to improve effectiveness. Rather than a one-time effort, it is a continuous improvement strategy toward strengthening organizations.

It is well noted within the nonprofit sector that small to medium-sized organizations often do not have the expertise and resources to carry out an in-depth assessment of organizational capacity needs and engage in long-term strategic thinking. With more than one-third of Guilford Nonprofit Consortium member organizations having budgets of less than one hundred thousand dollars, the Foundation identified an opportunity to strategically invest in capacity-building to strengthen organizations meeting critical needs in the community.
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN NONPROFITS ARE ABLE TO DO THE REAL WORK ON ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY?

“This is was a big leap for the Foundation. Our board saw this unique, innovative capacity-building work as a critical investment to shape long-term culture change and achieve greater impact towards health outcomes.”

- Leah Price, Vice Chair, Foundation for a Healthy High Point Board of Directors
Working together to improve long-term health of our community

The Foundation for a Healthy High Point is committed to improving health and wellness outcomes in Greater High Point. Guilford County, and High Point in particular, lags behind comparable metropolitan areas in its work to promote economic development, eliminate poverty and improve health outcomes. It was recently estimated that around 1 in 5 High Point community members live in poverty and disparities are even greater for people of color. (Source: American Community Survey, 2014)

Together, with the Guilford Nonprofit Consortium, the Foundation identified nonprofit organizations to engage in two phases of a unique, innovative capacity building program based on the communities they serve, interest and readiness to participate, and ability to address critical health issues in High Point.

Phase I

FHHP initially offered a six-month organizational capacity building program to eight health-related nonprofits, enabling them to look at the deep organizational issues that influenced how they carried out their missions including considerations surrounding finances, boards, human resources, and programs. The Consortium delivered an organizational assessment and development curriculum consisting of five workshop trainings for nonprofit executive directors, the use of evidence based assessment tools, and corresponding one-on-one support from a dedicated leadership coach with expertise in organizational development. Workshops and peer coaching sessions occurred every other month. In alternating months, organizations received personalized coaching.
Phase II

After the initial organizational capacity building program in 2016, the Foundation recognized that grantees had a strong desired need for deeper learning opportunities. The next phase of work was designed to build even greater organizational capacity through added support to three of the original participating organizations.

This six-month program, starting in Fall 2017, was team-based and included the executive director and key stakeholders including staff and board members. Each team defined and executed an Action Learning plan to directly address a pressing issue for organization. All teams met collectively at times and also worked independently. Each team had an Action Learning coach who also served as Executive coach for the director.

The program consisted of:

• Introductory meetings with participants and their executive coaches
• Action Learning workshop and Design Thinking workshop
• Team meetings with coaches every two weeks
• Three half-day special topic sessions
• Wrap-up session

Organizational teams worked together to solve real problems, learning and developing capacity as a group. They explored organizational issues, challenged assumptions of what they thought problems were, and surmount obstacles that have stymied progress.
"These nonprofit leaders are now willing to be vulnerable and open to change. They’re breaking through barriers by having honest, real conversations within their organizations and with each other. Some are now even formally collaborating on projects to better support the needs of their clients."

-Chris Musselwhite, Founder of Discovery Learning

“We’ve had difficult conversations as a team, confronting the challenge of restructuring our services to better meet the needs of people we support. After this program, my staff has gone on to tackle more problems without me using the methods we learned. We’re still working on it, but have confidence and more tools in toolbox to handle issues.”

-Shay Harger, Victim Services Director
Family Service of the Piedmont

“We knew we needed to work through a big challenge for our organization but it’s tough to find time to step away and work on it. With this program, we worked through a process to honor and replace four board members and create training for new members to better understand their roles in communicating our services to the wider community. This has been such a rewarding experience for our organization.”

-Becky Yates, Executive Director of Caring Services

“We have totally revamped our onboarding process for new staff, providing more consistency with information sharing across the organization. Yet, through this project, our team brainstormed more ideas and opportunities that we still want to incorporate using the process we learned.”

-Heidi Majors, Executive Director of High Point YWCA
What is Action Learning?

Action Learning is an approach to solving real problems that involves taking action and reflecting upon the results to improve the problem-solving process and solutions developed by the team. The Action Learning process includes:

- a problem that is important, critical, and usually complex
- a diverse problem-solving team
- a process that promotes curiosity, inquiry, and reflection
- a requirement that “talk” be converted into action and, ultimately, a solution
- a commitment to learning

In many forms of action learning, the Coach promotes and facilitates learning and encourages the team to be self-managing. Individual team members develop a customized learning agenda for themselves rather than a “one size fits all” curriculum.

What Is Design Thinking?

Design Thinking is an approach to explore issues and resolve problems more broadly than within a typical problem-solving session. In an organizational improvement context, the approach uses a designer’s sensibility and methods to match people’s needs. Design Thinking is a method for practical, creative resolution of problems. It is a form of solution-focused thinking resulting in a constructive future result. It is partially based on principles of empathetic questions and listening. By considering both present and future conditions and parameters of the problem, viable alternative solutions may be explored.

Design Thinking identifies and investigates known and ambiguous aspects of the current situation to discover unknown parameters and alternative solution sets that may lead to the goal. Because design thinking is iterative, intermediate “solutions” are potential starting points of alternative paths, including redefining the initial problem, in a process of co-evolution of problem and solution.

Reflection

Capacity building is a critical and ongoing investment that benefits nonprofit organizations as they strive to fulfill their missions while contending with myriad, multifaceted challenges. These investments offer opportunities to address organizational issues and inefficiencies, allowing organizations to tap into their internal expertise to amplify their impact.

The Foundation’s support of this capacity building program was not without risk. But as a result of this grantmaking investment, it was clear that organizations embraced philosophies, concepts, and dedicated themselves to new learning by entering “unknown territory.” Subsequently, the impact of new thinking, new tools, and new perspectives led – and will continue to lead – to ways to comprehensively and holistically address issues.

The Foundation intends to continue exploring additional opportunities to invest in capacity building efforts to strengthen and support nonprofit organizations. It also hopes to partner with other foundations and community partners to advance such efforts, which have the potential to strongly affect organizations and communities.
About
The Foundation for a Healthy High Point exists to encourage, support, influence, and invest in efforts that improve health and wellness throughout Greater High Point. Our tagline, “Leadership for change,” exemplifies our intent to be a leader in collaboration, and support initiatives that improve the long-term health of our community. We accomplish this by examining health issues and identifying evidence-based practices to improve health and wellness in Greater High Point.