2019 Opportunity Grant Survey  
Overview and Key Findings

During May 2019, the Greater Rochester Health Foundation (GRHF) distributed a confidential survey to applicants and partners to obtain feedback on our Opportunity Grant program. The survey was emailed to past applicants and posted to the foundation’s website for additional responses.

First, THANK YOU to all who took the time to complete the survey and provide your insights. We were amazed and grateful to receive 76 responses from our partners. Your feedback on our grantmaking is critical to ensure we are clear with our goals and how they might align with your efforts. Second, your feedback will be used to improve the applicant experience with GRHF through the Opportunity Grant program, with special care to respect the amount of time and effort that goes into applying for a grant and ensure our processes reflect this commitment. Finally, we are, and will continue, to share what we are learning as much as possible.

As we reviewed your responses to this survey, it’s clear we are doing some things well, but have room for improvement. As a result of your feedback, we will be working to improve the Opportunity Grant program by doing the following:

- **Interactions with GRHF:** We are in the process of improving our communication and follow-up processes to ensure every applicant receives constructive feedback on their proposal. In addition, staff will continue to be available to further clarify any questions with honest insights to support your project efforts.

- **Goals of Opportunity Grant Program:** We will clarify our program goals and update our website with a dedicated page for Opportunity Grants that details our expectations and intentions with this funding program. The updated page will provide information on program timelines, application requirements/expectations, reporting expectations, and grant funding decision dates. In addition, we will use this page to share what we are learning from supported projects and reflect the variety of the projects focused upon positively impacting the health status of our community.

- **Improve the Process:** In order to address timeline concerns, we will implement a streamlined two-step application process. We will shorten and publish the application to award timeline at the beginning of the process to allow for effective planning by our applicants and minimize the time between project submission to execution of grant agreement. The process will start with an initial submission that will be vetted for fit with the foundation priorities. Select applicants will then be invited to submit a full proposal. Staff will provide feedback and rational to applicants for projects that are not invited for full proposals and subsequently those not awarded funding. Finally, our post award process will be shortened and focused solely on ensuring timely implementation of an awarded project.
Again, thank you to all who took the time to complete the survey and we will continue to keep you posted on our progress as we modify the Opportunity Grants program. Currently, we anticipate the next Opportunity Grants cycle will become available between November 2019 and February 2020.

As always, if you have any questions, additional thoughts or feedback, please do let us know.

Sincerely,
Matt

**More detailed survey response takeaways:** Based on the survey responses and comments, we identified three major thematic categories of focus from those who participated:

1. **Interactions with GRHF:** Overall, survey respondents had a mixed experience with the foundation and foundation staff as it related to the Opportunity Grant program. There was high value placed on interactions with staff as part of the program through phone meetings, workshops, and other engagements, and over 80% of respondents felt they were respected by GRHF during the application process.

   While there was high value placed on staff interactions, respondents were also interested in clearer communication, more frequent interactions with staff and consistent communication during the application process. Respondents shared that the information received from GRHF was not always clear nor seen as helpful or constructive. Respondents expressed a desire for more direct feedback to help them with future proposals and/or to further develop their project ideas. In addition, feedback was inconsistently provided, and respondents expressed a strong desire for feedback and follow-up, regardless of the grant decision.

2. **Goals of the Opportunity Grant Program:** Respondents shared several comments related to a desire to better understand the goals and intent of the Opportunity Grant program. Comments to the survey describe the program goals as vague and unclear making it difficult to determine if they had a project that fit. They also expressed confusion on if the program was only looking for “projects that would be fully sustainable in three years” or “sure things to fund that have demonstrated evidence” rather than testing new approaches or seeking to get ahead of current trends. Applicants also expressed confusion, specifically if the program was only looking for projects with medical outcomes or if broader health topics would be considered.

3. **Improve the Process:** Respondents shared several ideas to improve the grant process, many of these centered on ensuring the application process was streamlined, all expectations of applicants are provided upfront, and the post-award process is not overly prescriptive. In addition to clarifying the intent of the program, a consistent theme was to have a two-step application process with letters of intent being vetted for fit with the program goals. This was described as ensuring applicants do not spend significant time on a project that is not a fit for the program and only requesting full proposals for those that appear to be a good fit from an initial review.
Furthering this point, applicants to the Opportunity Grant program spent a significant amount of time on their applications; 58% spent more than 30 hours applying to the program.

In addition to clarifying intent and a two-step process, respondents expressed concern and frustration with the program timeline. Respondents stated the timeline was not clear at the time of application and took longer than expected, “a full 12-month period between application and contracting” complicated planning and project viability. This was complicated by what was described as an overly prescriptive post award process that was not clear at the time of initial application.