

FEATURED

Forum aims to help connect Southern Maryland nonprofits with funds

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Julie Wagner, vice president of community affairs for CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, Jon Hornstein, program associate, small grants for the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Sharon Southerland-Smith, executive director of the Community Foundation of Southern Maryland and Mark Luckner, executive director of the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission, served as panelists at a forum on nonprofit funding opportunities in Hughesville Wednesday morning.

STAFF PHOTO by Jamie Anfenson-Comeau

There may be money out there for nonprofit organizations in Southern Maryland, and to help them access those funds, CareFirst BlueCross Blue Shield and Community Foundation of Southern Maryland held a forum to tell them how.

“If you’re the development officer or the executive director or even a board member of a local nonprofit, you know a large part of your discussions are around where your next dollars are coming from,” said Ellen Flowers-Fields, board chairwoman of Community Foundation.

The forum, held Wednesday morning in Hughesville, was attended by approximately 50 representatives of Southern Maryland nonprofit organizations, and featured a panel discussion with representatives from CareFirst, Community Foundation, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation and Maryland Community Health Resource Commission.

The idea for the forum came about last year, when CareFirst reached out to the Community Foundation, said Sharon Southerland-Smith, the foundation’s executive director. Another goal of the forum, Flowers-Fields said, was networking with other nonprofits.

“A lot of organizations may live here in Southern Maryland but may not know what each other are doing,” Flowers-Fields said.

Julie Wagner, vice president of community affairs for CareFirst, said that last year, the organization gave \$33.2 million to 296 nonprofits in CareFirst’s service area, which includes all of Maryland, Washington, D.C., and a small portion of Northern Virginia. It’s key focus areas are on improving maternal and child care, empowering the region’s health “safety net” clinics and expanding access to behavioral health services.

The criteria for applying, along with deadlines, are listed on the CareFirst website, www.carefirst.com/community, Wagner said.

“A couple of things we don’t fund: We don’t fund individual schools, PTAs, Little League sports teams ... we don’t fund religious efforts, although we have funded organizations that’s doing something nonsectarian,” Wagner said. “Everyone has to be a 501(c)3 charity — the only exception to that are health departments and some government health-related agencies.”

Jon Hornstein, program associate for small grants, said the Weinberg Foundation is focused on the alleviation of poverty and economic insecurity through direct service.

“They [Harry and Jeanette Weinberg] were really focused on direct service: ‘Someone will be hungry, someone will be cold; that’s our job,’” Hornstein said. “We don’t fund advocacy, we don’t fund medical research, we really focus on direct services in a number of different areas.”

The Weinberg Foundation funds programs covering seven broad areas, including older adults, workforce development, education, disabilities, basic needs and health, veterans and general community support.

Hornstein said the group's charter requires 50 percent of funds go to capital projects and the other half to operational projects. The Weinberg Foundation gives roughly \$35 million per year to nonprofits in Maryland.

"We do require that nonprofits be in existence for three years. We require, for all of our grant applications, we require a financial audit, except for our small grants, which just require a financial review," Hornstein said.

The Maryland Community Health Resources Commission was created in 2005 by the Maryland General Assembly to expand access to services for low income Marylanders and underserved communities, said Executive Director Mark Luckner.

"Since we were created in 2005, we've awarded 190 grants, totaling \$60.3 million, and those 190 grants have supported programs in all 24 jurisdictions in the state," Luckner said. "Those 190 grants have collectively served just under 400,000 Marylanders, most of whom have complex health and social service needs."

The organization sends out requests for proposals around Halloween of each year and has three strategic priorities: to serve vulnerable populations regardless of health care status, promote health equity and to support community-based projects that are sustainable and equitable, Luckner said.

Projects the commission funds fall into three categories: essential health services, behavioral health and substance abuse and food security, Luckner said.

"The first step for an applicant is to submit a Letter of Intent," Luckner said. "We screen the LoI submissions and we determine who is eligible to submit a grant proposal. It's detailed, we try to strike the right balance between requiring a lot of applicants while not asking for a lot of extraneous information."

The Community Foundation works to direct donor contributions to local organizations serving the community, said Southerland-Smith.

"We want to really align philanthropic interests within the community, identify the community needs and align them with organizations and entities and really make sure that those nonprofits are sustained," Southerland-Smith said.

The foundation helps nonprofits build endowed funds to allow them to continue their mission, Southerland-Smith said.

“We have limited resources oftentimes while we’re here on earth, but we have resources that, if we could, extend beyond our lifetime to help others, we need a way of ensuring they would be there and well managed and well taken care of,” Flower-Fields said.

Susan Layer-Whelan, director of special programs for Barstow Acres Children’s Center in Prince Frederick, said they had a number of different project concepts under development, and asked if they could get assistance shaping programs to grants.

“We often say, what is your greatest need? Don’t try to tailor your project to us,” Wagner said. “You want to make sure that it is on-target for your organization.”

Claire Piason, director of development for Calvert Hospice in Prince Frederick, asked if palliative care could fit within the organizations’ health missions.

“We’re kind of on the periphery, the outskirts, because everyone asks what does your organization do to improve health? We do help people live longer, but we can’t say how many people survived, because we’re hospice,” Piason said.

Wagner said that for CareFirst, they are looking at the whole person, and continuum of care, and there may be programs they could help with.

“In talking about hospice and palliative care, there are services that go around that, with families, that really fall under behavioral health,” Wagner said.

Christine Mulcahey, executive director of Health Partners Inc. in Waldorf, said her organization has benefitted from grants from all four organizations, including grants to support medical, dental and breast screening services.

“With your funds, we’ve been able to grow our facility, we now have two sites,” Mulcahey said. “As I sit here today, there’s still construction going on, they’re moving equipment in today, but it’s a very exciting time.”

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