

Case Study – Support KC

Support KC, a 501c3 charitable organization based in Mission, Kansas, was founded in 2001 with the mission to provide nonprofit organizations with business and development expertise, empowering them to focus on their missions.

Support KC's formation and development was driven by a prominent member of the funding community in Kansas City who recognized the need for organizations to improve financial reporting. As its first offering, Support KC provided affordable, shared, accounting services. Over years of development, Support KC has grown to provide 130 nonprofits not only with accounting services but also with database management, fund development planning, governance and strategy coaching, and other types of extensive training.

Services that are not customized specifically to suit an organization's mission have the potential to be shared.

FUNDING MODEL

Support KC was originally founded as a nonprofit that Kansas City funders would support until the organization became self-sufficient with expenses covered earned income from service fees. Later, the founder's successor, with the board and staff, determined that in order to keep services affordable, 85% of the budget would be covered by fees for services and 15% would be subsidized through community contributions.

As funders and the community better understood the value of Support KC's services, the importance of capacity building, and the need for high quality operating systems, foundations offered continued funding. Support KC is now able to offer services at fees that are not only below market but also below cost.

THREE KEY WINS

- Beginning in 2014, Support KC was able to serve as the backbone organization for the Cultural Competency Collective of Greater Kansas City (CCCGKC) and Nonprofit Advocacy KC (ADCAP). Through these two initiatives, Support KC is helping build the capacity of nonprofit organizations and increase their impact in the Kansas City Community.

“There was a shift in thought. Funders began to see the impact we were making. They saw this was a successful model and that it was important to invest in Support KC to be able to support more organizations.” Debra Box, President and CEO, Support KC

- Beginning in 2014, Support KC created customized trainings to provide content and to strengthen the network of relationships among organizations and staff. In designing training content, Support KC relies on close partnerships with clients and with other community organizations that offer complementing development work. Support KC utilizes training as an opportunity to educate clients about their spectrum of shared services and to facilitate a network for peer learning.

RETHINKING OVERHEAD

THE NONPROFIT CENTERS
NETWORK

- Beginning in 2014, Support KC was able to serve as the backbone organization for the Cultural Competency Collective of Greater Kansas City (CCCGKC), Nonprofit Advocacy KC (ADCAP) and, in 2017, Missouri Public Health Association (MPHA). Through these three initiatives, Support KC is helping build the capacity for organizations who are promoting equity, inclusivity and diversity in the Kansas City Community.

THREE LESSONS LEARNED

- Clients have many demands for time and attention. One of the toughest challenges as a shared service provider is requesting the initial time needed to work with the client to set appropriate expectations. It is important for clients to understand, from the beginning of the process, what successful shared services will look like within their own organizations. There also must be a way for clients to provide feedback to service providers to ensure their needs are met and the expectations for shared services are achieved.
- Support KC strives to provide services that are accessible and impactful for local nonprofit organizations. At the same time, client organizations have varying needs and some clients come on board with the need for more services than their budget can support. It is critical to have an intake process that identifies the key needs of client organizations. It is also important to define the shared services pricing strategy and communicate it clearly so that clients are aware of what services are provided at what price.
- Shared service providers need to be strategic in building their own organizational capacity and consider both the pipeline of local experts and the competing service providers. For example, Support KC faced challenges attracting high quality talent given the other, often bigger, accounting firms in the area. Shared service providers need to think ahead about how to attract service providers and how to nurture the pipeline for future service providers to ensure that clients' needs can be met.

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