



GEO Member Spotlight

In the current economic struggle, the resources we want and need are not always readily available. The arrangements between funders and grantees have been impacted significantly, as proposed plans for giving have been eliminated or changed. In some ways, these changed plans have been for the better. When forced to focus on the effectiveness of an organization, certain types of funding are crucial to making meaningful change. The Cherokee Preservation Foundation has found that their use of capacity building and collaboration in their giving has made real change, despite the depletion of funds in recent years.

As reported in *Philanthropy Journal*, the economic downturn put pressure on the foundation since the majority of their funding money comes from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' casino. Lower income at the casino reflected in lower amounts of giving dollars for the foundation. "It has been difficult, but the difficulty hasn't been on our part," says Susan Jenkins, executive director of the foundation. "It's when we have to tell our grantees that all the money they've requested isn't there."

Without all the money that grantees needed, the foundation had to look to other options to keep their mission intact and their grantees afloat. The foundation, rather than giving up, accepted this challenge by narrowing their work to promote capacity building and collaboration on projects with other area funders. Jenkins says this type of giving is "forcing us and many others to be more strategic. . . Sometimes you have to be pushed into some things you know you ought to be doing."

One way the foundation does what they "ought to be doing" is giving priority funding to those grantees that attend their Skill Builders program. The program focuses on creating internal skills for the nonprofits for a more stable, structured environment. Jenkins says that this "continual learning" also speaks to the foundation's learning, as they collaborate with fellow organizations to achieve similar goals for the community.

The casino has begun to recover, and funds have started trickling back into the foundation; however, capacity building has found a permanent place in Cherokee Preservation Foundation's future giving and collaborative initiatives. "Based on what we are learning through our capacity building program and our collaboration with grantees and other funders, we will continue to strengthen training for grant applicants and orientation for grant recipients," says Jenkins. "Consequently, we will also have higher expectations regarding grantee planning and results, and our community and region will be stronger for it."

We are thankful to Ret Boney of *Philanthropy Journal* for spreading the word about Cherokee Preservation Foundation's success. For the full article, please click [here](#).