

# Who is Successfully Building Nonprofit Capacity?

## Social Venture Partners Seattle

*SVP Seattle engages volunteer and paid consultants to help “investees” make the most of capacity-building grants.*

### Quick Grantmaker Stats

Type of funder	Donor-engaged capacity builder
Geography/Issue Area	Seattle/King County, WA
When founded	1997
Total assets (as of FY 2013)	\$981,000
Annual giving (as of FY 2013)	\$975,000
Number of staff	8.75 full-time equivalent
Website	<a href="http://www.socialventurepartners.org/seattle">www.socialventurepartners.org/seattle</a>
Brief description of the program/ practice being discussed	Grantmaker combines capacity-building grants with support from volunteers and paid consultants.

### 1. Describe the situation or practice.

Social Venture Partners Seattle funds 15 organizations with up to \$225,000 each in general operating support for up to a five-year period. These “investees” have access to an additional \$6,000 per year in capacity-building grants to work with consultants on specific issues. In addition to financial support, SVP provides nonprofit organizations with a high-engagement relationship through SVP “partners.” These are SVP donors with expertise in various areas of organizational capacity who consult with the investees on a voluntary basis.

SVP Seattle is part of the SVP Network, which engages more than 2,700 donors in cities throughout the world (currently in the United States, Canada, Japan, China, Australia and India) to pool their donations to vetted nonprofits while also contributing their business and professional expertise.

## The Role of SVP Partners

SVP's donor-partners are the primary resource to fill volunteer requests and meet the capacity-building needs of the organization's investees. SVP profiles its partners to understand their skills, time availability, interests and educational and professional background. SVP staff use this information to match partners with volunteer job requests submitted by investees. Each investee has a lead partner who serves as the primary liaison to SVP as well as the key contact for SVP volunteers. When a volunteer job request cannot be filled by an SVP partner, investees use capacity-building grants from SVP to work with paid consultants.

## 2. What have you tried to do differently?

Every SVP investee conducts an organizational assessment at the beginning of the relationship (and then two more times over the course of five years) to determine strengths and challenges across 10 areas of capacity. SVP's Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool looks at the following areas:

- 1) Mission, vision, strategy and planning
- 2) Program design and evaluation
- 3) Human resources
- 4) CEO/ED/senior management team leadership
- 5) Information technology
- 6) Financial management
- 7) Fund development
- 8) Board leadership
- 9) Legal affairs
- 10) Marketing, communications and external relations

Based on the results of the organizational assessment, each nonprofit develops an annual work plan. Grantees use SVP's core support to work toward goals identified in their plans, and SVP also supports grantees to achieve their goals through volunteer or paid consultants.

*“Evaluation is critical to the work of SVP Seattle. We conduct an investee survey every other year and we are always looking at trends across our portfolio so we can fine-tune and strengthen our approach. We want to make sure that we are doing all we can to help investees get what they need to reach their goals.” – Lynn Coriano, deputy director*

### 3. What has been the result?

According to the SVP Network’s 2012 report on capacity-building outcomes, SVP Value: The Nonprofit Investee Perspective, 97 percent of investees across the international network rated their overall relationship with SVP as “excellent” or “good.” The value of the contribution of partners’ time and talent to investees received an average rating of 4.6 out of 5. And, during the year covered by the survey, the non-grant contributions made possible by SVP partners around the world totaled \$2.4 million, increasing the value of SVP’s initial cash grants (\$1.7 million) by nearly 150 percent.

### 4. What are your key insights from doing the work?

SVP has historically employed a responsive, not a prescriptive, approach to capacity building. However, Lynn Coriano, deputy director with SVP Seattle, said that in recent years the organization has noticed many of its grantees facing shared challenges in areas such as financial planning and managing executive transitions. This prompted SVP Seattle to start exploring how to adjust its model to help nonprofits address these challenges more proactively.

“As we explore how we might adapt our approach, it may lead to more targeted support around particular capacity-building areas and changes in our grant guidelines,” Coriano said. As an example, she said the guidelines could indicate that in the first three years of a funding relationship SVP would want to see the grantee develop a succession plan or the ability to produce cash-flow projections or meet other benchmarks. Simultaneously, SVP would ramp up the consulting side of its model (through partners and consultants) to make sure it is providing support to help grantees meet the guidelines.