

# GEO Member Story



***How Saint Luke's Foundation creates and fosters open and honest relationships with its grantees to learn more about its community and collaborate in addressing complex social problems facing Cleveland, Ohio.***

When it comes to building strong relationships with grantees, the Saint Luke's Foundation pays more than lip service to its core values. By living and embracing values like respect and partnership, the foundation has been able to build open, honest and trusting relationships with grantees — the type of relationship that Saint Luke's views as integral to its ability to have an impact in the communities it serves.

Saint Luke's Foundation was founded in 1997 to continue the charitable work of Saint Luke's Medical Center, as the center became part of a for-profit partnership. The founding board of the foundation — all of whom had made up the board of Saint Luke's Hospital — recognized an internal weakness early on: while the board had experience with healthcare issues and services, it lacked the deep ties to the community that would allow it to make a difference for the citizens of Cleveland. The solution for Saint Luke's was to invite community members and, most importantly, grantees to serve on the board of the foundation. "This arrangement may seem risky, but it's valuable," said LaTida Smith, vice president for programs, outcomes and learning. "We've been able to derive extraordinary benefits by having grantees serve on our board."

Foremost among these benefits is how the foundation's grantee relationships enable it to create deeper connections to residents of Cleveland. "If we're trying to move the needle on the issues we're addressing, we really have to understand the space," Smith said. "No one knows more about what's happening in the community than our grantees. That's why we want to have a conversation and talk about what they are seeing in the community."

Among these grantee board members is Francis Afram-Gyening, chief executive officer of Care Alliance Health Center, one of Saint Luke's keystone grantees in the foundation's health portfolio. Serving on the foundation board has given Afram-Gyening a new avenue to share what he sees every day in the community: "The advantage of my being on the Saint Luke's Foundation board is that when something comes up about health care for special populations or serving the working poor, I can add my voice to the discussion."

The Saint Luke's Foundation's commitment to hearing from nonprofit and community voices extends beyond its grantee board members. The foundation has looked to hire senior program officers who have nonprofit experience. And each of the strategy committees that advise on the foundation's various issue portfolios is made up of both board members and community experts. Here again, both the foundation and its grantees are able to derive benefits from this open and honest relationship.

"When we conduct site visits, one of the questions we ask is 'How could we support you and make running your organization much easier?' as opposed to before, when grantee leadership may have

heard questions like ‘you didn’t meet this outcome – Why?’” Afram-Gyening said. “For example, you might learn that they are struggling to fill key leadership positions to assist them to move to the next phase of their organizational growth.”

And as an added benefit for the foundation’s grantees, this approach has helped ease some of the inherent tension in the grantmaker-grantee relationship. “The bottom line is, what can you do to help the leadership team feel at ease?” Afram-Gyening said. “Reducing fear is what makes them feel a bit more open than before.”

This site visit approach was an intentional step made by Saint Luke’s to increase openness and has helped the foundation better identify and address the needs of its grantees. “Our grantees are continually helping us to identify how to achieve our mission, and also how to think about things like how we invest in capacity building and where we can add more than our grantmaking dollars to the organizations we’re trying to serve. They have a particularly keen eye for identifying that,” Smith said.

One way Saint Luke’s has sought to do more with its grantmaking dollars is by listening to its grantees to identify ways and places the foundation can act as a convener. “Our role as a convener is a really important one,” Smith said. “We’re in a position to connect the dots.”

For Afram-Gyening and Care Alliance Health Center, the foundation has facilitated strategic collaboration opportunities, such as creating a partnership with the Kent State University College of Podiatric Medicine to provide regular podiatry services. Afram-Gyening notes that these opportunities benefit all participants, and allow his organization to “use our limited resources in other areas.”

Already seeing many benefits to these open, honest and trusting relationships, Saint Luke’s will continue to identify ways to foster the lines of communications between itself and its grantees. “We believe that our grantees are our partners in the work we’re trying to do in the community — we recognize that we can’t achieve our mission but through collaboration with them,” Smith said.

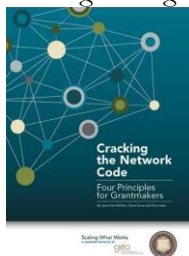
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To find out more information on Saint Luke’s Foundation, please visit <http://www.saintlukesfoundation.org>. To read additional perspectives from Francis Afram-Gyening, please download *Is Grantmaking Getting Smarter?*

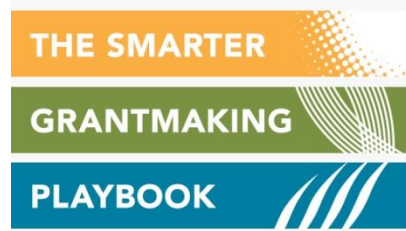
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### **GEO resources that relate to the topics covered in this member spotlight**

*Is Grantmaking Getting Smarter?*



*The Smarter Grantmaking Playbook: Strengthen Relationships with Grantees*



*Do nothing About Me Without Me*

