

GEO Member Spotlight

The Mary Morton Parsons Foundation

A small foundation working on a big vision for Richmond

With the purpose of building a community of support for local youth to be empowered and attain college degrees and jobs, a coalition of Richmond, Va.'s community leaders began to come together from across the nonprofit, public and private sectors in April 2009. Among these organizations was the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation.

The coalition was inspired by the Promise Neighborhood initiative of the U.S. Department of Education and the Harlem Children's Zone model that offers children and their families "cradle to career pipelines" of support by strengthening the local community. Although the U.S. Department of Education ultimately didn't select Richmond as a final grant recipient in 2010, the coalition recognized that federal funding was only a short-term goal; much of the true value of the coalition, known as Richmond Promise Neighborhood, lay in the new connections and collaboration that were being formed.

"One of the great things about the initiative is that it allowed us to bring the right people to the table," said Amy Nisenson, executive director of the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation. "[The initiative] wasn't just one funder's agenda. It was the community's agenda."

Over its 24-year history, the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation has worked to strengthen nonprofit organizations in Virginia and specifically in the Richmond area. Founded by its namesake, Mary Morton Parsons, in 1988, the foundation supports the capital needs of charitable organizations, specifically in education, health and human services, arts and culture, and historic preservation. It largely focuses on helping organizations to raise funds through challenge grants, which encourages other possible donors to match MMPF's support.

This month, Nisenson will be joining more than 150 other grantmakers for GEO's *Strategic Co-Funding Convening*. She is already experienced when it comes to helping grantees maximize capital projects and use matching grants. Next, she wants to apply those skills with ideas from the convening, hopefully paving the way for even greater success for Richmond Promise Neighborhood.

MMPF is already supporting the implementation of a data sharing system for the initiative. Nisenson said the system was an area that MMPF identified as fitting with the strategy and experience of MMPF.

"If you co-fund, you can make a more strategic, larger impact," Nisenson said. "Everyone is focused on the good of the community and what we are able to do together rather than promoting individual interests."



Amy Nisenson, Executive Director of the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation

Organizations Taking Part in Richmond Promise Neighborhood

- Better Housing Coalition
 - Bon Secours Richmond Health System
 - City of Richmond
 - Communities in Schools of Richmond
 - The Community Foundation Serving Richmond and Central Virginia
 - East End Partnership with Families
 - The Jackson Foundation
 - Local Initiatives Support Corporation
 - Mary Morton Parsons Foundation*
 - Partnership for Families Northside
 - Peter Paul Development Center
 - Richmond Memorial Health Foundation*
 - Richmond Public Schools
 - Richmond Redevelopment & Housing Authority
 - The Robert G. Cabell III and Maude Morgan Cabell Foundation*
 - Robins Foundation*
 - United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg
 - Virginia Commonwealth University
 - VCU Health Systems
 - YMCA of Greater Richmond
- * indicates GEO member

More information available at:

rvapromise.org



About Amy Nisenson

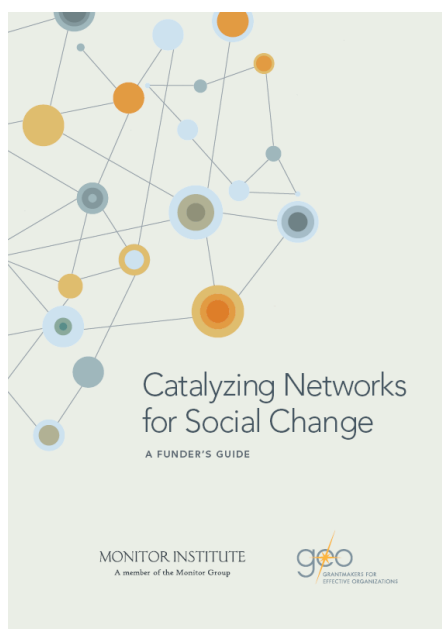
Nisenson serves as executive director of the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation and in a consultative role to small and emerging nonprofits in the Richmond area. She has taught in nonprofit management programs at the University of Richmond in the Institute on Philanthropy, the University of Virginia, Tidewater Community College Academy for Nonprofit Excellence, the Virginia Commonwealth University Nonprofit Learning Point, Network Williamsburg and Volunteer Hampton Roads. Prior to her position at the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation, Nisenson served as vice president and community affairs manager for Wachovia Corporation. In her consultative work, she offers support with corporate-community engagement, working to develop community engagement strategies and programs that support and further business objectives.

About Mary Morton Parsons Foundation

The Mary Morton Parsons Foundation was founded in 1988 by Mrs. Mary Morton Parsons as a private, non-operating foundation to support the capital needs of charitable organizations. To date, the foundation has awarded approximately \$73 million to qualified grantees.

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

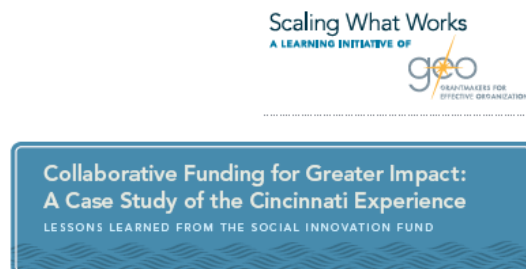
Catalyzing Networks for Social Change



Due Diligence Done Well: A Guide for Grantmakers



Collaborative Funding for Greater Impact: A Case Study of the Cincinnati Experience



Find these and other resources for grantmakers at www.geofunders.org