

# GEO Member Spotlight

## GEORGE KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION

*A supporting organization of Tulsa Community Foundation*

*How the George Kaiser Family Foundation is forging strong partnerships and bringing proven programs to Oklahoma*

Since it was founded in 1999, the George Kaiser Family Foundation has worked to strengthen and improve the Tulsa region and, more recently, has excelled by cooperatively supporting programs and services in the region that have proven themselves successful in other parts of the country.

With its approach to bringing promising programs to Tulsa, in addition to its work developing partnerships with other funders, GKFF is an example of using an evidence-based approach to philanthropic work.

Through its work with the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City — both [Social Innovation Fund](#) grantees — GKFF has been able to support four promising programs in the Tulsa area. Knowing the specific problems within the community that needed to be focused on — for example, incarceration rates for women, for which Oklahoma ranks highest in the nation — helped inform GKFF's efforts to bring to Tulsa programs like the [Center for Employment Opportunities](#), which offers comprehensive employment services to people with criminal records. Other programs supported by GKFF's partnership with Social Innovation Fund grantees include the [Carrera Program](#), [SaveUSA](#) and WorkAdvance (see sidebar). Jim East, a consultant with GKFF, said that it's possible that when the fifth anniversary of the Social Innovation Fund occurs in 2015, the fund may have helped to establish as many as 10 programs in Tulsa.

While these programs are currently supported by Social Innovation Fund grants, East said the hope is that these programs will prove themselves effective and remain part of the local landscape in Tulsa long after federal funding ends.

This year, nearly two years after beginning work involving the Social Innovation Fund initiative, GKFF convened a number of the individuals who had been involved in establishing these programs along with local stakeholders. At the gathering, information was shared about the programs already in place, and GKFF invited local stakeholders in attendance to partner together in bringing new programs to the region.

East said he sees more opportunities becoming available in the future for public/private partnerships at the state, local and tribal levels — even while there may be less money coming from the federal government.



Jim East, Consultant, George Kaiser Family Foundation

One example of success in Tulsa comes from the efforts of **WorkAdvance** — a workforce development program for unemployed and low-wage adults. [WorkAdvance's](#) model was developed by the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City and the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity.

WorkAdvance's establishment in the Tulsa region was possible largely through a partnership between GKFF, the Tulsa Community Foundation, and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City and the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, which received support from the Social Innovation Fund.

In July, the White House Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation highlighted a WorkAdvance success story featuring [Travis](#), a single father of two children working at jobs that were paying \$10 an hour or less. Through the services offered by WorkAdvance, Travis saw his income climb to \$14.50 per hour in a stable, full-time job that puts his training to use.



These partnerships further emphasize the need for projects to demonstrate focus and performance, he said.

When it comes to developing a successful partnership with other funders, East said that the key is genuine relationships.

“We needed to know who they were,” East said. “We needed to go to New York and visit them. We needed to see the programs that they provide in their environment, and, vice versa, we needed them to come to Tulsa, to see who we were, to see the kind of programs outside of the Social Innovation Fund that we have funded.”

East said the partnerships with EMCF and the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City allowed for the strengths and funding approaches of the different partners to help each other improve.

“It’s always good to work with someone who makes you better,” he said. “We loved our relationship with these national foundations, because it makes us better at what we do.”

### **About George Kaiser Family Foundation**

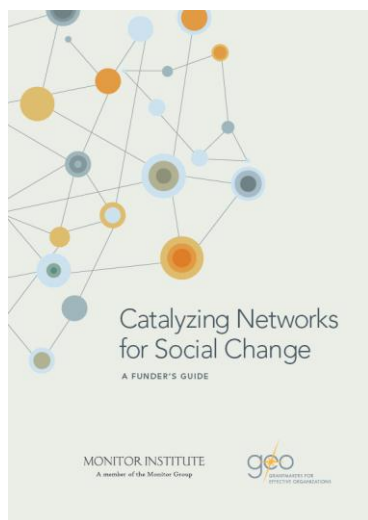
George Kaiser Family Foundation (GKFF) is a charitable organization dedicated to breaking the cycle of poverty through investments in early childhood education, community health, social services and civic enhancement. GKFF works primarily on initiatives developed in collaboration with Tulsa-based direct service organizations.

GKFF is a supporting organization of the [Tulsa Community Foundation](#). As a supporting organization, GKFF has a stated mission of engaging in charitable activities that are consistent with the purpose of TCF.

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

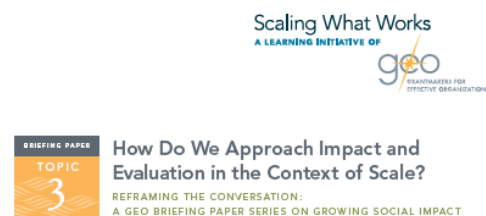
#### [Catalyzing Networks for Social Change](#)



#### [Strategic Co-Funding: An Approach for Expanded Impact](#)



#### [Scaling What Works Briefing Paper Topic 3: How Do We Approach Impact and Evaluation in the Context of Scale?](#)



Find these and other resources for grantmakers at [www.geofunders.org](http://www.geofunders.org)