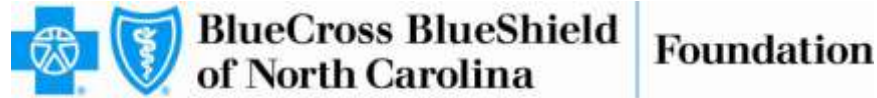


GEO Member Story



An independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation is connecting and equipping thousands of people trying to make a difference — including the employees of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina — and investing in crucial training for not only grantees but those outside their focus areas as well.

This month, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation will hold its twenty-ninth Healthy Community Institute for Nonprofit Excellence. Over the 13 years that the foundation has been holding the institute, they have helped to strengthen more than 1,000 North Carolina nonprofits with about 3,800 participants attending the institute.

Through extensive experience leading the Healthy Community Institute (HCI), the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) Foundation has come to understand what it takes to use a learning program to build nonprofit capacity and to change organizational status quo. Among the stipulations for participating in the institute is the requirement that each team be comprised of 3 to 5 people — one of whom must be the executive director and two of whom must be members of the board.

HCI, which is held twice per year, begins with two days of on-site learning. The program is offered free of charge to North Carolina nonprofits, even those who are not grantees of BCBSNC Foundation and those whose work lies outside of BCBSNC Foundation's focus areas. Over the two days, programming consists of a mix of general sessions, one-on-one sessions and workshops covering topics, such as board development and recruitment, annual appeals, strategic planning, tracking and reporting outcomes, and communications.¹

While the time spent with expert teachers during these sessions can be transformative experiences for attendees, Danielle Breslin, vice president at BCBSNC Foundation, said that the real value comes from getting the leadership from the individual organizations together for crucial, strategic conversations.

“What we hear consistently is that the time at HCI is an opportunity that nonprofits don't have when they're back in the office; the E.D. and the board chair having quality, carved-out time to get together and really talk through things. It's the time not only during the sessions, it's the time during dinner or traveling.” Ms. Breslin said. “We've heard nonprofits say, ‘We were so fired up that on the ride



The Healthy Community Institute begins with two days of on-site learning with time for valuable discussions to take place

"Staff and board members from our agency had two days of uninterrupted training and support to look closely at our board development, fundraising and strategic planning efforts. The consultants understood our mission and worked personally with us to discuss issues facing our organization. And after the event, we still have all of the online resources so that we don't have to reinvent the wheel. I highly recommend HCI for any nonprofit agency!"

-Testimonial from Steven R. Strom, M.Ed., MBA, Executive Director, The Arc of Wake County and 2011 HCI Participant

¹ We were honored to hear that BCBSNC Foundation has borrowed ideas from GEO conferences to encourage participatory engagement

back from HCI, we wrote a whole new appeal letter using the tools and techniques that we learned at the institute, and we had \$10,000 worth of donations come in based on that letter.”

As an organization, BCBSNC Foundation understands how crucial capacity building work is to supporting effective organizations. This recognition can be seen by one of the foundation’s three focus areas being “Nonprofit Excellence” — which works to provide capacity-building grant dollars to foundation grantees and capacity-building support via workshops and trainings, like HCI.

In more recent years, BCBSNC Foundation has been working to keep the momentum going for nonprofits who attend the institute by providing webinars and other resources for the participants. The foundation has begun framing HCI as a year-long organizational change program, with the foundation working to support participants along the entire journey, said Valerie Stewart, program officer for the Nonprofit Excellence focus area.

Perhaps the most enticing incentive for HCI participants to make good on their training is a \$10,000 unrestricted award that is given to an organization that best exemplifies the implementation of the principles taught at HCI.

While HCI, with its reputation, large size and professional trainers is seen as BCBSNC Foundation’s hallmark capacity building initiative, the foundation is also working to connect smaller, peer exchanges across the state with its “5 Good Ideas *Make Them Great*” workshops. The workshops bring together 20 to 30 nonprofit leaders. One organization shares five “good ideas” from their experience and the other organizations work to take at least one of the ideas and make a way to adapt it to their own work.

“I think this is another way of telling grantees, ‘We don’t have all the answers. You are out there doing the work day to day, and we want to use our position as a foundation to lift you up in a way that maybe you can’t do yourself, which has been really humbling and engaging,” Ms. Breslin shared.

For more about the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, the Healthy Community Institute or other items mentioned in this Member Story, visit www.bcbsncfoundation.org or email the BCBSNC Foundation staff mentioned: [Danielle Breslin](#) and [Valerie Stewart](#).

Connecting skills to needs

Recently, for the first time in two years, one of BCBSNC Foundation’s grantees was able to send an electronic newsletter to its supporters — thanks to the help of a BCBSNC company employee who was thrilled to put a personal skill to work for others.

Ms. Breslin and Ms. Stewart shared that they have both been greatly excited by a recent initiative to connect the foundation’s grantees with the company’s 4,000 employees.

The foundation partnered with [Catchafire](#) to pilot a skills-based volunteering program for its grantees. The effort has been a success; all 30 grantees that submitted a need for a skilled volunteer had their need met by tapping into a pool of about 450 employees who volunteered their services.

Ms. Breslin shared that the foundation is eager to connect company employees in a meaningful way to the work of grantees. This not only helps bring the foundation’s mission to life, but it has energized employees and helped the foundation have an even greater impact in the community.

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

[Learn and Let Learn](#)



[Cracking the Network Code](#)



[Working Better Together](#)

