



2020 WGA Agency Convening Summary

WGA invited the 22 agencies awarded grants in the poverty focus area to our Annual Convening August 11. The session was virtual via Zoom. The session began with Allison Newberry Dennis, GLT Co-chair welcoming agencies, providing an overview of the agenda, and introducing two speakers to highlight how their agency is adapting to the pandemic. Colleen Rodriguez explained how JFCS has adapted its services considering increased demand. Lori Richards showed a brief video BEAM produced to thank donors, staff, suppliers, and volunteers for the support of the mission.

Attendees then entered one of three pre-assigned group rooms: one primarily composed of agencies with programs for girls; another with programs primarily for women focused on readiness for work and learning; and the third for agencies primarily providing wrap around, specialized, and transition resources to women.

Common themes emerged from the groups: the need for flexibility and willingness to adapt; the importance of communication with all audiences; the unexpected ability of the agency to adapt to technology change; how well and easily the agency is adjusting to virtual networks; and the unexpected gift of an opportunity to examine processes and roles to enhance service to clients.

Participants shared the **challenges the agency faced**:

- Determining how to serve clients, e.g. those who are older and technologically challenged clients, those having no or limited access to technology, limits on the numbers allowed in group meetings, and the impact on after school programs.
- Helping people feel safe, including their clientele, staff and volunteers
- Maintaining client contact
- Addressing the impact of major growth in the number of clients
- Increasing food insecurity in the community
- Continuing concerns with transportation, housing for clients and the massive amount of unemployment. When the moratorium on evictions is lifted, the need for housing assistance will increase dramatically.
- Asking too much or too little of clients
- Addressing a decrease in the number of staff and weary staff

Strategies to overcoming barriers:

- Examining all agency processes to eliminate barriers and using staff more flexibly. Seeing challenges as an opportunity to recreate. Redesign workforce, redeploy staff, use the opportunity to cross-train. Adapting the “product” to the market need, e.g. producing masks.
- Greater attention to the need to distribute food, meals, personal products, and childcare items. Taking it to clients
- Looking for ways to address lack of access to technology, e.g. keeping in touch by telephone, providing phone and needed equipment
- Holding programs and camps virtually, including Telehealth. Clients have been able to connect with others and enjoy using Zoom. Some feel more comfortable speaking in the privacy of their own space. The use of technology served to bond staff and was a confidence builder.
- Developing individuals plans for next steps rather than in a group
- Reaching out to the community and to clubs for help with specific projects
- Increasing collaboration with other agencies
- Creating of new safety protocols
- Promote transparency and honesty for clients and staff
- Holding informal conversations with clients and parents to stay in touch and support

Fundraising strategies:

- Relationships matter with staff, donors, clients. Board, volunteers. You cannot share enough information.
- Try a challenge grant from willing major donors then asking the community to match. One agency found that the challenge of a \$135,000 raised a total of \$835,000.
- Use soft asks through keep-in touch letters. Ask for something specific in connection with the story you tell.

Highlights of the concluding general discussion with all participants:

- The clear overlap between poverty and mental health
- Advocacy by WGA is important, for example the Sadowski trust for affordable housing was fully funded this year.
- Be aware of the plight of incarcerated girls. With the number of Covid-19 cases in the facilities, girls affected have been placed in isolation, no outside contact has been permitted since March 15.
- The City of Jacksonville’s COVID-19 nonprofit, for-profit organization aid package granted \$350,000 to Boy Scouts and only \$16,666 to the Gateway Council of Girl Scouts. This continues to demonstrate what a research study found that more funding and monetary donations go to organizations serving boys (and pets) than girls.
- Encourage the selection and promotion of women of color to leadership positions in agencies.
- Try alternative venues to reach other agencies, e.g. The Jacksonville Free Press
- Meetings during nonwork hours would benefit participating women leaders who are employed.

Conclusions from WGA's members attending the session:

It was quite heartening to hear that these agencies were genuinely focused on sharing what were, and what may actually become, very positive out-comes and strategies that they will continue to develop and utilize through-out these times as well as post-pandemic. To quote one agency; "there may be a sliver-lining in what we have experienced". The ease and success they reported in adapting to virtual networks was remarkable. Their resilience, constancy, and forward thinking are amazing and truly admirable!

Follow up note: The first convening was held in 2013. The objectives continue to be to encourage sharing among the agencies receiving grants and to provide WGA with an opportunity to learn from them about needs and potential process improvements.

Agencies attending the 2020 session were:

Barnabas
BEAM
Boys & Girls Clubs of Nassau County Foundation
Center for Children's Rights
DBW Policy Center
Girls, Inc.
Delta Research and Educational Foundation
Catholic Charities St. Augustine
Family Promise
First Coast No More Homeless Pets
Gateway Community Services, Inc
Girl Scouts of Gateway Council
Hubbard House
IM Sulzbacher
MailiVai Washington Kids Foundation
Year Up Jacksonville
Helping WIN
Jewish Family & Community Services
Rethreaded
St. Gerard Campus, Inc.
Volunteers in Medicine