

P O L K B R O S F O U N D A T I O N

a foundation for chicago families

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

For the past 25 years, the Polk Bros. Foundation has been asking the question: What do Chicagoans, especially those affected by poverty, need most?

As one of the largest foundations dedicated to supporting Chicago nonprofits, we have structured our philanthropy to support and foster:

- Effective education that prepares students for success in college and careers
- Thriving, safe communities with quality jobs, housing, legal services, and economic activity
- Strong families, with help to promote positive youth development, build resilient families, and break the cycle of violence
- Preventive and primary care that improves the health of families and individuals
- Access to the learning opportunities that come from a deep participation in the arts
- Systems and policies that support individual and community growth

Our commitment to addressing these needs is unwavering. Over the past year, we have been talking with many of our nearly 400 grantees to understand what's been working, what hasn't been, and how we should adapt our approach. More than 250 nonprofit leaders joined us at listening sessions to share their assessment of current opportunities and challenges. We were grateful for these truly thought-provoking, candid discussions.

In January 2014, we celebrated the Foundation's [25th anniversary](#) with you. Robert Reich, Barbara Byrd-Bennett, Evelyn Diaz, Alex Kotlowitz, and nearly 300 nonprofit and foundation leaders joined us for an inspiring afternoon and a festive evening. [Videos](#) of the speakers and grantee rapid responders, [my remarks](#) at the event, and a collaboration with StoryCorps to create an [oral history](#) of the Foundation are now all on our web site.

The listening sessions and comments at our 25th anniversary event gave us a lot to think about. Today, we are releasing our [updated Program Area Guides](#), which shepherd our annual grant-making of more than \$20 million and deepen our commitment to ensuring that all Chicagoans have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

What's new in the Guides? Here's a sample:

- The overall structure of the Foundation's program categories has been updated to reflect the outcomes we envision for Chicago, and much of the language throughout has been refined. As a result, you may find that your next proposal submission relates to a strategy with a revised name and updated components and evaluation criteria.

- You'll see a few new strategies articulated, for example grants to support schools' learning climate. Also, anti-violence efforts at the community and family levels – two areas we have historically funded in the same program – have been separated to allow more dedicated focus on each.¹
- Systems improvement strategies, new to many program areas, will support work to transform sectors, generate resources and collaboration, and improve service delivery system-wide.
- Enhanced capacity funding strategies have been tightened to ensure that a) grants truly build the capacity of the Foundation's grantees, especially in the areas you tell us you need the most help (financial planning and management, marketing and communications, technology, and strategic restructuring and mergers) and b) grants lead to the implementation of clear action plans.

How are we addressing real costs? For all grants, the Foundation's Board recently elected to remove the 10% administrative cap on its grants. This means that our grant can be used to cover any expenses related to the program we support. To be clear, our grants will remain program-focused – they are not general operating grants – but we want you to have greater flexibility within your program budget.

We understand that you may have questions about these updates and changes, and we welcome your questions. Please feel free to reach out to your program officers at any point.

I look forward to working with you toward our shared vision for an equitable, thriving Chicago.

Best,

Gillian Darlow
CEO

¹ The Program Area Guide for community safety is “under construction” and will be completed by Fall 2014.