Michigan’s non-partisan Governor’s Office of Foundation Liaison (OFL) was created in 2003 at the suggestion of Michigan philanthropic leaders. It currently operates with the support of Governor Rick Snyder and is located in the Governor’s administrative offices. The Office — the first of its kind in the nation — helps to identify and broker strategic partnerships between the state and foundations to encourage the success of programs or policy reforms that would improve the lives of all Michigan residents. Since its inception, the OFL has been funded by 17 foundations and supported by state government.

MISSION
To develop strategic partnerships between philanthropy and the executive branch of state government in order to create better outcomes for all Michigan citizens within a commonly defined set of agendas.

PRIORITY ISSUE AREAS
The OFL focuses its efforts on three key issue areas that are aligned with both foundation and state government priorities:
1. P-20 Education (Prenatal – Postsecondary)
2. Workforce Development
3. Health

GOALS
The OFL seeks to accomplish its mission through the following goals:
• To promote mutual understanding and collaboration between state government and foundations, and to identify strategic opportunities for partnering;
• To serve as a trusted source of data, information and dialogue about programs, policy impacts, and policy and implementation options;
• To facilitate strategic joint investments that will improve outcomes for Michigan and its residents.

GOVERNANCE
The OFL is governed by an advisory committee of contributing funders; the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF), its fiscal agent; the Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA); and a member of the Governor’s executive staff. Members are:
• David Egner, Co-Chair, Hudson-Webber Foundation
• Ali Webb, Co-Chair, W.K. Kellogg Foundation
• Rob Collier, Council of Michigan Foundations
• Neal Hegarty, C.S. Mott Foundation
• Kate Levin Markel, McGregor Fund
• Kristen McDonald, Skillman Foundation
• Donna Murray-Brown, Michigan Nonprofit Association
• Julie Ridenour, Steelcase Foundation
• Diana Sieger, Grand Rapids Community Foundation
• Doug Bitonti Stewart, Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation
• Laura Trudeau, The Kresge Foundation
• John Walsh, Office of the Governor

ADDITIONAL FUNDERS
In addition to the funders represented on the OFL Advisory Committee, the following foundations are either past or present funders:
• Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation
• Battle Creek Community Foundation
• Community Foundation of Greater Flint
• Community Foundation for Muskegon County
• Community Foundation for St. Clair County
• Fremont Area Community Foundation
• Frey Foundation
• JEHT Foundation (closed)
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since its inception in 2003, the OFL has brokered more than $150 million in foundation investments in initiatives increasing Michigan’s economic competitiveness through reforms in K-16 education, economic/workforce development, health, early childhood and land use. Notable projects include:

OFFICE OF GREAT START

Officially, the Michigan Office of Great Start (OGS) began in June 2011 with the signing of an executive order by Governor Rick Snyder that initiated the consolidation and streamlining of the State’s early childhood education programs and services within the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). This important milestone is a testament to the hard work and financial commitment of Michigan foundations and the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF), the perseverance of the Governor’s Office and State educational leaders, and the convening and facilitation expertise of the Office of Foundation Liaison. The historical partnerships that helped lead to the formation of today’s OGS began within the foundation community which has long provided both financial support and expertise in an effort to achieve quality early childhood education.

In 2003, the OFL — through its unique connecting role being “in” but not “of” the executive office — began bringing together the governor, State administrators, local school officials, researchers and foundation leaders to help coordinate the State’s early childhood programs with a goal of building collaborative partnerships throughout the public/private sector. The OFL’s efforts led to the first “Early Matters Forum” which provided an opportunity to develop strategic plans to increase access to high-quality preschool programs beginning with low-income families and those most at-risk of school failure.

As a result of this collaborative effort, in 2005 the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC), an entity designed to be the State’s focal point for information and investment in early childhood education in Michigan, was founded. Philanthropic support was immediate and game changing. Initial grants in 2006-2007 from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and The Kresge Foundation totaling more than $9.2 million helped leverage the first State investment in this effort to assist ECIC in implementing a Great Start system. The action taken was designed to ensure preschool programs met professional standards while building public will for policies and investments. At the OFL’s urging, foundation leaders also served on the initial ECIC Executive Committee. Today, the ECIC continues to help inform the OGS.

This public/private partnership has been a financial success, as well. The governor, State Department of Education officials, and business and foundation leaders have seen their efforts pay off as state/philanthropic spending to educate Michigan children before they get to kindergarten has saved taxpayers at least $1.15 billion annually, according to a 2010 study released by the St. Paul-based Wilder Research.

OGS Director Susan Broman, a long-time philanthropic supporter of early childhood education programs as the former president of the Steelcase Foundation, credits the work of the OFL, CMF and its member foundations, along with the many dedicated State education and administrative leaders, for “initiating the important dialogue, providing the educational framework and helping build the base of support that led to the Michigan Legislature agreeing to add $130 million to State preschool funding.”
PATHWAYS TO POTENTIAL
Finding new ways to assist children and their families in removing barriers that may be keeping them from self-sufficiency is an important ongoing goal of the OFL. By leveraging the dedication of foundation leaders and the financial strength of philanthropy while engaging the knowledge and expertise of community educational leaders across the nation, the OFL is assisting the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) as it successfully implements a new business model called Pathways To Potential.

This initiative focuses on three core principles:
• Place workers in the community where people are already looking for help.
• Use a network approach with DHHS staff serving as connectors.
• Leverage partnerships with communities to integrate services toward shared outcomes.

The Pathways to Potential model allows State public assistance benefit services to be better coordinated by placing a DHHS caseworker, identified as a success coach, in schools to assist children and families in reaching their goals of self-sufficiency. At the end of the 2012-2013 school year, DHHS staff workers were in 124 schools in the four core cities of Flint, Pontiac, Saginaw and Detroit. Presently, Pathways is in 21 counties with workers in more than 200 schools. C. S. Mott Foundation through a grant to the Children’s Aid Society of New York is providing statewide technical assistance and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation has provided a $1.4 million grant to Grand Valley State University for a comprehensive evaluation of the initiative.

The OFL’s ability to convene experts and State officials on myriad educational topics and bring other successful State programs to the table for review and discussion helped DHHS to create and expand its Pathways project, including transitioning Michigan to the Community School model in which a Community School Coordinator works directly with the success coach to connect families within the school and surrounding community with services.

MICHIGAN COLLEGE ACCESS NETWORK
Since 2008, the Office of Foundation Liaison has worked to secure funding for college access initiatives. Those initiatives include the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN), a plan to dramatically increase Michigan’s college readiness, participation and completion rates, particularly among low-income students, first-generation college-going students, and students of color. MCAN coordinates college access resources, programs, and services and serves as the state authority on college access issues.

Among OFL’s accomplishments on behalf of college access is the acquisition of a $1 million Kresge grant to the MCAN to develop high-quality, community-based college access strategic alliances known as Local College Access Networks (LCANs) around the state. That grant, as well as grants from participating community foundations, were used to leverage matching support in the amount of $25 million from the U. S. Department of Education.

Since launching as a statewide network, MCAN has invested public and private funds in Michigan’s college access movement by guiding 50 LCANs in development, establishing partnerships with the leading state and national education organizations, training hundreds of K-12 counselors as postsecondary planners, and hosting professional development opportunities through an annual conference and webinar series. MCAN has also created and maintained a number of statewide programs and initiatives for communities to directly engage with students including College Application Week, College Decision Day, FAFSA completion, KnowHow2Go Michigan, and the Michigan College Access Portal.

“A great facilitator. Dedicated to making a difference. A knowledgeable expert in how philanthropy and government can work together … and bringing both sides to the table. Michigan is extremely fortunate that it has the (OFL) helping bridge the public/private divide.”

Mimi Corcoran, Director, Open Society Foundations’ Special Fund for Poverty Alleviation
MICHIGAN BENEFIT ACCESS INITIATIVE
A major accomplishment for the Office of Foundation Liaison in the area of economic/ workforce development is establishment of the Michigan Benefit Access Initiative (MBAI). A public/private partnership, the MBAI was created in response to a devastating economic recession that left Michigan with extremely high levels of unemployment, homelessness and foreclosures. The MBAI was challenged with finding a better way for affected Michigan families to access and receive benefits and services.

Familiar with the work being done in the public and private sectors, as well as the resources and limitations of each, the OFL convened meetings, compiled and disseminated data, extended the list of stakeholders, and coordinated funding from foundations — all of which contributed to the eventual partnership between the public and private sectors to establish a statewide benefit access system in Michigan. According to one of the key players, Aileen “Ali” Webb, Deputy Director of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, “The role that the Office of Foundation Liaison has played — and is playing — is critical to the ongoing success of MBAI. It is the glue that keeps everyone and everything together.”

Successes born of the OFL’s convening efforts include the Michigan Association of United Ways’ (MAUW) collaboration with the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services to create “Michigan Benefit Access Capacity-Building Mini-Grants,” funded by the Kresge Foundation. MAUW awarded over $450,000 in MBA capacity-building mini-grants to 72 diverse nonprofit organizations statewide. Grant recipients were funded to integrate benefits access into all of their agency services in order to support more people in their community in becoming more financially stable. Each mini grant recipient was funded up to $10,000 to purchase the materials necessary to successfully integrate and sustain MBA services for the grant year and beyond.

EVALUATION
The Community Research Institute at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy, Grand Valley State University, has evaluated the work of the OFL since it began. Through surveys, interviews, analysis of the project database and meeting observation, the most recent evaluation found that the Office:

• Is seen by both government and foundation staff as being a reliable, credible and non-partisan source of information.
• Has played an important, and often critical, role in fostering collaboration and joint investments among foundations and between foundations and government, according to foundations.
• Adapts successfully to the specific needs of each potential project and its partners.

Dr. Teri Behrens, the lead evaluator, notes that the OFL’s success in transitioning across gubernatorial administrations has reinforced its position as a national model.

STAFF

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