

Illinois Association of Free & Charitable Clinics

Grant Type: *Dollar*

Grant Amount: *\$ 13,865 (initial); \$75,000 per year × 3 years (subsequent)*

Organization: *VNA Foundation*

What was the objective of your grant or initiative?

More than 30 free or charitable clinics in Illinois provide medical, dental, mental health, and/or pharmacy services to medically uninsured residents. Yet, unlike other states, Illinois did not have an effective state association to coordinate and optimize the efforts of local free clinics.

We sought to provide a grant to revive and reinvent the long-dormant Illinois Association of Free and Charitable Clinics (IAFCC) in the hope that it would allow the state's free and charitable clinics to network and collaborate during a time when national health care reform was impacting all providers and constituencies.

What was your approach?

From the start, this project was about collaboration—among funders and clinics alike. It began when VNA Foundation and another small Chicago-based funder hosted several discussions between funders and safety net providers about the benefits of an active statewide association for free clinics. This open and trusting environment led to the following:

- The executive directors of several free clinics in Illinois began to actively share their ideas.
- Their passion and knowledge inspired us as funders, and we felt comfortable awarding a planning grant to the fledgling association.
- That grant allowed clinics time to cement relationships among each other, discuss how to use future grant support, and, perhaps most important, support a consultant to lead the planning process.

What were the outsized results?

The reborn IAFCC did indeed allow the critical work done by these health care providers to be recognized and for their voice to be heard at the health care reform table. Thanks to the IAFCC, the challenges, skills, and capacities of free clinics were well represented during the Illinois health care and safety net discussions.

IAFCC has grown sufficiently in stature and recognition that it attracted a highly qualified full-time executive director and held its first statewide conference in 2012, drawing together member clinics, funders, health care experts, and others. In 2013, the annual conference had an even more robust turnout. A third annual conference is scheduled for Fall 2014.

We believe that, collectively, these results represent an outstanding return on investment for an initial investment of \$13,865 by small foundations.

