The Sewall Foundation brought 12 grantee organizations together for a day of sharing and learning to pilot an alternative to written grant reports. The day consisted of facilitated conversations, networking, and skills building and was recorded through note taking and pictorially. The primary goals of the event were:

- To pilot an alternative reporting process
- To increase learning among grantees
- To build new connections and strengthen existing connections between nonprofits
- Skill building

Themes

Participants’ willingness to embrace the invitation to reflect on their work and share challenges openly made for rich conversations reflective of a thoughtful, brave, committed, and generous community. New relationships formed, others were strengthened, and opportunities for peer-to-peer support as well as collaborative action to address shared challenges were abundant.
Throughout the day several primary themes emerged:

1. **Sharing.** The animal welfare sector is committed to working together to address the needs of animals statewide. Partnerships and collaborative efforts are abundant and there is opportunity, need, and appetite to do more and to establish systems to facilitate increased collaboration.

2. **Caring for people is as important as caring for the animals.** Caring for animals means caring for people, too. This takes many shapes including providing quality work environments and livable wages for staff, supporting pet owners in crisis to keep their pets in their homes when they can and to rehome them when necessary. It is about hearing from and responding to the needs of the community.

3. **Access to veterinary care:** Access to and affordability of veterinary care are significant system barriers for shelters, pet owners, and veterinarians. There is interest in the group to address these issues collaboratively to meet the needs of humans, organizations, and animals alike.

4. **Disparities:** Significant disparities exist between larger, better resourced organizations and smaller ones that are often located in rural areas with great needs. The disparities affect organizational operations and a wide array of services. The recognition of these disparities was accompanied by openness to strengthen partnerships and collaboration among partners across the state.

5. **Facilities & Funding:** A variety of challenges related to facilities and funding were discussed. Many noted an essential need for facilities improvements in order to serve animals, staff, and community. Others mentioned the difficulty of managing day to day operations and annual fundraising while engaging in facilities campaign and improvement work. Fundraising challenges at the conclusion of facilities improvement projects were also mentioned, reflecting that donors and potential donors often don’t recognize the need for ongoing operations support.
Sewall Reflections

The conversations raised several points for Sewall Foundation to consider for future grantmaking:

- **Multi-year, unrestricted funding** provides continuity of support and flexibility needed for strong, mission-driven organizations that are responsive to community needs.
- **Increased support for lower-resourced organizations** will help them to meet their missions while advancing the sector overall.
- **Increase support and incentives for collaboration, networking, and resource sharing.**

Wrap Up

Participants found value both in the skills section and networking opportunities that the day provided. Feedback was rich with ideas that participants could take back to their organizations, and several expressed interest in collectively addressing issues and opportunities common to the sector. Many reflected on having a much better understanding of the challenges facing peers as well as opportunities for the sector to work together.

Enthusiasm for this gathering, our experience at the event, and feedback from participants all point favorably toward continuation of gatherings such as this as an alternative to written grant reports. The Sewall Foundation looks forward to continuing and learning from such events.

~ We are grateful to all who participated in this experiment in shared learning ~
We also offer our thanks to:

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