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## Grant Program Helps Truliant Build Connections With Grassroots Nonprofits

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By [Michelle Samaad](#)

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — As a grant writer for more than seven years, Majorie Rorie has a bird's eye view on which applications have a greater chance of being approved.

So when she came to \$1.2 billion Truliant Federal Credit Union a little over three years ago after working for a nonprofit organization, she convinced the higher-ups that helping local, grassroots groups with their grant applications could not only further extend the financial institution's outreach in the community but could potentially bring in new member relationships.

To that end, Rorie, director of community services, was instrumental in creating Truliant's community mini-grant program to assist nonprofit agencies with operational costs. To qualify for the grants, community and faith-based agencies have to affect one or more of the following areas: health or human services, youth, affordable housing, financial literacy or economic development. The agencies also have to provide service to underserved groups or low- to moderate-income areas in communities surrounding Truliant member financial centers in North Carolina, Virginia and South Carolina.

This year marks the third year Truliant has offered grants. In the program's first year, the credit union approved \$8,000 in grants, followed by \$11,000 in the second year and \$30,000 this year, Rorie said. Each year, Truliant earmarks grant money for use by nonprofit agencies. Demand for the funds has grown so much that this year, more than 110 applications were submitted. The credit union was able to award grants to 31 agencies.

Rorie said the grants are typically used for things like fixing an air conditioner, hiring an additional worker for the summer or paying for banquet expenses. One organization used the money to bring someone in to help with a financial audit.

"I've always felt that nonprofits are the heart of any community," Rorie said. "As a credit union, a big part of our commitment is to serve the underserved."

To help nonprofits become more familiar with the grant writing process, Rorie conducts free, one-hour workshops. She recently held 13 sessions in Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina, home to Truliant's service centers. In all, 232 organizations participated. Truliant's grant cycle runs from May 15 to July 15 and this year's workshops started in April.

"We break down the components of a successful grant—what grantors like to see and how you should structure the grant," Rorie said. "I've developed grants that I would fill out myself and answer questions that would give operational dollars to nonprofits, which are very hard to find these days."

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Selecting which groups will receive the Truliant grants is decided by an 11-member committee, Rorie said. Branch managers are given a rating sheet to judge the requests. The credit union will provide a nonprofit with the rating sheet should they have questions about their grant denial.

The Shepherd's Center in Kernersville, N.C., was one of the 31 agencies that received a grant from Truliant this year. An ecumenical organization that serves older and disabled persons in several communities, the center was awarded a \$1,000 grant for volunteer recruitment, retention and recognition. Truliant had been a corporate sponsor for one of the center's fundraisers.

"I write grants on a regular basis but the mini-grant conference reminded me of the importance of attention to detail, [and telling] the story [of] how our community will be different in light of a grant award," said Deborah Mitchell, director of development at Shepherd's Center.

Mitchell spoke highly of Rorie, praising her preparedness and ability to speak "on a level that those not familiar with grant writing were able to be comfortable with." Rorie was also very accessible for any follow-up questions during the grant writing process, she added.

In the three years Truliant's grant program has been in place, Rorie said she has built a network of alliances with nonprofit agencies. Many of them help get the word out about the workshops, even providing the venue and food.

Some of them are also using the credit union's products and services. Surveys were sent out to grant workshop participants with one of the questions being would they be interested in becoming a member or using the credit union's business services program. Rorie said she will follow up this month to gauge interest.

"A lot of partnerships have occurred from the workshops. Even more important, [the partnerships] have helped me to better understand the different areas where these organizations are located and to better understand Truliant's markets."

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