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Key Findings and Recommendations from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation 2023 Grantee Perception Report

Prepared by the Center for Effective Philanthropy

In May and June of 2023, the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) surveyed the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation (“GDDF”, “the Donnelley Foundation,” or “the Foundation”) grantees. The memo below outlines the key findings and recommendations from the Donnelley Foundation’s Grantee Perception Report (GPR). GDDF grantees’ perceptions should be interpreted in light of the Foundation’s goals, strategy, and context.

This memo accompanies the comprehensive survey results from 213 grantees (a 76 percent response rate) found in GDDF’s interactive online report at <https://cep.surveymethods.org> and in the downloadable online materials, including respondents’ written comments. The Donnelley Foundation’s online report also contains more information about the survey methodology and subgroup analysis.¹

Overview and Context

The Center for Effective Philanthropy is pleased to share the results of The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation’s fifth Grantee Perception Report.

- ▶ Similar to the Foundation’s last GPR in 2017, grantees continue to report positive experiences across most survey themes, including perceptions of impact on and understanding of their fields, communities, and organizations, the Foundation’s approachability, as well as the clarity and transparency with which the Foundation has communicated its goals and strategies.
 - These positive experiences are reflected in written comments, where grantees describe the Foundation as “a leader in best practices for foundations.” As one writes, “The Foundation is well known for its integrity and excellence in mission-driven philanthropy.”
- ▶ Even in the context of their generally positive feedback, grantees do highlight some opportunities for improvement, and on a few measures, their ratings have declined significantly since 2017. Grantee feedback suggests some opportunities for the Foundation to reflect on how it can further refine and right-size its grantmaking processes, deepen its relationships with grantees, and build on its organizational impact and commitment to grantees.

¹ Throughout this summary, ratings are defined as higher than typical when average ratings are above the 65th percentile in CEP’s overall dataset, lower than typical when average ratings are below the 35th percentile, and typical when ratings fall between those thresholds. Ratings described as “significantly” higher or lower reflect statistically significant differences at a P-value less than or equal to 0.1.

Strong Impact on and Understanding of Grantees' Fields and Local Communities

- ▶ In 2023, grantees provide ratings that place GDDF among the top funders in CEP's comparative dataset for their perceptions of its impact on their fields – a sustained strength of the Foundation since 2017.
 - Grantees also continue to provide higher than typical ratings for their perceptions of the extent to which the Foundation has advanced the state of knowledge and affected public policy in their fields.
- ▶ In addition to its work in grantees' fields more broadly, GDDF has regional focuses on Chicago and the Lowcountry of South Carolina. Grantees provide higher than typical ratings for their perceptions of Foundation's impact on and understanding of their local communities, as well as for its understanding of the social, cultural, and socioeconomic factors that affect their work.
 - CEP research finds that funders' understanding of grantees' local communities tends to be a key predictor of perceptions of impact. While GDDF continues to receive higher than typical ratings on this measure, ratings have significantly declined since 2017.



"GDDF is an important community member and is considered a thought leader in our field. GDDF is an invaluable resource."



"The Donnelley Foundation is a leader in our field. They foster partnerships and alliances among organizations to foster peer learning and build our strengths to complete meaningful and impactful community and environmental impacts. They are visionaries."

Strong Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- ▶ Grantees applaud the Donnelley Foundation's strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). They provide higher than typical ratings on all DEI-related measures, including their agreement that GDDF has clearly communicated what DEI means for its work, demonstrates an explicit commitment to DEI, and is committed to combatting racism.
 - While grantees recognize the Foundation's commitment to DEI, only 45 percent of GDDF's grantees report that the efforts funded by their grant are primarily meant to benefit historically disadvantaged groups, compared to 74 percent of grantees at the average funder.
- ▶ Two-thirds of grantees report making changes to their practices around DEI as a result of support from GDDF. The largest proportions of grantees instituted or modified policies relating to their organization's staff, incorporated voice and perspectives of racially diverse stakeholders in defining problems and developing solutions, and modified their work to reach more racially diverse populations.
- ▶ Grantees suggest that the most important actions for the Foundation to take to support their efforts to advance DEI are to help build their organizational capacity to pilot/and or scale programming that reaches more racially diverse beneficiaries and to support leaders of color.



“The Donnelley Foundation is very involved in making arts programming funding more equitable... [the Foundation] is on the forefront on creating equity in the arts and always present at conferences and industry convenings on these matters.”



“The Foundation is taking very intentional steps toward supporting environmental justice and equity, and I am very enthusiastic and supportive of the direction that the Donnelley Foundation is making in this area.... Having a trusted name like Donnelley invest in the capacity-building and DEI efforts of its grantees has been a welcome addition to support we never receive from other funders.”

Opportunity to Build on Organizational Impact through Larger Grants and Targeted Non-Monetary Support

- ▶ Grantees perceive the Donnelley Foundation to have a strong impact on and understanding of their organizations, providing ratings that place GDDF in the top 25 percent of funders on both measures.
 - In addition, grantees perceive GDDF to have a strong awareness of the challenges their organizations are facing, providing ratings that place GDDF in the top 10 percent CEP’s comparative dataset.

Opportunities for Larger Grants

- ▶ CEP’s broader research has shown that grant characteristics – including size, length, and whether the grant was restricted – are often meaningful predictors of perceptions of impact on grantee organizations, with multi-year unrestricted support being a particularly powerful contribution.
 - Seventy-five percent of GDDF’s grantees receive multi-year unrestricted funding – a higher proportion than at most other funders in CEP’s dataset.
 - However, GDDF’s median grant size of \$27K is smaller than that of most funders in CEP’s dataset and in GDDF’s peer cohort. Requests for larger grants is the most frequently mentioned theme in grantees’ suggestions for improvement.

Valuable Non-Monetary Support for Grantees

- ▶ The non-monetary support that the Donnelley Foundation provides is an important and beneficial part of grantees’ experiences with the Foundation. Seventy-three percent of GDDF’s grantees report receiving non-monetary assistance – a higher than typical proportion.
 - In particular, the 32 percent of grantees that receive capacity building assistance and the 20 percent of grantees that receive program-related assistance rate significantly higher for their agreement that the non-monetary support they received met an important need and strengthened their work. They also report significantly more positive experience on several other measures throughout the survey, including those related to GDDF’s impact on their organizations, their relationships with the Foundation, and their experiences with GDDF’s grantmaking processes.
- ▶ Non-monetary support was the second most frequently mentioned theme in suggestions for improvement, with grantees requesting more opportunities for convening and additional capacity building support.



“Would love to continue seeing the multi-year support from Donnelley, but with larger amounts.”



“I benefit so greatly through the gatherings of leaders organized by Donnelley and would appreciate more of them, more frequently.”

Stellar Relationships with Opportunities to Deepen Mutual Understanding

- ▶ Grantees report strong relationships with GDDF, rating typical or higher than typical on all measures related to interactions and communications.
 - In particular, grantees provide ratings that place the Foundation in the top 15 percent of CEP’s comparative dataset for the Foundation’s responsiveness, its openness to their ideas, the clarity of the Foundation’s communication of its goals and strategies, and its level of transparency.
- ▶ How GDDF interacts and engages with grantees matters, as these patterns of interaction and engagement are often associated with funder-grantee relationship ratings.
 - Sixty-nine percent of grantees report interacting with GDDF at least once every few months or more often, a smaller proportion than in 2017 and than at the typical funder.
 - Grantees that interact with GDDF at least once every few months rate significantly more positively compared to grantees that engage with GDDF less frequently on many measures, including those related to their relationships with GDDF, their experiences with GDDF’s grantmaking processes, and their perceptions of the Foundation’s understanding of their communities and organizations.
 - Twenty-six percent of grantees report that their main contact at the Donnelley Foundation has changed within the past six months, which is both a significant increase since 2017 and a higher proportion than at the typical funder.
 - In contrast to CEP’s fieldwide research where contact changes tend to be associated with less positive grantee experiences, GDDF grantees that experienced a change in contact provide similar ratings to those that had a consistent point of contact. This suggests that GDDF ensured that transitions were handled supportively and smoothly.
- ▶ In written comments, some grantees suggest ways that GDDF can build on its relationships with them by deepening mutual understanding.
 - Regarding interactions, grantees request more frequent touchpoints, site visits, and other mutual learning opportunities. As one writes, “Site visits, coupled with a chance to share the unique challenges and strengths of our organization, would be great.”
 - Regarding communications, grantees mention opportunities for GDDF to communicate more clearly and transparently. As one grantee suggests, “Share with us about what Donnelley does to support small arts organizations, and the various ways we can access further support through our affiliation with Donnelley.”



“The Donnelley Foundation has been a reliable and invaluable partner for some time. Program officers have historically made themselves very accessible and have been enthusiastic to support our work. Communication has been clear and consistent.”



“I find the Donnelley Foundation one of the most accessible and communitive foundations. Our communications and interactions are productive and transparent. I also appreciate all of the support and flexibility the organization offers.”

Helpful Processes with Opportunities to Right-Size

- ▶ Overall, grantees report positive experiences with GDDF’s grantmaking processes, providing ratings that are typical or higher than typical on all related measures.
- ▶ GDDF grantees report spending less time fulfilling the Foundation’s process requirements over the lifetime of their grants than is typical (15 hours at GDDF vs. 29 hours at the typical funder). Still, given GDDF’s comparatively smaller grant sizes, grantees are awarded fewer grant dollars per each hour they spend on processes.
 - In a custom question, grantees report that streamlining GDDF’s reporting requirements was the most helpful action that the Foundation took to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19, rating a 6.7 out of 7 on average.
 - While grantees appreciate the work GDDF has done to streamline its processes, some request that GDDF go even further to ensure processes are right-sized to grant amounts and suggest that GDDF “continue to try to figure out ways to lessen time requirements.”
- ▶ However, in refining its processes, GDDF should also be careful to maintain the aspects that grantees find most helpful. As GDDF streamlined its processes since 2017, some aspects of its prior processes that grantees found helpful may have been removed:
 - While grantees continue to rate higher than typical for the relevance of GDDF’s reporting process, their ratings have declined significantly since 2017.
 - The exchange of ideas between funders and grantees is often a meaningful aspect of funders’ grantmaking processes. Forty-five percent of GDDF grantees, compared to 63 percent of GDDF grantees in 2017, report exchanging ideas regarding how their organization would assess the results of their funded work. Grantees that did have this exchange of ideas rate higher on many measures throughout the survey.



“I would like the Foundation to consider the amount of meetings and reporting that is required of organizations of such a small size in relation to the amount of funding received.”



“Paperwork and reporting can become a barrier. Constant review of your process will keep it reasonable for a grantee.”

CEP Recommendations

Based on its grantee feedback, CEP recommends that the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation consider the following in order to build on its strengths and address potential opportunities.

- ▶ Celebrate, maintain, and continue to build on the aspects of the Donnelley Foundation's approach that have contributed to strong perceptions of the Foundation's impact on and understanding of grantees' fields, communities, and organizations, clear and transparent communications of its goals and strategy, and commitment to DEI.
- ▶ Consider opportunities to further build on its impact on and commitment to grantee organizations through grantmaking and non-monetary support, by:
 - Determining whether there is interest and/or capacity, given the Foundation's broader grantmaking strategy, to increase the size of grants awarded, while continuing to provide multi-year and general operating support.
 - Expanding its provision of capacity-building support and program-related assistance, which are the forms of non-monetary assistance that feedback suggests result in the greatest benefit to GDDF grantee organizations.
- ▶ Reflect on opportunities to deepen its relationships with grantees, including by:
 - Focusing interactions and communications on developing and demonstrating a deep understanding of grantees and the contexts in which they work, as well as ensuring that grantees have a strong understanding of GDDF's broader work and impact, through clear and transparent communications.
 - Engaging with grantees at least once every few months or more often, which survey results suggest leads to more positive experiences for GDDF grantees.
- ▶ Maintain the helpful nature of the Foundation's processes while continuing to explore ways to right-size their requirements to the level of funding awarded, by:
 - Considering opportunities to streamline pieces of the grantmaking processes that grantees and GDDF staff find more time-consuming.
 - Expanding the proportion of grantees that engage in discussion with GDDF to exchange ideas about their funded work and how it will be assessed.

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