

## Open-ended Responses :

?? organized by the respondent's years in the nonprofit sector

?? the number at the end illustrates how many of that response we received

### 25. What are the best aspects of the process of securing funding from foundations?

*(3-5 years)*

Caring partners to help us help our world.

Site visits, because people are familiar with who we are and can see real value in what we do! 2

The best aspects are being able to make relationships with officers and honestly discuss common goals and priorities so that it could be a true partnership.

*(6-10 years)*

The best aspects are short, straightforward application procedures, with clearly delineated guidelines. A quick turn around time is ideal as well as more than one funding cycle per year. (If you miss a deadline or are declined a request on an annual cycle, your organization must wait a full year before reapplying.) Blunt, friendly, honest information.

The chance to clarify my own goals and refine my techniques for expressing my organization's strengths. The opportunity, if it arises, to receive suggestions from grant makers on how to improve my program. 3

When foundation representatives appreciate the time and energy we put into our proposals. Also, when foundations seem genuinely invested in our work and help us promote it.

When funders let you know exactly what they want (application forms and websites helpful). A short proposal, interview, and notification time frame. 2

Relatively clear guidelines and less administrative burden (than public funding).

Of course the celebration of knowing your vital program will be funded, as well as the validation given by the philanthropic community. Personal phone calls from funders mean a lot.

*(10+ years)*

It is inspiring how our relationship with foundations promote a higher level of service to our clients due to program development that occurs as a result of the conversation about proposal and report preparation. (The built-in sense of accountability fosters this.)

There are many knowledgeable professionals in the field who can provide information and support beyond funding – community building aspect.

Program officers are wonderful and a joy to work with. The best ones have experience in the nonprofit side (i.e.: they have worked in a nonprofit) 4

The ability to communicate with program officers throughout the process.

Cultivating and creating relationships with foundation staff members at all levels – having the people to people relationship so that the process isn't faceless and is more efficient.

Foundation funding is generally more flexible than public funding. It's a great source, therefore, for start-up funding.

The opportunity to discuss the mission and purpose of the agency and to receive feedback on the quality of the proposal.

Working with a clear thinking foundation staff who are truly interested in our work, whether it is within the foundations funding interest or not.

Getting the check.

Those foundations that fund fully when they fund, rather than small amounts with full expectations make us feel understood and like partners. Authenticity is highly valued. We have that with some. We didn't with others.

The chance to meet with and educate the foundation, opportunities for new partnerships, and the chance to re-examine the organization through someone else's perspective.

Mutual report, genuine interest in our mission, appropriate balance of power, mutual goals, learning together, and clear expectations.

Receiving news of a grant award – especially after working very hard on the application – remains the most satisfying part of the process. Knowing you have presented your best case to a potential funder is very satisfying.

That funding is available, that foundations are committed to the work we do, that foundation staff are open to new ideas, and that they genuinely want to work with organizations to make them more effective.

Being able to introduce new program officers to the work that we do. Requirements for evaluation around goals, objectives, and outcomes (it would be great if these could somehow become standardized).

I really appreciate (and like) the relationships I form with the foundation staff members. I have found them to be very positive and encouraging –0 and we've had great "brainstorming" sessions together.

## **26. What are the most frustrating aspects of dealing with foundations?**

*(0-2 years)*

As much as seeking foundation support can be useful for organizational planning purposes, the questions foundations ask can sometimes be unproductive. It can be frustrating to have to quantify projects by criteria, which are more statistical than qualitative. In addition, as an arts organization, it is sometimes frustrating that so many of the foundation opportunities essentially ask arts organizations to become social service groups and to compensate for the lack of arts education in schools and lack of opportunities for the under-privileged rather than to support creativity in and of itself.

*(3-5 years)*

Time, takes too long. 2

We have had to cut back staff and close sites, because we are not getting enough funding to survive. Funding for multiple years would help.

The most frustrating is competing for funds from smaller foundations with limited funding. It is also frustrating when foundations draw the proposal process out over six months, which has recently happened quite frequently.

*(6-10 years)*

Being treated patronizingly or as if we have no clue how the funding process works and feeling as though we never get a satisfactory answer as to why we were not funded, or if we will ever be.

By far the most frustrating thing is the different formats I'm required to use for proposals. Forms that need to be typed on are particularly difficult often, budget information is requested in widely divergent formats, requiring much extra effort that takes me away from program work. 3

Foundation representatives who abuse their power, e.g. make unreasonable requests of small non-profit staff members. Funding is limited, so most nonprofits can't get consideration unless they know someone at the foundation.

Almost every foundation on the planet wants to fund "projects" (usually "special projects") Very few offer multi-year operating support grants, which provide excellent visibility into the future, results in greater financial stability and assumes the mission of the organization is, in and of itself a "special project" – very validating. 2

Not getting enough of their time. 3

When the foundation gives you the idea that you will likely get the grant and they string you along, but you don't win the grant after all. 2

Award dates really align with program dates and fiscal year. Relatively small grant amounts – good for leveraging resources, but not enough for programs.

When a foundation will not allow unsolicited proposals – I think we all should have a chance to state our mission.

I find that local foundations are very tuned in, and willing to return calls. Others, who are not “exact” prospects, or are in other geographic areas are very difficult to cultivate. I’ve often seen foundation support for local organizations, but here found it impossible to reach a live person at these foundations. Even a call saying you are alive, and not interested would be helpful – this is especially true with corporations.

(10+ years)

The lack of communication. Although this is very rare, some foundations do not communicate the status of grant proposals, nor do they provide any method for follow-up communication to occur.

I think many program officers don’t actually know as much as they think they know about our constituency, how to best serve, etc... They are interested in quantity over quality. The worst is when (they or their boards) view themselves as agents of social change or social engineers. There can be an element of arrogance from funders who think they know better and most often, they don’t.

The inability to provide candid and honest responses to compatibility of proposals and/or reasons for not funding a proposal. A standard form letter of rejection begs a follow-up call to discuss and it’s at the point that the candid and honest response is most useful.

Revolving door program officers. No substantial communication or dialogue between grant cycles.

This does not happen often, but once in awhile, foundation staff will ask for outrageous amounts of unnecessary follow-up information after the proposal and requested attachments have been submitted. It’s very frustrating very time-consuming.

The ever changing program focus areas.

Single year funding cycles.

Changing priorities and the program officers that are invasive in suggesting ways to run your own programs.

When phone calls or other inquiries are not returned promptly. When deadlines for decisions pass, but the decision is not communicated in a timely fashion. 2

Partial funding with full expectations. Prospective guidelines that don't have sufficient understanding of the value-added nature of different approaches to the work. Long, long processes for small awards. Lack of authenticity in the relationship: If it will be a no, say so upfront. If it will be partial, say so early in the process. Being surprised by the decision is harmful.

Lack of long term commitments to general operating support, changing priorities, emphasis on project support, and difficulty in gaining specific reasons for a rejection.

Completing forms that require a typewriter.

Changing expectations, unstated expectations, and numbers aren't everything – quality counts too!

Some foundations seem to require excessive amounts of supporting documentation as part of the application process. In some cases, we must jump through more hoops to receive a smaller grant (for us, under \$10,000) from a small-mid-size foundation than a mere significant grant.

Special foundation initiatives with large amounts of money behind them that cause agencies to contort themselves in ways they ordinarily wouldn't in order to get a grant.

When foundations do not communicate their process/timeline for review and do not allow inquiries from nonprofit officers. Non-standardized reporting requirements.

Funders who really want to become operating foundations.

Sometimes the reporting requirements are frustrating. They can be restrictive, so that some of the best “outcomes” and stories and vignettes have no place in the reports. Counting #s has never been the most important or compelling part of the nonprofit's “story” – it's only a piece of it but often doesn't reflect the heart of the work.

**27. If you could change one thing about the process for a grant (or working with foundations), what would it be?**

*(3-5 years)*

Turnaround time.2

Foundations should continue to fund organizations over a period of 5-7 years, if the organization has a history of making progress with its goals and is fiscally responsible.

Less reporting requirements. It would be nice to condense the written reporting and combine it with more of a personal discussion aspect.

*(6-10 years)*

More funds for general operating support. 2

Standardized formats for proposals and budget information. Of course each foundation has different needs, but there could be a core set of questions which each foundation adds to. Also, the budget requests could be simplified. No awkward forms. 3

Make the letter of intent process easier – few organizations would waste valuable time on dead-end funding opportunities.

Focus on clear funding guidelines and why there are glaring exceptions on the organization's web sites. Information for many granting institutions tends to be vague, conflicting and/or ambiguous. 2

Require site visits.

Making phone conversations more accessible. Staff person should be more involved in your proposal and be your advocate in board meetings to decide grantees.

Award multi-year grants. 3

Unsolicited proposal rule.

Sometimes the reporting process is arduous. Perhaps a visit from the funder during the program would be most vivid – written documents can then be more stats and short descriptions.

*(10+ years)*

More site visits – at least every three years

Encourage online proposal submission with templates on foundation site. 2

Don't make applicants send in proposals (and 990s which are public domain and available on the internet) in triplicate or worse.

I would implement electronic screening of a proposal project – in the end, it would save time for both the foundation and the applicant.

Provide foundation staff with better training in organizational development so that funders do not have the same expectations of two year old organizations as ten year old organizations.

Confirming before time is spent on a full proposal that the letter of intent and the project concept is an area of interest to the foundation.

Communication.

Less interference and less mystery about how applicable your proposal is.

We would like to know why a proposal is declined. There are times when the fit appears so obvious, yet the grant is not give. I understand that choices must be made, but sometimes don't understand the logic.

The inequality in the relationship. If we could see ourselves as collaborators or partners in our complimentary missions and as shared stewards of our communities' resources rather than patron to beneficiary much more impact from the dollars could be achieved.

Increased and increasingly open dialogue.

Working closely with and receiving support in evaluating programs would benefit all involved parties (foundation, NPO, and community)

Allowing for a systematic process for inquiry from NPO to foundation and vice versa.

I'd change the attitude of a few of the funders. Every once in a while, a funder will communicate that they know what's best for a community, and hand down "edicts" – I've heard many sotires from other nonprofit staff about this.

## **28. What improvements would you suggest in these areas:**

### **A: Grant application/proposal requirements (written document)**

*(0-2 years)*

Require letter of intent then invite application and fund the planning process: in funding the structure of grants.

*(3-5 years)*

One page proposal. 2

Quarterly review of new proposals.

Shorter turnaround time.

*(6-10 years)*

Brief, concise, clear questions and expectations – particularly for renewal grants, the less paper, the better.

Standard proposal. 3

Be reasonable.

More online process. 2

Put a limit on pages – 6 to 8 max.

We should be able to capture the program in three pages. 2

*(10 + years)*

One concise format. 2

Realistic page limitations considering the number of questions asked.

Attempt to minimize required agency core information for renewal of grant request.

If the grantee is known to the funder, suggest that some attachments could be left out (e.g. 501(c)(3) letter).

Explain how applications will be graded/ judged.

Clear decision dates and deadlines to submit. Do you want a budget – how detailed?

One-size-fits-all applications aren't so workable, and funder flexibility here is important.

## **B: Communication with foundation/staff**

*(3-5 years)*

Assign designated person.

More frequent.

*(6-10 years)*

The more open, honest, helpful, and friendly communication the better. Excessive gate keeping is deeply frustrating. 2

They should not wait until the last minute to request clarification or additional information and then assume we'll have the ability to drop everything else and respond immediately.

Be nice – most foundation staff members act like you are ruining their day if you call them with a question.

More timely response – use email more than phone.

Foundation staff should return calls.

Communication upfront before investing time in proposals unlikely to get funding.

Recognition of receipt and timeline for review.

I believe site visits and conversations after an initial letter of intent or short proposal would be ideal. Less emphasis on the document, more on the project/organization.

*(10+ years)*

More dynamic use of websites and email to announce deadlines and updates would be helpful.

Be accessible to help determine appropriateness of grant seeker, e.g. short appointment or phone call.

More personal contact.

More communication between grant requests.

Encouragement of email dialogue.

Answer calls promptly.

Staff turnover – finding the right person and developing a relationship.

Foundation staff understand the unequal power dynamic, so requests should be realistic.

Grantees are anxious to share information with foundations. Please ask us if something in an application is unclear or confusing.

I'm not convinced site visits are an effective use of time for funders or organizational staff. Can a funder really learn anything in an hour long visit?

Provision for a vehicle for NPO to inquire about their pending requests.

## **C: Site Visits**

*(3-5 years)*

Talk to recipients.

Visit programs more often at least 2 or 3 times a year. 5

Mandatory for foundations considering first-time funding.

*(6-10 years)*

We love doing site visits. We strongly encourage all of our foundation funders to do site visits, but they rarely take us up on it. 4

An understanding that the organization will possibly “overdo” them, but these are important ways

to understand the program.

*(10+ years)*

Continue to make them a mutual learning format – Recognize board officer involvement from NPO.

Everyone should do one site visit.

Try to make appointments when sites are active (i.e. when students are there, etc...).

Can be helpful, but rarely happen.

Let us know what you’d like to accomplish during the visit in advance –e.g. meet staff or clients, see facilities, etc.

We encourage more participation from foundation officers.

## **D: Reporting requirements**

*(0-2 years)*

Make reports part of the overall foundation conversation, not just evidence of impact.

*(3-5 years)*

One page summary.

Keep it simple (streamline and summarize). 3

*(6-10 years)*

The most onerous requirements entail labor that ultimately exceeds the amount of the grant!

Please remember the staff time involved in exhaustive reporting costs us money.

Two times a year- 6 month and final. 2

*(10+ years)*

Quarterly is reasonable.

Annual please.

Present questions or forms with grant agreement.

A real search for “the bumps in the road” – everything doesn’t go as planned.

Higher acceptance of the interim reports as being a tool for altering info/outcomes presented in original request.

Measurable outcomes balanced with quantity of services.

Generally reasonable though occasionally statistics asked for that are very labor intensive to gather.

Open ended reports are better. It places a burden on the grantee to tailor reports for individual foundation formats, especially for the same project.

Fine, by and large. Are you reading them?

Allow grantees to define what comes of the grant for themselves rather than prescribe a lot of requirements for the narrative part.

## **E. Other**

*(3-5 years)*

Foundations must remain very clear about their funding priorities and stick with them.

Each applicant should be assigned to a staff person who should be their advocate in foundation board meetings where board members decide who to award grants to.

*(6-10 years)*

More collaboration between foundations in funding programs, more general support for core activities, more than the required 5% payout.

It would be a blessing if more foundations would consider operating support in their areas of interest; and even “ongoing” operating support.

Almost all organizations could use additional general operating support.

Letters of intent – use them. Only invite what you are comfortable recommending. Then work with those groups to create effective portfolio for trustees. We’re guessing too often about what you need to do your job on our behalf. Shorten turn around time.

Communicate your thinking along the way.

Let prospective grantees know what the process is like and what the time frame is.

## **29. Have email and websites improved communication with foundations and/or facilitated getting information about funding priorities? If not, why not?**

*(3-5 years)*

Yes 15

Somewhat need more information on when and how to apply at deadlines.

Absolutely, but it is still nice to have a personal contact and guidance from the program officers.<sup>2</sup>

*(6-10 years)*

Yes and no. Basic funding priorities info on website is definitely helpful for starting to get to know a funder. Ultimately, the best contact is live, either via phone or in person.

Yes. Websites of foundations are a useful tool for learning about their priorities and procedures.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past 10 years, definitely. But there seemed to be cessation of focus on web site development and updating information. <sup>3</sup>

Only for the foundations that put their forms online.

*(10+ years)*

Absolutely! Very helpful and creative uses are in play. Cuts down on research time and helps grantseekers to focus and target.

No, it still doesn't mean that guidelines are any more current or accurate.

Yes, it's simply another avenue to make contact. Sometimes email is more efficient to respond to.

No, funding agencies are becoming too dependant on a website to explain their priorities – it is not always clear and few seem to be able to explain beyond the information on the website – it's great for general information, but more contact is often needed.

Helpful for guidelines – email rarely used. <sup>3</sup>

Yes, but many foundations are not up to speed in this area. This survey, for instance, could easily have been on the web.

Website, when regularly updated are extremely useful in getting information about funding priorities. The internet has vastly improved the 'research' part of foundation fundraising. We have not used email as frequently to communicate with foundation staff, preferring telephone contact with staff to determine a fit! Email is a viable way to communicate.

**30. If you had one piece of advice for foundation staff as to how to do their jobs better, what would it be?**

*(0-2 years)*

It is deeply important that the funder and the funded speak the same language. In the case of arts organizations, the language of cultural policy and artists/producer can be very different. It is important to bridge the gap and be sure that everyone understands each organizations' needs and how to truly share information.

*(3-5 years)*

Never turn us down.

If you fund programs for education, please try to continue to fund the same types of programs, because there are times there are times when some foundations only fund or adopt a certain area and wont fund programs that historically support our organization.

Be responsive and informative about funding opportunities up front and be realistic about timelines.

*(6-10 years)*

The time we spend searching for funding support is time that could be spent providing services to the community – so the more we can do to improve the process, the better!

Be sympathetic to the difficulties of nonprofit fundraising – understand how understaffed most of us are.

I can't emphasize enough the need for multi-year investments in an organization's basic mission (as opposed to the sexy project du jour) Can you all advocate for this at board level?

Ask for more feed back from grant seekers more often (like this survey), publish the recommendations, and a plan for achieving them.

Communicate more with organization. 2

Many foundation staff people do this, but please remember just how much we depend on you- and how important it is to balance that dynamic. Remind us that you need us, and believe in us too; our work is vital even if you can't support us. And tell us why you can't support us. Also, perhaps point us in the direction of someone who might. Let's keep educating each other.

*(10+ years)*

Do a website and include all the pertinent dates: proposal deadlines, meeting/decision dates, "we will contact you by" dates.

Be assessable with in professional bounds. Keep it fresh...take a sabbatical if you're burning out. Stay positive and seek to enable grantees through your relationships.

Schedule quarterly phone calls with grantees for check-in and to build relationships deeper understanding of programs.

Always remember the people aspect – yes, everyone wants your money and not everyone will qualify for it – be honest – it's just business.

Keep more in touch with the nonprofit stuff about what are current issues and challenges. Be available other than times when a nonprofit is seeking a grant.

More site visits.

Put yourself in the NPO “shoes”. Ideally foundation staff should have NPO experience themselves before working for foundations.

Try to come from the perspective that applying for grants is difficult and time-consuming. Giving money away is satisfying. Seeking it and trying to justify your work to an outsider who is not necessarily objective can be frustrating.

Try to sympathize with the limitations and resources of the NPOs. Most are understaffed or have frequent staff turnover thus record keeping may not be what it should be, yet the program, the delivery of services to clients is strong.

Listen more closely to what we know about what we need-more effort to not be proscriptive. Then work with us to help make your pitch to your trustees as focused and powerful as it can be. Working with us at that stage can improve perceptions and outcomes at trustee meetings.

The golden rule!

Listen to what the NPO really needs and trust the nonprofit staff.

We encourage staff to find ways to meet grantseekers and prospective grantseekers informally such as through Foundation Center programs.

Convince your boards that what we need is support for operating expense... makes your job easier and supports us in meaningful ways. 2

Be accessible – approach the staff of nonprofits as peers – because we are...we’re just doing different pieces of important work.

