

# Key Findings and Recommendations from the Rogers Family Foundation 2017 Grantee Perception Report

Prepared by The Center For Effective Philanthropy

*In September and October of 2017, The Center for Effective Philanthropy conducted a survey of the Rogers Family Foundation’s (“Rogers” or “the Foundation”) grantees, achieving a 68% response rate. The memo below outlines CEP’s summary of key strengths, opportunities, and recommendations. Rogers’ grantee perceptions should be interpreted in light of its goals and strategies, and should take into account its current context, including its recent strategic planning process and staffing changes.*

*This memo accompanies the comprehensive survey results found in the Foundation’s interactive online report at <https://cep.surveymresults.org> and in the downloadable online materials.*



*The Foundation’s full report also contains more information about survey analysis and methodology.*

## Strong Community Impact and Exceptional Grantee Understanding

- Like in 2014, grantees continue to view the Foundation as having a strong positive impact on their local communities, providing higher than typical ratings for its overall community impact.
  - Rogers grantees also provide higher than typical ratings for the Foundation’s understanding of their communities, placing the Foundation in the top five percent of CEP’s comparative dataset for this measure.
  - The Foundation also receives higher than typical ratings for its understanding of the social, cultural, and socioeconomic factors affecting grantees’ work, as well as for its understanding of its intended beneficiaries’ needs.
- As in 2014, the Foundation receives higher than typical ratings for the extent to which it has advanced the state of knowledge in grantees’ fields, with grantee ratings now placing the Foundation higher than 90 percent of funders in CEP’s dataset. Grantees also continue to rate the Foundation higher than typical for the extent to which it has affected public policy in their fields.
  - Grantees continue to provide higher than typical ratings for the extent to which Rogers understands the fields in which they work, with the Foundation rated in the top quarter of CEP’s dataset for this measure.
- Rogers grantees also continue to provide higher than typical ratings for the extent to which the Foundation understands their organizations’ goals and strategies, as well as for the extent to which it is aware of the challenges their organizations are facing.



*“The Rogers Family Foundation is a game-changer in Oakland, particularly in the field of education. They are pushing for equitable outcomes for all students and believe in the promise and potential of EVERY child.”*



*“Foundation Program officers and staff are deeply rooted and ‘in-the-know’ about Oakland schools and public education. They are extremely in tune with the needs and priorities of schools, the district and families in the district.”*

## Lower than Typical Perceived Impact on Grantees’ Fields, Organizations and Sustainability of Work

- Despite grantees’ positive ratings for grantee understanding, ratings for the Foundation’s overall impact on grantees’ fields have trended downward since 2014. The Foundation is now rated lower than typical for this measure.
- Additionally, grantees provide ratings that are lower than typical for the Foundation’s impact on their organizations, placing the Foundation in the bottom 20 percent of CEP’s dataset for this measure.
- In particular, ratings have significantly declined for the extent to which the Foundation has improved grantees’ ability to sustain the work funded by the grant in the future, dropping from higher than typical in 2014 to the bottom 10 percent of CEP’s comparative dataset.
  - A handful of grantees suggest that Rogers should continue to work with existing players in the field despite the changing landscape, rather than starting new initiatives or acting in a reactive way. One grantee says *“..one of the challenges to doing deep, long-term community work is that organizations may change directions in a reactive way. Consistent and persistent work is needed in many fields even though there may be other emerging needs. I feel it is important to not abandon work in one community when political landscapes change in another.”*
  - Other grantees suggest investing in fewer initiatives with more strategic, deeper funding. One grantee says *“Consider making fewer, but larger grants to select organizations to amplify impact.”* Another grantee suggests that Rogers be *“More strategic in what they fund. Invest a lot in fewer initiatives.”*



*“Like many foundations today, Rogers FF seems to be inventing new initiatives in response to current events, which can be great, or can inadvertently create new programs and spawn new organizations which do not have the necessary leadership, experience or sustainability to have a real and lasting impact. Why not look around at who is already doing great work in the community and give them direction and support to meet current/ evolving needs?”*

## Opportunity to Consider Changes to Grantmaking Characteristics and Build on Patterns of Non-monetary Assistance

- CEP’s research finds that the specific pattern of larger (often six-figure), multi-year, general operating support grants is associated with significantly more positive perceptions of impact on grantees’ organizations.
- The proportion of grantees receiving general operating support, as well as average grant length, remain similar to findings in 2014. Average grant size, however, has roughly doubled, increasing from an average of \$28k to \$60k, now placing the Foundation in line with the typical Funder.
  - Those receiving grants that are six-figures or larger rate the Foundation significantly higher for its impact on their fields and organizations, the overall quality of their relationships with the Foundation, and the consistency of its communications.
  - Grantees receiving general operating support rate the Foundation significantly higher for its understanding of their local communities and organizations, as well as for the overall quality of its relationships with grantees.
  - Those receiving multi-year grants provide higher ratings for the Foundation’s impact on their organizations.
  - Grantees that report receiving intensive non-monetary assistance provide significantly higher ratings for the extent to which the Foundation has improved their ability to sustain the work funded by the grant.

## Declining Ratings for the Quality of Relationships with Grantees, in Particular with Regards to Clarity of Communications

- CEP’s research finds that strong funder-grantee relationships – defined by high quality interactions and clear, consistent communications – are the single strongest predictor of grantees’ perceived impact on their organizations. They are also a driver of higher perceived impact on grantees’ fields and local communities.
- Grantees rate the Foundation similar to grantees of the typical funder for the overall quality of its relationships, though ratings have significantly declined from those that were higher than typical in 2014.
  - While grantees continue to provide higher than typical ratings for their comfort approaching the Foundation if a problem arises and for staff responsiveness, ratings have significantly declined for the extent to which grantees perceive they have been treated fairly by the Foundation. Rogers is now rated similar to the typical funder for this measure.
- Grantee ratings also indicate a change in their experience with Foundation communications, as ratings for the clarity of communication of the Foundation’s goals and strategies have significantly declined and are now lower than typical.
  - Ratings for the consistency of communications have also trended downward, and the Foundation is now rated similar to the typical funder in CEP’s dataset.
- Compared to 2014, interactions between grantees and Foundation staff have declined in frequency slightly, with the proportion of grantees reporting interacting with their program officer monthly or more often decreasing from 40 percent to 24 percent.

- Grantees that report interacting with their program officer monthly or more often provide significantly higher ratings for the extent to which they feel comfortable approaching the Foundation if a problem arises.



*“All the Foundation team members we have interacted with are smart, thoughtful, knowledgeable and kind. It's a pleasure to interact with them as partners working towards shared goals, not just as a funder.”*



*“The workings of the Foundation remain a bit of a mystery to me in terms of who makes decisions and how they are made.”*

## Streamlined Processes with Opportunities to Improve Helpfulness of the Selection Process and Mitigate Pressure Felt by Grantees

- Similar to 2014, Rogers grantees report experiencing streamlined processes, spending fewer hours on funder requirements over the grant lifetime than 90 percent of funders in CEP’s dataset.
- Grantees also, however, continue to provide lower than typical ratings for the helpfulness of the selection process.
  - Grantees report a lower than typical level of involvement by Foundation staff during development of the proposal.
  - In addition, a lower than typical proportion of grantees – 53 percent – report exchanging ideas with the Foundation during the application or grant period regarding how to assess the results of the funded work. This proportion has trended downward from 2014.
  - Grantees who did have such discussions rate the Foundation significantly higher for its impact on their organizations, its impact on their ability to continue the funded work, its awareness of their challenges, the overall quality of their relationships, and the clarity of the Foundation’s communications.
- Compared to 2014, grantee ratings have trended upward for the extent to which they felt pressure to modify their organizations’ priorities in order to create a grant proposal that is likely to receive funding. Rogers is now rated similar to the typical funder in CEP’s dataset.
  - According to CEP’s research, pressure experienced by grantees is one of the key predictors of the strength of funder-grantee relationships: high pressure is associated with lower relationships ratings.
- Virtually all grantees – 98 percent – report participating in the Foundation’s reporting process.
  - These grantees rate the Foundation higher than typical for the extent to which the reporting process is straightforward and for how appropriately aligned it is to their work.
  - Rogers receives lower than typical ratings, however, for the extent to which the reporting process is adaptable to fit grantees circumstances and for the extent to which it is a helpful opportunity to reflect and learn.



*“Rogers Family Foundation's processes are well streamlined and easy for grantees to use and to access.”*



*“Good process, but seems to be the same process for \$6k as a grant for \$100k.”*

## CEP Recommendations

- Identify opportunities across interactions, processes, and communication channels to emphasize a cohesive and clear message about the Foundation's goals and strategy.
- Consider engaging grantees in targeted conversations to better understand recent declines in perceptions regarding the Foundation's impact on grantees' organizations, fields, and ability to sustain funded work.
- Keeping the Foundation's capacity in mind, consider the potential benefits of providing an even larger proportion of select grantees with general operating support, longer grants, and intensive patterns of nonmonetary assistance.
- Facilitate conversations with Foundation staff about what is causing increased levels of pressure felt by grantees to change their program or grant priorities in order to receive funding, and discuss opportunities to mitigate this pressure.
- Discuss approaches to increasing staff capacity to more frequently exchange ideas during the application or grant period regarding how to assess the results of the funded work.

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