

FUNDING PERFORMANCE

HOW GREAT DONORS
INVEST IN
GRANTEE SUCCESS



PREFACE

By Lowell Weiss, Sam Cobbs, Hilary Pennington,
Daniel Stid, Jeri Eckhart Queenan, Jeff Bradach,
Hilda Polanco, and Deborah Linnell

An essay from *Funding Performance*,
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Preface

*By Lowell Weiss, Sam Cobbs, Hilary Pennington, Daniel Stid,
Jeri Eckhart Queenan, Jeff Bradach, Hilda Polanco, and Deborah Linnell*

In an era when our communities are being rocked by a health pandemic, economic upheaval, and political turmoil, the world has never needed more from civil society leaders—and these leaders have never needed more from their funders. Now is the most important moment in our collective lifetimes for funders to dispense with conventional practices that have been shown to undermine grantees and adopt those that have been shown to produce greater impact for grantees, funders, and constituents alike.

Actually, let's rephrase that. Without any of the typical nonprofit politeness, here's what we really mean:

Funders, heal thyself! Your intentions are noble, but your practices aren't. The vast majority of you are starving your grantees rather than nourishing them. When your grantees get a chance to speak freely—that is, anonymously—about the way you treat them, they express resentment that you're not listening to them or giving them what they need for success. Enough is enough!

This passion is why our organizations have joined forces to publish this monograph. Some of us are funders. Some of us have nonprofit backgrounds. Some of us are advisors to funders and nonprofits. Some of us are researchers. All of us have vantage points that have given us a close-up look at the best and worst practices in our sector. We're ready to share both—in the hope of turning this moment of crisis into a moment of truth and then a moment of productive pivot.

The good news is that we and our respective organizations have discovered a prescription for change which is remarkably consistent. As you will see in the six essays that follow, which we wrote independently and without seeing each other's contributions, all roads lead to the following changes:

- If you want to empower grantees rather than hamstringing them, provide more of what nonprofit leader Vu Le cleverly calls “MYGOD” support—multiyear, general operating dollars.
- If you’ve made the decision to give your precious resources to an organization, then give that organization the benefit of your trust and respect as well.
- If your website trumpets your concern about inequality, then don’t perpetuate it with funding decisions that always favor fancy pedigrees and PowerPoints over lived experience and relationships.
- If you’re moved by the suffering in your community, then show the courage to give more money when the supply of funding from governments is down and the demand for nonprofit services is skyrocketing.

And here’s the even-better news: The above commitments aren’t just doable; they’ve been put into action at a small but growing set of foundations. We know this because three of us (Hilary, Daniel, and Sam) have helped drive these changes within our own funding organizations. We also see this in research that four of us (Jeri, Jeff, Hilda, and Deborah) have conducted. And one of us (Lowell) has profiled nine foundations that are truly “walking the talk.”

In other words, these funding changes aren’t just aspirational. They exist in nature. And because they work, and because the urgency is rising, we’re intent on making sure they become our sector’s norm.

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