

# is grantmaking getting smarter?

A national study of philanthropic practice

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BY J MCCRAY



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*Smarter grantmaking. Stronger nonprofits. Better results.*

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations is a community of more than 370 grantmakers challenging the status quo in their field to help grantees achieve more. Understanding that grantmakers are successful only to the extent that their grantees achieve meaningful results, GEO promotes strategies and practices that contribute to grantee success. More information on GEO and a host of resources and links for grantmakers are available at [www.geofunders.org](http://www.geofunders.org).

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# INTRODUCTION

What makes the difference between a nonprofit organization that is able to adapt and thrive, and one that struggles to survive? It may be the presence of a clever and intuitive leader. It may be a highly supportive board. It may be savviness about the political environment. Some of it, though, boils down to the kind of support they receive from donors.

Smarter grantmaking practices are those that are designed to equip nonprofits to tackle head on the deep-rooted problems they are trying to solve. In short, evidence from many sources is mounting that several specific grantmaking practices are connected to nonprofit results. These include:

- ▶ funding nonprofits in a way that allows them to nimbly address systemic problems (e.g., general operating, multiyear and capacity-building support),
- ▶ taking every opportunity to take stock of what's being learned and share this information with others,
- ▶ engaging stakeholders at key decision-making moments, including strategy-setting, and
- ▶ collaborating with other funders to not only channel resources to promising approaches but reduce the application and reporting burden.

Every three years, GEO surveys the field to take a snapshot of funder practices that, collectively, add up to smarter grantmaking. In early 2008, we found that despite efforts to shift to practices that better support nonprofit results, there remained a disconnect between nonprofit needs and grantmaker practices. A year later, toward the beginning of a turbulent time for grantmakers and grantees alike, we released a briefing to the grantmaking community: *Smarter Grantmaking in Challenging Economic Times*. In it, we recommended four practices:

- ▶ Hold Steady — For nonprofits facing declining contributions, it was important to hold disbursements steady.
- ▶ Engage Your Stakeholders — As funders designed their response to the downturn, it was also important to engage stakeholders in the solution.

- ▶ Provide Flexible Funding — Flexible funding would allow nonprofits to nimbly respond to changes in the environment.
- ▶ Find Ways to Do More with Less — GEO recommended that funders do more with less and find low-cost changes they could make to give grantees a greater chance of weathering the storm, such as streamlining application and reporting processes.

When we conducted our 2011 study, we weren't sure what we would find. The past several years required nonprofits to be creative and nimble if they were going to stay afloat and effectively serve the growing need in their communities. How did funders respond? On the one hand, we found that there was little to no movement across a variety of practices from whether a foundation provided some level of general operating or capacity-building support to whether they tracked administrative requirements to their reasons for conducting evaluations. However, in a choppy economic environment, it may represent no small success that there was no backsliding.

On the other hand, we found that many funders stuck to the kinds of investments they know are connected to long-term nonprofit success, in particular general operating and capacity-building support. At the same time, they did what they could to minimize the turnaround time for decisions and for delivering grants to cash-strapped organizations. One of the surprising findings — funders reduced their turnaround time by more than 30 days.

What's different about funders who changed their practices for the better? Interestingly, we saw a pattern in our study that connected learning and stakeholder engagement practices with the types of funding grantmakers chose to increase. Those grantmakers that engaged with their grantees and their peers were more likely to offer multiyear, general operating and capacity-building support — the kinds of support we know will enable nonprofits to address the deep-rooted problems in their communities.

# How do funders help nonprofits adapt and thrive?



Picture an organization in your community that time and again manages to beat the odds. How is it that they are able to thrive when others are struggling? Chances are that they have the right leader or leadership team at the helm. But just as importantly, they are probably getting the right kind of support from their funders — support that is flexible, sustainable and makes it possible for nonprofits to invest in themselves.

So, how do funders support nonprofit resilience?

## THEY GIVE THE RIGHT KINDS OF SUPPORT

In the past decade, there has been a groundswell of interest in figuring out which grantmaking practices help build strong, effective, sustainable nonprofit organizations. Groups like the Center for Effective Philanthropy, FSG, The Bridgespan Group, Nonprofit Finance Fund, TCC Group, GEO and others have built a body of research about what works. GEO's research with funders and nonprofits alike shows that the types of financial support that are most associated with long-term nonprofit success are:

- ▶ General operating support (also known as unrestricted support)
- ▶ Multiyear support
- ▶ Capacity-building support

Nancy Burd, in GEO's publication *On the Money*, writes that because short-term restricted grants are the norm, nonprofits "plow most, if not all, of their grant monies into delivering services now, rather than investing in their organizations so they can get better at what they do and perhaps take a long-range approach to address some of the root causes they are working so hard to address."

TCC Group defines *adaptive capacity* as the ability of a nonprofit organization to monitor, assess and respond to internal and external changes.<sup>1</sup> Organizations with strong adaptive capacity have financial resources that are sustainable and flexible. General operating and multiyear support allow nonprofits to maintain programs at the same time that they are investing in ways to innovate, adapt and learn. Multiyear support allows nonprofits to craft approaches appropriate to the scale of the problem they are trying to solve and means they can concentrate their efforts on fulfilling their mission rather than fundraising.

In the private sector, investments in capacity are integral to the success of any venture. In the nonprofit sector, with fewer resources to go around for capacity investments, these investments may be less frequently available or on a smaller scale, but they are no less critical. In the recent *Daring to Lead* study of nonprofit executives,<sup>2</sup> a joint project of CompassPoint and the Meyer Foundation, the researchers found that leadership development is essential for long-term sustainability and, furthermore, nonprofits should include capacity building in their budgets for all staff, not just the executive.

<sup>1</sup> *The Sustainability Formula*. © 2009. TCC Group.

<sup>2</sup> *Daring to Lead 2011: Brief 2, Inside the Executive Director Job*. © 2011. CompassPoint and the Meyer Foundation.

**THEY GIVE NONPROFITS  
FASTER DECISIONS AND  
MAKE IT EASIER TO  
ACCESS CAPITAL**

Imagine walking into a car dealership and being told that it might take up to three months to get approved for a loan, but that depending on how many loan requests they receive, you might need to wait yet another three months before a decision is made. Not knowing if you'd qualify, or when you would know for sure, it would be very difficult to plan how or when you could get things done. Nonprofits find themselves in this position all the time. Their communities have immediate needs, but when it comes to grants from private philanthropy, nonprofits frequently find themselves in zones of uncertainty for months at a time.

Nonprofit Finance Fund has found that for the third year in a row 60 percent of nonprofits have less than 90 days of cash on hand.<sup>3</sup> Add to this the fact that many nonprofits rely on government grants to fund their work — grants that are frequently slow to arrive once awarded — and it becomes that much more important to nonprofits to have a quicker turnaround from the comparatively more agile funders in private philanthropy.

Several years ago, Project Streamline, in its report *Drowning in Paperwork, Distracted from Purpose*, described problems with the current application and reporting process, including variability across funders, requirements that weren't right-sized (i.e., very small grants had the same requirements as larger grants) and due diligence redundancy.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, grantseekers may find that the time involved in applying for and

reporting on a grant will likely not be covered in the amount of the grant award. All of this adds up to additional time and money spent on the transaction with the funder — and less devoted to serving their communities.

*Funders preserved some of the kinds of funding we know are connected with long-term nonprofit success, including general operating and capacity-building support.*

What has it been like to be a grantseeker over the past couple of years? The challenges facing nonprofit leaders in raising enough money to address the rising needs in their communities have been well-documented by Nonprofit Finance Fund and others, and there are no doubt many obstacles ahead. In a number of practices, grantmakers remained static in the past three years, which may not be surprising given the kinds of pressures facing the nonprofit sector and philanthropy. However, in our study, we found that funders preserved some of the kinds of funding we know are connected with long-term nonprofit success, including general operating and capacity-building support. We also found that funders used this time to try to speed up their decision-making process for nonprofits. Many also looked for additional opportunities to solicit feedback from grantees.

<sup>3</sup> 2011 *State of the Sector Survey*. © 2011. Nonprofit Finance Fund.

<sup>4</sup> *Drowning in Paperwork, Distracted from Purpose*. © 2008. Project Streamline.

# Key Findings



**FUNDERS PRESERVED TWO TYPES OF MUCH-NEEDED SUPPORT AND ARE MAKING IT EASIER TO ACCESS FUNDS**

In a time of turbulence in the field, driven in large part by a severe economic downturn, grantmakers demonstrated their commitment to several practices they know are connected to grantee success.

## General operating support and capacity-building support are here to stay

When a small group of grantmakers formed GEO in the late 1990s, it wasn't clear if general operating support and capacity building would ever become core elements of foundation grantmaking strategy. Capacity building and general operating support are two ways a grantmaker can fund an organization's long-term outcomes, not just the short-term outputs of a project. In a time of great uncertainty for many nonprofits, these are the types of support that help them stay nimble and improve their ability to adapt and react to changes in the environment. With a major disruption like the economic recession that took a large bite out of foundation endowments as well as new gifts to foundations over the past several years, it was difficult to predict how these types of support would fare. Our research suggests that they are here to stay.



### DURING THE PAST TWO FISCAL YEARS, IN WHAT WAYS (IF AT ALL) DID YOUR GRANTMAKING PRACTICES CHANGE?

	Reduced a lot	Reduced slightly	Did not change	Increased slightly	Increased a lot
Total dollars awarded	14%	37%	17%	27%	5%
Total dollars for general operating support	5%	10%	51%	28%	7%
Total dollars for grantee capacity building	3%	9%	59%	24%	6%

When faced with decisions about what to do with their grant funds, many grantmakers chose to give the same level of operating support and capacity-building support they had before the recession hit — a significant number even increased these types of support. Only 15 percent of those surveyed said they decreased dollars for general operating support and only 12 percent decreased dollars for capacity building. When asked whether the changes were related to the downturn, funders who increased these investments overwhelmingly said it was unrelated to the economy.

Organizations that give operating support at least sometimes named providing flexibility and stability as one of their core reasons. Other reasons were to invest in the overall grantee mission or to flexibly fund a grantee that had proven results. This might be particularly true for grantees whose mission fits squarely within the stated giving area of a funder. The Boston Foundation, for example, has defined specific impact goals for its discretionary grants program. It has moved in recent years toward a preference for multiyear general operating support for core partners aligned with these impact goals. To further enhance its investment in these key organizations, The Boston Foundation augments its general operating support to key grantees with technical assistance and capacity-building support for issues ranging from mergers and alliances to strategic and business planning, board and organizational development, evaluation and data tracking.

Research from TCC Group, The Bridgespan Group and others has shown that capacity-building support helps nonprofits navigate a complex and changing environment.<sup>5</sup> Types of capacity building that funders supported most frequently were leadership and management skills, fundraising and technology and information system development.

*Funders who support capacity building have found that long-term capacity-building support helps grantees improve their organizational performance.*

Funders selected these more frequently than investments such as succession planning, volunteer management, evaluation capacity and advocacy capacity. Funders who support capacity building, such as the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, which funds comprehensive capacity building through its Nonprofit Support Program, including executive transitions and evaluation capacity, have found that long-term capacity-building support helps grantees improve their organizational performance.<sup>6</sup>

However, grantmakers still design the vast majority of grant dollars to fund discrete projects, not organizations. General operating and capacity-building support are still some of the hardest funds to come by. For example, according to the Foundation Center, the proportion of total grant funds given in the form of operating support has hovered at around 20 percent for the past nine years.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Sustainability Formula*. © 2009. TCC Group. *Assessment of Bank of America's Neighborhood Builders Program*. © 2011. The Bridgespan Group.

<sup>6</sup> *Nonprofit Support Program Assessment and Evaluation: Executive Summary*. © 2011. Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

<sup>7</sup> *Highlights of Foundation Giving Trends*. © 2011. Foundation Center.

**With limited funds to give out, some foundations made improvements to their internal processes**

**TURNAROUND TIME**

In the past three years, funders have made a number of changes to their practices to reduce their turnaround time by more than 30 percent and provide nonprofits the opportunity to give them feedback. These changes aren't free to implement, but they may be relatively low-cost options to better serve grantees.

When the recession hit, funders could have retreated inside their doors and limited their engagement with the outside world, particularly as some reduced their staff size and had fewer dollars to give. During a time when grantmakers may have had limited options for supporting nonprofits financially, they made shifts they could, including shortening the process of requesting and awarding funds. The biggest shift was that funders reduced the amount of time it takes from the day a

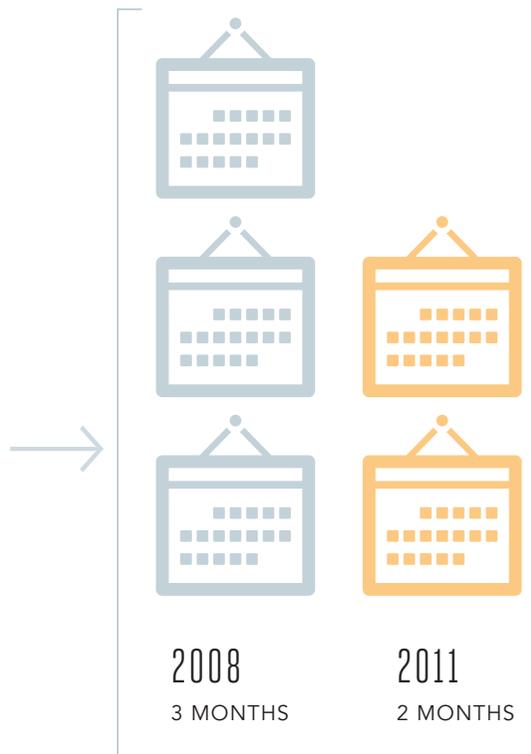
nonprofit submitted a full proposal to notifying the nonprofit of the funding decision — from a median of 90 days to a median of 60 days. More funders also said they made their application requirements proportionate to the type and size of grant — half of all funders now say they vary their application requirements for smaller grants.

Do these kinds of changes really matter to nonprofits? Some of these may seem like small adjustments, but when you are a nonprofit executive stretched for time, reductions to application requirements for smaller grants free you up to focus on either serving your community or developing relationships with other funders to help round out your organization's fundraising picture. Since we last conducted this survey in 2008, funders reported that they have knocked more than 30 days off the process of reviewing a grant and making the initial payment. Reducing the amount of time from the original request to notification of the decision allows nonprofit executives to more quickly decide if they need to make adjustments. And of course, the quicker the money arrives once the decision is made, the sooner they can respond to needs in their communities.

 **DURING THE PAST TWO FISCAL YEARS, ON AVERAGE HOW MANY DAYS DID IT TAKE FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION TO ACCOMPLISH THE FOLLOWING\*?**

	2008	2011
Acknowledge receipt of funding requests	7	5
Approve a typical grant (from submission of a full proposal to notification of funding decision)	90	60
Make the initial payment after a typical grant award was approved	21	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>80</b>

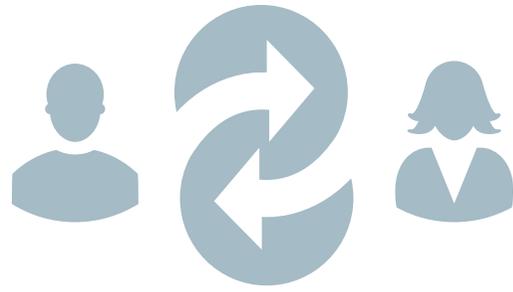
\*Median number of days



## SOLICITING FEEDBACK

Funders are increasingly finding ways to ask their grantees how their foundation is doing. As more and more funders solicit feedback, this may represent a shift in mindset in the field about the relationship between funder and grantee. More funders may be starting to view nonprofits as customers, not just as grantseekers. Funders are now more likely to solicit feedback (both anonymous and nonanonymous) from grantees to strengthen foundation performance. Nearly a third of funders surveyed said that they solicited anonymous feedback, with a similar proportion collecting nonanonymous feedback. The increasing availability of tools like the Center for Effective Philanthropy’s Grantee Perception Report makes this easier for funders.

When funders solicit feedback, they frequently make changes as a result. The Saint Luke’s Foundation of Cleveland, Ohio, conducted an outreach effort to find out how grantees’ needs were changing amid the economic crisis and what kinds of additional support



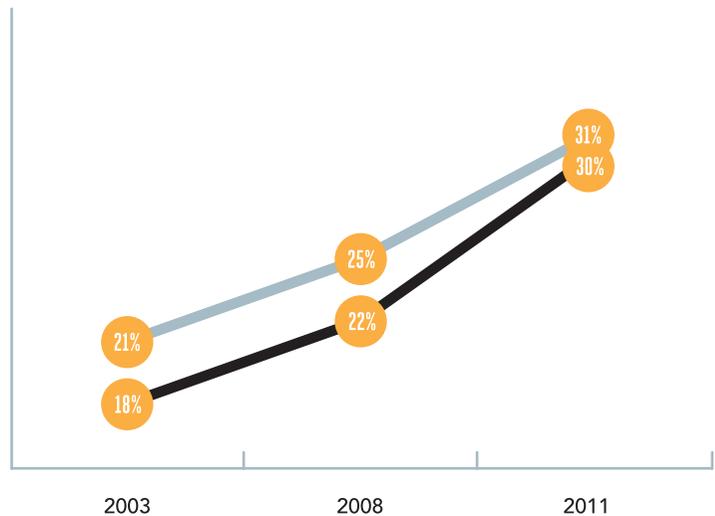
*Nearly a third of funders surveyed said that they solicited anonymous feedback, with a similar proportion collecting nonanonymous feedback.*

they might require. Based on the results, the foundation began an investigation of how it might support nonprofit collaboration and infrastructure. The Durfee Foundation, after gathering feedback from grantees, created The Springboard Fund to provide multiyear grants and assign seasoned leaders to mentor newer nonprofits.



**DURING THE PAST TWO FISCAL YEARS, DID YOUR ORGANIZATION ENGAGE IN EITHER OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES TO HELP EVALUATE OR STRENGTHEN ITS PERFORMANCE?**

- Solicit nonanonymous feedback from grantees through surveys/ interviews/focus groups
- Solicit anonymous feedback from grantees through surveys/ interviews/focus groups



**BY AND LARGE,  
GRANTMAKERS DID  
NOT CHANGE THEIR  
APPROACH IN SEVERAL  
CRITICAL AREAS**

With a game-changing disturbance like the recession that hit in 2008 — from which we're still recovering — it was hard to know how philanthropy would react. In many areas of practice, we saw little change. Whether you view the absence of movement as a disappointment, or whether you view stability during turmoil as a success in itself, it is clear that the field at large did not change practices in many critical areas that support nonprofit success. The vast majority (roughly 80 percent) of grantmakers provide some level of general operating support, and this number hasn't changed much. During the past two fiscal years, the median amount of annual grantmaking budget devoted to general operating support was steady at 20 percent. The majority of funders, although a smaller proportion (65 percent), support some form of capacity building among grantees.

Grantmakers also did not significantly change their stakeholder engagement practices, with around 60 percent assessing the needs of communities and roughly half inviting stakeholders to address board members or provide input on foundation strategy or grant proposals.

When it comes to evaluation, about 70 percent of respondents said they evaluate their work. Grantmakers' reasons for evaluating did not change in the past three years in any area except one. In 2011, grantmakers were less likely to identify strengthening

future grantmaking as a very important reason for conducting evaluations. Grantmakers still appear to be more focused on proof and accountability than on learning with their peers inside and outside their organization. Reasons such as learning about outcomes of the work, completion of grant objectives and grant implementation still far surpass more external-facing reasons such as contributing to knowledge in the field or strengthening public policy.

*Grantmakers still appear to be more focused on proof and accountability than on learning with their peers inside and outside their organization.*



2008 2011

**TYPE OF SUPPORT**

Devoted a proportion of annual grantmaking budget to general operating support	80%	83%
Median proportion of budget devoted to general operating support	20%	20%
Supported capacity building among grantees	65%	65%

**STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

Assessed the needs of the communities or fields served (e.g., through surveys, interviews, focus groups)*	61%	58%
Invited grantees to address board members*	56%	53%
Sought external input on foundation strategy from representatives of recipient communities or grantees*	n/a	51%
Sought external input on grant proposals from representatives of recipient communities or grantees*	48%	49%
Sought advice from a grantee advisory committee about policies, practices or program areas*	39%	42%
Delegated funding decision-making power to representatives of recipient communities or grantees*	15%	16%

**ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS**

Collected information about how long it takes grantees to meet the organization’s administrative requirements	12%	12%
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**USES FOR EVALUATION**

Learn about outcomes of funded work**	88%	88%
Learn whether original objectives were achieved**	83%	84%
Learn about implementation of funded work**	75%	77%
Strengthen our future grantmaking**^	73%	62%
Contribute to knowledge in the field**	38%	34%
Strengthen organizational practices in the field**	31%	32%
Strengthen public policy**	24%	22%

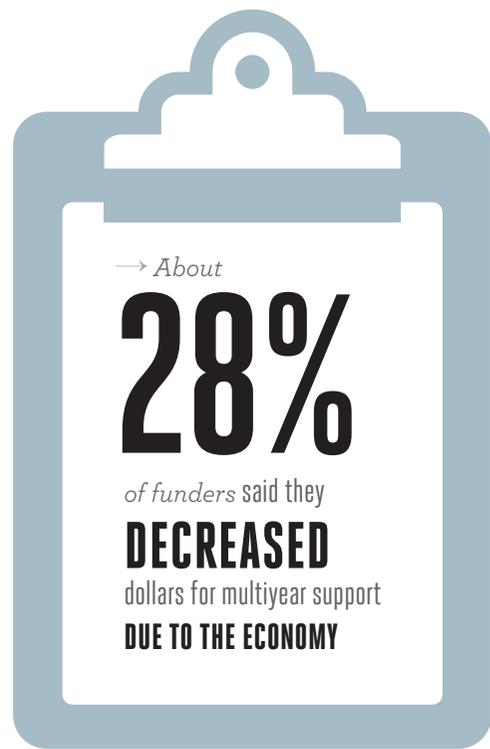
\* sometimes, often, always

\*\*very important

^statistically significant  $P \leq .01$

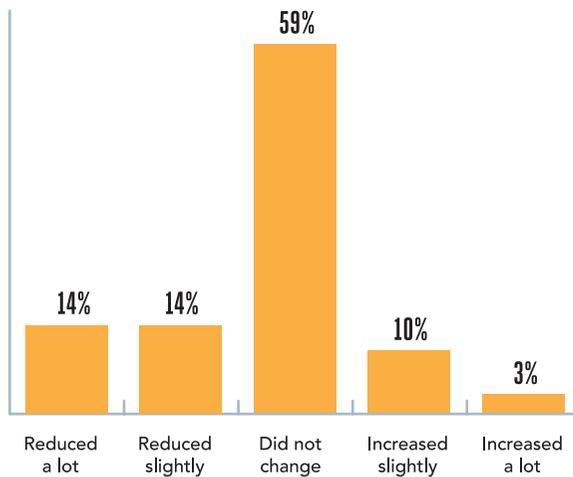
Perhaps not surprisingly, with an uncertain future ahead for both foundation assets and infusion of new donations, multiyear support did not fare well over the past several years. Twenty-eight percent of funders said they had decreased these dollars due to the economy. Funders reported making multiyear awards much less frequently than they had in 2008. Unfortunately, these reductions came at a time of volatility in investments and unreliable donor commitments, shifting the burden to grantees at a time when their funders could have been a stabilizing force for the nonprofit sector.

**One of the more hopeful pieces of news — more than half (54 percent) of those who decreased their multiyear commitments said these changes were temporary due to the economy.**



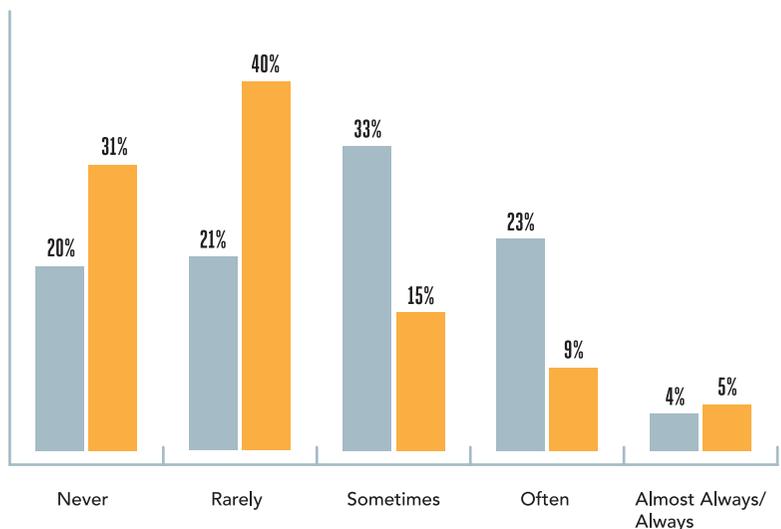
➔ **DURING THE PAST TWO FISCAL YEARS, IN WHAT WAYS (IF AT ALL) DID YOUR GRANTMAKING PRACTICES CHANGE?**

Percentages represent changes in total dollars for multiyear support



➔ **DURING THE PAST TWO FISCAL YEARS, HOW OFTEN DID YOUR ORGANIZATION MAKE MULTIYEAR GRANTS OF TWO YEARS OR LONGER?**

2008 2011



**GRANTMAKERS WITH A STREET-LEVEL VIEW OF WHAT'S GOING ON MAKE INVESTMENTS APPROPRIATE TO THE DEEP-ROOTED NATURE OF THE PROBLEMS FACING THEIR COMMUNITIES**

Most of the problems that nonprofits are trying to solve can't be solved in a year. Nor can they be solved by organizations that don't invest in the ability of their own leadership and personnel to adapt to an ever-changing environment. General operating, multiyear and capacity-building support are all effective investments to address systemic problems in communities. Funders that take this approach to their funding practices have two important things in common: They are good at listening to grantees and they come together with their peers to learn about better ways to support nonprofits. In other words, these funders have a street-level view of what's going on.

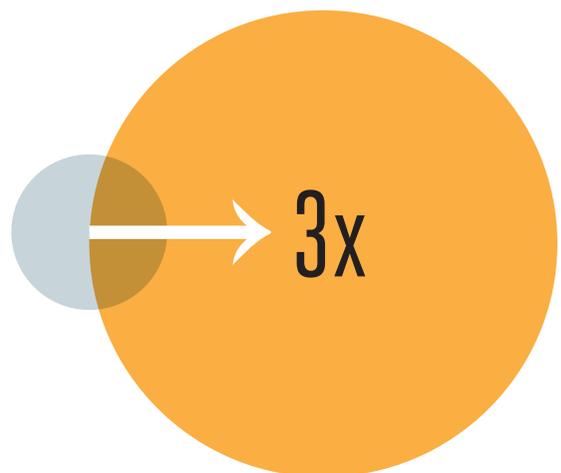
**Funders that keep their ear to the ground have increased vital types of support**

Years ago, beginning with our Change Agent Project, GEO began noticing a pattern: Grantmakers with a street-level view of the challenges facing grantees tended to make smarter investments. This is something that Dev Patnaik of Jump Associates, with whom we co-wrote our publication, *Widespread Empathy*, calls a "gut-level connection." Engaging stakeholders allows grantmakers to base their decisions and actions on an authentic, firsthand understanding of the perspectives of grantees, community members and other partners. Some of the practices that help grantmakers gain this gut-level connection include seeking external input from stakeholders on foundation strategy, seeking

advice from grantee advisory committees and using grant reports to foster learning and meaningful exchange.

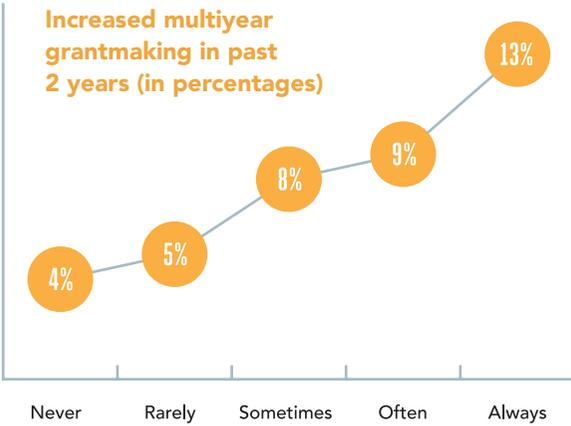
One of the most critical decisions a funder could have made in the past several years was to increase the types of support nonprofits need to address the ever-changing needs in their communities — general operating, multiyear and capacity-building support. When we looked at the data to see what kinds of funding practices are common among grantmakers with an ear to the ground, an interesting pattern began to emerge. It turns out that when funders had strategies in place for listening to and learning with grantees, they were more likely to increase these types of support. Funders who always used grant reports to foster learning between the foundation and its grantees were three times more likely to increase multiyear grantmaking than those who never did. Those who always sought external input on foundation strategy from recipient communities or grantees were nearly three times more likely to increase general operating support than those who never did. Funders that always sought advice from grantee advisory committees or sought external input on foundation strategy from recipient communities or grantees were about twice as likely to increase capacity-building support.

Funders who always used grant reports to foster learning between the foundation and its grantees were three times more likely to increase multiyear grantmaking than those who never did.



**USE OF GRANT REPORTS TO FOSTER LEARNING IS RELATED TO INCREASED MULTIYEAR SUPPORT**

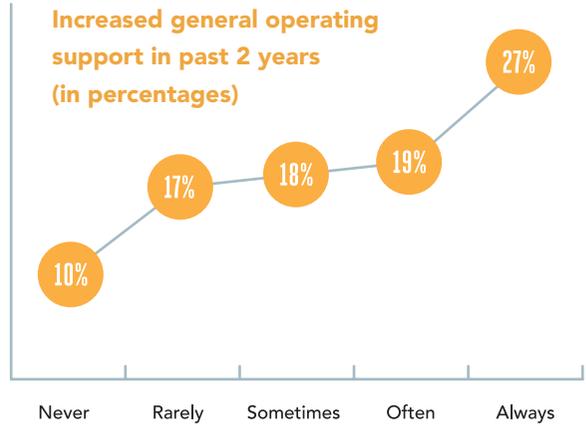
**Increased multiyear grantmaking in past 2 years (in percentages)**



How often did your organization use grant reports to foster learning and a useful exchange between the foundation and its grantees?

**SEEKING EXTERNAL INPUT IS RELATED TO INCREASED GENERAL OPERATING SUPPORT**

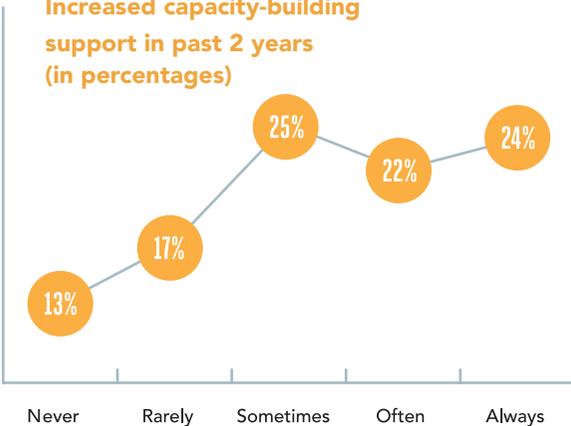
**Increased general operating support in past 2 years (in percentages)**



How often did your organization seek external input on foundation strategy from recipient communities or grantees?

**SEEKING ADVICE FROM A GRANTEE ADVISORY COMMITTEE IS RELATED TO INCREASED CAPACITY-BUILDING SUPPORT**

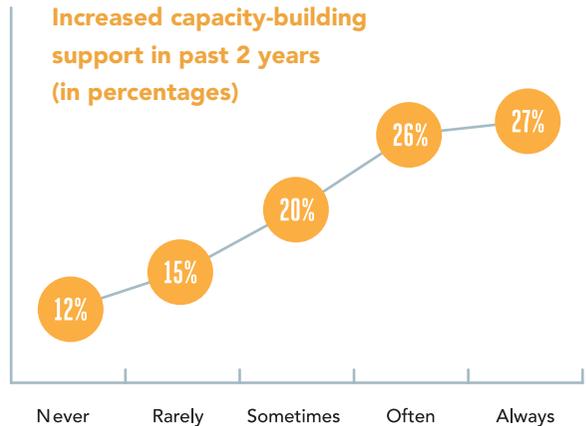
**Increased capacity-building support in past 2 years (in percentages)**



How often did your organization seek advice from a grantee advisory committee about policies, practices or program areas?

**SEEKING EXTERNAL INPUT IS RELATED TO INCREASED CAPACITY-BUILDING SUPPORT**

**Increased capacity-building support in past 2 years (in percentages)**



How often did your organization seek external input on foundation strategy from recipient communities or grantees?

## Funders that are part of the GEO community engage in smarter grantmaking

Grantmakers in the GEO network are philosophically aligned and are much more likely to change their practices in ways that are positive for their grantees. Notably, while the median proportion of funds going to general operating support stayed steady at 20 percent in the field at large, it jumped from 20 percent to 25 percent among GEO members. GEO members were also two times more likely to:

- ▷ increase the percentage paid out of their endowment (34 percent vs. 19 percent)
- ▷ increase dollars for grantee capacity building (47 percent vs. 25 percent)

- ▷ increase dollars for grantee evaluation activities (21 percent vs. 11 percent)
- ▷ increase use of strategies to improve grantee cash flow (22 percent vs. 11 percent)
- ▷ delegate funding decision-making power to representatives of recipient communities or grantees sometimes, often or always (27 percent vs. 13 percent)
- ▷ give multiyear grants sometimes, often or always (50 percent vs. 23 percent)
- ▷ increase dollars for multiyear grants in recent years (20 percent vs. 11 percent)

Grantmakers can achieve a street-level view through a variety of means, but there does appear to be an important link between looking outside the foundation’s walls and the kinds of funding decisions grantmakers ultimately decide to make.

### MEDIAN PROPORTION OF GRANTMAKING BUDGET DEVOTED TO GENERAL OPERATING SUPPORT

	GEO members	Nonmembers
2008	20%	20%
2011	25%	20%

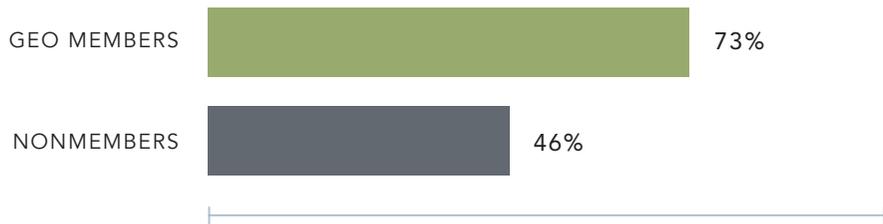


Pen symbol by Ethan Clark, from The Noun Project



GEO members were more likely to engage in sophisticated stakeholder engagement practices.

**Seeking input on foundation strategy from representatives of recipient communities or grantees**



**Assessing the needs of communities or fields served**



## CONCLUSION

So, is grantmaking getting smarter? To be fair, our study shows that grantmakers did not change many of their practices significantly in the past three years. In good news for grantseekers, however, they protected much-needed general operating support and capacity-building dollars. Grantmakers also made some adjustments to their internal processes to make applying for grants easier and to speed up the time it takes to reach a decision and deliver the cash.

We may be seeing a shift in the way that funders see themselves and their role in supporting nonprofits. Funders are seeking additional ways to stay plugged in, including seeking feedback from grantees to help strengthen their performance. Also, they are increasingly participating in dialogue with their peers through communities like the GEO network. In particular, grantmakers with an ear to the ground tended to use their investments to help build strong, adaptable nonprofit organizations. It is these resilient nonprofits that stand the greatest chance of making a difference at times when their communities are in the greatest need.



# ABOUT THE STUDY

GEO conducted our 2011 national survey of staffed grantmaking foundations to gather data — some baseline and some longitudinal — on key grantmaking practices both nonprofits and grantmakers agree are critical to support nonprofit results. We conduct this survey every three years to track progress in the field. Overall, 755 grantmaking organizations responded to our 2011 survey. This represented 16 percent of the 4,814 staffed organizations we surveyed. We sent the survey to the CEO or Executive Director of each organization. The respondents in the 2011 study are similar in makeup to the respondents in 2008 when compared by foundation type, foundation size and GEO membership status. Our partner, TCC Group, conducted the survey and performed the analysis of the results. We have made the full report available on the GEO website at [www.geofunders.org](http://www.geofunders.org).

We owe a great deal of thanks to our field study advisory committee, which provided invaluable input and support during the process. Below is a list of individuals who participated on the field study advisory committee:

## FIELD STUDY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- ▶ Robyn Browning, Herbalife Family Foundation
- ▶ Vignetta Charles, AIDS United
- ▶ Anna Cowenhoven, The Bank of America Charitable Foundation, Inc.
- ▶ David Harris, Iowa West Foundation
- ▶ Caroline Hotaling, Ms. Foundation for Women, Inc.
- ▶ Jackie Kaye, Wellspring Advisors, LLC
- ▶ Clark McCain, The Coleman Foundation, Inc.
- ▶ Antonia Monk Reaves, Cone Health Foundation
- ▶ Danielle M. Reyes, The Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation
- ▶ Maura Riordan, AIDS United
- ▶ Brenda Solórzano, Blue Shield of California Foundation
- ▶ John Weiler, The F.B. Heron Foundation

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- ▶ The F.B. Heron Foundation
- ▶ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- ▶ S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation
- ▶ The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- ▶ W.K. Kellogg Foundation

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