

Key Findings and Recommendations from the Foundation for a Just Society 2018 Grantee Perception Report

Prepared by the Center for Effective Philanthropy

In February and March of 2018, the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) conducted a survey of Foundation for a Just Society's ("FJS") grantees, achieving an 83 percent response rate. The memo below outlines the key findings and recommendations from the Foundation's Grantee Perception Report (GPR). Grantee perceptions should be interpreted in light of the Foundation's goals and strategy.

Overview

Overall, grantees provide ratings of Foundation for a Just Society that are similar to or higher than the typical funder in CEP's comparative dataset. Notably, grantees emphasize the value of the Foundation's "unique" and "progressive" approach; they experience FJS as an "ally," and comment on FJS's philanthropic leadership, describing the Foundation as "an excellent model for the foundation world." This shared sense of FJS's unique approach is informed by perceptions of FJS's strong impact on grantee organizations and on their fields of work, deep understanding of grantees' work, and exceptionally strong funder-grantee relationships, all of which are described below in more detail.

In addition to overall positive ratings, certain groups experience FJS even more positively. Grantees who have had relationships with FJS for four years or more rate significantly more positively than newer FJS grantees on a number of survey measures. And, ratings from Central America and Francophone West Africa grantees trend higher than grantees of other regions on many survey measures. These differences can be explored more fully in the Foundation's interactive online report.

Deep Understanding of and Strong Impact on Grantees' Organizations

Overall, ratings reveal Foundation for a Just Society to have a profound impact on grantees' organizations and movement-building that spurs long-term structural change.

- ▶ FJS receives ratings that are higher than typical, and in the top 15 percent of CEP's dataset, for its impact on grantees' organizations, its understanding of their organizational strategy and goals, and the extent to which the Foundation improved grantees' ability to sustain the grant-funded work.

- ▶ Beyond strengthening individual organizations, nearly all (92 percent) grantees strongly agree that the Foundation funds in a way that strengthens the infrastructure of social justice movements.
- ▶ Ratings are also higher than typical for FJS's broad understanding of aspects of grantees' work, a summary measure comprised of seven related measures of understanding, including understanding of grantees' organizations, fields, context and beneficiaries. In CEP's research, this measure is the strongest predictor of funder-grantee relationships in CEP's research.
 - Importantly, FJS grantees who have had a relationship with FJS for four years or more provide ratings that are more positive than 97 percent of other funders on this broad understanding measure.
- ▶ More specifically, grantee ratings reveal FJS's deep understanding of its grantees' contexts and intended beneficiaries. FJS grantees rate the Foundation higher than typical for its understanding of the social, cultural, and socioeconomic factors that affect their work and for its understanding of their intended beneficiaries' needs.
- ▶ Relatedly, FJS is rated in the top 2 percent of CEP's dataset for the extent to which its funding priorities reflect a deep understanding of the needs of intended beneficiaries. This outstanding rating puts FJS among the top three highest-rated funders on this measure in CEP's comparative dataset.
- ▶ Grantee comments and ratings also suggest that FJS's grantmaking characteristics play a role in impacting and strengthening grantees' organizations. Overall, compared to the typical funder, FJS gives larger and longer grants and more general operating support. Grantees who receive the combination of six-figure, multi-year, and general operating support grants rate FJS significantly more positively for its impact on their organizations.
 - Grantees highlight the value of this type of support in their comments, describing it as "invaluable," having a "profound impact," and a "strong example of trust-based philanthropy."
- ▶ Another way funders can strengthen grantees' work is through providing non-monetary supports, often described as capacity building. Foundation for a Just Society provides a typical proportion of grantees with what CEP categorizes as "intensive patterns of non-monetary support," defined, generally, as receiving more than a few types of support.
 - Importantly, grantees who receive non-monetary supports from FJS rate the Foundation significantly higher on many measures in the report, including its understanding of their organizations' goals and strategies.
 - Grantees highly value FJS's non-monetary assistance, and request even more of these helpful supports; in fact, it is the most common suggestion from grantees' open ended comments. Grantees see opportunity for FJS to facilitate further collaboration amongst grantees and for FJS with other funders, in addition to general requests for even more capacity building opportunities.



“FJS is a trusted partner and supporter. The flexible, general support has played a pivotal role in strengthening our organization and work.”



“Facilitate interaction and learning among grantees to share best practices, information and become a stronger collective voice.”

Strong Perceptions of Impact

Grantees highlight FJS’s strong field impact and rate the Foundation higher than the typical funder on a number of field-related measures.

- ▶ Ratings are higher than typical for both FJS’s impact on grantees’ fields, as well as its understanding of the fields in which grantees work.
 - Notably, grantees who have had relationships with FJS for four years or more rate the Foundation significantly more positively for its understanding of the fields in which they work than grantees with newer relationships.
- ▶ Grantees strongly associate FJS with funding “across issues and movements to advance the rights of women, girls, and LGBTQI people,” with 97 percent of grantees strongly agreeing with this statement.
- ▶ Further, comments underscore enthusiasm for FJS’s leadership in philanthropy and field-led approach to grantmaking.
- ▶ Interestingly, there is distinct regional variation for community-related measures, with Central America grantees providing ratings that are higher than typical.



“They have gone above and beyond to understand the realities of our work and what it takes to support the long-term, systemic change we hope to see.”



“FJS applies an innovative “field-led” approach to grant making that is flexible and provides needed resources to organizations which support feminist, women’s rights and LGBTQI movement-building... Within the philanthropic and funding community they are strong advocates for a movement strengthening approach.”



“Despite being a very young Foundation, FJS is recognized as a leader in the donor community for its vision, flexibility and commitment.”



“While [the Foundation] hasn't yet played a significant role in shaping the field through public leadership, its grantmaking has positioned it to in the future.”

Exceptionally Positive Interactions and Transparency, with Opportunity to be Clearer about Goals and Strategy

Both the quantitative and qualitative data illuminate strong relationships and highlight what grantees describe as unique dynamics, based on trust, deep understanding, and a sense of partnership.

- ▶ FJS receives higher than typical ratings for the quality of its interactions, including responsiveness, approachability when a problem arises, and perceptions of being treated fairly.
 - Grantees who have had a relationship with FJS lasting four years or more rate the Foundation even more positively than other grantees for its responsiveness and approachability when a problem arises.
- ▶ Grantees also provide higher than typical ratings for both FJS’ transparency and the extent to which it is open to ideas from grantees about its strategy. On this latter measure, grantees rate FJS in the top three percent of CEP’s dataset, among the top 10 highest-rated funders.
- ▶ Relatedly, in their comments, grantees describe trust-based relationships with FJS. One grantee writes, “FJS has never exercised pressure as a ‘funder’ and the partnership has been rather a mutual learning and solidarity journey,” while another describes feeling like “a true partner of FJS – we feel trusted, respected and supported.”
 - The second most frequent grantee suggestion relates to this strength; grantees are interested in even more frequent interactions and deeper engagement with FJS. They suggest more site visits and regular contact, in particular.
- ▶ Ratings are solidly typical for perceptions of how clearly FJS has communicated its goals and strategy, though this is one of FJS’s lower comparative ratings. Grantee comments recognize this as a moment of change for FJS, and note staffing transitions and ongoing strategic planning efforts. While some made a point to note that they enjoyed positive engagement with FJS throughout these transitions, comments suggest an eagerness to learn more about the Foundation’s strategy and goals and enthusiasm for the Foundation’s work going forward.



“We really appreciate FJS staff - they are warm, accessible, clear and good communicators. They are clearly advocates for grantee partners and build horizontal, respectful relationships.”



“FJS is a leader in the field of women's human rights... With new leadership at the helm, and an expanding program, the foundation is poised and expected to play a stronger and more active role in the field than it has previously.”

Streamlined, Speedy and Proportionate Processes with Opportunity to Expand Staff Involvement in the Selection Process

- ▶ Grantees experience FJS’s selection process as light touch, and describe it as “simple, flexible, and responsive.” Ratings show it to be low pressure and with limited FJS staff involvement. It is not particularly time consuming, especially relative to grant size, with fast turn-around time from proposal submission until clear funding commitment. However, ratings also point to a process that is not particularly helpful in strengthening grantee organizations.

- ▶ Grantees experience FJS’s reporting process as straightforward, adaptable, and relevant; ratings on these measures are higher than typical. For the extent to which the reporting process was a helpful opportunity for grantees to reflect and learn, however, ratings are typical.
- ▶ When asked about the Foundation’s administrative processes in a custom question, grantees agree least strongly with the statement, “I understand the way the Foundation uses the proposals and reports submitted by our organization in its grantmaking.”
- ▶ Given large grants and streamlined grant requirements FJS’s “dollar return,” — a calculation of total grant dollars awarded relative to time grantees spend fulfilling grant requirements — is higher than 96 percent of funders in CEP’s dataset. In other words, for every required process hour, FJS grantees receive \$10,000, in comparison to \$2,400 at the typical funder.
- ▶ In light of streamlined processes, grantees report fewer touchpoints with FJS about the selection and reporting process. For example, smaller than typical proportions of grantees report staff involvement in proposal development, and engaging in an idea exchange with staff about how they will assess the grant-funded work. A typical proportion of grantees report having had a substantive discussion about their submitted report. This is noteworthy because these touchpoints are associated with more positive perceptions. Grantees who engage with FJS in these ways provide significantly higher ratings on many measures in the report.
 - In particular, the involvement of FJS staff in the development of grantees’ proposals seems to set a positive and important tone, with these grantees rating the Foundation more positively on most GPR measures.



“The processes is very smooth and consistent and requires to-the-point information.”

CEP Recommendations

Based on its grantee feedback, CEP recommends that FJS consider the following in order to build on its strengths and address potential areas for improvement:

- ▶ Given the many strengths across the GPR, reflect on which aspects of the Foundation's values and approaches contribute to these strengths and ensure these practices are embedded across the organization.
- ▶ Consider where subgroup differences reflect intentional variations in context and strategy and whether more relative internal strengths can be incorporated more broadly across the Foundation's work.
- ▶ Seek to more clearly communicate with grantees about FJS's goals and strategy, particularly given this moment of transition.
- ▶ Consider where the Foundation might provide grantees with even more of the highly valued, and requested, non-monetary assistance, as well as where there may be opportunities for deeper engagement with grantees.
- ▶ Given its value and association with more positive perceptions, consider opportunities for more targeted staff involvement as it relates to FJS's processes, particularly during proposal development, as well as discussing reports with grantees. Further, consider which aspects of the valuable reporting and evaluation processes could translate to improvements in the selection process.

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