The Colorado Health Foundation™



The Latest from Our Recent Grantee Perception Study from Center for Effective Philanthropy

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Every four years, The Colorado Health Foundation (CHF) – like many philanthropic organizations all over the country – taps into our partnership with the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) to learn from our amazing grantees about how they experience us as a funder. This important survey is one of many data points we prioritize to help us understand what it's like to work with us. Our last survey, in 2019, revealed essential learnings for us about our philanthropic practices, and we committed to improvements to address some of the gaps our grantees identified.

Fast forward to 2023. Not only has the world experienced dramatic challenges and change, but so have we as an organization. Like many of you, our world is still rebuilding around the fall-out of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Those years both highlighted centuries-long health inequities that our mission is focused on correcting, but also the need for a "new normal". Our "new normal" has involved a lot of changes within CHF. **And, our most recent CEP grantee survey results have highlighted that these changes have not just affected us internally, but also externally for our nonprofit grantees all over Colorado.**

The survey, which was fielded in September and October 2023, reflects strong positive perceptions of our:

- **Continued impact on Colorado's communities and organizations.** Survey respondents say that CHF "provides a benchmark for health in Colorado."
- **Shift to more large, multi-year grants (84% of grantees report receiving grants lasting two years or longer) and expansion of our philanthropy beyond monetary grants to include capacity building programming and convening.** Respondents who report receiving any kind of non-monetary assistance from the Foundation rate significantly higher on most measures across the survey.
- **Our commitment to racial justice.** In 2021, we intentionally deepened our mission's focus on racial justice as our chosen pathway to achieving health equity in Colorado**.** Survey respondents who serve communities historically without power, privilege and income are being positively impacted by CHF's funding, and most grantees agree that staff communicate well about our commitment to equity and how it applies to their work.

The survey also indicates areas for improvement. The pandemic is one reason for these challenges. Still, as we examine the changes we've experienced closely against these improvement areas, it's clear that they are related:

- **Namely, we were not immune to the "great resignation" that started during the pandemic, ultimately nearly 30% of our staff transitioned between 2021 and 2023**. As a funder that prioritizes community engagement and relationships as core to the work, this has been difficult to navigate. The bottom line is that our grantees and other community partners have recently experienced many staff transitions. About a third of survey respondents experienced a contact change in the six months leading up to the survey.
- **Because of staff transitions and other factors, some grantee partners are still in the earlier stages of relationship building with our staff, and some of our staff are in the process of gaining a deeper understanding of grantees and the communities they serve.** This means that grantees are less

familiar with and have less access to program staff, especially if they are newer to CHF. There are also communications gaps, as grantees need more clarity and context about CHF's work, processes and funding decisions.

- **We must continue to deepen and expand staff time in communities across Colorado**. Whether it's interruptions due to pandemic travel restrictions, staff transitions, shifting community dynamics, or other factors, the survey results reinforce the immense need for staff to spend time in community with those who live and work there. Meaningful engagement and relationship building across Colorado communities is vital to our work and essential to help advance the kind of change communities want to see.

We are heartened by some of the good news I shared above, especially given our impact on the nonprofits we fund. We are also focused on many opportunities to try new approaches to our work that we hope deliver solutions to the gaps.

The following summarizes key opportunities for improvement that CEP provided us, along with our plans to address challenges and opportunities moving forward:

1. **Relationship Building**: **Grantees generally want clarity on their primary point of contact and the ability to reach that staff member as needed. There is a need for more responsiveness, candid discussions and openness to grantee ideas.**

In response, our staff are considering the following:

- Ensuring that our relationships are not transactional, but deeply meaningful and high quality.
- Using technology to increase responsiveness and accessibility including leveraging our new customer relationship management system.
- Building intentional connection moments between staff and a grantee throughout the life cycle of a grant.

- Creating more informational connection opportunities with program staff, including office hours, to increase accessibility to staff.
- Looking for more opportunities that create flexibility for grantees that balances both relationship building and compliance needs.

2. **Community Understanding: Grantees want program staff to have a stronger and deeper understanding of the work they do and the communities they serve.**

In response, our staff are considering the following:

- Ensuring our staff have engagement and learning skills and practices that deepen our understanding of work that grantees are leading, along with the dynamics of every community they work and live in.
- Spending more time out in communities in Colorado and expanding our relationships with local business owners, elected officials and other community leaders.

3. **Communications: Grantees want and need clearer and more consistent communications from program staff about our work.**

In response, our staff are considering the following:

- Updating our approach on how we communicate or share funding opportunities each cycle.
- Making primary communication pathways easier to navigate. This includes improving website navigation and updating our organizational messaging and communications practices to be clearer about our work.
- Creating more transparency around the decision-making process for grant applications, along with how a funding cycle works through recorded webinars.

A core value of CHF is transparency, which takes shape in various forms for us. When it comes to data we collect, we know how vital it is to share back with any community who has taken the time to tell us about their experiences with CHF. While we move forward to address our practices to better center grantee needs, we also hope it has been helpful to see the CEP survey feedback summary and how we are responding to it. Attached you will find the full survey results, if you're interested in reading more detail.

I value and welcome your individual responses to this blog post. If you have follow-up feedback or comments, feel free to contact Show email or your assigned program officer.

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Blog

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