

5 Core Practices of Grantee-Centric Philanthropy

Grantee-centric practices create funder interactions that strengthen a grantee's ability to achieve their outcomes, and address the power imbalance of typical funding relationships. The grantee-centric funder shows understanding and empathy for social entrepreneurs and non-profit leaders.

Simply put, it's philanthropy with humility.

There are numerous things you can do to be GC. We've boiled them down to 5 core practices that encompass what we believe are the most important aspects of being GC:

1. Build internal culture

Hire experience: Build a team with real fund-raising and operating experience, having delivered outcomes, reports, and milestones TO funders. Select those who know the game, but also know where rules can be altered.

Build empathy: Model empathy. Ask questions like: How can we prioritize our grantee's time? Will this request require a grantee to go out of their way? Is what we gain from this question worth what it will take to answer it?

Keep communicating: Charge your team to discuss expectations with grantees--of both sides--from the outset of a grant. Encourage your team to prioritize transparent communication when a challenge or delay comes up.

2. Do the homework

Actively source: Beat the pavement. Build relationships with funders who can make recommendations to you. Attend events aligned with your priorities. Be open to conversations with potential grantees. *Listen* with respect.

Appropriate due diligence: Ask grantees for due diligence materials prepared for their internal use or for other funders. Only ask for what you use. Assess whether your due diligence process is appropriate for each grant size.

Aligned reporting: Hold grantees accountable to their own internally set milestones. Align reporting timing with other funders of the grantee, or internal reporting they can leverage. Ask grantees how long reporting to you takes.

3. Give what's most effective

Unrestricted multi-year funding: Signal confidence in grantees with general operating support. Trust grantees know how to allocate funds. Enable grantees to make long term decisions by providing multi-year commitments.

Contingency funding: Where you can't provide unrestricted funding, provide contingency funding in addition to the project budget. Actively encourage your grantees to build a contingency line item in to all their project budgets.

Don't freeze: Set a goal of how long it should take you, on average, to get a grant out the door. Please, please don't freeze your funding decisions due to strategic planning! Communicate all delays in process proactively.

4. Provide additional support

Make introductions: Build relationships with other funders. Use your social equity carefully but generously when you see potential fit between a grantee and a funder. Warmly recommend grantees for opportunities and funding.

Provide non-monetary support: Ask about and listen to what grantees tell you they need. Provide advice when solicited. Consider additional services as you see trends. End meetings by asking: what else can we do for you?

Be of service: Start conversations with honest enquiry. How are your grantees doing as people? Go to *their* office for meetings. Let them know they can say no to your requests. Say thank you to your grantees on a regular basis.

5. Stay accountable

Set expectations: Let your grantees know that you want to be accountable to them. Establish the expectation that you are interested in their input and ideas.

Seek input regularly: Ask grantees what they think of your performance. Regularly solicit anonymous feedback on your work and approach intermittently. Regularly discuss what you hear, with your team.

Act on what you hear: Listen, discuss, and then DO! What can you change now you have more information about your performance? Report back to grantees on how their input changed your practice. Thank them for it!

This list is not fully comprehensive. Consulting your grantees is important to understand the nuances to grant-making in various contexts. Together you can create a process that prioritizes and facilitates increased impact.

Being grantee-centric isn't something you can just do overnight. It will take time to shift culture and build a set of habits amongst your team. Take things slowly and integrate one or two steps a month. Keep asking your grantees how you're doing. Keep adding and shifting as you hear from your grantees about what works best for them. It's a journey rather than a destination. No one foundation, as far as I know, is an expert at all these things—yet!
