

Key Findings and Recommendations from the Voice 2021 Grantee Perception Report

Prepared by the Center for Effective Philanthropy

In March and April of 2019, the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) conducted a survey of Voice’s active grantees between January 2018 and December 2020, achieving a 69 percent response rate. The memo below outlines the key findings and recommendations from Voice’s Grantee Perception Report (GPR). Grantee perceptions should be interpreted in light of Voice’s goals, context, and strategy.

This memo accompanies the comprehensive survey results found in Voice’s interactive online report at <https://cep.surveystats.org> and in the downloadable online materials. Voice’s full report also contains more information about survey analysis and methodology.

Solid Perceptions of Impact on Grantees’ Fields and Communities and Valuable Non-monetary Support

- ▶ Grantees frequently describe the impact Voice is having on their work, writing that “Voice made me discover another world: a world of mutual assistance...” and has “significantly influenced the field, community, and organisations of the marginalized sectors...”
- ▶ Grantee ratings for Voice’s impact on their fields and communities are strong and similar to the typical funder.
 - Voice receives one of its highest comparative ratings, in the top third of CEP’s comparative dataset, for the extent it has advanced the state of knowledge in grantees’ fields.
- ▶ A higher than typical proportion of Voice grantees report receiving non-monetary support: 66 percent compared to 45 percent at the average funder. Ninety-five percent of grantees describe Voice’s non-monetary support as a major or moderate benefit.
 - These grantees also rate significantly higher for several key survey measures, including for the quality of interactions with Voice, Voice’s overall understanding of their contexts and work, and Voice’s effect on public policy and ability to advance knowledge in the field.
 - Eighteen percent of grantees are asking Voice for more non-monetary support, with 25 grantees asking for capacity building, 18 grantees asking to be linked or collaborate more with other grantees and Voice, and 8 grantees asking for specific technical support.
- ▶ Relatedly, ninety-seven percent of grantees indicate that partnering with Voice inspired them to link and learn more with their organisation or interventions.

- Similarly, over 90 percent of grantees report that as a result of partnering with Voice they enlarged their network, bolstered new collaborations with their field, and/or innovated or changed their own practice or ways of working.



“Voice brings different rights holder groups together who wouldn’t otherwise come together. This is incredibly unique and important. The linking and learning component is significant.”

Smaller and Shorter than Typical Grants, Yet Funding a Large Proportion of Grantees’ Budgets

- ▶ However, Voice grantees provide lower than typical ratings for Voice’s impact on their organisations. CEP’s research finds that the specific pattern of larger (often six-figure), multi-year, general operating support grants are associated with significantly more positive perceptions of impact on grantees’ organisations.
 - Voice provides smaller than typical grants – €26K at the median – yet it is also funding smaller than typical organisations. At the median, Voice funds over a third (34 percent) of a grantee organisation’s median budget.
 - Interestingly, grantee organisations with budgets above €840K rate significantly higher for perceptions of the extent to which Voice understands their fields, overall understanding, awareness of their challenges, compassion for those affected by their work, is committed to combatting racism and has clearly communicated what diversity, equity, and inclusion means for its work.
 - Voice grantees also report shorter than typical grants. On average, grantees indicate a grant length of just over a year and a half, compared to over two years in CEP’s overall comparative dataset. The vast majority of grants (93 percent) are also restricted to a specific use.
 - The largest theme in grantee suggestions (29 percent) relates to Voice’s grantmaking characteristics. Grantees ask for longer and/or more flexible funding, writing that “Voice should work for a longer time with their partner to ensure that the [work] can be sustained” and that “Voice should be open to discussion around general and administrative cost related to the implementation of a project.”



“Changes in the society take time, sometimes a long time. The short-term (one-year) funding model has not had the expected impact. In order to be more sustainable and in order that the results can be more tangible, the duration of the project should be longer.”

Opportunity to Deepen Understanding of Grantees’ Fields, Communities and Contexts and Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

- ▶ CEP’s research finds that one of the two strongest predictors of the strength of funder-grantee relationships is the extent to which partners see their funders as understanding their organisations’ strategies and goals and the context in which they work. Seven related survey

measures of understanding together create the larger construct that CEP refers to as “understanding.”

- Grantees hold strong perceptions of the extent to which Voice’s funding priorities reflect a deep understanding of their intended beneficiaries needs – placing Voice in the top half of CEP’s comparative dataset for this measure.
 - Grantees also rate higher than typical for the extent to which Voice is open to their ideas.
- ▶ However, perceptions of Voice’s understanding of grantees’ fields, local communities, social, cultural, or socioeconomic contexts, intended beneficiaries’ needs and overall understanding are lower than the typical funder in CEP’s comparative dataset.
- Ten grantees make qualitative suggestions to improve Voice’s understanding of their work, with one grantee sharing “Small organizations supported by Voice have great needs and sometimes, this is not factored in the grantmaking, yet they have potential of delivering support.”

Severe Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Most Vulnerable Populations

- ▶ Perhaps relatedly, though a majority of grantees are aware of actions that Voice has taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (63 percent), the proportion of grantees that either aren’t aware or don’t know is higher than at the average funder in CEP’s dataset: 37 percent of Voice grantees compared to 23 percent at the average funder.
- Moreover, grantees rate lower than the median funder for Voice’s effectiveness in responding to the COVID-pandemic.
 - In open-ended survey responses, grantees ask Voice to “support programs and activities aimed at cushioning the devastating economic effects of the pandemic on disadvantaged people” and share “More support is needed”.



“Some of the [communications] sent are generic (regional) and do not address the specific contexts of the country especially during COVID 19...”

Clear Communications with Opportunities to Improve Quality of Interactions

- ▶ Voice grantees have a clear understanding of Voice’s goals and strategy. Grantees write that “communications are clear, transparent, and well-focused,” and that Voice has “transparent communication.”
- ▶ Grantees also indicate that Voice staff indicate a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion and that Voice is committed to combatting racism.
- ▶ However, quantitative, and qualitative findings indicate that interactions are a “challenge,” as “staff are very busy,” and as a result “there’s lag in communications.”
- ▶ Grantee ratings place Voice in the bottom five percent of funders for the responsiveness of Voice staff, and grantees rate lower than typical for their comfort approaching Voice if a problem arises.

- Grantees also rate lower than typical for the extent Voice exhibits respectful interactions during the grant, as well as for the extent Voice exhibits compassion for those affected by the work. In fact, Voice receives ratings that are lower than nearly every other funder in CEP’s comparative dataset.
- ▶ While some grantees describe their interactions as “satisfying,” “consistent,” and “empowering,” fifteen percent of all grantee suggestions encourage Voice to improve their overall quality of relationships through “increased responsiveness,” and greater partnership by being a “collaborator, partner, and helper, instead of a commentator and auditor.”
- ▶ As important context, grantees report interacting with Voice staff more frequently than is typical and a larger than typical proportion of Voice grantees report reciprocal or program officer led contact.
 - Grantees who report more frequent and/or reciprocal interactions provide significantly higher ratings on some measures in the report, including their comfort approaching Voice if a problem arises.



“...Sometimes more than a month goes by before receiving an answer to our letters or e-mails, which causes delays in the execution of the project that we are carrying out with VOICE.”



“...be more sensitive, compassionate to grantees and treat them as partners, not just mere project implementers”

Helpful, but Intensive Processes with Opportunities to Streamline

Helpfulness of Voice’s Processes

- ▶ Grantees find aspects of Voice’s processes to be helpful in strengthening their organisations and as an opportunity to reflect and learn.
 - Voice receives ratings in the top 25 percent of funders for the helpfulness of the selection process in strengthening grantees’ organisations, as well as the extent to which Voice’s reporting process was a helpful opportunity for them to reflect and learn.
 - Moreover, Voice grantees rate in the top 10 percent of CEP’s dataset for the extent to which the evaluation resulted in them making changes to the work evaluated.
 - A larger than typical proportion of grantees’ evaluations was fully funded by Voice (67 percent compared to 39 percent at the average funder). These grantees rated higher on a few measures, including understanding of grantees’ goals and strategy, fields, and Voice’s effect on public policy and ability to advance knowledge in the field.
 - A majority of grantees indicated having exchanged ideas with Voice about how their grant would be assessed (83 percent). These grantees rate significantly higher for several survey measures, including for Voice’s transparency, how Voice advanced knowledge in the field, and how their grant fits in Voice’s broader efforts.

- ▶ However, Voice grantees report feeling more pressure to modify their organisation’s priorities in order to create a grant application that was likely to receive funding than is typical.
 - Grantees who report at least a moderate level of pressure – rating at least a four on a one-to-seven scale – are significantly less comfortable approaching Voice if a problem arises. Also, they have significantly less positive perceptions of the extent to which staff exhibit trust in their interactions.

Streamlining, Clarifying, and Simplifying Aspects of Voice’s Processes

- ▶ Notably, despite Voice’s smaller than typical grants, grantees report spending more hours on Voice’s processes than grantees at nearly all other funders in CEP’s dataset.
 - Grantees’ reported hours on both the proposal and selection process as well as the monitoring, reporting, and evaluation process place Voice in the top 10 percent of CEP’s dataset for time spent on funder-required processes.
 - Furthermore, a larger than typical proportion of grantees (74 percent) report waiting at least four months from the submission of their grant proposal to a clear commitment of funding. A majority of grantees in CEP’s comparative dataset (58 percent) report waiting less than three months.
 - In qualitative comments, twenty grantees request quicker disbursement of Voice’s funds, with one grantee writing, “The funds should also be disbursed on time to enable quick implementation of the project as we have found ourselves in many occasions waiting for the funds to hit our accounts to continue with our implementation.”
- ▶ The second largest proportion of grantees, eighteen percent of all grantee suggestions, suggest opportunities to streamline, clarify, and simplify the less helpful aspects of Voice’s processes.
 - Grantees describe these aspects of Voice processes as “cumbersome,” “time consuming,” and “strict.” As a result, they suggest that Voice establish “less stringent requirements,” “relax some strict conditions of application requirements,” and “be more flexible in the procedures for carrying out activities.”
- ▶ More broadly, grantee ratings place Voice in the bottom quarter of funders for the extent to which the reporting process is straightforward, adaptable, or aligned appropriately with the timing of their work.



“We are a professional organisation, in existence for more than 10 years, though we are small, but we found the level of bureaucracy and paperwork for reporting on our work to be extremely burdensome.”



“Greater flexibility in implementing budgets is also needed. It is almost impossible to foresee all expenses for a 2-year project, especially when dealing with communities and partner organizations. Many things change and the budget spending framework is too inflexible.”

CEP Recommendations

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

- ▶ To further boost positive perceptions of impact on grantees' fields and local communities, continue growing Voice's Linking and Learning efforts and provision of non-monetary support.
- ▶ Explore approaches to improve the quality of interactions with grantees.
 - Prioritize responsiveness across all grantee relationships and set clear expectations around responses times.
 - Taking into consideration lower than typical ratings, reflect on opportunities to demonstrate trust, candor and respect, and to emphasize a culture of approachability and compassion to grantees.
 - Consider opportunities to deepen staff understanding of grantees' fields, local communities, and social, cultural, or socioeconomic contexts, as well as address grantees' requests to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ Review the Foundation's proposal and reporting requirements to identify areas that could be revised to ensure processes are streamlined, less time-intensive, helpful and more adaptable to grantee circumstances, particularly for small grantee organisations.
- ▶ Facilitate internal discussions about the drivers behind the high level of pressure grantees experience to change their organisational priorities during proposal development and seek ways to mitigate its potential adverse effects on impact and on relationships with grantees.
- ▶ Consider providing more flexible and multi-year grants for Voice's trusted grantees.

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