

Key Findings and Recommendations from The Harvest Foundation 2023 Grantee Perception Report

Prepared by the Center for Effective Philanthropy

In May and June of 2023, the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) surveyed The Harvest Foundation's ("Harvest" or "the Foundation") grantees. The memo below outlines the key findings and recommendations from Harvest's Grantee Perception Report (GPR). Harvest's grantee perceptions should be interpreted in light of the Foundation's goals, strategy, and context.

This memo accompanies the comprehensive survey results from 29 grantees (an 81 percent response rate) found in Harvest's interactive online report at <https://cep.surveystats.org> and in the downloadable online materials, including respondents' written comments. The online report also contains more information about the survey methodology and subgroup analyses.

Overview

- ▶ In comparison both to funders in CEP's overall dataset and a custom cohort of peer funders, Harvest grantees rate the Foundation higher than typical on most thematic areas of the report. In quantitative and qualitative feedback, the Foundation is viewed as having a very positive effect on grantees and their work. As one grantee comments, "The Harvest Foundation is a blessing to nonprofits in its service area. They truly understand what is important in the community."
- ▶ Harvest's external engagement – for example its impact and understanding of grantees' local communities, and its contextual understanding of the people and communities that grantees serve – is perceived to be a major strength of the Foundation.
- ▶ Compared to the typical funder, Harvest is viewed by its grantees as having a stronger impact on their organizations, and many grantees underscore how valuable they find the Foundation's efforts to provide assistance beyond the grant.
- ▶ The Harvest Foundation receives very positive ratings for many aspects related to its relationships with grantees, including responsiveness, the extent to which staff exhibit candor, and Harvest's openness to ideas from grantees about its strategies.
- ▶ While the Foundation is rated higher than typical for many measures related to its selection processes, grantee ratings for the relevance, adaptability, and straightforwardness of its reporting process are less positive.
- ▶ Grantees who have had a proposal to the Foundation declined by Harvest in the past hold positive perceptions about this process overall, although there may be some inconsistency in the time required for applicants to hear back about this declination.

Strong External Impact and Understanding

- ▶ Compared to the typical funder, The Harvest Foundation is viewed more positively for its impact on grantees' fields, with ratings placing Harvest in the top ten percent of CEP's overall dataset. Ratings for the Foundation's impact on grantees' local communities are even more positive – in the top two percent of CEP's dataset and near the top of its custom cohort.
- ▶ Additionally, grantees provide higher than typical ratings for the Foundation's understanding of grantees' communities. However, ratings are lower than most other funders for the extent to which Harvest understands the fields in which grantees work – one of the Foundation's lowest comparative scores in the report.
- ▶ For measures related to contextual understanding – specifically how well the Foundation understands the *social, cultural, or socioeconomic factors* that affect grantees work and how well the Foundation understands the *needs of the people and communities* grantees serve – Harvest receives ratings in the top 15 percent of CEP's overall dataset.
- ▶ These strong, externally -oriented scores are reflected in grantees' qualitative feedback, with the Foundation being described as “a great asset,” “monumental,” and “influential.” Several grantees highlight new leadership as being fundamental to Harvest's impact, particularly in “[ensuring] more collaborative partnerships in the community” and the Foundation “becoming more inclusive and welcoming of new ideas to address community challenges.”

Outstanding Impact on and Understanding of Grantees' Organizations

On measures related to Harvest's impact on grantees' organizations and the Foundation's understanding of grantees' strategies and goals, ratings are in the top four and three percent of CEP's dataset, respectively. Harvest is also rated higher than typical for its awareness of grantees' challenges. On all three of these dimensions, grantee ratings place Harvest at or near the top of its custom cohort of peer funders.

- ▶ CEP's research has shown that grant characteristics – size, length, and whether the grant was restricted – are often strong predictors of grantees' perceptions of a funder's impact on their organizations, with multiyear, unrestricted funding being a particularly powerful combination.
- ▶ Harvest's median grant size is higher than that of the typical funder in both the overall dataset and in the Foundation's custom cohort – \$300K compared \$110K and \$250, respectively.
- ▶ Compared to most other funders, Harvest provides a larger proportion of its grantees with multi-year support. Of note: grantees with smaller organizational budgets (less than \$500K) are less likely to receive multi-year grants from The Harvest Foundation compared to their counterparts.
- ▶ Harvest awards less unrestricted funding (10 percent) compared to the median funder (22 percent).

Non-Monetary Support

- ▶ Harvest provides a higher than typical amount of non-monetary assistance to grantees – nearly 80 percent compared to 58 percent at the typical funder. In particular, Harvest grantees are more likely to receive program-related assistance (e.g., advice on program approach or efforts,

program assessment or evaluation assistance) and fundraising and development assistance. As one grantee writes, “[The Foundation’s] contracted grant writer is a huge benefit to the community, as many organizations cannot afford to have someone on staff in this specific role.”

- ▶ In addition, these supports tend to be viewed as being comparatively more helpful. Harvest’s grantees more strongly agree compared to grantees from other funders that assistance provided beyond the grant met an important need for their organizations or programs, strengthened their organizations or programs, and was a worthwhile use of their time. In fact, several grantees mention finding Harvest’s non-monetary support to be *as helpful* as their monetary support.
- ▶ In a series of custom questions about Harvest’s assistance beyond the grant, grantees provide the lowest ratings when asked whether they have input about the types of non-monetary support offered by the Foundation.



“Harvest] offers real time support to organizations, local businesses, and individuals making grassroots efforts [allowing] community members to make a greater impact on the everyday lives of the community as a whole.”

Excellent Relationships with Grantees

- ▶ For many measures related to relationship building with grantees, Harvest receives ratings that are above the typical funder in CEP’s overall dataset. The Foundation is rated in the top five percent of CEP’s overall dataset and towards the top of its custom cohort for the candor Harvest exhibits about grantees’ work, and the extent to which the Foundation is open to ideas from grantees regarding Harvest’s strategy.
- ▶ While grantees strongly agree that they feel comfortable approaching Harvest if a problem arises, ratings diverge based on the size of the organization, with larger grantees providing more positive ratings.
 - One area where the Foundation receives comparatively lower ratings was the extent to which Harvest exhibits respectful interactions. On a scale of 1 to 7, the Foundation rated at 6.78 for larger organizations and a 6.27 for smaller organizations with a budget under \$500,000.
- ▶ Harvest is rated higher than 90 percent of funders for the responsiveness of its staff.
 - As additional context, Harvest staff appear to interact more frequently with their grantees compared to staff of other funders. Forty-one percent of Harvest grantees report being in contact with their program officer monthly or more often – nearly 20 percent higher than the typical funder.
 - A much higher than typical proportion of Harvest grantees report receiving a site visit, either virtual or in-person, during their grant— ninety percent compared to forty-seven percent at the typical funder.
- ▶ It should be noted that The Harvest Foundation program staff manage a smaller caseload compared to that found at the typical funder: fifteen active grants per full-time program staff compared to 31 at the median; and nine applications per full-time program staff compared to 24 at the median.



“Harvest Foundation staff have been extremely professional, responsive, and informative during the grant application and reporting processes...Our program officer was very accessible...We have participated in events held at the Harvest Foundation and are extremely happy to have this foundation as a critical resource in our community.”

Demonstrated Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- ▶ Overall, grantees hold positive views of The Harvest Foundation’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work. For both the extent to which the Foundation demonstrates an explicit commitment to DEI and the degree to which most staff embody a strong commitment to DEI, Harvest receives particularly high ratings, with scores falling in the top 5 percent of CEP’s overall dataset.
 - However, responses based on organizational budget size do contribute to some differences in ratings. Compared with smaller organizations, grantees with organizational budgets greater than or equal to \$500K provide significantly higher ratings for the extent to which the Foundation clearly communicates what diversity, equity, and inclusion means for grantees’ work.
 - Conversely, on average, these same smaller organizations provide *higher* ratings than their peers when asked if they believe Harvest is committed to combatting racism.
- ▶ It should be noted that there were no consistent, significant differences when analyzing these data based on survey respondents’ POC identity or gender identity. However, non-POC, male-identifying respondents tend to rate higher than their counterparts for most themes of the survey, including measures related to DEI.



“[Harvest] makes major efforts [to provide] fair funding across many areas, [in] most every community, [and] every demographic.”

Overall Helpful Grant Processes with Opportunities to Improve

Grant Processes

- ▶ Fifty-five percent of respondents report that Harvest staff encouraged them to apply, and 48 percent state that the Foundation reached out to their organization to initiate a relationship – figures that perhaps reflect a uniquely proactive approach that Harvest has in cultivating funding partnerships. What’s more, 97 percent of grantees report speaking to a Foundation staff member *before* applying for a grant.
- ▶ Grantees provide higher than typical ratings for the extent to which the application process was a helpful opportunity to strengthen efforts funded by the grant, as well as the clarity and transparency of both application process requirements and timelines and criteria used to decide whether a proposal would be funded.
- ▶ Meanwhile, Harvest grantees rate the Foundation lower than typical for a number of measures related to the reporting process: the extent to which the process was straightforward, how adaptable Harvest’s reporting process was to fit grantees’ circumstance, and the relevance of

reporting questions and measures. Grantees also report spending slightly more time on the reporting process compared to grantees at the typical funder.

- That being said, grantees' ratings for the helpfulness of the reporting process towards reflection and learning place the Foundation among the top third of funders in CEP's dataset.
- ▶ Harvest Foundation grantees report feeling more pressure than typical to modify their organization's priorities to create a grant proposal that was likely to receive funding.

Declination Process

- ▶ Nearly half of Harvest's grantees report being denied funding by the Foundation at least once in the past, with smaller-sized organizations more frequently indicating a prior declination.
- ▶ Sixty-four percent of denied applicants report hearing about Harvest's negative funding decision within three months of submitting their application, a larger percentage compared to the average funder. At the same time, 27 percent of declined applicants indicate receiving a response from the Foundation *after more than twelve months* – compared to one percent of declined applicants at the typical funder in CEP's dataset. (Note: The Foundation previously operated with a once per year grant cycle.)
- ▶ Eighty percent of declined applicants report some kind of encouraging or discouraging response from Harvest about whether they should apply again in the future – a much higher proportion compared to the typical funder (41 percent).
- ▶ Perhaps unsurprisingly, grantees who had never experienced a proposal declination rate the Foundation more positively on a number of measures throughout the report, including the extent to which the Foundation understands their organization's strategies and their local communities, as well as the extent to which they feel comfortable approaching the Foundation if a problem arises.



“The Harvest Foundation provided clear guidance on the grant process, monitoring, and evaluation. Throughout the entire process, our program officer collaborated closely and was extremely thorough. We appreciate the clarity and attention to detail, which made for a clear and concise experience.”

CEP Recommendations

Based on this grantee feedback, CEP recommends that The Harvest Foundation consider the following in order to build on its strengths and address potential opportunities.

- ▶ Celebrate and maintain aspects of the Foundation's approach that have led to such strong perceptions of its impact on grantees' fields, local communities, and organizations.
 - Given the perceived impact of this type of funding on grantees, consider expanding unrestricted funding where it aligns with the Foundation's strategies.
 - Continue providing valuable non-monetary support and determine if there are ways to collect input from grantees about the types of assistance and resources they would find most useful.
- ▶ Discuss and codify program staff's strong approach to relationship building and identify certain

touchpoints that ensure the Foundation is developing respectful interactions with all grantees, regardless of size, and to a lesser extent, all grantees feel comfortable approaching Harvest should a problem arise.

- ▶ Maintain Harvest’s proactive approach for seeking out grantee partners and building in a number of touchpoints throughout the application process, specifically as a means of reinforcing positive perceptions that grantees already have about this process.
 - Explore reasons for why grantees might be experiencing aspects of the proposal process to be more pressure-filled.
 - Revisit what might be driving a slower funding decision for a segment of the applicant population and determine if these communications might be accelerated.
- ▶ Consider ways for reinforcing the straightforwardness, relevance, and adaptability of the reporting process among grantees, and whether there may be ways to streamline the amount of time required of grantees while still maintaining the helpfulness of the reporting process for grantee reflection and learning.
- ▶ Examine any differences in perceptions among grantees based on their organizational budget size throughout the grants process and funding relationship, and determine if there are ways Harvest might clarify aspects of its communications, processes, and grantmaking approaches for smaller organizations.

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