

Key Findings and Recommendations from the Maine Health Access Foundation 2020 Grantee and Applicant Perception Report

Based on information and recommendations provided to MeHAF
by the Center for Effective Philanthropy

The summary below outlines findings and recommendations from the Maine Health Access Foundation's (MeHAF or the Foundation) Grantee and Application Perception Reports (GPR/APR) provided by the [Center for Effective Philanthropy](#) (CEP). The information is based on surveys conducted in early 2020 of recent MeHAF grantees and applicants. CEP is a nonprofit that provides funders with tools to improve performance. Over the past ten years, CEP has surveyed more than 50,000 grantees of more than 300 funders to build a dataset that allows foundations to assess their performance, as viewed by grantees, on a comparative basis. MeHAF has engaged CEP on a periodic basis to collect, analyze, and report on feedback to help us continue to improve our work.

Overview

Overall, grantees' and applicants' perceptions of Maine Health Access Foundation are similar to those in 2015. The Foundation has particular strengths in perceptions of field impact, quality of relationships, and helpful selection and reporting processes – rating higher than the typical funder in those areas.

Grantee ratings vary by Program Area across a number of impact, understanding, and relationship measures in the survey.

Perceptions of Impact on Grantees' Fields a Strength and Impact on Communities Trending Up.

- ▶ Grantees' have positive perceptions of the Foundation's impact on their fields and role influencing public policy, providing higher ratings than at the typical funder in CEP's dataset. In written comments, grantees frequently refer to the Foundation's leadership in these areas.
 - Relatedly, grantee ratings place MeHAF in line with the typical funder for its understanding of their fields and role in advancing knowledge in their fields.
- ▶ Declined applicants also hold extremely high perceptions of the Foundation's impact on their fields, with ratings that place the Foundation in the top 1 percent of CEP's dataset. Their perception of the Foundation's understanding of their fields is also higher than typical.
- ▶ Grantee ratings for perceptions of the Foundation's impact on their communities trend higher than 2015 and are similar to the typical funder – though perceptions of MeHAF's understanding

of their communities is lower than typical. Applicant ratings are moving in the opposite direction, so are now lower than typical.

Organizational Impact and Grantmaking Characteristics

- ▶ Grantees generally rate the Foundation’s impact on and understanding of their organizations in line with the typical funder in CEP’s dataset, though these perceptions vary by program area.
- ▶ When asked how MeHAF funding led to changes at grantees’ organizations, nearly 80 percent reported that it improved their organization’s capacity to meet their mission and goals. Over two-thirds of grantees indicated that the funding helped them to establish new partnerships and engage with a broader cross-section of people in their communities.

High Levels of Intensive Non-Monetary Assistance

- ▶ Thirty-six percent of MeHAF grantees receive intensive forms of non-monetary assistance - defined as multiple types of support beyond the grant check - a larger proportion than at 90 percent of other funders in CEP’s dataset. These grantees rate significantly higher across the report, including for perceptions of the Foundation’s impact on and understanding of their organizations, overall relationships, and overall understanding.
- ▶ At MeHAF, over half of grantees report receiving assistance in the form of learning community/grantee convenings, connections with other community organizations, and connections with other field leaders.
 - When asked about the helpfulness of non-monetary supports received, grantees indicate that they found connections with field leaders, connections with potential partners, and public policy support to be extremely helpful.

Changed Grantmaking Characteristics

- ▶ Since 2015, the structure of MeHAF’s typical grant has changed – grants are smaller, to smaller organizations, and a greater proportion now receive unrestricted funds¹.
 - In 2020, grantees report receiving an average grant of 2.1 years and median grant size of \$50,000, making MeHAF’s grants typical in length and smaller than typical in size. Thirty percent of MeHAF funding is unrestricted – a higher than typical proportion.
 - Because MeHAF funds organizations with relatively small budgets, a typical MeHAF grant covers about 3 percent of grantees’ annual budgets – a fairly typical proportion.
- ▶ Grantees that receive grants longer than 1.5 years, over \$100,000, or receive unrestricted support rate significantly higher across the report, often on measures related to perceptions of impact on grantees’ fields, communities, and organizations, and overall relationships.

Strong Relationships with Valuable Interactions

¹In 2015 4% of grantees indicated receiving “general operating support” vs. 30% receiving “unrestricted” support in 2020.

Grantees see the overall quality of their relationship with the Foundation as a strength, providing ratings in the top 20 percent of CEP's dataset.

- ▶ The Foundation is also rated in the top twenty percent of CEP's dataset for several aspects of relationships: fair treatment, comfort approaching the Foundation if a problem arises, respectful interactions, compassion for beneficiaries, transparency, and openness to grantee ideas.
- ▶ Relatedly, grantees rate the Foundation's transparency and clarity with which the Foundation communicates its goals and strategy in the top 20 percent of CEP's dataset.
- ▶ Similarly, applicant ratings place MeHAF higher than typical for nearly all relationships measures – responsiveness of staff, fair treatment, accessible relationships, and transparency – and in the top 10 percent of funders for clarity and consistency of communications.

Level of Engagement with Grantees

- ▶ Overall, MeHAF grantees interact with the Foundation regularly. Sixty-seven percent of grantees engage with MeHAF every few months, compared to 55 percent at the average funder.
 - Grantees who interact with staff at least once every few months rate significantly higher for perceptions of impact on grantee organizations, comfort approaching the Foundation, and clarity of the Foundation's goals and strategies.
- ▶ Forty-seven percent of grantees report receiving a site visit – a typical proportion. Grantees who received a site visit rate significantly higher across the survey, including for perceptions of impact on grantees' fields, communities, and organizations, as well as overall relationships.

Understanding Beneficiaries and Building Equity

- ▶ Grantees strongly agreed that MeHAF's focus on equity is positively influencing Maine's philanthropic sector, positively influencing the field in which they work, and providing value to their organizations.
- ▶ MeHAF grantees' perceptions are in line with the typical funder for how well the Foundation understands the social, cultural, or socioeconomic factors that affect grantees' work, understands grantees' intended beneficiaries' needs, and has funding priorities that reflect intended beneficiaries' needs.
 - Grantees and applicants strongly associate the Foundation with working to achieve fair and just health outcomes for all. However, applicants indicate that they do not associate the Foundation with soliciting a broad range of ideas to inform its work, nor welcoming perspectives that challenge its assumptions.

Helpful Selection and Reporting Processes, with Opportunities to Improve Evaluations

- ▶ Grantee ratings are significantly higher than in 2015, and are now higher than the typical funder, for the helpfulness of the Foundation's selection process in strengthening their organizations or funded programs.
 - During this process, MeHAF grantees report feeling a lower than typical amount of pressure to change their organization or program's priorities in order to get funding.

- ▶ Grantees indicate that they find value in the Foundation’s reporting processes, as well. Grantees provide higher than typical ratings for the degree to which it is straightforward, adaptable, and a helpful opportunity to reflect and learn.
- ▶ Perspectives on evaluation are much less positive. Over half of grantees report that they participate in an evaluation, of which 74 percent were conducted by an external evaluator.
 - Grantees’ ratings are lower than typical – in the bottom 20 percent of funders in CEP’s dataset – for the extent to which the evaluation was designed with their input and led to changes in the work that was evaluated.
- ▶ The total time that grantees spend on foundation processes has significantly decreased from 2015, from a median of 63 to 24 hours – an amount that is now lower than the typical funder.

Declined Applicants – MeHAF’s Application Process

- ▶ During the application process, MeHAF applicants report feeling very little pressure to change their organization’s priorities in order to receive funding, with ratings that have significantly decreased from 2015.
- ▶ A higher than typical proportion of applicants, about three-quarters, indicate that they apply to the Foundation because of the guidelines or call for proposals.
 - Applicants ask for greater clarity on application guidelines and expectations, including more information on “what types of organizations... [and] projects they are looking for.”
- ▶ Sixty-five percent of applicants requested feedback following their declination and over 90 percent of applicants who requested feedback received it. These applicants find the feedback MeHAF provided to be helpful, with ratings that are similar to the typical funder.

CEP Recommendations

Based on its grantee and applicant feedback, CEP recommends that the Maine Health Access Foundation consider the following to build on its strengths and address potential opportunities for improvement:

- ▶ Celebrate and reflect on the strong relationships MeHAF staff has built with grantees and applicants. Work to codify best practices to ensure that these strong relationships continue.
- ▶ Work to build – and communicate – deeper knowledge of nonprofits’ organizational goals and strategies, contextual factors that affect their work, and beneficiary needs.
- ▶ Given the value grantees receive and their interest in more, consider expanding opportunities to leverage MeHAF’s networks and social capital to facilitate connections and build partnerships in the field.
- ▶ Reflect on the Foundation’s objectives for evaluation processes. Consider improvements that ensure grantees are realizing that intended value.
- ▶ Provide greater clarity on application expectations and guidelines in written materials, and even more specific feedback and helpful reasons for declinations of applications.
- ▶ Explore the differences in grantee experience by Program Area and consider whether those differences reflect the goals and strategy of each Program Area.