

The **EQUITABLE** **GIVING** Project

AN EQUITY LAB INITIATIVE



HOW CAN EDUCATION PHILANTHROPY BE MORE EQUITABLE?

To answer that question, the University of Delaware's Center for Research in Education and Social Policy (CRESP), The Equity Lab, and Goodbets Group joined together to conduct a first-of-its-kind research project. In 2020, the partners designed and administered a comprehensive survey to learn more about the experiences of those seeking funding. Over 200 individuals who had applied for funding from education-focused philanthropic organizations responded to the survey, providing a rich view into their lived experiences and providing a call to arms to funders interested in creating a more equitable playing field.

The survey responses brought much-needed attention to the challenges faced by grant-seekers and to the opportunities that exist to create a more equitable future in the education philanthropy sector. The findings also represented a wide range of experiences given that a vast majority of the survey respondents had applied to three or more organizations for funding in the past five years.

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THE PERCEIVED ROLE OF IDENTITY

Personal identity — particularly racial and ethnic identity — was perceived by a large number of respondents as the main factor in whether they received funding. **Nearly 80% believed their personal identity played a role in funding decisions with over 90% of that group naming their race or ethnicity as the driving identity characteristic that influenced funders to approve their grant applications.** A majority also believed their gender or professional background influenced the decision.

Leaders of color also noted a perceived bias from funders that leaders of minority-run, small organizations may not be capable of managing funds appropriately.

“Often when awarded grants, there is still a lack of confidence in our ability to implement the proposed project although we have 23 years of experience and positive outcomes. **There appears to be an unspoken concern about a Black male running and managing an organization of our size.**”

— Survey respondent

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Who you know — and who will advocate for you — was also noted as critical in leading to positive outcomes. Multiple respondents spoke to the critical nature of relationships with program officers, and the need for new ways for funders to get to know applicants and build relationships.

THE BURDEN OF THE PROCESS

“Without understanding funders and funding formulas it is very difficult to know if what you are doing will be supported, **so often I just do not even try. The barrier of getting the grant written is often bigger than just self-funding smaller scale projects.**”

— Survey respondent

Finally, the application process itself created hurdles for many respondents — requiring time and effort without the guarantee of funding at the end. Particularly for smaller organizations without dedicated staff for grant writing and development, **the time and capacity required to submit an application meant less time devoted to impact, leading some leaders to stop applying.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

OUR RESEARCH UNEARTHED THE FOLLOWING DATA AND AVENUES FOR INNOVATION IN THE FUNDING SECTOR:

MORE THAN
2/3

of respondents said that **more information about how to apply** would help them to feel better prepared when seeking funding.

Another

60%

of respondents said that **access to coaching and mentoring, or even feedback on their applications**, would be helpful.



FUNDERS SHOULD CONSIDER:



Creating new ways for grant seekers to

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

with funders.



Creating new ways for grant seekers to

PRESENT THEIR WORK AND IDEAS

outside of the traditional funding process.



RE-DESIGNING THE FUNDING PROCESS

to further reduce barriers for leaders of color.

Given the issues respondents raised about personal identity influencing funding decisions, there is likely a deeper set of reflections and interventions equity-minded funders can explore to ensure that **each grant seeker is given an equitable opportunity to receive funding and showcase their work.**

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE EQUITABLE GIVING PROJECT, OUR RECOMMENDATIONS, AND WHAT'S NEXT, VISIT [THEEQUITYLAB.ORG/EQUITABLEGIVING](https://theequitylab.org/equitablegiving).