



THE CENTER
FOR EFFECTIVE
PHILANTHROPY

BENCHMARKING

Program Officer Roles and Responsibilities



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Program Officer

Roles and Responsibilities

PROJECT TEAM

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ABOUT THE CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE PHILANTHROPY

The mission of the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) is to provide data and create insight so philanthropic funders can better define, assess, and improve their effectiveness—and, as a result, their intended impact.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This research is based on CEP's independent data analyses, and CEP is solely responsible for its content. The report does not necessarily reflect the individual views of the funders, advisers, or others listed throughout this report.

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DEAR COLLEAGUE,

The role of the program officer at foundations is one of great importance. This is not news to the thousands of nonprofit organizations relying on program officers for crucial information, guidance, and funding. Yet, we know relatively little about the role that program officers play at foundations and with nonprofits. What are the backgrounds and experiences of program officers? What are the job responsibilities on which they spend the most time? How do they view their relationships with grantees?

In the following pages, we share the results of a survey we conducted, in mid-2016, to gain a better understanding of the role of the program officer. We sent surveys to over 300 program officers who we randomly selected from foundations that give at least \$5 million annually. We received responses from 150 individuals for a response rate of 48 percent.

We hope this data will be useful to foundation leaders as they consider the role that program officers play at their foundations, as well as to program officers reflecting on their own jobs.

Sincerely,

Ellie Buteau, Ph.D.
Vice President—Research

Jen Glickman
Manager—Research



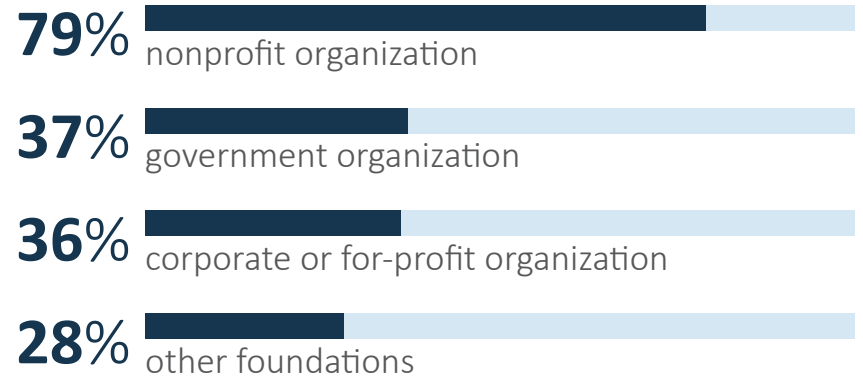
Respondent Demographics



PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND



Percentage of respondents who have previously been employed at the following types of organizations¹



71%

of respondents who have previously worked at a nonprofit organization were involved in raising money from foundations.



ONE-THIRD of respondents who have previously worked at a nonprofit organization interacted with foundation staff often or very often as part of their work.

¹ Respondents were instructed to select all types of organizations that applied to their past employment.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND



Highest level of education reported by respondents



59% master's degree

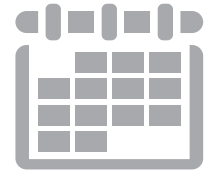
26% bachelor's degree

11% doctoral degree

3% professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)

1% other

TENURE IN CURRENT ROLE



13%
Less than 1 year

37%
At least 1 year but fewer than 3 years

21%
At least 3 years but fewer than 6 years

15%
At least 6 years but fewer than 10 years

14%
10 years or more

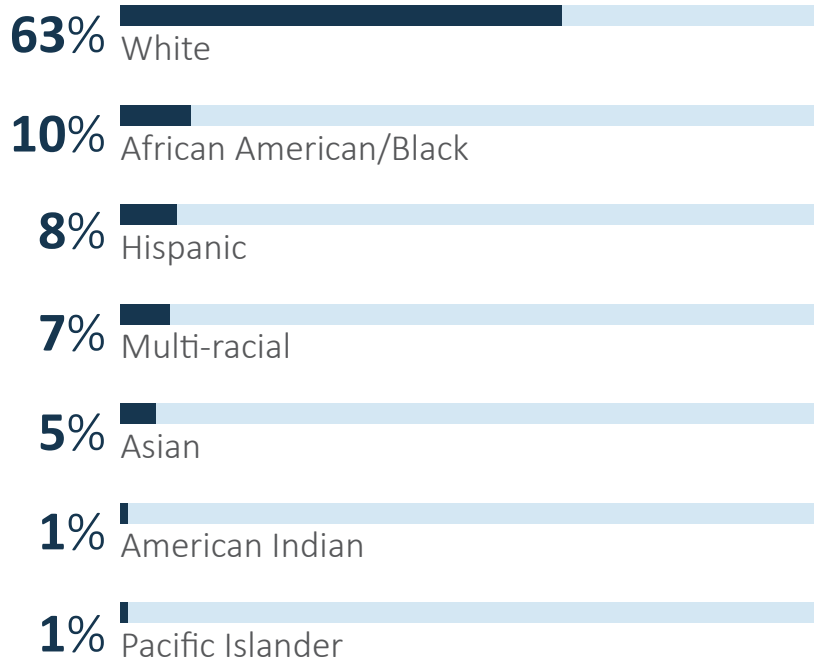
GENDER AND RACE

Gender identity of respondents



74% female 23% male 3% preferred not to say

Race/ethnicity of respondents³





³ Five percent of respondents indicated that their race/ethnicity did not fall into any of the listed categories or preferred not to say. Respondents who selected more than one race/ethnicity were categorized as multi-racial.


Issue Areas and Geographic Focus



ISSUE AREAS

Percentage of respondents whose work focuses on the following number of issue areas

52%  
multiple issue areas that are **interrelated**

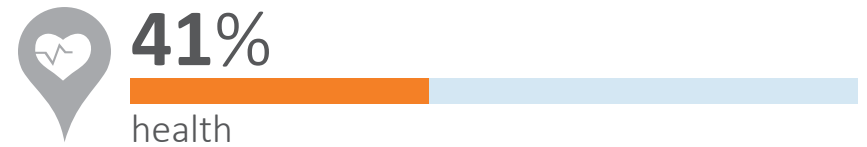
34%  
multiple issue areas that are **not necessarily related**


9%  
 a **single** issue area

5% 
does not focus on issue areas





Most frequently mentioned program areas in which respondents work





61% 
 of respondents worked in the **same issue areas** in their previous jobs as they do in their current roles.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Percentage of respondents whose work focuses on the following number of geographic areas

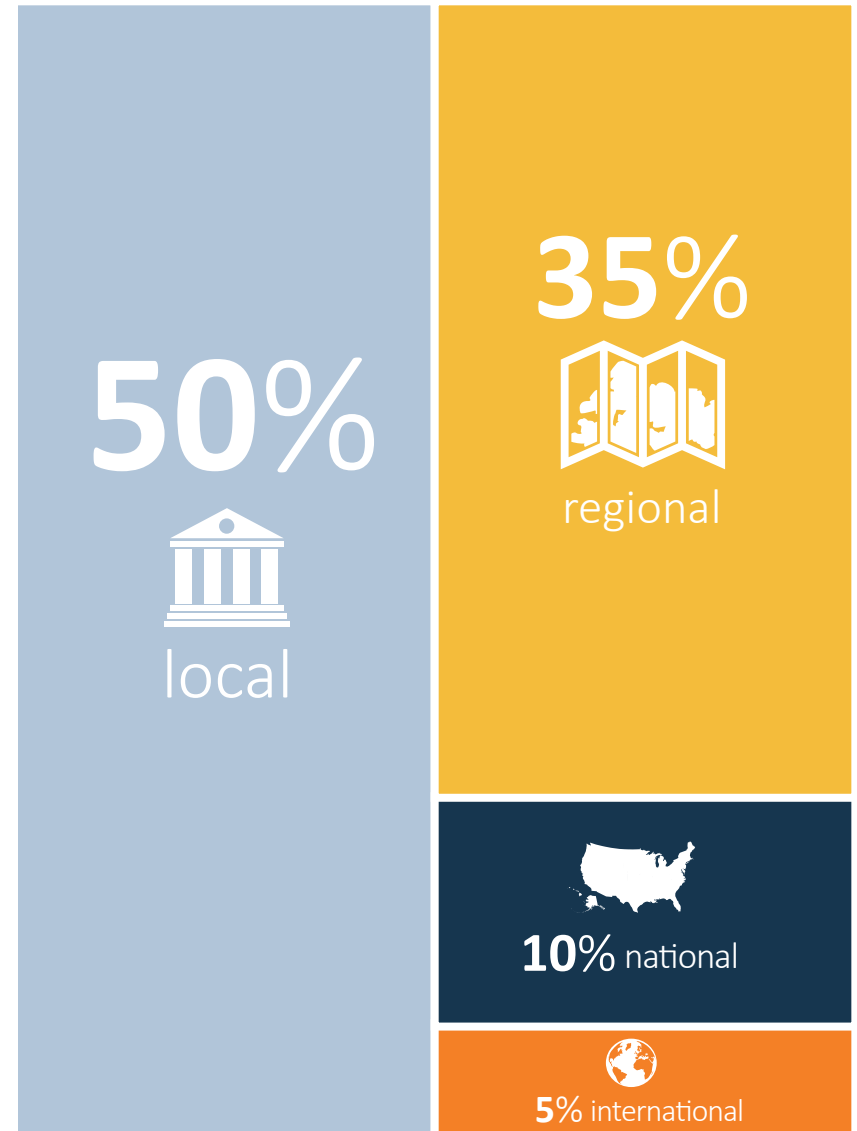
50%  
one geographic area

44%  
multiple geographic areas

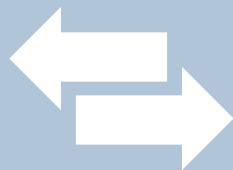
6% 
does not focus on a geographic area



Primary geographic focus reported by respondents



Funder-Grantee Dynamic



GRANTEE RELATIONSHIPS



Percentage of respondents who agree with the following statements

98%

Having **strong relationships** with grantees is important for achieving my foundation's goals.

95%

Learning from the grantees I work with is an integral part of my professional development.

88%

I believe the grantees I work with **feel comfortable** approaching me if a problem arises.

85%

I am **aware of the challenges** the grantees I work with face in achieving their goals.

53%

I have the **knowledge necessary** to help the grantees I work with assess the results of their work.

 63%

of respondents typically respond to grantees either the same day they are contacted or by the following day.

PERCEPTIONS OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN GENERAL

Percentage of respondents who agree with the following statements

73% In general, nonprofit organizations **maximize their impact** given the resources they have.

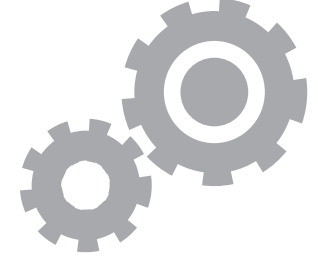
54% In general, nonprofit organizations are **well-run**.

39% In general, nonprofit organizations have the **knowledge necessary** to assess the results of their work.

9% In general, nonprofit organizations have the **resources necessary** to assess the results of their work.

UNDERSTANDING

Percentage of respondents who rate themselves as having a considerable or thorough understanding of the following



77%
the **social, cultural, or socioeconomic factors** that affect grantees' work

75%
the **fields** in which grantees work

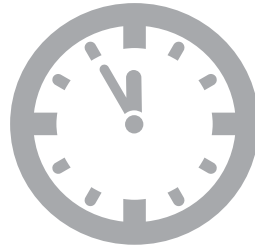
74%
the **communities** in which grantees work

72%
the needs of grantees' **intended beneficiaries**

70%
grantees' **goals and strategies**

SPENDING TIME WITH GRANTEES

When asked, “If you had more time to spend with your grantees, how would you spend that time,” **60 percent** of respondents say they would spend their time **learning more about and/or developing relationships with the grantees** they support.



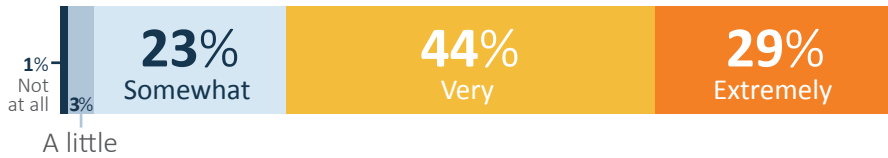
Many fewer respondents, only **28 percent**, say they would spend that additional time **helping grantees in technical or procedural areas**, such as strategy, evaluation, and/or capacity building.

Satisfaction and Engagement



PERCEPTIONS OF ROLE

Respondent **level of satisfaction** with their current job



Percentage of respondents who agree with the following statements

82% My job makes good use of **my skills and abilities**.

75% My job **requirements** are clear.

71% I have an appropriate amount of **autonomy** in my role at my foundation.

16% I have a clear path for **career advancement** at my foundation.⁴

⁴ There is no relationship between the extent to which respondents believe they have a clear path for advancement and the size of their foundations.

MEANINGFULNESS AND IMPACT OF WORK

Percentage of respondents who agree with the following statements

96% My foundation has a **positive impact** on the issue(s) or geographic area(s) in which I work.

94% My career is **meaningful**.

92% My work contributes to my **personal growth**.

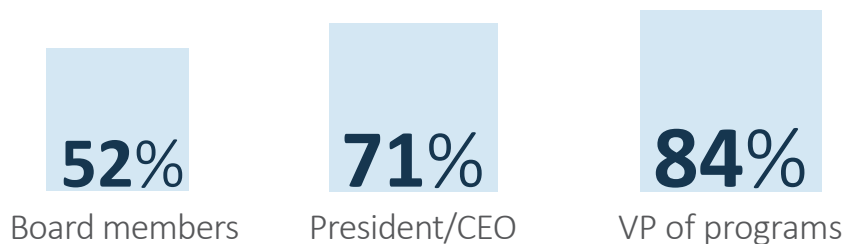
92% A primary reason I work at my foundation is because I **believe in its mission**.

WORKPLACE DYNAMICS

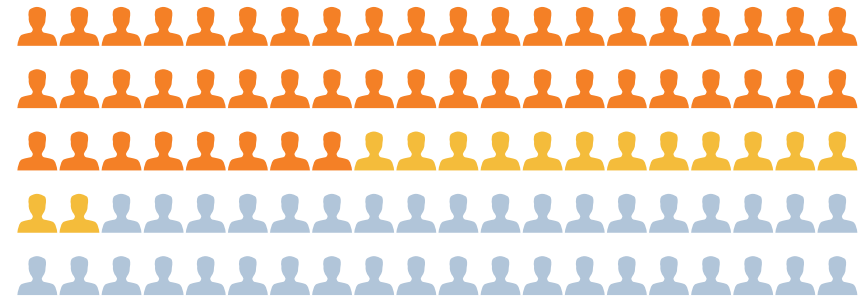
Percentage of respondents who agree with the following statements



Percentage of respondents who very much or completely believe they are working toward the same goals as the following parties at their foundations



PLANS FOR THE FUTURE



48% plan to stay in philanthropy for the remainder of their careers

14% do not plan to stay in philanthropy for the remainder of their careers

38% don't know if they will stay in philanthropy for the remainder of their careers

Job Responsibilities



WORKLOAD

HOURS



About half of respondents work **45 hours or more** in an average week.

About one-quarter of respondents work **40 or fewer** hours in an average week.

About one-quarter of respondents work **50 or more** hours in an average week.

ACTIVE GRANTS



About half of respondents have **40 or more** active grants currently open.

About one-quarter of respondents have **20 or fewer** active grants currently open.

About one-quarter of respondents have **70 or more** active grants currently open.

LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT IN PROCESSES



Percentage of respondents **who are very or extremely involved** in the following processes

Percentage of respondents **who would prefer to be more involved** in the following processes

Deciding if a **grant gets awarded**



Developing **strategies** used to achieve programmatic goals



Developing programmatic **goals**



Deciding the **type of support** to award a grantee (e.g., general operating support, program support, etc.)



Deciding the **size of a grant** awarded to a grantee



Assessing **progress** toward programmatic goals



Deciding the **length of a grant** awarded to a grantee (e.g., one-year grant, two-year grant, etc.)



Using information from assessments of progress to **make improvements**



Developing measures used to **assess progress** against programmatic goals



HOW TO SPEND TIME TO BE MOST EFFECTIVE

We asked respondents to list the three job responsibilities that:

- Currently **do** take up the greatest amount of their time
- **Should** take up the greatest amount of their time in order to be most effective in their role
- Should take up **less** time in order to be most effective in their role⁵

The job responsibilities below were mentioned by the following percentages of respondents.

Internal administration

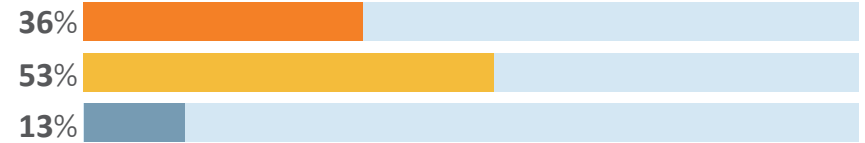


Grant-related processes



⁵ This question was only asked of respondents who selected “Yes” to a survey question asking if there are job responsibilities on which they believe they should be spending less time in order to be most effective in their role. Two-thirds of respondents answered “Yes” to this question.

Developing and maintaining relationships



Understanding grantees’ work and context



SELECTING GRANTEES TO FUND



90%

say their foundation’s leadership **accepts their funding recommendations** often or very often

28%

feel they can take quite a bit or a lot of risk when **choosing which grantees to fund**

Professional Growth and Development



Percentage of respondents who **have participated** in the following professional development opportunities in the past year

86% conferences or seminars

58% activities or events offered by relevant affinity groups

41% job-specific training through a third party (e.g., Nonprofit Finance Fund, Council on Foundations, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations)

30% job-specific training by foundation staff

23% leadership/management coaching through a third party

Percentage of respondents who want **further professional development** in the following areas⁶



25%
finance or
accounting



17%
leadership
skills



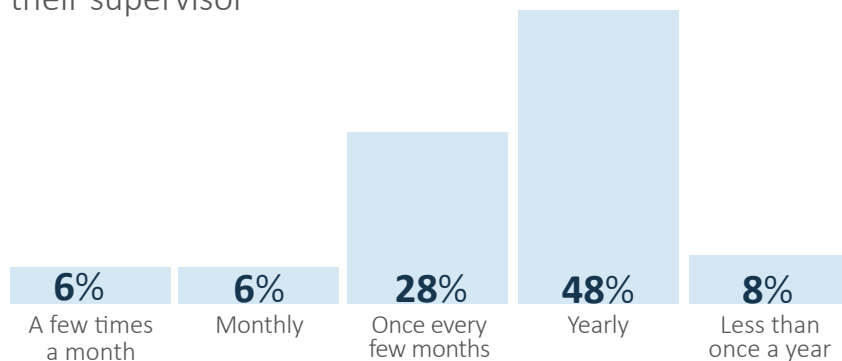
24%
general philanthropy
knowledge



16%
evaluation

JOB PERFORMANCE

How often respondents discuss their job performance with their supervisor⁷



⁶ The areas cited came from responses to the open-ended question, "In what skill set or knowledge area do you believe you could benefit the most from further professional development?"

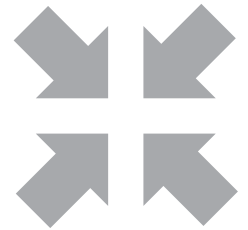
⁷ Four percent of respondents say they have not yet discussed their job performance with their supervisor.

 **74%**

of respondents believe they **can be honest** with their supervisors.

CHALLENGES

When asked what the biggest challenges are that they face in their role, **84 percent** of respondents mentioned **internal challenges** at their own foundations, such as:



- Having limited resources or capacity
- Lacking independence or room for growth in their role
- Managing a disconnect between their perceived priorities and the priorities of leadership at their foundation



Only **15 percent** of respondents mentioned **challenges external** to their foundations.⁸

⁸ Some respondents who mentioned an external challenge also mentioned an internal challenge, and vice versa. An additional nine percent of respondents mentioned challenges that were not specific to either an internal or external challenge.

Methodology

SAMPLE

Data discussed in this report were gathered through a confidential survey administered to foundation program officers. Specific criteria were used to determine whether program officers were eligible to be randomly selected for the research study. Foundations were considered for inclusion in the sample if they:

- were based in the United States;
- were an independent foundation, including health conversion foundations, or a community foundation, as categorized by Foundation Directory Online; and
- provided \$5 million or more in annual giving, according to information provided to CEP from Foundation Center in September 2015.

Individuals working at eligible foundations were considered for inclusion in the sample if they:

- had a title of program officer, or had a title of program manager or equivalent at foundations with no listed program officers, as identified through the foundation's website; and
- had an e-mail address that could be accessed through the foundation's website or CEP's internal contact management software.⁹

One eligible individual was selected at random from each eligible foundation, resulting in a sample of 319 individuals.

In July 2016, the 319 individuals selected were sent an invitation to complete the survey. Later, 15 individuals were removed from the sample because it became apparent they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Seven of these individuals were replaced with staff from their foundation who better met the criteria. Completed surveys, defined as having at least 80 percent of questions answered, were received from 149 participants, and a partially completed survey, defined as having at least 50 percent of questions answered, was received from one participant. Thus, 150 of the 311 eligible individuals completed the survey, for a response rate of 48 percent.

⁹ Program associates, assistants, and vice presidents were not included in the sample because of the rarity with which grantee contact is a primary job component.

Survey Period	Number of Staff Surveyed	Number of Responses	Survey Response Rate
July 2016	311	150	48%

METHOD

The survey was fielded online during a three-and-a-half-week period in July 2016. Program officers were sent a brief e-mail, including a description of the purpose of the survey, a statement of confidentiality, and a link to the survey. Program officers were sent up to seven reminder e-mails.

The survey consisted of 46 items, some of which contained several sub-items. Program officers were asked about a variety of topics related to their work, including their professional background and experience, role at their foundation, job responsibilities, professional growth and development, grantee relationships, thoughts about the future, and demographic information.

RESPONSE BIAS

Foundations with program officers who responded to this survey did not differ from foundations whose program officers did not respond by annual asset size, annual giving amount, geographic location, or foundation type (i.e., whether the foundation was an independent or community foundation).

Respondents with titles of either “Program Officer” or “Senior Program Officer” were slightly more likely to respond to the survey than respondents with titles of “Manager” or “Director.”¹⁰ Program officers of foundations that have used CEP’s assessments were slightly more likely to respond to the survey than program officers of foundations that have not used a CEP assessment.¹¹

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the foundations in our final sample of respondents, 72 percent were

¹⁰ A chi-square analysis was conducted between whether or not foundation program officers responded to our survey and whether those program officers had titles equivalent to “Program Officer,” “Senior Program Officer,” or “Manager”/“Director.” A statistical difference of a small effect size was found (0.19).

¹¹ A chi-square analysis was conducted between whether or not foundation program officers responded to our survey and whether or not those foundations have used a CEP assessment. A statistical difference of a small effect size was found (0.14).

independent foundations and 28 percent were community foundations. Health conversion foundations accounted for 10 percent of the independent foundations. The median asset size for foundations in the sample was \$298.5 million and the median annual giving level was \$14.9 million. The median foundation in this study was established 50 years ago.

Foundation Characteristics	Range	Median Value
Age	<10 years to >100 years	50 years
Assets	<\$2 million to >\$10 billion	\$298.5 million
Giving	<\$6 million to >\$500 million	\$14.9 million

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

To analyze the quantitative survey data from foundation program officers, descriptive statistics were examined. Only descriptive information, including means and percentages, are shared in this report.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Thematic and content analyses were conducted on the responses to the following open-ended survey items:

- In order to be most effective in your role, what three job responsibilities do you believe should take up the greatest amount of your time?
- What three job responsibilities currently do take up the greatest amount of your time?
- On what responsibilities do you believe you should be spending less time in order to be most effective in your role?¹²
- What are the biggest challenges you face in your role?
- In what skill set or knowledge area do you believe you could benefit the most from further professional development?

¹² Only respondents who answered “Yes” to the question, “Are there responsibilities on which you believe you should be spending less time in order to be most effective in your role?” were shown this open-ended item.

- If you had more time to spend with your grantees, how would you spend that time?

A coding scheme was developed for each open-ended item by reading through all responses to recognize recurring ideas, creating categories, and then coding each respondent's ideas according to the categories.

A codebook was created to ensure that different coders would be coding for the same concepts, rather than their individual interpretations of the concepts. One coder coded all responses to the question and a second coder coded 15 percent of those responses. For each open-ended item, an inter-rater agreement of at least 80 percent was achieved for each code.

CEP FUNDERS

We are very appreciative of the support that made this work possible. See below for a list of funders.

\$500,000 OR MORE

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

\$200,000 to \$499,999

Ford Foundation
Fund for Shared Insight
S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation

\$100,000 to \$199,999

Barr Foundation
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
Rockefeller Brothers Fund
The Rockefeller Foundation
The Wallace Foundation
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

\$50,000 to \$99,999

Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
The Kresge Foundation
Rita Allen Foundation

\$20,000 to \$49,999

The Duke Endowment
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
Lumina Foundation
Oak Foundation
Surdna Foundation

Up to \$19,999

The Assisi Foundation of Memphis
California HealthCare Foundation
The Colorado Health Foundation
Delaware Community Foundation
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund
The Heinz Endowments
Henry Luce Foundation
Houston Endowment
Kansas Health Foundation
The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust
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