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Improving Communication Between Foundation Staff and Grantees

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**Prepared for the
California HealthCare Foundation**

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Preface

The California HealthCare Foundation (CHCF) commissioned a Grantee Perception Report (GPR) from the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) in 2009. Since 2003, CEP has conducted surveys of almost 70,000 grantees at almost 240 philanthropic organizations to gather information on their perceptions. This extensive database allows CEP to provide CHCF with data on how our grantees experience working with us and how we compare to other foundations. More information about CHCF's GPR, including an overview of our ratings and an excerpt of CEP's report, is available at www.chcf.org/about/assessing-our-impact.

Though CHCF's ratings related to both consistency and clarity of communication were statistically similar to or above those of other foundations, comments and suggestions from grantees indicated room for improvement in communication between staff and grantees. We decided to retain Putnam Community Investment Consulting, Inc. (Putnam) to identify ways to improve this communication.

Putnam's focus was to analyze the results of CHCF's Grantee Perception Report and to conduct further research that included assessing grantee communications practices of our program staff and other foundations, as well as examining the presentation of grantee resources on our Web site. Putnam prepared a report for CHCF outlining the results of this research and providing recommendations in working with grantees and potential grantees.

In response, we have:

- Revised CHCF's published funding guidelines based on best practices.
- Implemented a new Grantee Communications Checklist for program staff, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that new projects begin with clear and shared expectations regarding each organization's roles and responsibilities.

While researching this project, which was overseen by CHCF's Jill Yegian, Ph.D., director of Research and Evaluation, and Lisa Kang, director of Grants Administration, we learned there are very few resources to help foundations improve their communication with grantees. As a result, we decided to share what we've learned in hopes that it might support other foundations' efforts.

This document is a modified version of the report prepared for CHCF by Putnam, designed for use by other foundations interested in improving their grantee communications. We hope you find it useful.

Mark D. Smith, M.D., M.B.A.
President and CEO
California HealthCare Foundation

*Why should clear communication with grantees matter?
Grantees are typically a foundation’s chosen agents of change, selected for
their ability to create impact. The better a foundation can communicate
its goals and strategies to grantees, the more effective these partnerships
will be — and the more likely grantees will be to perform in ways
that are consistent with the foundation’s goals.*

— Center for Effective Philanthropy

I. Key Findings

A. What We Learned from Other Foundations and the Literature

Senior staff from seven foundations identified as being engaged in grantee communication efforts were interviewed to learn more about their strategies for clear and consistent grantee communications and useful funding guidelines (see Appendix for a list of interviewees).

Few best practices exist for grantee communications, funding guidelines, or foundation Web site usability. There is a dearth of information on comprehensive guidelines, recommendations, or best practices in any of these areas. The Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) appears to provide the only research-based information on the qualities of effective funding guidelines (which are very helpful and shared in this report). Much of the literature on grantee communications centers on external foundation communication to broader audiences, or on strategies to use communication to highlight grantee accomplishments. No information could be found specific to foundation Web site design and navigation in general, or as it pertains to supporting effective grantee communications.

Foundations recommended strategies for clear and consistent grantee communications.

Interviewed funders suggested the following practices, based upon experiences trying to improve their own communication with grantees:

- Hire program officers who value transparency and communications;
- Regularly discuss grantee communications challenges, best practices, and the results of grantseeker satisfaction surveys, such as during program team meetings;
- Incorporate grantee communications and the results of grantseeker satisfaction surveys into staff performance appraisals;
- Conduct a communications audit (a systematic assessment, either formal or informal, of an organization’s capacity for, or performance of, essential communications practices¹);
- Develop key messages for foundation staff and board to describe the foundation, respond to current issues, and explain changes in strategy or guidelines;
- Convene grantees and potential grantees (for example, in listening tours, community meetings, town hall meetings, and focus groups), both to learn from them and to update them on foundation plans or changes;

- Document the grantmaking processes by creating a grantmaking manual or other standards for program and grants management staff ;
- Develop “pledges” to grantees that outline what grantees can expect from the foundation and what the foundation expects of grantees, as well as the foundation’s distinctive way of working with grantees; and
- Ensure consistent grantee communications within program areas, especially if each program has different funding guidelines.

Funders offered suggestions to improve funding guidelines. Although funders interviewed for this report did not provide significant guidance or best practices regarding funding guidelines — a which are a critical component of effective grantee communications — they did offer these suggestions:

- Develop funding guidelines based upon a customer-service orientation that values grantee communications;
- Ensure that funding guidelines and requests for proposals (RFPs) make clear the connection between the funding opportunity and the foundation’s goals and strategies, so that the grantee understands where it fits into the foundation’s overall efforts;
- Develop a system to continually update the funding guidelines on the Web site whenever a grantee expresses confusion about them. This requires a channel of communication between the program staff and communications staff responsible for the Web site; and
- Conduct usability testing of the Web site.

The Center for Effective Philanthropy has identified common characteristics of highly rated funding guidelines. CEP conducted research on common characteristics of highly rated funding guidelines, based on the findings of their Grantee Perception Report (GPR) surveys. The following ten elements can help grantseekers understand a foundation’s funding guidelines. More information can be found in the CEP report, *Foundation Communications: The Grantee Perspective*.

1. Prominent mention of foundation’s mission, goals, and strategies;
2. Individual program area descriptions and/or detailed descriptions of priorities;
3. Deadlines for applications or an explanation of the foundation’s review of applications on a rolling basis;
4. List of funded grantees;
5. Answers to frequently asked questions;
6. List of suggested resources in addition to foundation-provided materials;
7. List of staff contact information;
8. Downloadable application;
9. Detailed description of funded grantees and projects; and
10. Examples of “not funded” grantees and projects.

Most funders had not developed any materials for staff to ensure consistent communication with grantees, such as communications standards or checklists. Similarly, staff generally does not receive trainings on grantee communications. A few one-time trainings were mentioned, such as staff training on how to improve grantee relationships; media training; training on how to have “crucial conversations with grantees”; and participation in training on GrantCraft materials, such as “Saying Yes/Saying No: Strengthening Your Decision-Giving Skills.”

The funders interviewed seek to be transparent about the grant decision-making process. This includes outlining the process on their Web sites, describing the program review process with grantees, explaining the role of the board in decision-making, and providing board meeting dates.

Funders identified several challenges they experience in trying to improve grantee communications. These include that it’s difficult to “legislate” interpersonal communication due to differences in personality, style, and approach, but that the relationship between program officer and grantee is critical to grantee satisfaction with the foundation; that there is often tension between program and communications staff (e.g., program staff thinking that communications staff try to “dumb down” complex issues, and communications staff being frustrated that program staff don’t understand the importance of clarity and simplicity in communications); and the difficulties in ensuring continuous feedback from program staff to communications staff, so that changes can be made to Web sites, funding guidelines, and other grantee resources.

The initiation of contact with grantees, and the frequency of that contact, is important for a successful foundation-grantee relationship. CEP found that grantees that have contact with their foundation more than once a year, and are not the ones reaching out most frequently, they rate their funders higher on the “relationships measure” of the Grantee Perception Report.²

B. What We Learned about Effective Grantee Communication at CHCF

CHCF program officers described many practices they engage in that they believe support clear and consistent grantee communications – though, of course, not every practice is applied to every grant by all program officers. These good practices include:

Setting Expectations

- Reviewing all of the required proposal documentation with every applicant (proposal questions, budget template, reporting questions, etc.);
- Explaining the process and timeframe for approving or turning down grants;
- Using the contracting process to clarify scope, timeline, expectations, deliverables, and payment schedule;
- Determining how (email, phone, mail, etc.) and how often the program officer and grantee will communicate, such as biweekly calls;
- Letting the grantee know what is expected in terms of final report questions, specifying the deliverable, etc.; and

- Informing the grantee of the amount of effort and time that will be needed to prepare a report for publication (as described below).

Communication During the Grant

- Scheduling and conducting periodic check-ins with grantees;
- Using email to communicate with grantees when appropriate, because this allows the program officer to document and track communication, as well as to copy program assistants;
- Summarizing and documenting key decisions made with grantees, as well as next steps;
- Coordinating with CHCF communications staff if needed, including setting up a meeting early in the project with the grantee to discuss the CHCF publication process; and
- Meeting with program assistants regularly (such as every two weeks) to discuss the status of proposals and grants and to determine communication needs.

Reviewing Reports and Deliverables

- Sending reminders of deliverable deadlines one month in advance;
- Reviewing outlines and early drafts of reports to ensure the grantee is on track;
- Emailing questions about reports in advance of discussions with grantees; and
- Discussing interim and final reports with grantees and requesting revisions if needed.

C. Grantee Communications Vary Depending on Grant Type and Phase

We learned from CHCF program staff that different types of grants required different types of communication with grantees, and that particular phases in the grant process warranted greater communication. Two types of grants require the most communication with grantees:

- ***Large grants and initiatives.*** Grants and initiatives that span multiple years or receive more than \$250,000 in funding generally require more collaboration between CHCF and grantees. For such initiatives, program officers might have additional roles, such as participating in advisory group meetings, helping grantees identify interviewees, reacting to preliminary research findings, providing feedback on selection processes (if the initiative involves regranting), meeting with grantees and their evaluators, supporting conference planning, and providing resources and technical assistance. Communication tends to be more frequent: daily, several times a week, or regularly scheduled meetings with standing agenda. These types of grants often require many meetings and proposal revisions before the program officer and grantee can agree on the scope of work and deliverables.
- ***Grants that result in CHCF publications.*** As described above, such grants require significantly more communication between CHCF and the grantee, and they tend to involve many CHCF staff and consultants communicating with the grantee (such as program officer, communication staff, copy editors, and graphic designers).

Program officers also described different amounts and types of communication with applicants and grantees, depending on the phase in the grant’s life cycle. The four phases, and the communication that typically occurs during them, are:

The pre-grant phase occurs when the project is being initiated by CHCF and is in the concept stage. Frequently, program officers contact potential grantees to discuss their ideas and gauge qualifications and interest. Communication at this stage tends to be informal, and program officers described the need to carefully contain the expectations of potential grantees.

The proposal development/beginning of the grant phase is perhaps the most communication-intensive stage. Program officers described communicating with grantees during this phase to: develop the proposal/scope of work; distribute a request for proposals and field questions; set expectations; clarify deliverables, timeline, and payment schedule; work with grantees to determine the audience or end-user of the grant-funded project; explain the foundation’s decision-making process; finalize the contract and review it with the grantee; and have a “kickoff” meeting once the contract is signed.

During the grant period, program officers described a quieter phase when the grantee is doing its work. Communication during this phase generally ranges from none at all to periodic check-ins, communication only following interim reports, regularly scheduled (e.g., monthly) conference calls, or — in the case of some large grants and initiatives — ongoing active program officer participation in the project.

At the end of the grant period communication generally ramps back up. This might include sending email reminders about deliverable due dates, scheduling regular calls during the last month of the grant to help the grantee prepare a report for publication, and processing invoices and payments. Additional communication focuses on the final reports and deliverables.

D. Grantee Communication Challenges at CHCF

While CHCF’s ratings on the Grantee Perception Report related to both consistency and clarity of communications were statistically similar to or above those of other foundations, comments and suggestions from grantees indicated room for improvement in communication between staff and grantees. To identify opportunities for improvement, program officers and program assistants described the types of communications challenges they sometimes experience with grantees and provided examples of communication that are confusing to grantees. Although these are specific to CHCF, we present them here because other foundations might experience similar challenges.

According to program staff, communication problems can emerge when there are:

- *Multiple staff involved with a grantee.* This might occur when two or more program officers or teams are involved in the same grant and each are telling the grantee different

things, or when the grantee works with multiple program officers over various grants. In the latter instance, the grantee might experience confusion if the program officers operate differently or have different styles.

- ***Changing internal priorities and external environments.*** Sometimes the grant objectives, scope, timeline, and/or deliverables need to change midway through proposal development or the grant itself. This might occur at the idea stage of a project, when the concept is still evolving and there is a lot of back-and-forth communication between the program officer and grantee. Also, real-time policy issues in California can change quickly, resulting in CHCF asking the grantee to change what it is doing. These changes can result in grantee confusion and frustration, as well as a need for more effective communication between the grantee and CHCF staff.
- ***Inconsistencies in directing grantees to CHCF's resources and templates.*** Program officers' and assistants' use of grantee resources such as the foundation's proposal guidelines, letter of inquiry instructions, and final report template can be inconsistent. Moreover some staff create their own resources instead of using the sanctioned versions. These resources are provided as guides for staff and their use is not required; however, the inconsistent use of them appears to be a source of confusion in grantee communications.
- ***Unclear expectations about the time required for CHCF's publication process.*** Many CHCF-funded projects result in publications. At CHCF, this generally means that the foundation's Publishing and Communications Department works with the grantee to edit, revise, and graphically design the document to prepare it for publication. This may be a time-intensive process that involves many CHCF staff and consultants communicating with the grantee (e.g., program officer, communications staff, copy editors, and graphic designers). Sometimes this time required for this process is not clearly communicated with grantees during the proposal development phase.

Program staff also identified communications problems that can emerge from the grantee. For example:

- With large grantee organizations, the person who signs the contract is not always the person who manages the project. If the grantee organization lacks clear internal communication, the project manager is not always aware of the contract deliverables and expectations.
- Some grantees fail to use the reporting templates that are sent to them, submit incorrect invoices, are late with deliverables, and/or do not respond to CHCF calls or emails, resulting in increased and more difficult communication.
- When grantees submit poorly written deliverables, communication becomes more time-consuming and challenging.
- Occasionally, a grantseeker does not like what he hears from a program officer and goes directly to someone at a higher level within the foundation, hoping to get a different response.

- Sometimes grantees “put the funder on a pedestal” and read into what a program officer says without confirming it. An example given was a case when a program officer made a casual suggestion and the grantee believed that he was required to follow up on it.

We wondered whether some grantee communication challenges were due to conflicting information shared with grantees by program officers and assistants, so we explored this issue in particular. However, this does not appear to be a problem at CHCF. In fact, there appears to be a fairly clear division of labor between program officers’ and program assistants’ communication with grantees. Although each program officer/assistant relationship varies somewhat based on personal style and preferences, the role of the program assistant in communicating with applicants and grantees is primarily transactional (for example, confirming deliverable schedules; directing applicants to the Web site to find templates; and processing invoices).

We also examined the “Grants” section of the CHCF Web site, which is where grantseekers and grantees can find resources such as guidelines for proposals and report templates. While we did not conduct a Web site usability study, we did make the following observations:

- ***Overall CHCF’s Web site appears easy for grantees to navigate to find grantee resources and information, but improvements can be made.*** Using criteria suggested by one foundation in assessing Web site usability (Does it provide relevant content to the user, and is that content easy to find?), a review of CHCF’s Web site by this author results in an affirmative “yes” to both questions. Assuming grantees efficiently navigate the Web site, they are only one to three mouse clicks away from all of the characteristics of highly rated funding guidelines that exist on the site. A good deal of useful and practical information is also available for existing grantees, including report templates, financial and expense reports, style guidelines, and program area information.
- ***CHCF does not have one particular set of “published funding guidelines.”*** Instead, it has two different types of documents similar to funding guidelines: instructions for unsolicited Letters of Inquiry, and a list of questions for grantseekers to answer in the solicited Proposal Guidelines. It also has a well-organized and easy-to-find “Grants” section on its Web site (<http://www.chcf.org/grants>) that provides information on submitting solicited and unsolicited proposals, grantee resources, and frequently asked questions. (Updates to this section of the Web site have been made to incorporate key recommendations resulting from this project.)
- ***Additionally, CHCF does not incorporate all of the “characteristics of highly rated funding guidelines” identified by CEP.*** In the “Grants” section of its Web site CHCF fully incorporates two characteristics and partially incorporates three. Two additional characteristics are located elsewhere on the site and are easy to find.

II. Summary of Recommendations

Based on the key findings from our research, we have developed the following recommendations for foundations interested in improving their communication with grantees.

A. Internal Practices

- Consistently communicate a foundation’s goals and strategies through both written and verbal communication with applicants and grantees.
- Regularly discuss grantee communications challenges, best practices, and grantseeker feedback survey results at program team and staff meetings. Additionally:
 - Encourage regular meetings of program officer/program assistant teams to discuss the status of proposals, grants, and grantees.
 - Organize formal discussions for program assistants to share their strategies for successful grantee communications and to troubleshoot communications problems.
- Ensure program staff has adequate time and resources for consistent grantee communications and for building strong relationships with grantees.
- Incorporate grantee communications into staff performance appraisals.
- Conduct regular grantee satisfaction surveys to keep grantee experiences at the forefront and to track progress in making improvements.
- Pay special attention to communications measures that support grantee satisfaction and effective communication, as identified by the Center for Effective Philanthropy:

*Best predictors of overall grantee satisfaction with the foundation:*³

- Quality of interactions with foundation staff: fairness, responsiveness, and approachability;
- Clarity of communication of a foundation’s goals and strategy: clear and consistent articulation of objectives; and
- Expertise and external orientation of the foundation: understanding of fields and communities of funding and ability to advance knowledge and affect public policy.

*Best predictors of effective communication of foundation goals and strategy:*⁴

- Consistency among communications resources;
- Quality of interactions with staff: fairness, responsiveness, and approachability (this is also the first dimension listed above); and
- Selection and reporting/evaluation processes that are helpful to grantees.

*Essential in shaping grantees’ understanding of foundation’s goals and strategy:*⁵

- Individual communications, which should reinforce funding guidelines; and
- Funding guidelines, which should be as specific as possible.

B. Setting Up Grantees for Success

- Make sure program staff consistently direct grantseekers to grant guidelines, templates, and other resources designed to help grantees submit proposals and reports.
- Spend time talking with grantseekers about the following *before* the grant proposal is finalized: (1) the selection process and timeline; and (2) the foundation and the applicant’s expectations (such as for final deliverables, reporting, communication during the grant period).
- If multiple foundation staff will be working with the same grantee, be sure that they coordinate their communication and expectations, and represent a single voice from the foundation.
- Develop a grantee communication checklist for program staff. We’ve provided CHCF’s checklist in Section III and encourage you to use it and modify it for your needs.

C. Funding Guidelines, Grantee Resources, and Web Site Usability

- Compare your funding guidelines to the “characteristics of highly successful funding guidelines” developed by the Center for Effective Philanthropy and make adjustments as appropriate.
- Consider conducting a communications audit and/or Web site usability testing.
- Solicit grantee feedback when making improvements to funding guidelines and Web site.
- Ensure that funding guidelines and RFPs make a clear connection between the funding opportunity and the foundation’s goals and strategies.
- Make sure it is very easy for grantseekers to find information on your Web site about how to apply for a grant.

III. Grantee Communications Checklist

CHCF program staff were asked what tools might help them improve communication with grantees, such as training, grantee communications standards, or a grantee communications checklist. All six program officers who were interviewed indicated that a checklist would help them remember to review certain items with applicants and grantees, ensure consistency, and prevent problems during the course of the grant.

Based upon staff feedback, Putnam prepared “Set for Success: A Grantee Communications Checklist,” which is attached below. CHCF has begun piloting this checklist with staff, and initial feedback indicates that it has been useful, especially with new staff. CHCF encourages other foundations to review this checklist and, if useful, to adapt it for your own use.



Set for Success: A Grantee Communications Checklist

Name of Grantseeker/Grantee _____

Project Title _____ Date _____

This checklist is designed to:

- Remind program officers about important topics to discuss with applicants/grantees
- Establish clear expectations between you and the grantee
- Be used with all grantees, both previous and first-time

1. Concept and Proposal Phase

If this is a previous grantee, talk to the program officers who worked with them.

- What was their experience communicating with this grantee? Did they experience any difficulties? (e.g., grantee tends to be late with deliverables, contracts manager is different from the project manager, etc.)
- Any suggestions for how best to work with and communicate with them (e.g., helpful to schedule monthly check-in calls, be sure to always copy the assistant, etc.)

Discuss potential project and expectations with grantee. This might include:

- How project fits into CHCF's goals and objectives
- Scope, final product, outcome, and/or deliverables
- What factors might impact the scope and deadlines? (e.g., timeline must align with state budget process, complicated data collection methods, real-time policy changes might impact project direction, etc). If so, discuss expectations and possible scenarios.
- Realistic timeline
- Measuring and reporting on progress – performance indicators to track, availability of data, whether data will be made public, consideration of an external evaluation
- If there will be an external evaluation, make sure the grantee understands CHCF's commitment to share the results of evaluations and discuss any related concerns
- If project is in the idea stage be sure to contain expectations (e.g., if you are discussing it with several potential grantees)
- If CHCF is unlikely to fund the full project, work with the grantee to identify potential co-funders and to recruit them

Direct grantseeker to relevant templates for solicited proposals on CHCF Web site (cover letter, proposal template, budget template, tax ID info) at <http://www.chcf.org/grants>

- Discuss proposal submission and review process:**
 - Deadlines for submission
 - Proposal review process (e.g., who is involved in review, role of PRM and board, etc.)
 - Whether you plan to conduct a site visit
 - Decision-making process (How are decisions made? How long could it take for CHCF to make a decision? When can grantee expect to learn if grant approved?)
 - Do you anticipate any issues with the review and approval process? (e.g., if multiple CHCF teams are involved, if project doesn't easily fit into CHCF objectives). If so, discuss this with grantee.

- If the project may result in a CHCF publication, discuss expectations and implications for time and budget:**
 - Grantee can expect to be paired up with an editor early in the process
 - Grantee can expect to write three to four revisions before final version is approved
 - Grantee might be in communication with multiple people regarding the publication (program officer, editor, copyeditor, graphic designer)
 - Who is target audience? Ensure program officer and grantee are in agreement about the intended audience(s) for the publication – which is generally *not* CHCF
 - Direct grantseeker to CHCF Report Guidelines and Stylesheet at <http://www.chcf.org/grants/grantee-resources>
 - Be clear that CHCF has first right of refusal to publish the deliverable(s); and that if CHCF decides not to publish, the grantee organization may post it on its own Web site with the appropriate funding acknowledgment.

- If the project may result in a peer-reviewed journal publication, discuss implications:**
 - What journal(s) does grantee anticipate submitting to? See CHCF's Guide to Peer Reviewed Journals for ideas.
 - If you anticipate both CHCF and journal publications, how will this be handled? Consider both the content (material submitted for peer review cannot appear elsewhere prior to publication), and timing issues (it often takes many months for a submitted manuscript to be published)

- If the project may result in a policy briefing in Sacramento, consider implications:**
 - Consult with Sacramento staff on whether the project would benefit from a briefing
 - Will the project require additional deliverables and funds to cover related costs (e.g. slide deck, handouts, or travel to Sacramento)?
 - Grantee will need to coordinate with P&C to ensure any deliverables will be ready for briefing

2. Award Phase

- Review scope of work, deadlines, deliverables, and payment schedule with grantee.** Make sure to discuss this with the person who is actually managing this project.
 - Discuss reporting expectations and deadlines. Refer grantee to progress report and final report templates (if they will be used) at <http://www.chcf.org/grants/grantee-resources>. If you have different reporting requirements, explain this to grantee.
 - Refer grantee to templates as needed: Financial report, invoice, expense report, and guidelines for evaluation reports at <http://www.chcf.org/grants/grantee-resources>.

- Discuss needs and expectations for communication between you and the grantee:**
 - How often do you want to be in communication (e.g., as needed, bi-weekly calls)?
 - If regular calls/meetings are scheduled, is the grantee responsible for developing agendas and taking notes? Who should participate? (e.g., other CHCF staff, staff at grantee organization, consultants)
 - Will you need to be involved in other aspects of the grant? (e.g., attending meetings or conferences sponsored by grantee under this grant, helping grantee identify interviewees or TA providers, reviewing preliminary findings, participating in an advisory group, etc.)
 - Role of the program assistant
 - Encourage grantee to contact you as needed to discuss project, concerns, if deliverable will be late, etc.

- Send grantee any project-related documents you might have that could be useful for their project/proposal (e.g., related reports, articles, data, names of potential interviewees, etc.)**

3. During the Grant Period

- Monitor grant progress on a regular basis:**
 - Check in with grantee as needed to assess progress, discuss potential problems/delays. Do you need to schedule more/less frequent communication?
 - Remind grantee of key deliverable and report deadlines as needed, and send/resend reporting templates
 - Review and respond to deliverables in a timely way
 - If multiple CHCF teams are involved in the grant, communicate with your CHCF colleagues regularly
 - If project includes a CHCF publication, ensure the grantee has style guidelines and that the editor assigned by P&C receives the first draft of the product
 - If the project is an external evaluation, ensure that the evaluator conducts a round of review with grantees and partners on the final report

- Disseminate results:** Work with grantee to ensure that the grant products are disseminated to the appropriate audiences.

4. As Grant Period Ends

- As grant nears completion, assess opportunities for renewal or additional funding, and discuss with grantee as appropriate.**

- Debrief with grantee:** Review final report, discuss what worked, what could have been done better, barriers/challenges, ways to improve program officer-grantee communication, etc.

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Appendix: Methodology

The findings and recommendations presented in this report are based upon Internet search, literature review, in-person interviews with CHCF staff, phone interviews with seven foundations, a review of CHCF Web site design and navigation as it relates to information for grantees, and a review of CHCF's funding guidelines and other documents and templates provided to applicants and grantees for use in proposal submission and report writing.

It is worth noting that CHCF chose not to conduct an extensive scan of the field as part of this project. We learned a great deal from the foundations we interviewed, but there are certainly many other foundations with effective grantee communications practices whose experiences were not able to be included this document.

A. Internet Search and Literature Review

Putnam posted several online queries seeking information about: (1) foundations that do a terrific job communicating with applicants/grantees via Web site, funding guidelines, and program officer communications; (2) examples of documents, tools, checklists, trainings, standards, etc., that outline foundation expectations for grantee communications (aids a foundation would use internally to help staff understand expectations for grantee communications); and (3) reports, articles, etc., that describe best practices in foundation-grantee communications.

These queries were posted:

- On the listservs of the Communications Network, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, Grants Management Network, and the National Network of Consultants to Grantmakers;
- As a question emailed to the author's LinkedIn connections who have self-identified as working in the field of philanthropy (approximately 150 individuals); and
- As a tweet sent to the author's Twitter followers (approximately 3,000 individuals).

Additionally, a Google search was conducted to identify relevant information, using the following key words:

- “grantee communication,” “grantee communication standards,” “grantee communication checklist,” “grantee communication guidelines,” “grantee communication practice,” “grantee communication”+“best practice”
- “applicant communication,” “applicant communication standards,” “applicant communication checklist,” “applicant communication guidelines,” “applicant communication”+“best practice”
- “grantseeker communication,” “grant seeker communication”
- “funding guidelines”, “funding guidelines”+“best practice”
- “Website navigation”+foundation, “Website navigation”+philanthropy, “Website design”+foundation, “Website design”+philanthropy, “Website usability”+foundation, “Website usability”+philanthropy, “Website navigation”+ “best practice”, “Website design”+ “best practice”

Based on this Internet search, approximately 16 relevant documents (reports, articles, PowerPoint presentations, etc.) were obtained and reviewed.

B. CHCF Staff Interviews

In-person interviews were conducted with six CHCF senior program officers and three program assistants. The purpose of these interviews was to better understand program staff communications with grantees, including the roles of program officers versus program assistants, CHCF's strengths and challenges with grantee communications, use of CHCF templates such as the funding guidelines, and recommendations for improvement.

The staff interviewed were:

1. Veenu Aulakh, Senior Program Officer
2. Nandi Brown, Program Assistant
3. Helen Duhe, Program Assistant
4. Jan Eldred, Senior Program Officer
5. Len Finocchio, Senior Program Officer
6. Robbin Gaines, Senior Program Officer
7. David O'Neill, Senior Program Officer
8. Glenda Pacha, Program Assistant
9. Chris Perrone, Senior Program Officer

C. Other Funder Interviews

Phone interviews were conducted with staff from seven foundations to learn more about their strategies for clear and consistent grantee communications and useful funding guidelines. These foundations were:

1. David and Lucile Packard Foundation
2. Doris Duke Charitable Trust
3. Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust
4. St. Paul Community Foundation
5. The Wallace Foundation
6. Connecticut Health Foundation
7. McKnight Foundation

Of the seven foundations interviewed, three were identified by the Center for Effective Philanthropy as foundations that had scored well in communications measures on their most

recent Grantee Perception Reports. The remaining four foundations were identified through the Internet search as foundations with potentially strong grantee communications practices. Interviewed staff held senior leadership positions in communications and/or programs. The Funder Interview Guide is available upon request from the author.

The staff interviewed were:

1. Claire Baralt, Communications Officer, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
2. Claire Chang, Associate Vice President of Grants and Program, The Saint Paul Foundation
3. Betsy Fader, Chief Program Officer, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
4. Jane Ferguson, Director, Communications & External Relations, Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust
5. Monette Goodrich, VP of Communications & Public Affairs, Connecticut Health Foundation
6. Tim Hanrahan, Communications Director, The McKnight Foundation
7. Lucas Held, Director of Communications, The Wallace Foundation
8. David Kennedy-Logan, Communications Production Manager, The McKnight Foundation
9. Stephanie McAuliffe, Director of Organizational Effectiveness, The David & Lucile Packard Foundation
10. Ed Pauly, Director of Research & Evaluation, The Wallace Foundation

D. Examination of CHCF Results on GPR Communications Measures

We reviewed all the Grantee Perception Report measures, and identified 20 that were related to grantee communication. We carefully examined CHCF's results on each measure: its overall score, its percentile ranking, how it compared to all funders, and how it compared to its cohort funders.

Additionally, we reviewed comments provided by grantees in two open-ended questions on the GPR that related to grantee communications.

E. Review of CHCF Grantee Documents and Web Site Design and Navigation

Funding documents and other resources available to grantees on the CHCF Web site were reviewed, as were the design and navigation of the site. Additionally, CHCF's funding guidelines were compared to ten common characteristics of highly rated funding guidelines developed by the Center for Effective Philanthropy. Additionally, highly rated funding guidelines from the foundations we interviewed were reviewed.

Endnotes

¹ Coffman, Julia. *Strategic Communications Audits*. Communications Consortium Media Center. 2004.

² Buteau, Ellie, Buchanan, Phil, and Chu, Timothy. *Working with Grantees: The Keys to Success and Five Program Officers Who Exemplify Them*. The Center for Effective Philanthropy, Cambridge, MA. 2010.

³ Boduc, Kevin, Buchanan, Phil, and Huang, Judy. *Listening to Grantees: What Nonprofits Value in Their Foundation Funders*. The Center for Effective Philanthropy, Cambridge MA, 2004.

⁴ Huang, Judy. *Foundation Communications: The Grantee Perspective*. The Center for Effective Philanthropy, Cambridge MA, 2006.

⁵ Huang, Judy. *Foundation Communications: The Grantee Perspective*. The Center for Effective Philanthropy, Cambridge MA, 2006.