

TRANSPARENCY &
ACCOUNTABILITY
INITIATIVE

COVID-19 Monitor

Transparency, Civic Participation, and Accountability
During and Beyond COVID-19

Funder Voices and Responses

Issue 2
September 2020



What Can We Learn from Funder Voices and Responses?

What We Listened for in this Issue

COVID-19 Monitor content, sourced by issue theme, addresses accountability relationships or actions, a non-U.S. region or country, and/or funder role or practice.

The “Who”: Funder actors (bi-lateral, community foundation/intermediary, private foundation)

The “What”: Funder practices (financial, non-financial)

Defining the Terms

TPA = transparency, civic participation, and accountability

Funder actors = Institutions or organizations and their staff that provide financial (and other) resources to governments or organizations to pursue development or other social change outcomes

Funder practices = financial and/or non-financial funder support offered in the form of money and/or non-monetary contributions

TPA actors = types of non-state TPA organizations or associated individual actors

Sources

How much content did we analyze?

97 pieces - produced between February and August 2020

See resources we used for coding and analysis [here](#).

In what languages did we read the content?

Predominantly in English; one piece in Spanish, and one in English and Spanish*
* While we are reading content mainly in English, we recognize authors are writing in other languages, too.

What type of content was it?

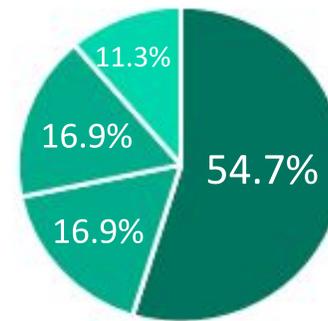
Analysis, Descriptive, Opinion, Research

Who did we hear from?

Funders, civil society and media are all writing about funder responses.

Private foundations are the most prominent type of funder authors.

- Funder private
- Funder bilateral
- Funder other
- Funder multilateral



Headline: Show me the money

Overall, there are far more references to financial vs non-financial practices (regardless of author type - funder, civil society, media).

Among all authors, private funders are most vocal on non-financial practices

Civil society authors focused almost exclusively on financial over non-financial practices.



What We are Hearing around Funder Financial Practices

Financial practices discussed ranged from how or how much funding is distributed.

Content centered around launching **new grants or funds**, including rapid response or emergency funding and some collaborative or pooled funds.

Another common theme was calls for / commitments to **flexibility in grant type** (project to core support) or grant requirements and hastening grant dispersals.

Content also touched on core issues around **philanthropic financial models**.

There were few instances of **increased annual spending** through living donor contribution or issuing bonds.

More concerns were noted with **philanthropic endowments** (size and payout levels) and models (perpetuity vs spend-down)

TPA actors working on taxation take note: there was one non-US instance of corporate foundation giving up non-profit status to become tax-paying entity.

What We are Hearing around Funder Non-financial Practices

Signals we heard from greater to lower frequency:



Stronger: Increasing engagement: listening activities to hear from grantee partners; network building with funder or broader social sector communities

Stronger: Sharing knowledge /expertise: availability and accessibility of tools, information, and technical expertise for partners; resource guides on grant proposals; COVID business survival programs, platforms to share expertise



Weaker: Supporting advocacy: statements of solidarity or amplification of partner work; calls for policy reform; calls for funders to take positions/prioritize systems change approach

Weaker: Adapting strategy: funder shifts to COVID response or system change approach; supporting grantee strategic or programmatic shifts

What We are Hearing around Funder Practices in Relation to TPA Actors



Stronger: Civil society actors and organizations (type, volume, and timeliness of funding; need for support with programmatic and operational challenges and remote work)



Weaker: Grassroots organizations and social movements
Weaker: Corporate actors and social enterprises



What We are Hearing around Funder Practices in TPA and Development Sectors

Development sectors are discussed more often than TPA sectors in the context of funder practices.

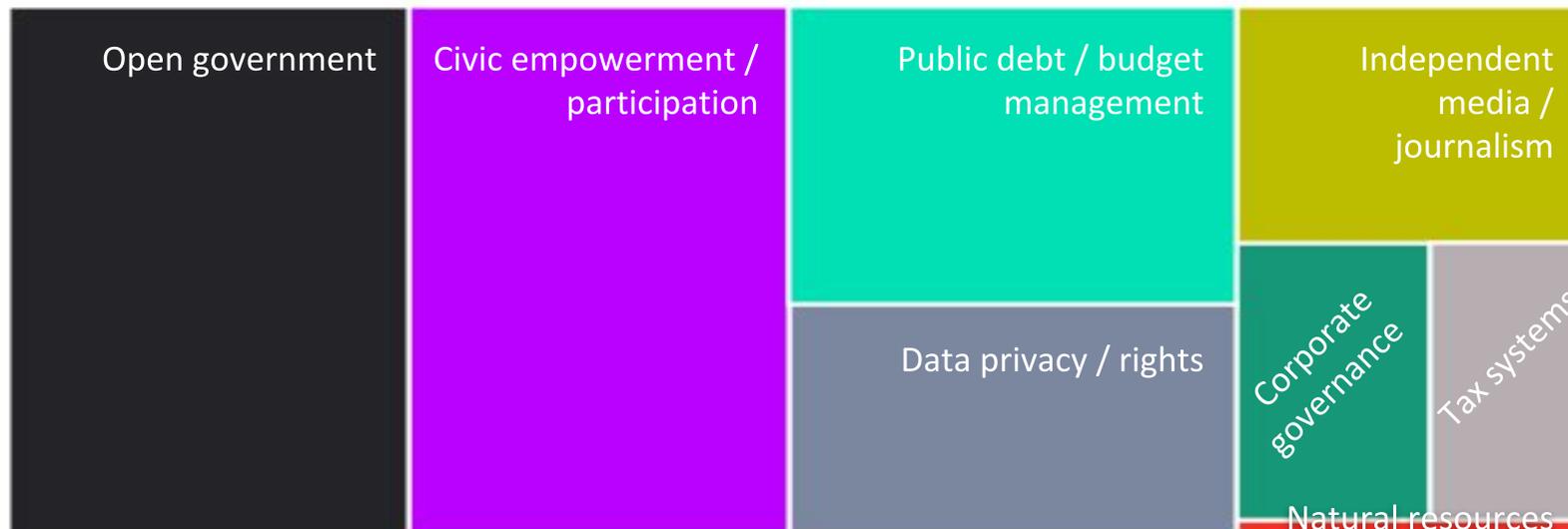
Unsurprisingly, **health** is the most referenced development sector followed by economic and humanitarian pandemic relief, including funding targeting front-line needs and flexible and timely distribution of funds.

Open government and **civic empowerment and participation** were most prominent in relation to both financial and non-financial practices. This relates to the need to maintain funding in these areas despite the urgency to divest funds to emergency relief and health responses.

What Actors and Issues are Funders Focusing On?

Unsurprisingly, funders overwhelmingly referenced **TPA grantee partners**

Open government and **civic empowerment** are most referenced sectors across funder authors.



Do Public and Private Funder Voices Differ?

Private funders are most vocal by far on public debt / budget management and then data privacy / rights.

Private and bilateral funders are focused on similar sectors: open government and civic empowerment and participation and, albeit less frequently, on independent media / journalism.

When discussing **civic participation / empowerment**, private funders emphasized the importance of inclusion of vulnerable groups. Bilateral actors were more general in advocating for political participation.

On **open government**, there is a shared focus among private and bilateral funders on protecting democratic norms and fighting corruption as states take on greater power amidst the pandemic.



TAI's Take: Secretariat Reflections

Emerging threats and opportunities for TPA goals and sector

How We Fund - Optimizing impact of thematic portfolios

- Rethink of financial models (for funders and grantee organizations)
- Implications for funding relationship (between funders and grantee organizations). New way of [learning and adapting](#) emerging for funders
- Funder purpose - lines blurring between internal practice and external systems (opportunity for a new [theory of philanthropy](#))

What We Fund - Reinforcing effective grantmaker practice

- Impressive funder commitment and action to funding flexibility and strategic adaptation but there is a need to reconcile tension between immediate needs and long-term TPA challenges and systems change goals in coming years
- Evolving assumptions and shifts in how TPA problems are framed: e.g., [failure of the state](#) or [collapse of capitalism](#), will (re)shape how desired outcomes are conceived/evaluated. Need for funder transparency and accountability for adaptation in funder practices and any near-term grantee budget shortfalls.

Funder Landscape - Expanding and enhancing funder connections

Foster funder partnerships (global networks and policy vs community or place-based connections) for collaborative or pooled funding and long-term planning and investment.

Specific examples of collaboration referenced:

- Make joint pledges on strategy
- Recommend convenings and conferences to each other in order to build relationships and align funding activities
- Share information with other funders by writing about priority or process changes

We Want to Hear from You

Tell us how you are using the *Monitor* on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#)

See resources we used for coding and analysis [here](#).

Stay tuned

Issue 3 to cover **TPA-relevant research and evidence around COVID-19**

TAI COVID-19 Monitor and Collaborative Learning

Why? Based on TAI strategic learning themes outlined in our [2020-2024 strategy](#), provide structured, bird's eye view of content for reflection and action on medium- and longer-term opportunities to advance transparency, participation, and accountability (TPA) during and beyond the pandemic.

What? Brief monthly synthesis of TPA-relevant responses to COVID-19 and emerging research and evidence from peers and practitioners, with Secretariat qualitative analysis and reflections.

Who? As a member-serving funder collaborative, TAI's primary audience is comprised of our members. We also aim for the COVID-19 Monitor to be a public good for other funders, funder collaboratives, and practitioners pursuing TPA outcomes.

Producing and Using the TAI COVID-19 Monitor

TAI works with a small team of researchers using an established [framework to code](#) public and grey qualitative content, including but not limited to blogs, articles, or event summaries. Analysis is based on the characteristics of content reviewed and the code frequencies, code co-occurrences, and qualitative data of the content reviewed.

Offering both opportunities and facing limitations, this information:

Aims to
Provide structure to disparate content and perspectives
Offer a starting point for learning and action

Does not aim to
Be representative of any one or collective voice or experience
Ensure rigid coding reliability or provide solutions for action



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