

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?

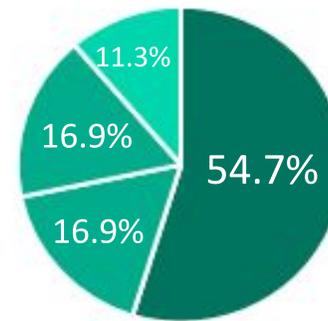
Analysis, Descriptive, Opinion, Research

## 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

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## 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.

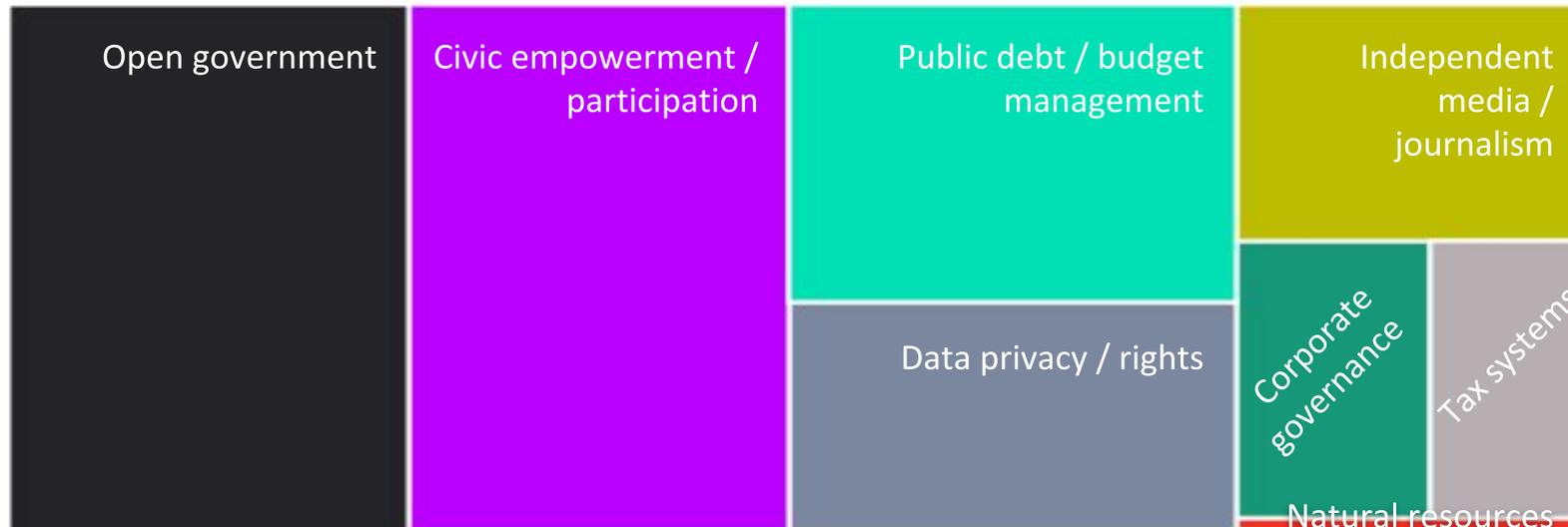
Unsurprisingly, **health** is the most referenced development sector followed by economic and humanitarian pandemic relief, including funding targeting front-line needs and flexible and timely distribution of funds.

**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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