

CENTER ON NONPROFITS AND PHILANTHROPY

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Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Concerning Effective Philanthropy

In recent years, government, media, the public, funders, and researchers have dramatically increased their level of attention to performance and accountability in the nonprofit sector. One part of this development is a growing concern with improving the effectiveness of philanthropic foundations' grantmaking. If efforts to strengthen philanthropy are to be effective, however, they must be informed by reliable data on the current state of the field. Such data, unfortunately, are not currently available.

To remedy this critical gap in our knowledge, the Urban Institute is conducting a major study of foundation attitudes and practices concerning effective philanthropy. The research was designed with input from the leadership of Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, a network of over 600 grantmaking organizations, and funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. Central questions being asked by the *Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Concerning Effective Philanthropy* study include:

- How do foundations today define “effective” philanthropy?
- What practices do they use to increase their effectiveness?
- What are the major influences on foundation attitudes and practices concerning effective philanthropy?
- What obstacles to achieving greater effectiveness do foundations encounter and how are they overcome?

To create a rich and broad portrait of effective philanthropy, the study will gather information through multiple methods that include a national survey of foundations, personal interviews with foundation staff and leaders, and case studies of individual foundations. The resulting portrait will:

- Advance the field's discussion of effectiveness, by clarifying the concept of “effectiveness,” recognizing that it has multiple components and usages.
- Provide foundation staff and leaders with a detailed overview of how their peers strive for more effective grantmaking, including practices that may be useful in their own efforts.
- Identify and analyze variations and commonalities in orientations, practices, needs, and challenges as they relate to effective philanthropy. The study will explore how attitudes and practices differ among funders depending on such variables as the size of the institution, the issue(s) supported, or its geographic location. Attention to variation will allow users of the

study to develop strategies to strengthen philanthropy that are sensitive to grantmakers' potentially diverse needs and goals.

- Provide benchmark data that can be used to track changes in foundation practices over time in order to assess the impact of efforts to strengthen philanthropy.
- Allow those seeking to foster more effective philanthropy to identify and target their efforts on areas of greatest need.

Study results will be widely disseminated as they become available.

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