

Change Up Your Questions

Practicing Your Values & Vision as a Funder

A Resource from CAPITAL PHILANTHROPY

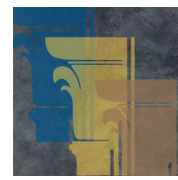
WORKBOOK AND GUIDE

This document is divided into three sections **1) Exploring Who You Are as a Funder** **2) Exploring Your Nonprofit Partners** and **3) Exploring the World in which Your Nonprofit Partners Operate**. They do not necessarily have to be completed in the order presented. “*Change up Your Questions*” is designed to be useful and thought-provoking, encouraging you to explore things about yourself as well as the partners you support. Additionally, the sections do not have to be completed all at once or within a specific timeframe in order. You can review the entire document, then tackle different sections over the course of a few weeks or months.

And while these questions and tasks can be managed independently, engaging with Capital Philanthropy to help facilitate these steps will greatly enhance the process. Contact information is at the end of this document.



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Section 1. Exploring Who You Are as a Funder

Area of Consideration

What is your guiding purpose?

Mission framework and/or mission statement

Review mission framework and/or mission statement. Identify examples where the mission has shaped or influenced current practices and application materials.

Foundation founders or initial donors

Assess how documents or materials reflect the goals of the foundation's founders or initial donors. Identify materials that specifically refer to founder. Identify materials that should refer to founder but do not.

Mission impact on grantmaking practices

Consider how the mission continues to shape grantmaking practices, application process, or evaluation. How is the mission reflected in the specific questions asked in the application or information gathered through the application? Take note of whether and how the mission informs your decision-making process.

Area of Consideration

What's important to you? What are your values?

Effective partner relationships

Examine characteristics, and attributes that describe your most effective relationships. Identify specific examples among current grantee partners.

Organizational values

Assess the values that shape decision making: Are they personal values rooted in your upbringing? Should they be lifted up as models? Review your values statement, if in place. Or identify three to four specific values that typically guide decision making. Note whether your values expressed as ideals ("Equity") or mandates ("Be open to learning").

Impact of values

Evaluate how values are reflected both in your practices as well as in how you identify whether those values are present among your nonprofit partners. Are there questions or parts of the application process that help you identify whether these same critical values are present in your grantee partners?

Area of Consideration

What are your beliefs? What is your history?

Choices and basic assumptions

Examine the choices/basic assumptions built into grant-making decisions, or how they impact assessment of potential partnerships. Identify/articulate those key beliefs, individually and as a group. Explore how those beliefs play out in your work. Articulate (and challenge) the underlying assumptions.

Basic philosophies

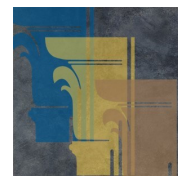
Identify fundamental beliefs or core principles on which you will not compromise. (If you were to turn away from these, your core identity could be at risk.) How do these shape your priorities; do your practices and processes start from the same place?

Unintended or unappreciated consequences

Examine how your beliefs and assumptions in the past may have led to unintended or unappreciated consequences with regard to social justice, equity, or inclusion. Reflect as a group and individually how you might respond to these consequences in the short term and long term.

Values and beliefs—Lived out practices

Explore how your values and beliefs are lived out in various practices, assessing whether anything needs to be reviewed/changed. Review the scope and type of research/homework you undertake when getting to know potential grantees. How do you solicit feedback from grantees and how do you act on such feedback?



Section 1. Exploring Who You Are as a Funder (cont.)

Types of support provided	Examine the types of support you provide. Review how grants are structured – annually, multi-year, unrestricted, project-based, etc. Do you provide assistance to grantees beyond the check? If so, what types of support do you provide? What else could be offered?
Transparency and openness	Are you being open and transparent regarding your approach and process, and about your own journey as a funder? Review how you speak to others about your work and your journey – to whom, in what context, through which channels, etc.

Specific tasks you might consider going forward:

- Formally review/refresh your Mission Statement, especially if it's been more than 5 years.
- Review and edit your materials – website, application, impact reports, etc. - that need a clearer link to your ideals, ensuring that all reflect your mission, especially if the Mission Statement is being revised/refreshed.
- Create a place in materials or on your website where your “ideal” partner is described – expectations, actions, communication, etc. Ensure that the qualities of an “ideal” partnership are discussed if you host a webinar (or other orientation) for potential applications.
- Review/refresh your Values Statement, especially if it's been more than 5 years. Or consider creating one.
- Identify (and edit as needed) specific places in the application materials where your values are reflected through the way a question is asked or in the materials requested from grantees.
- Consider adding application questions or creating a set of questions that can be asked during a conversations with the nonprofit that identify whether a nonprofit's values mirror/align with yours.
- If challenging discussions are held regarding unintended consequences and past actions, identify a specific way to share the story of that discussion with grantees and the community.
- Revise how you learn about your partners and the issues on which they focus. Ensure that grants managers are provided opportunities to learn and build their understanding of key issues.
- Build in the ability to adjust/change/update grantmaking practices based on learnings from the field, feedback received from grantee partners, and board member discernment.
- Develop a process through which you assess the opportunity to update your grantmaking, such as employing multi-year grants, or clearly articulating for grantees the support you provide beyond the grant.

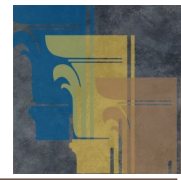
Section 2. Exploring Your Nonprofit Partners

<i>Area of Consideration</i>	How do the management practices of grantees align with your values and guiding principles?
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Management practices – How they conduct their ongoing business, work and programs.

Assess your overall knowledge and understanding of basic nonprofit management practices.

Do your partners understand the link between sound management practices and the capacity to achieve the mission? How do they demonstrate that? How do you identify characteristics and management practices during the evaluation process. Do these practices come up during the evaluation/ deliberation conversations or is the lack of some practices a roadblock?

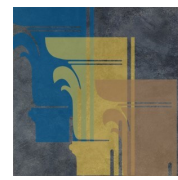


Section 2. Exploring Your Nonprofit Partners (cont.)

Management philosophy – The approach the nonprofit’s leaders take in managing the organization.	How do your grantee partners approach managing the organization? Whom do they engage? How do they model best practice behavior? Is this approach shared throughout the organization? How do they support their employees? Is staff wellbeing and mental health a priority for this organization?
Relationships with other organizations, stakeholders and the community at large.	How do your partners interact with other organizations in their ecosystem, stakeholders, and the community at large. How does it view collaboration, competition, and its own distinctiveness?
Expertise and Experience within your nonprofit partners	What do the teams at your partners bring to the table? What skills and background are they deploying to make an impact on their cause or issue? How do they leverage their human capital in their work?
Understanding the nonprofit experience	How well do you/your board understand the basics of nonprofit organization management? What is their level of experience with working with community-based nonprofits?

<i>Area of Consideration</i>	How do your grantees think of themselves?
Self Awareness	<p>Are your grantee partners <u>Self-Aware</u>? Do they know how they fit into their ecosystem? Are they connected to their founding principles while keeping their eyes on future opportunities? Can they articulate their core competencies?</p> <p>Are they <u>Self-Confident</u>? Are they able to describe their strengths as and their shortcomings? Do they understand what makes them special?</p> <p>Are they <u>Selfless</u> in their interactions with others? Do they share best practices and learnings with other organizations? Do they collaborate often, with a sense of openness and appreciation?</p> <p>Discuss how these qualities may be important to you. Explore the extent to which these characteristics make grantees better partners. As critical qualities are identified, review how you will learn about these from your grantee partners.</p>
Self Confidence	
Selflessness	

<i>Area of Consideration</i>	What has changed and what has remained constant with your grantee partners?
Constants and Evolution	Discuss how grantee partners are changing and how they are staying the same. Review grantees broadly, and consider reviewing specific grantees with whom you’ve had a long-time relationship. Use surveys, focus groups, or one-on-one conversations to gather outside perspective.
Reactions to Change	Are applicants are fundamentally different now than they were a few years ago? Articulate the fundamental changes seen in your grantees over the past several years and take note of your reactions: pleased, inspired, discouraged, confused, anxious, etc.
Stuck in the Past or Looking Forward	Identify your own practices, procedures that might be rooted in the past but which might not be in alignment with current practice among your grantees. Hold an open discussion about past practices that have appropriately evolved over time as well as those which have not changed but probably should.



Section 2. Exploring Your Nonprofit Partners (cont.)

Area of Consideration	Be prepared to be inspired by your grantee partners.
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Interesting, inspiring, or thought-provoking responses to questions posed in the grant application

Build in time at decision-making meetings to identify and review inspirational, insightful, or provocative responses from grantee partners. Discuss your reactions, explore what further inquiry these might suggest.

Explore whether the underlying issues raised through interesting or thought-provoking responses warrant a broader look and a potential addition into the review process.

Awards, certification, and recognitions

Identify if grantees have sought and won awards, recognition, certifications that set them apart. Learn about the steps they took to reach those achievements.

Discuss the extent to which awards, certifications, accreditations, prizes, etc. that a grantee partner has achieved affect your decision-making process. If these do impact the decision-making process, assess how such information is requested from your partners.

Area of Consideration	Review your grant portfolio.
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Portfolio Review

Routinely review your grant portfolio to ensure they reflect your current priorities and relationships can be managed appropriately by staff (or trustees).

Strategically review and analyze grantee portfolio along multiple lines – issue area, population served, number of years supported, grant levels, grant types, etc. Use the analysis to guide board-level conversations.

Portfolio Management

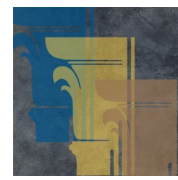
What happens when a grantee no longer fits into your priorities or approach? Discuss decision-making process for managing grantee partners that should be transitioned out of the portfolio.

Process for New Grantees

Identify how/whether you would entertain proposals from organizations not currently in your portfolio. Discuss current application process – open or invitation-only. Assess pros and cons of each approach.

Specific tasks you might consider going forward:

- Craft specific questions addressing management practices for either the application or conversations held with grantees. Use these to establish decision-making guides for your evaluation conversations.
- Identify specific characteristics that make grantees especially suitable partners. As qualities are identified, identify how you will learn about these from your grantee partners and how you will communicate their importance to you in your materials.
- Routinely identify what has changed recently with grantees. Review grantees broadly, also consider reviewing long-term grantees. Use surveys, focus groups, or conversations to gather this information.
- Specify the steps that will be taken to address practices and procedures that might be rooted in the past but which might not be in alignment with current practice among your grantees.
- Maintain a “bank” of interesting, inspirational, thought-provoking, or insightful responses from grantees. Explore adapting such responses into a “test” question or introduce a line of inquiry into an upcoming grant cycle. Assess the responses from future applicants, see if they spark the same reaction.



Section 2. Exploring Your Nonprofit Partners (cont.)

- Enable grantees to identify awards, recognition, certifications, etc. they've achieved in the past 12 months. Learn about the steps they took to reach those achievements.
- Develop a consistent, compassionate process for engaging with and releasing grantee partners who no longer fit into your priorities, or with whom the relationship is not fulfilling expectations.
- Identify a potential process for reviewing proposals (or inquiries) from new organizations.

Section 3. Exploring the World in which Your Nonprofit Partners Operate

Area of Consideration

How has the ecosystem changed?

Explore how the world in which grantees operate has shifted or changed – issues, funding landscape, clients, competition, etc. Assess how your grantmaking has or has not changed during these shifts.

Reach out to local resources – community foundation, local nonprofit management resource center, regional grantmakers' associations, etc. – to learn about shifts in the community or the sector. What are the sources to which your grantees turn for intelligence and updates. Are any of these new to you?

Catalog the content-specific resources to which you routinely turn for guidance; assess for potential updates or changes.

Area of Consideration

What are the “signs of the times?”

Identify characteristics, qualities, etc. exhibited by organizations that might be emblematic of the changing times. Review how those changes may or may not affect your grantmaking strategies.

Review local, regional and national think tanks to see how they are talking about societal trends, both exciting and troubling.

Explore the shifts in the political climate – local, regional, national or international – that might affect the sector and your grantees.

Area of Consideration

Diversity, equity and inclusion

How are issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion used as a lens through which you view all of your actions? How has your board and/or staff discussed the implications of the power dynamic that exists between funders and nonprofits?

Are matters related to DEI incorporated into who you are as a funder, not just what you do?

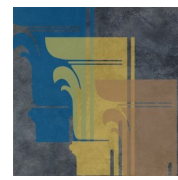
Has the question “Who might be excluded or who might not be best served by [this action or decision], even if inadvertently?” ever surfaced during a decision-making discussion?

Area of Consideration

Work with innovative tools to support better grantsmanship.

Review the Trust-based Philanthropy Project's guiding principles of practice, exploring practices you are already doing or identifying opportunities for the future.

Get connected to national organizations such as the National Center for Family Philanthropy (NCFP), Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), Exponent Philanthropy, the Center for Effective Philanthropy, and regional grantmaker associations to develop and strengthen peer networks and learning opportunities.



Section 3. Exploring the World in which Your Nonprofit Partners Operate (cont.)

Area of Consideration

Stay updated on trends, changes, and evolution in the issue areas you seek to address through your funding.

Are you reviewing the latest literature, research or papers highlighting changes in your target field/issue/community; this may have shifted since your funding guidelines were developed?

Have you sought input from content experts, or brought them in to address your board or review your application questions and guidelines for relevancy.

If you engage nonprofit partners to help guide or inform future grantmaking, especially their senior leaders, how are you being mindful of how that might impact their capacity to manage their organization?

Specific tasks you might consider going forward:

- Establish a centralized, shared location into which you routinely keep articles, resources, reports, etc. Make it available to staff and board. Periodically review the content to keep it updated.
- Consider setting aside a portion of your board meetings for “community briefings.” Invite an outside speaker or review some newly published research that might cause you to adjust your grantmaking.
- Establish a process for keeping on top of trends and changes in the sector. Identify ways that you can be responsive to the times and the real-time issues faced by your grantee partners while being sure there are guidelines in place to ensure your practices align with your overall purpose.
- Commit to ensuring that DEI becomes an ongoing and sustained way through which you do all of your work. Foster an environment where it’s permissible to ask questions, challenge assumptions, and name moments when you might be missing the mark.
- Ensure that time and financial resources are set aside to enable staff and board to participate in conferences, webinars, training, and other activities that strengthen their ability to perform their duties.
- Consider hosting a roundtable or some sort of in-person gathering at which you convene representatives of your grantee partners to learn about issues and their work. Ensure that such gatherings are outside/separate from the grant evaluation process. Ensure that grantees do not feel pressured to participate, and if their involvement reaches a certain threshold, have a compensation process in place to support those nonprofit leaders.



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