WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST

Innovation and creativity in grant making & management in North America

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BBC Children in Need

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About me

BBC Children in Need is the BBC's UK corporate charity. We are a donor dependent funder, raising money via our annual telethon. Our vision is that every child in the UK has a childhood which is safe, happy and secure and allows them the chance to reach their potential. We provide grants to both small and large organisations to fund projects in the UK which focus on children and young people who are disadvantaged.

My role at BBC Children in Need is Regional Officer for the East of England. This involves providing a leadership, management and support function for the regional grant-making and grant management process. The purpose of my role is to support our vision to enable even more effective and sustainable positive change for disadvantaged children and young people in the UK. A large focus of my role is relationship building and management, working closely with my portfolio of funded projects and potential applicants. I am interested in how funders make and manage grants and in particular whether our processes and cultures as funders could be improved to better support grantees. Prior to working for BBC Children in Need I worked as a Project Manager for a small, local charity. I am passionate about the sector, having been both a grant recipient and a funder I endeavour to use this experience to inform my work and to remind me of the practicalities and challenges of non-profit delivery.

Glossary of definitions

Creativity

Processes or practices that transcend traditional ideas or practices that in turn leads to the creation of new practices, ideas, and methods.

Funders

Broad based definition referring to organisations (Including trusts, foundations and corporate funders) that are focused on giving away money, often via grants for the benefit of others.

Funding and grants

The funders I met with give grants, some in addition to other forms of funding and investment. I have highlighted where I am referring to other types of non-grant funding where relevant.

General operating support

Number of terms used to describe this including core costs, overheads or day to day operational costs. I am referring to costs outside of specific programmes or projects.

Innovation

I have taken the definition that this is the introduction of changes, new ideas, devices, methods or processes to affect positive change whether large or small in scale.

Non-profit

There are a number of terms used to describe the sector and its organisations including (but not exhaustive) - voluntary, community, charitable, civic, civil, social, not-for-profit, non-profit, for purpose, beyond profit and third sector. With understanding of the differences and nuances of these terms, in this report I settled on this terms which is generally understood across both geographic locations, to describe the sector and its organisations (encompassing a range of institutions focused on making a social or societal difference rather than being focused on profit).

North America

I use the term North America to refer to the USA and Canada for the purpose of this report. I am not referring to the entire continent of North America. My research focused on philanthropy in the USA and Canada. The majority of funders and organisations I met with were US based but I used research and resources from both countries. Whilst Canadian philanthropy may be smaller in terms of number and size compared to the USA the sector there includes a range of examples of innovation. I use the term North America with the understanding of the significant differences between the two countries.

Philanthropy

Referring to the sector including funders, community foundations and philanthropic infrastructure organisations (Including networks, membership organisations and governing bodies) whose are focused on the issue and/or give money away, most commonly via grants for the benefit of others. I am not referring to individual giving in this report.

Philanthropic infrastructure organisations

This includes membership organisations and networks that support funders through research, making connections, help them to look at key issues, drive best practice and facilitate the work of the philanthropy sector.

Proactive and responsive funding

The report will use the following definitions:

- Proactive funders- those who are mainly focused on seeking out non-profit organisations to grant to, usually with closed, invitation only programmes.
- Responsive funders - those who respond to applications via grant rounds.

As such these are basic definitions for what is ultimately a spectrum of funding. Both proactive and responsive funders may have focused strategies and aims; both may have grant programmes and grant rounds and both may deliver outreach and research to identify suitable potential grantees. Some funders practice a mixture of proactive and responsive funding. I have attempted to draw some definition between the two for the purpose of this report.

Abbreviations

ACF- Association of Charitable Foundations

AECF - Annie.E.Casey Foundation

Benwood - Benwood Foundation

GEO - Grantmakers for Effective Organizations

GMN – Grant Managers Network

Hewlett – William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Meyer Foundation - Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation

NCRP - National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy

Packard - David and Lucile Packard Foundation

PANNA- Pesticides Action Network North America

Executive summary

"In philanthropy, we are working each day to make the world a more open, inclusive, and participatory place. A place where marginalized voices are heard and smart solutions that work rise to the top. But, we have lagged behind in modelling the behaviour we want to see in the rest of society. With some notable exceptions, the way we as philanthropic institutions currently engage is not only inconsistent with our current values, but also behind the times in which we live".[1]

This quote resonated with me as I researched my Fellowship, it summarised my own sentiments and frustrations. Philanthropy is diverse containing a range of players including corporate, community, family, independent, large and small, well established and newly created. The unifying element is the aim to make a difference through giving. Funders are mostly independent and due to this construct there is limited onus to share information, collaborate or alter how they work. Despite the lack of obligation there are of course bright spots and examples of excellence. I researched into the key developments in philanthropy with a focus on North America looking at three key themes- failure, transparency and innovative practice. Essentially I was trying to understand what approaches were being developed and implemented outside of the orthodoxies of philanthropy.

Observations

Through meetings, interviews and desk based research I was able to conclude that there are commonalities between North American and UK funders but also key areas of innovation that we can learn from. The scale of giving is different with approximately 28,000[2] UK non-profit organisations making grants compared to 87,142[3] US and 10,524[4] Canadian grant making foundations. There are differences in the issues and programmes funders give to due to the contrasts in government funding and structure but there are shared challenges regardless of location in how to make and manage grants effectively with the backdrop of rising and more complex needs.

It is often said that US philanthropy is 10 years ahead of the UK. This feels deflating as if we will never catch up or that our input into philanthropy is less important or valid. Now I have completed my research and travel for my Fellowship I am less convinced by this. The UK philanthropy sector has good examples of practice and continues to develop, there is more strategic and impact focused philanthropy taking place alongside other developments such as the increase of social investment models. From my particular perspective as a grant maker and manager it seems as if we are casting a more self-critical eye at our work and how we interact with peers and grantees and furthermore, what this means in terms of the difference we make. There is of course always room for improvement and development; this seems to be a good time to look to our North American funding peers. In North American philanthropy there are examples of innovations we can learn from. The North American philanthropic sector is well connected, offering a variety of ways for funders to engage together from broad, sector-wide events and forums to specific, local or issue focused groups. There is support and focus not just on policy or programme themes but on the 'nitty-gritty' of grant making and management, the fundamentals. There is also focus on adopting approaches like failure and transparency which drive the development of good practice. These approaches are creating opportunities to learn, foster and improve relationships and to enhance the effectiveness of funding. There is chance to absorb knowledge from our peers about the value of connecting, sharing, learning and challenging some of the usual funding practices.

Recommendations

- Engage with transparency as a key issue to improve effectiveness and impact
- Put failure on the agenda and embed the issue into practice. Funders who have embedded this issue make a convincing argument for its ability to contribute to high-quality implementation, innovation of new strategies and improved governance and transparency
- Create and engage with more opportunities to connect, convene and collaborate. Place importance on sharing learning so as to best support development of the non-profit sector and improve grant making and management
- Recognise that grant management practices may hinder impact and effectiveness and that flexible support can be a tool to create greater success and achievement of aims.

Introduction

The aim of my Fellowship was to gain insight into the North American Philanthropic sector. I was inspired to do this as I saw increasing challenge for non-profit organisations in increasingly challenging times where need seems to be rising year on year. With this in mind I wanted to appreciate what innovative and creative approaches were being developed to support effective funding. Underpinning my aims was the understanding that funders may need to make philosophical and structural changes to work and strategies so as to ensure that society is supported during challenging times.

I looked to North American philanthropy for a number of reasons. Firstly this is where the wealth of information and development related to philanthropy comes from. I often refer to North American philanthropic resources to support development of my work and skills. The sector is well established with a range of funders and infrastructure organisations to learn from. There has been a move to adopting approaches that are new and innovative and could benefit the work of UK funders. Of course there are many fundamental differences between the UK and the USA and Canada, not least in terms of social welfare, education and health. Funders in the USA in particular fund issues and programmes which would be seen as a statutory responsibility in the UK. I was not looking to learn about funding specific issues rather the concepts and approaches they adopt to fund challenging and complex need effectively. My aim was to learn from innovative grant making and management practices, to understand how to adapt and build upon traditional philanthropic approaches. I wanted to understand how funders who have moved beyond the orthodoxies of funding have done this and what they have learnt.

I aimed to meet with a range of funders and organisations to gain a broad insight into practice. I looked for funders of different sizes, geographic locations and reach including national, regional and local. I identified funders that were incorporating creative or innovation approaches and seemed to be models of best practice. I was also keen to meet with infrastructure organisations to gain understanding into their perspectives and approaches. I have used resources and guidance from a number of these organisations to inform my work and to develop my knowledge and was keen to get the opportunity to engage with them more closely. Through research I identified transparency, failure and innovation as interesting and key areas I was keen to learn more about. I approached funders who I identified as delivering these innovative or creative approaches to funding and infrastructure organisations that had guidance, research or opinions on these issues. I looked to gain different perspectives and as such identified funders from a range of locations. This was to ensure that I was exposed to different approaches and not just one geographic or organisational viewpoint. I travelled to Washington DC, Baltimore, Chattanooga, San Francisco, Oakland, Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Los Altos, Vancouver and Victoria (a full itinerary can be found in the appendices). This report lays out my learning under three key themes; Transparency, Failure and Inserting innovation into funding practice.

Transparency

"It is important to tell our story consistently, broadly and openly"[5]

Philanthropy is about more than processes and policies at its heart is a focus on issues and a passion to make a difference. Despite this emotional core it can appear to be reserved, perhaps even a little cloistered. As Janet Camarena from the Foundation Centre says "people tend to be private about love and money, and in philanthropy it's both."[6] A lack of openness is a common criticism levelled at funders, perhaps due in part to different perceptions of what we believe transparency to be and what we think is needed or wanted from us, which of course may be very different to what we assume. Regardless of why these criticisms persist it is a rare funder who hasn't heard the critique that funders are hard to access, that processes and policies are not clear, accessible or easy to understand or that it is unclear who they give to and fundamentally difficult to grasp who they are. All of these criticisms are intrinsically linked to transparency.

I didn't plan to look specifically at transparency when undertaking my Fellowship. I understood its importance and have always endeavoured to work as openly as possible with grantees but I didn't regard it as something particularly innovative. As soon as I began my research though this changed, a difference immediately became apparent. For example I considered early on whether one of my North American peers could have researched and accessed funders in the UK quite as easily as I had with them. I was able to access key individual staff contact information, gain a clear idea about who the funders are, their focus and their learning without difficulty. Reflecting on this prompted a shift in my Fellowship research to find out more about the issue, to better understand what we mean when we talk about it in the philanthropic context and why some funders are more open than others.

There are of course UK funders who practice a good level of openness. The Charity Commission requirements alone mean that we can access key information about many funders including trustees' details, main contacts, size of staff team, financial information and annual reports etc. There are funders whose websites include key details to enable others to access information about their work. There are also programmes such as 360 Giving which enables UK funders to share their grant making data. Just as in North America there are funders that embrace the issue and disclose more about themselves than others. There did though seem to be a difference in how the issue is approached and I was keen to better understand this and possible learning.

One of the questions posed to me on a number of occasions was why UK funders were more closed than our North American peers. There was a perception that we were operating behind closed doors or not as open to sharing learning. I cannot speak for the whole sector but overall though I don't think all UK funders are closed. There are funders of all types who strive to be transparent whether they are family trusts or corporate grantmakers. There is not a deliberate, collective approach to this issue or at least not one that I am privy to. I think UK philanthropy may appear more closed due to the differences in our sector. For example the scale and scope of infrastructure support for philanthropy in the UK is different than in North America. We have organisations such as New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) and the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) driving and supporting practice in addition to regional and local funders' forums who offer space for peer engagement but comparatively this is much smaller than in North America. In North America organisations like Grantmakers for Effective Organisations (GEO), National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP), Philanthropic Foundations Canada (PFC) and the Foundation Center are supporting development of practice in philanthropy. Prompting review of issues and aiding funders to develop a shared understanding. Coupled with affinity groups and grant making professional organisations such as the Grant Manager's Network (GMN) there seems to be greater opportunity and structure for looking at issues collectively and developing a more cohesive understanding. With a number of funders and infrastructure support organisations examining issues such as transparency there is good opportunity for thorough examination and increased understanding. This can then lead on to strong development in terms of best practice and quality.

I was keen to look into this issue as a model of innovation, to better understand how North American funders and infrastructure organisations are driving this. Those funders that are committing themselves to being more transparent are opening themselves up to learning and criticism and their examples act as learning to their peers, to encourage others to follow suit and fundamentally better support their grantees.

What is transparency?

> *"Transparency is not only about what does or does not get communicated — it is also about whether or not foundation funders are being "clear," "open," and "honest" when sharing information with non-profits."*
> *The Center for Effective Philanthropy*

Transparency is essentially openness but our understanding of what we mean in terms of transparency in philanthropy can be interpreted in many ways. Transparency can be related to all aspects of philanthropy, how money and support is given, how funders talk about themselves, data about who they give to, their learning and what they make available. We can assume that because we post basic information about who we are, our grant application guidelines and FAQs that we are operating openly. But is this true transparency? For the funders I met with transparency was about more than the bare minimum, they are engaging with the issue above and beyond the essentials. Transparency for funders such as the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Hewlett Foundation) and Annie. E. Casey Foundation (AECF) is about more than just sharing basic organisation information. "A foundation that operates transparently is one that shares what it does, how it does it, and the difference that it makes in a frank, easily accessible, and timely way. True transparency comes down to a mind-set, one in which funders believe they are most effective when they approach all aspects of their work by saying "let's publicly share this"."[7]

Examples that I came into contact with included funders at different stages. There were those who are open at the basic level, these funders share information about grant making guidelines, vision and strategy. Then there are those who have taken this further by making their grant data available, sharing their decision making processes and learning, publishing grantee feedback and sharing their failures. There is a spectrum of transparency that starts with looking internally and asking "is transparency something that's an important and deeply held value to the work of the institution?"[8] If it is then the next step is to start examining this commitment and rise up to it by opening up about themselves and their work.

The rationale for transparency

> "There are no predators in philanthropy, no competition, it is easy for funders to be mediocre in perpetuity"
> *Aaron Dorfman, National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP)*

Philanthropy taking place behind closed doors can allow funders to make decisions in a focused manner, ensuring that their aims are met and that decision making is free of influence. There may be aspects of funding that are private and benefit from staying so. There are basic requirements for funders depending on where they are located to share information for example their finances or activities but beyond that it is up to the funder. This can be freeing in general terms but it could also be seen to stifle change in terms of grantees and funder practice. As Aaron Dorfman at NCRP underlined "limited regulation can bring freedom and drive innovation but in turn this does not place any onus or urgency on funders."[9] The lack of necessity to share can mean that funders do not and by not sharing they miss out.

Clear from my Fellowship research was an understanding that transparency is an issue with unintended consequences both positive and negative. Whether this issue is on the agenda or not, it has an impact. By not being open about what we do, how we work and what we have learnt are we missing out on opportunities to strengthen practice and preventing others from benefiting? Meghan Duffy from GEO emphasised that it is important that funders understand and learn from each other, that funders must look at transparency and "build their muscles and make space for it."[10]

A lack of transparency can impact on grantmaking. For example if publically accessible information about a funder does not best demonstrate who they really are this can result in funders missing out on potential grantees or more importantly getting to the right grantees. Clear guidance and information can lead to better targeted applications. In an ever demanding sector funders may not need more applications but they certainly need the right ones. Clear information about who we are and how we make decisions can help to get to the non-profits that best fit our aims. Furthermore this could help to reduce time spent focused on applicants that

do not best fit saving time, money and focus particularly in the case of responsive funders. In this instance transparency acts as a tool to increase effectiveness.

Transparency is also key in terms of how we build and manage relationships. Honesty and openness are basic facets of good relationships, true in any type but most importantly so where power dynamics come into play. Openness speaks to the culture of organisations, what information is made public and how clear and accessible it is can indicate a closed approach even when this is not a true reflection. Looking at basic processes and ensuring they are open can help remove ambiguity and support better relationships, moving these processes on from being purely transactional. Adopting an open style can encourage grantees to share about challenges and failures, leading to increased impact.

An open ethic can be applied to all relationships including those with funding peers. An open approach could facilitate greater learning and collaboration. As Renee Kaplan from the Skoll Foundation emphasised "if we don't share, nothing will change, foundations need to be open to working together, they should be models of open-sourcing information."[11] This sharing with each other as funders can be done in a formal manner via publishing reports but it can be as simple as ensuring accurate information is available on our websites. Some funders such as the Benwood Foundation share with their local funding peers who they see as "critical friends". They invest time to meet regularly to talk about their work and share information. They also convene groups including key strategy and policy makers and those who might be "non-traditional players"[12] to ensure that information and ideas are being shared and collaborations are established. GMN are launching EPIcenter, a benchmarking library which will include information and resources on the most common grant management practices and sample documents. This will enable open information sharing and benchmarking against funding peers on effective practice.

Transparency is not just about what we are doing but also why and how. For example sharing information about how decisions are made, how reports are processed could drive quality and consistency. Sharing grant data can highlight opportunities to work together. There seem to be many benefits but ultimately it all links to being better grant makers and managers and in turn making a difference. As one Glasspockets blog highlighted a funder can use "transparency as a lynchpin to greater philanthropic impact through better project management and grantee relationships."[13] It is also used as a tool to improve the non-profit sector. Kevin McCort at the Vancouver Foundation emphasised that there is regular discussion about the need for governmental institutions and private corporations to be more open and that the non-profit sector can lead by example. By being more open this can build greater trust and understanding of the sector and the value in it. Through transparent practice and sharing learning the profile of the sector can be raised and its importance underlined. By managing their output funders have more control, greater openness does not mean letting go of control completely. Transparency can be a tool to address or alter assumptions about practice or culture, it can aid funders to highlight their strengths and improve their standing and reputations. These are all critical issues in a time of greater media scrutiny of the sector as such transparency can be a tool to meet this challenge.

The opportunities to gain through an open approach seem too significant to ignore but of course these are not all easy wins. Transparency involves internal reflection and may necessitate significant culture change. Confidentiality and privacy are also key issues which cannot be ignored. In particular for family trusts privacy can be paramount. There is also the issue of being ready for deeper examination, Janet Camarena explained that "when you are open you no longer hold all the power anymore, you are inviting people to opine" and that funders may need to be prepared to work differently to achieve this that opening up the doors may challenge how we work, "you clean your house differently when you have guests."[14] To be truly open and honest requires a commitment and may involve some funders making significant changes to be ready for it but it doesn't need to be all at once. It is not about volume of information but the right information being made available. It is about understanding what is most useful for the intended audience rather than simply information overload. All those I met with who were committed to transparency emphasised that it was worth the work. Transparency can lead to a range of benefits- time saving, more on target grant proposals, effective and informed grantmaking, stronger and more open relationships, closer and more collaborative relationships with peers and increased public trust.[15]

Methods for sharing

I was fortunate to hear about a range of ways funders are being more transparent. As highlighted, for some this was about ensuring that their public information is clear, accessible and open. Ensuring key staff contact details are online alongside clear grant making policies and practices that outline how decisions, and when decisions are made. For others alongside process and policy some are sharing their research and learning. Foundations like the Hewlett Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and AECF are producing engaging content about their learning through reports and posing questions and thoughts on blogs about policy and practice. Many of the foundations I met with use Grantee Perception Reports (GPRs) which provide funders with actionable feedback based on grantee survey responses, a number share these results publically. Some funders such as Hewlett and Packard publish their survey results and summaries on their websites.

There are lots of ways of being transparent, I couldn't show them all in detail here so have highlighted some of the interesting practices and tools I came across:

- *Grantee Perception Reports*
- *Performance assessments*
- *Publically searchable grants databases*
- *Open data*
- *Foundation Center - Issuelab*
- *Get on the Map campaign*
- *Internal learning reports*
- *Convene and collaborate*
- *Engaging websites*
- *Blogging and tweeting*
- *hGrant reporting*
- *Creative Commons*
- *EPIcenter*
- *Clear staff contacts*
- *Grantee surveys*
- *Glasspockets Assessment*
- *Foundation Maps*

There are a range of interesting tools that funders can use and adapt to support greater transparency, some require investment of time and money others are about building on what is already there. Websites are one of the tools that can be used to aid transparency. Having an online profile is not only useful for applicants it can be a way of being more open, sharing learning, failures etc. There are of course strengths and weaknesses attached to this, some of which I have laid out here:

Strengths:

- Can provide a space for open communication and sharing learning.
- Can help grantees and potential grantees to better understand a funder's approach, mission and culture.
- Time saver- it can be a method for sharing decision making and grant management processes with grantees and applicants which may save staff time spent on pre-application advice. If clear this can help non-profits to understand quickly if there is a fit with the funder.
- Signals that a funder is open or at least shows some commitment to transparency, depending on what is shared.
- A tool for openness about who the funder is- staff details, board details, mission, vision etc. All basic but important factors.

Weaknesses:

- Need for clear messaging otherwise has potential for miscommunication.
- Publishing information does not mean that it is understood, it does not wholly replace important communication such as pre-application support and discussion with potential grantees or current grantees.
- Online information can strengthen and support communication between grantees, applicants and funders but does not replace other methods of relationship building.

- Potential risks attached to naming staff particularly if funders work in difficult or volatile settings or countries.

Websites require time and commitment to ensure that they are developed and maintained effectively. Design, layout and tone are all important factors. The idea is to use websites as a transparency tool, it is more than simply providing information. To be a tool of transparency websites need to be designed so that they support openness and so that the information provided is useful and clear. Transparency is not about quantity though, it is a way to signal an open approach by providing key information rather than providing everything. Websites can host a wealth of information including learning, failures, decision and grant management processes and data on grants. They can also provide staff and board details including information about diversity. The Hewlett Foundation are one funder who publish information online[16] about staff demographics as part of their commitment to transparency. They along with 5 other foundations have called others to publish their diversity data in the spirit of openness.[17]

Websites are a communication tool and as such can support transparency in a variety of ways. They can be a space to communicate, provide information about grant management processes, data and learning. By sharing learning and good practice online funders can support the strengthening of philanthropy practice. Used in the right way websites are a key transparency tool but I am not convinced that a good quality website alone means that a funder is transparent. This is a tool that can be used amongst others to build a more transparent approach.

The range of methods being used by funders is diverse, one thing that struck me was that there is significant information available from a range of North American funders and that there is a balance to strike between being open and ensuring that publically available information is useful and appropriate. This is not about just publishing swathes of information it is about the most useful and impactful information. Those who strike a good balance, such as AECF, are open but still manage to get their message out with a clear voice and impact. As they highlighted it is about understanding the purpose of the information, who is the intended audience and how it is best conveyed.[18]

The range of tools could be of benefit to UK funders. Some funders here do use GPRs and other tools but overall it would be positive to see more funders engage with Glasspockets or similar and to see more discussion on this topic. Better yet it would be great to see implementation of a range of the good examples set by North American peers.

Example- The Foundation Center

The Foundation Center's mission is to "strengthen the social sector by advancing knowledge about philanthropy in the U.S. and around the world". Included in their core values is the importance of transparency in philanthropy. They have a number of initiatives in place to meet their aims including Glasspockets. This was launched in 2010, with the aim of championing transparency in philanthropy. "Glasspockets provides the data, resources, examples, and action steps foundations need to understand the value of transparency, be more open in their own communications, and help shed more light on how private organizations are serving the public good."[19] Glasspockets offers a range of different tools and resources for funders to be more transparent, these include:

- Who has Glass Pockets? This is an interactive tool where funders can voluntarily submit a profile to or be invited. The profiles showcase how transparent the funder is against 23 benchmarking indicators. These indicators fall under the following headings: basic information, governance, HR and staffing, grantmaking, performance measurements and financial information. This tool includes a "heat map" which is a visual display of funders with "Who Has Glass Pockets?" profiles on the Glasspockets web site. The map incorporates measurements of the frequency of types of information available on funders' websites.
- Foundation Transparency 2.0. This is a collection of data and resources on how funders are communicating online.

* The Reporting Commitment. This is in near-real-time data about grants being made and where in the USA. This can be accessed via the map tool or by downloading the data.
* Transparency Talk blog. The blog is a space for "candid and constructive" conversations and information about transparency and accountability.

The Foundation Center also runs Issuelab which is a collective knowledge base housing thousands of documents including case studies, evaluations, white papers, and issue briefs. Funders can also have an individual Knowledge Center which works like an online library to house publications and make them available publically.

Example- NCRP- Philamplify

Philamplify is an initiative of NCRP. The aim of the initiative is to "build a culture of transparency, mutual accountability and knowledge sharing."[20] The initiative includes an assessment of funders, it comprises a range of reports and research into grantmaking, strategy and operations alongside feedback from the funder, staff, non-profits and community members. Funders are able to participate by providing reports, information and taking part in interviews. The assessments are all public and the website allows for an interactive process as people are invited to comment on findings. NCRP aim to "break through the isolation bubble and give everyone involved a place to share feedback and learn from one another."[21]

Example- Vancouver Foundation- Creative Commons

The Vancouver Foundation is Canada's largest community foundation. Since it was founded the Foundation has distributed more than $1 billion to community projects and programmes. The Foundation is adopting an open licensing policy via Creative Commons for projects funded through its grant making programmes. Creative Commons is a non-profit that provides free tools and licences to enable simple and consistent granting of copyright permissions to allow open use, copying and distribution of work.

The Vancouver Foundation's goal by implementing this is to "advance transparency and accessibility of materials to drive greater innovation and creativity."[22] The policy applies to the Foundation's own intellectual property and will also "require grantees to apply a Creative Commons Attribution Licence to projects and research funded through community advised grant programmes. This policy will enable grant recipients to retain copyright over materials while, at the same time, allowing others to use and build upon the positive work created by these Vancouver Foundation grants."[23] The Foundation is developing a framework for this and sees themselves as "enthusiastically jumping into this"[24] sharing of information and open data to build collective knowledge, reach their aims of improving communities and to improve philanthropy by acting as an example to other foundations to follow suit.

Conclusions

This was a part of my research that seemed both simple and effective, in theory at least. As an issue it is fairly straightforward to define however, the ways in which it can be approached are varied. Transparency can be about the basics such as sharing information about who funders are, their policies and procedures. It can also be taken further and be about developing an open and sharing culture to enable effectiveness and accountability through sharing knowledge, learning and data. I found it hard to identify a persuasive argument that transparency is negative or inconsequential in philanthropy. Whilst it is not a cure-all solution it is a key tool to enable funders to meet their goals. Funders miss out by being closed, they miss out on opportunities to develop, collaborate and learn. Without transparency creativity and the ability to take risks can be stifled. UK funders have the opportunity to learn from North American peers, their experiences offer practical tools and examples which can be adapted to inform individual practice.

Key learning

- Tools- there are a range of ways to engage with the issue. North American philanthropy offers examples of approaches and methods to learn from.
- Effectiveness- greater accessibility to learning and funding data can support more effective grantmaking and better, more targeted applications.
- Learning- open sharing of knowledge by funders can support development of the sector and issues.
- Time and capacity- to be open funders need to take time to look at the issue and give it sufficient space and capacity.
- Consistent- if undertaken, there needs to be commitment to looking at the issue and adapting changes consistently
- Reputations- transparency can be a tool to strengthen reputations and manage them.
- Relationships- transparency is a tool of strengthening trust and relationships of all types (with grantees, peers, stakeholders and the public).
- Connected- there are more opportunities to connect, convene and collaborate if funders are better able to access information about each other's processes, policies and learning.
- Far reaching- not just about our funding relationships transparency has the potential to increase wider trust and recognition of the non-profit sector.

Failure

"With innovation comes the risk of failure. Every great innovator has experienced moments of failure, but the truly great amongst them wear those failures as badges of honour" [25]

Failure is an emotive subject, it is not always easy to face mistakes yet it is an inevitable part of the human experience and something that none of us are spared. Working within the non-profit sector certainly does not free you from facing failures of all kinds. Non-profits look to tackle complex issues whilst managing myriad and ever changing challenges which are impacted by both internal and external forces. "Complex problems require increasing levels of innovation. Innovation is risky because, by definition, it is untested….organisations must accept higher levels of failure during the process of developing increasingly innovative solutions."[26]The issues that are being dealt with are intrinsically human, they are fallible and with that of course comes the possibility of failure. How failure is managed is essential so as to ensure that we do not repeat mistakes and ultimately that we learn from them. Funders are not immune to failure any less so than their non-profit colleagues.

The tech start-ups and the large successful global names that call Silicon Valley home are intrinsically linked with the concept of "failing fast" and "failing often". These agile and responsive companies produce products that are subject to seemingly continual update. They respond to feedback, review, fix, improve and then release new versions and updates. As such we seem to have become more used to the concept of update and improvement as intrinsic to getting the best out of our phones, apps and social networking platforms. This makes us more comfortable with the idea of failure, flaws and learning. The tech start-ups of Silicon Valley are not alone in buying into the concept of embracing failure and responding to it, their neighbours in the philanthropic world are using some of these concepts to inform their work as funders. Silicon Valley is home to funders who are examples of best practice in this area, who seem to be truly embracing failure and propelling the issue forward. The Skoll Foundation for example looks to create large-scale change by investing in entrepreneurs and innovators and support this through flexible and responsive philanthropy. They look to create iterative relationships so that entrepreneurs and innovators are able to pivot and change in relation to challenges and failures and are not restricted by "heavy handed grantmaking".[27]

Embracing failure in philanthropy is not distinct to Silicon Valley nor to North America however, within North American philanthropy there is a movement to not only face and embrace failure but to move this issue on and to use it as a tool for self-reflection and learning. There are a number of high profile funders who are looking at this issue and driving it forward. Across all the funders and philanthropic infrastructure organisations I met with it was clear that this is a key agenda item and a developing and dynamic issue. All had an individual take on this, how much it is embraced and how this is taking place in terms of practice. There were though commonalities across the foundations I met and I could see a shared approach beginning to be established.

Defining the issue

Failure in philanthropy can be related to a range of areas for both funders and grantees. Failures can be identified in all aspects including planning, process, strategy and delivery. How we identify and define failure is a personal matter, for one funder this can be that a grantee has not achieved their outcomes or has not achieved them quite as planned, or it could be that a new programme does not reach the applicants hoped for or hasn't had a wide impact. Examples given by those I met with covered all of these areas. A funded organisation was impacted by a change in public policy which lead to challenges engaging with external stakeholders and ultimately meant that they made less of an impact they aimed to. Another organisation did not get the take up from beneficiaries they expected, once they looked into this it was clear that planning could have been improved and greater work done to build links. Essentially failure is something that does not meet our expectations and ultimately we do not perceive as a success.

Failure in philanthropy is not just about identifying failure in grantees though but also failure in funders. For example AECF highlighted how an initiative they ran related to employment included mistakes in a range of areas. They programme had overly complicated standards which led to unintended consequences.[28] They recognised that whilst there were positives arising from the funded work that there were elements which could have been improved. This included metrics which led grantees to doubling up on work to meet both AECF and other funders' requirements. Additionally they identified a need for better understanding of the

external context they were operating in. From this initiative they invested in a benchmarking project for metrics related to workforce, implementing changes as a direct result of learning from their failures.

Another example of failure is from the Hewlett Foundation, they posted insights on their blog[29] into mistakes they made when they sought to make changes to grant reporting processes. The changes were focused on due dates and getting rid of ambiguity related to multiple due dates and grace periods. Issues they initially felt would be a "simple" and a quick win. Their failure post highlighted that this supposition was wrong. Ultimately they could not make the changes they set out to as the issue was more complex than they initially thought. They came to learn through consultation with staff and review of the issue that processes matter, that internal changes could impact significantly on grantees negatively, that consensus is not always possible and that a broad approach to finding solutions may be needed even for the seemingly simplest of issues. Their blog post detail openly what they learned and the knowledge they gained as a result of this failure.

Failures come in all shapes and sizes, they can be large program failures or smaller issues related to process or policy. What is clear from the funders I met with is that this is an issue where the funders hold significant influence and as such how each funder defines failure, how they talk about it and what learning they derive from it will impact on how and what they fund. Fay Twersky, Director of the Effective Philanthropy Group at the Hewlett Foundation, views failure as "being rooted in the value of transparency."[30] Looking at failure is linked to the desire for learning and improvement in both funders and grantees. Examining and embracing the issue of failure can helped to improve funders work and bring them closer to achieving their vision and aims. Kathy Reich, Director of Organizational Effectiveness Grantmaking at the Packard Foundation, noted this is an opportunity to be "self-critical" and to "acknowledge" internally and with grantees where funders have made mistakes or failures and what their subsequent learning is.[31]

> *"To improve is to change, so to be perfect is to have changed often"*
> Winston Churchill

Even if the issue of failure may not be being purposely examined funders will have some idea of what it views as failures and successes. This could be a clear understanding about what is recognised to be a successful grant and/or a grant that has not lived up to expectation. The process of defining what is viewed as a failure can be a useful way of supporting improved grant making and management. The issue is flexible as Bob (Robert) Giloth at AECF points out it "can be developed, extended or reduced"[32] to enable an individual approach linked to a funder's individual capacity and commitment to the issue.

Language

Failure is a loaded issue and the language associated with it can be divisive and challenging, "It can feel absolute."[33] Failure comes across as an inherently negative term, bringing with it connotations of weakness and blame. However, as Nicky Goren CEO at Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation (Meyer Foundation) points out it is possible to "flip"[34] the conversation and view this issue positively. The Meyer Foundation are acutely aware of the power and value of the context of the dialogue around failure and highlighted that "how we discuss failure as funders is important."[35] That it is essential in order to set the agenda, encourage openness by being receptive to the issue and be clear and consistent when discussing it.

It is a very human reaction to be wary of failure and the language of the issue. Giloth points out because it is a tough subject "funders can have an almost allergic reaction to it."[36]Key to all the conversations I had with funders was that the language itself can be a barrier and not all felt comfortable with the wording. Some are at a stage where they are more at ease with the language; both the Hewlett and the Packard Foundations seemed to have ingrained the terminology into their practice. The Hewlett Foundation for example engaged with the issue from senior management down and as such this seems to have freed staff to talk more openly about it. With this acceptance the language loses some of its fear factor. Other funders such as the Case Foundation, whose publications I used for my research, have an agenda of fearlessness; they are challenging how the sector meets current needs and challenges. The Case Foundation sees being fearless as "setting audacious goals, acting urgently and boldly, being unafraid of risk, being willing to strike unlikely alliances and accepting the possibility of failure while still pressing forward".[37]

The decision about what specific word or words to use may differ depending on the type of funder. For some funders there may be barriers to being open, for example donor reliant funders or corporate funders may not

wish to use "failure" due to the negative connotations and potential impact on income. The issue can be complex and not suitable or adaptable to a sound bite; as such they may prefer to use a different language to talk about the issue. In the same vein funders may not wish to use this language when examining this in relation to grants and grantees, especially publically, so as to safeguard reputations. When beginning the process of embracing the issue funders may wish to apply some caution in terms of language and over time review this and become bolder as they become more comfortable. The funders I met with seem to have become less concerned and afraid of the language the further along the journey they are with it. "It doesn't matter which words you choose to use: "mistake", "failure", "disappointment", "challenge", or even "do-over". Find a word that is comfortable in your own culture. What does matter is how you choose to talk about it, regardless of what you call it."[38]

Embracing the issue

The acceptance of failure is crucial. Funders highlighted this time and again throughout my Fellowship. Failure is possible in funding of all kinds, whether or not a funder and grantee have both designed and implemented clear approaches, strategies and delivery models. With the best planning and safeguards in place failure can still happen, how we deal with it is the key and that funders embrace the opportunity for honest self-reflection and learning. Any supposition that we are able to be perfect grant makers and managers is not realistic. It serves to create more distance between us and our grantees, perpetuating the ivory tower myth that funders are, or see themselves as beyond reproach and ultimately leads us to miss out on learning opportunities. Embracing failure includes recognising this and looking to forge a new path, as Hewlett points out "real honesty about our failures takes real bravery. But it's worth the risk."[39]

The role which funders occupy offers significant opportunity for influencing. Funders can influence by how they talk about and deal with difficult and emotive subjects. If funders begin to talk about failure it sends a signal about their approach that they understand that giving a grant, attaching requirements and setting outcomes and targets does not guarantee success. Funders can approach the issue as boldly and publically as fits their work and position. This can mean highlighting it widely and publically like the Hewlett Foundation who include information about their approach to this issue on their website, blog, online policy documents and in commissioning reports such as "Hard lessons about Philanthropy & Community Change from the Neighbourhood Improvement Initiative." It can also be reviewing internally with staff fail "pot lucks" or discussing with funding peers at fail fests and conferences, or with grantees by encouraging space for discussion of challenges, successes and failures when undertaking meetings and site visits.

> *"Working with grantees on this issue can be the hardest place to highlight failure and comes with big responsibility."*
> *Kathy Reich, David and Lucille Packard Foundation*

Whichever way funders choose to be involved with the issue the topic of failure it can help to drive change and learning in the sector. Furthermore, this can encourage grantees to share their issues, failures and challenges openly and honestly. The dynamics of funding relationships often seems to result in a lack of sharing. Funders highlight that grantees do not share their challenges, failures or mistakes. Grantees may feel that if they share this information that it will reflect badly on them or might cause them to loose funding. Ultimately this results in missed opportunities for learning and development. Throughout my Fellowship those funders who are looking at failure highlighted that they perceived this to have had a positive impact on their relationships with their grantees, leading to greater openness and breaking down some of the power balance between funder and grantee.

The issue of managing failure and grantees is a sensitive one. At best it can be a tool to support collaborative working and learning and at worst it could have implications for grantee's reputations. The funders I met with acknowledged this issue, whilst funders may have broad shoulders to take on criticism, even those who are donor reliant; the implications for grantees may be more significant in terms of income and their reputations. By starting internally with the issue some of the risk is kept in-house with funders. Once the processes have been trialled it is then seen as a good time to start the journey with grantees. The idea is to work collaboratively and use failure as an opportunity to support learning, foster openness and improve relationships as opposed to apportioning blame. The Hewlett Foundation manages this tricky process with grantees by "congratulating by name and blaming by category".[40] They emphasised that learning about and

managing failure with grantees should be designed so it is a collaborative process with grantees to ensure that any outputs and learning is constructive and not about simply pointing out mistakes.

In addition to building openness and improving learning there is also a cost element. Failure costs whether we seek it out or not. If we choose to ignore our failures we will continue to make the same mistakes and work under the same assumptions. Not only financial cost, but also a potential cost to the beneficiaries of funding who will be impacted by delivery methods that do not meet their needs. The idea that funders have no incentive to look at or discuss failure overlooks the potential risk and cost attached to ignoring it. As Michelle Greanias at the Grant Managers Network (GMN) points out "Discussing failure can help to combat the inefficiencies in grantmaking and help to gain a better understanding of good examples."[41]

Across the funders I met with there were examples of funders at different stages in the process of embracing failure. There were those starting out on the journey such as the Benwood Foundation who are currently reviewing their significant investment into education locally in Chattanooga, and asking hard questions internally about what their successes and challenges have been and what this means going forward. Others such as AECF have been looking at failure for some time. The foundation started with mistake "pot luck" sessions where staff share examples and work through them together. They have developed practice to include training staff in Emergent Learning Techniques and implementing "Before and After-Action Reviews" and embedding this into their work. Giloth highlighted that whilst they have made good progress that it is not institutionalised and they themselves are on a journey, that it is a continuous learning process. Giloth underlined the need to start somewhere to start admitting failures, for example firstly encouraging this internally by facilitating colleagues to have regular, open conversations and taking it from there. What is key is to start somewhere, accept that we are all fallible and then to move past this. Not to just simply accept that we make mistakes but to use these failures and knowledge as opportunities to become better grant makers and managers. As highlighted by the Hewlett Foundation "a perfect grantmaking record would be a sign that we're not taking the risk necessary to accomplish our goals".[42] We can derive so much and for a wide range of people (funders, grantees, beneficiaries and the wider sector) from the process of honest self-reflection in terms of failure.

Culture

> *"Fear, embarrassment, and intolerance of failure drives our learning underground and hinders innovation. No more. Failure is strength. The most effective and innovative organizations are those that are willing to speak openly about their failures because the only truly "bad" failure is one that's repeated".*
>
> *Admitting Failure, https://www.admittingfailure.org/about/*

Many funders view themselves as having a learning culture however "calling yourself a "learning organisation" doesn't mean that you are one".[43] Some areas of learning are harder to embrace than others. Learning about failure seems to have been a challenge at some point for the funders that I met with and is an ongoing process for each of them. Each funder has their own concept of failure based on their own aims, strategy and working practice. Failure is contextual; the culture of the funder is key to how this is interpreted and managed. To really engage with failure funders need to ask some difficult questions about their approach and practice, review their working culture and make changes to ensure that it can be taken on.

A common theme is the need to keep focussed on the purpose. The objective is to learn not to blame and those funders that do this well have buy in from senior management down with managers who "lead the way".[44] By sharing their own examples and not being risk-averse when it comes to failures. Some funders create regular space to examine failure in open and friendly peer group settings. Others go further by running competitions for the best failure in a grant year, celebrating their subsequent learning and normalising failure as part of the process of funding. It is clear that in order to embrace failure funders must develop a culture that is not focused on penalising but one that is truly open to learning.

Talking about failure is part and parcel of being transparent it is a part of the same dialogue around sharing learning. Embracing failure can be transformative, "admitting failure contributes to high-quality implementation, innovation of new strategies and improved governance and transparency."[45] To really embrace the idea of failure, reviewing it, not fearing it, talking about it etc. requires a level of transparency in an organisation. It seems to me that North American funders are working in a wider environment where transparency is promoted and that this is helping to support the issue of failure.

Funders each have individual approaches dependent on what type of funder they are, their leadership and their priorities, as such how the process of examining failure is established will be led by this culture. Different funders have adopted different ways of embedding the issue. For example the Hewlett Foundation have adopted the practice of admitting and embracing failure from senior management down while others such as the Packard Foundation have seen it derived from key individuals like Kathy Reich who started to talk about her own personal experiences with her peers, developing a positive self-critical culture, which ultimately helps to develop their work and fosters trust in them. The need for a champion internally to promote the issue was clear. A number of funders including AECF have an individual or individuals who promote the issue and encourage regular inclusion of the issue on agendas. "There are many ways to start conversations about mistakes and at many organizational levels. No matter where you start, key ingredients for productive discussions are sufficient time, a safe place and a champion who supports such learning."[46]

Delivery methods

There are a range of different tools and methods that can be used for embracing and examining failure. This can include in-house reviews conducted by individual champions, internal peer group reviews, external peer learning and affinity group review sessions, and informal peer group meetings with failure as a regular agenda item. There are also failure conferences and fail fests to attend and online forums such as Admitting Failure[47] created by Engineers Without Borders Canada where not-for profit organisations can share their stories of failure and access resources for learning (Including a Fail Forward 'how to' failure report guide). Across the North American sector there are a number of ways to engage with the issue. These tools and events offer the opportunity for peer working. Failure is not just about self-reflection; it presents opportunities to build relationships with other funders, partner as critical friends to share how funders would have worked differently and then collaborate to make changes and/or develop new processes in light of this learning.

> *"It is always the strongest organizations with the most effective programs that are able and willing to speak openly about their failures"*
> *https://failforward.org/vision/*

The outputs of this work vary from the publishing of reports publically to internal-use only documents. Across the funders I met with this commitment to publish depended on where they were in the journey of examining and embracing failure. In order to share learning from these challenges there needs to be a culture of transparency in place. Publishing this information ultimately shows strength and requires confidence in the work being delivered. This may not be simple for those funders beginning their failure journey or donor reliant funders; they may choose to focus on internal review and reporting to begin with and then build up to more open sharing about failure. Sensitivity and collaboration seem crucial. Funders who were publically talking or reporting about grantee failures have highlighted that it needs time and capacity to ensure it is implemented well.

Funders can review failure in a range of ways. Some of the funders I met with used internal review groups and processes and some used external techniques and processes. Key to whatever tool and process being used is the idea that "failure should be something that is reflected upon on a continual basis, it should be habitual."[48] This struck me as a positive challenge and process, much in the same way that funders expect monitoring and evaluation to be an intrinsic part of grantees' work, reflection on failure should be an inherent part of funders. North American funders offer a range of examples and tools to use in order to embrace and embed the issue.

Example- Emergent Learning

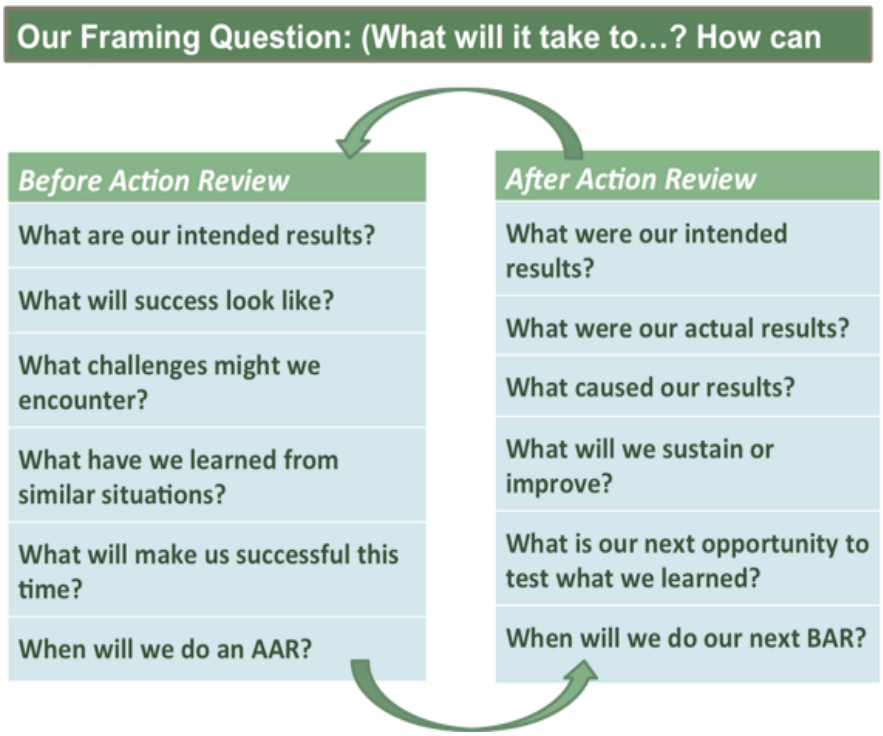
Emergent Learning (EL) first emerged in the 1990s and was used in the corporate sector primarily and now has been used by non-profit organisations. EL is a tool which can be used for a range of learning including complex work and broad, organisational issues. There are different models of EL using tools such as maps and tables to facilitate learning. 4th Quadrant Partners (4QP) have worked with funders such as AECF to help them to learn from their work as part of their process for reviewing failure. "Emergent Learning involves simple tools that help teams develop shared insights for improving action. It pushes us beyond our comfortable rhetoric and enables us to learn from our everyday work as social investors."[49]

The approach supports funders through a process. This process includes review of work, it looks at causes and seeks to identify solutions with the aim to use this for planning and future development. EL focuses on:

- **bringing** everyone's best thinking to the table
- **testing** ideas "on the ground" using real-time data
- **discovering** patterns in cause and effect
- **understanding** how action needs to be adjusted to take situation into account
- **capturing** how thinking and results evolve over time

EL uses Before and After Action Reviews (BARs and AARs) as a practice method to "make it easier to learn in real time from real work".[50]AARs were developed in the U.S. Army. This tool is used to improve practice, and it is flexible and iterative using a set of questions to ask before and after work.

This is an example of questions used in BARs and AARs from 4QP:



Extract from Marilyn Darling, Jillaine Smith, Heidi Sparkes Guber, 4QP Guide to Emergent Learning, Version 0.9, Fourth Quadrant Partners, LLC, 2015

BARs and AARS are used in a group setting so that teams can learn together and build capacity and help organisations to become more agile. The idea is that the groups compare actual results with their intended results, explore the causes of those results, identify successful practices and then plan how to apply this learning for the future. As the process is collaborative this can be used by funders internally as a staff group and/or with grantees. BARS and AARs are distinct from general planning and review methods. They are devised to support real time learning, are to be used in real time so that organisations can pivot and course correct. More information about this can be accessed at Fourth Quadrant Partners LLC and on the AECF blog.

Conclusions

Failure is not an easy topic but it is an important one. If grants or programmes are not meeting their targets, outcomes or outputs what then? Do we chalk this up to simple failure, or do we examine? As Meghan Duffy at GEO states "grantmakers are only successful to the extent that their grantees achieve meaningful results."[51] Examining and embracing failure enables learning and knowledge sharing and it can lead to transformative change for funders, grantees, beneficiaries and the wider sector. Looking at failure can help to support innovative work by making funders more comfortable with the failure element. The process of examining the issue is in itself innovative, asking funders to be self-reflective, pushing them to ask hard questions and hopefully leading to positive change. The exact process for how funders examine the issue can be developed to their individual needs but there were some common learning points about the issue. Funders need to:

- Put failure on the agenda
- Have a culture open to self-reflection and critique
- Acknowledge their own failings
- Be flexible and recognise that grantees need to be agile and may need to course correct during a grant
- Ensure that the issue is embedded and part of regular review and evaluation
- Manage failure with their grantees sensitively and understand the reputational risks
- Share their learning- publically and/or with grantees and sector peers

Inserting innovation into funding practice

"As the world around philanthropy changes rapidly, it's important to consciously examine the orthodoxies that guide practice and determine whether these old assumptions are still valid, and whether we ought to carry them forward or flip them on their heads"[52]

Many of the funders I met with are adopting flexible approaches to the practice of making and managing grants, challenging some of the orthodoxies of funding. There are a number of conventions that many funders buy into and for good reason; they can foster cohesion and good practice. They can also lead to a dogmatic resistance to change and blind spots in decision-making that can prevent organisations from developing better ways of working.[53] I was keen to better understand how funders were changing some of the fundamentals of their practice.

Flexible relationships

Relationships are a crucial tenet of grant making and management. I heard often that a key aim is to develop iterative relationships to enable grantees to learn and adapt whilst they are funded. The idea is to allow space for change and adaptability so as to reach goals rather than being constrained by uniform processes. For example at the Benwood Foundation they build in space for course correction, using reports and close relationships with grantees to identify where they may need to support change and use their processes to enable this rather than present barriers. Iterative approaches are about understanding that making a significant change does not always mean following a linear path. It is factoring in space for change and direction change, being less prescriptive. By focusing on building more collaborative and dynamic relationships the transactional nature of funding can be reduced, supporting development of more reciprocal or partnership based work.

> *"Iterative, collaborative relationships are the ideal, where funders see their grantees as peers and colleagues"*
> *Steve Scholl-Buckwald, PANNA*

Other examples of more flexible approaches included reporting. For example reducing how often grantees report, moving the focus to visits and relationship building or looking to decrease heavy handed management by putting the focus on outcomes and impact rather than box ticking and costings focus. Hewlett, for example, customise some of their reports and will design this collaboratively with grantees, where they can, to ensure that reporting is fit for purpose for both the funder and the grantee. Other funders such as Skoll adopt a more flexible approach to how grantees use their funding, focusing on the outcomes and impact rather than costings and expenditure.

GEO's research showed that relationships are strengthened by funders who show willingness to listen and learn.[54] This can be moved on further by involving their grantees more, using their knowledge to shape strategy, decision making and learning. How this is done can take different forms. The Meyer Foundation hold public outreach sessions to ensure relevant local input into their strategic plans. The Vancouver Foundation have a Youth Advisory Circle whose aim is to enable young subject matter experts' to input into the Foundation's grantmaking, research, policy development and communications work related to their Fostering Works programme. A key part of the programme's mission includes recognition that the work is only possible through relationship building and partnership with young people and grantees.[55] All of which are developed to support improvement in trust, openness and ultimately the effectiveness of their programme.

I was enthusiastic to hear about funders adopting a dynamic, collaborative approach to relationship building and management. The common thread is that this is a key component of funding and that without flexibility funding relationships remain contractual or transactional which in turn can stifle learning and the opportunity to make a deeper impact. Kathy Reich at Packard underlined this, that "if you remove flexibility you remove innovation and the ability to take risks." Ensuring flexibility in funding seems a pragmatic, sensible approach but not a simple one. You need a funding culture that is open to a more collaborative manner. Where funders had implemented more flexible approaches or invited grantees to feed in, this was not about removing the focus on due diligence or risk management but using flexibility as a tool to meet goals. Essentially this is about deepening relationships. However, to do this though requires capacity and as such may necessitate changes to working practice. These changes do not need to be about more staff necessarily, a number of the funders I met with had relatively small teams; they make changes by stopping some aspects of their practice to allow this work to happen.

General Operating Support

General operating support costs is a key issue in UK funding as it is in North America. I had many conversations about this difficult subject during my Fellowship. I heard about how a lack of general operating support funding has led to a "starvation sector". I have always felt uncomfortable with the assumption that these costs are not for certain funders or should be wholly found by non-profits themselves, particularly in challenging economic times. I do though understand that funders have different missions and policies and these can act as a barrier to funding these costs. It remains though a key issue and one which persists. By and large the funders I met with were funding general operating support costs as a matter of course. Kristy Huntley at the Benwood Foundation highlighted that she had seen projects "blossom" through having funding for core costs with projects able to concentrate on delivering and making a difference.[56] Funders such as Hewlett and Meyer both emphasised that over 50% of their grants are for general operating support costs. GEO are clear about the importance of this funding all based on a rationale developed from understanding need and context in the sector. In their "General Operating Support Action Guide" they emphasise that supporting these costs can lead to "improved results and delivery, enhanced capacity, increased flexibility and allow non-profits to focus spending where needed."[57] There are North American funders who offer good examples of how and why these costs should be covered. The learning I took away from my research and discussions on this issue is that funders need to decide what their aim is and what model is right to get there. Is it a transactional or relational philanthropy? Are they looking to make significant change and find solutions? If they are looking to fund significant change can this be done when supporting basic project or programme costs alone? Complex issues require complex responses and the orthodox way of funding project or programme costs may not be fit for purpose. It is not simply a matter of funding everything but looking to find an approach which meets the needs of non-profits to enable them to make an impact. Increasing the dialogue amongst funders would be beneficial to ascertain what funders are doing, debate the issue and ensure that funding is rooted in the here and now. It was refreshing to hear and see how funders were trying to make this happen and it would be useful to widen this conversation in the UK.

Funder development

A key takeaway of my Fellowship is the wealth of opportunities for funders to learn and collaborate together in the North American philanthropic sector. As previously highlighted this included an array of forums and groups. In particular it was interesting to hear about the range of affinity/collaborative groups across North America for example the Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples which connects with and support the empowerment of First Nations, Inuit and Métis nations or the Grassroots Grantmakers group that facilitates learning for place-based funders. There seemingly are groups for all types of funders on a range of specific issues which offer the opportunity to make a difference in the specific issue that binds the funders together. This can be about simply sharing knowledge or it can be about making an impact and/or supporting collaborative funding efforts. In addition to the range of networking opportunities the philanthropic infrastructure and membership organisations such as GEO and GMN support capacity, build relationships and strengthen the sector. Some offer online learning and development opportunities for members. Some look to spark change through their webinars and conferences such as the Leading Together theme which the Council on Foundations developed to create a paradigm change in philanthropy. I came away with the impression that the sector is, or at least is aiming to be collaborative and cohesive and this is something I could see as aspirational for the UK. The North American sector offers a range of examples for us to learn from, adapting them to fit our sector.

Example- The Skoll Foundation

Skoll fund social entrepreneurs who aim to make "equilibrium change - the disruption of social, economic, and political forces that enable inequality, injustice, and other thorny social and environmental problems to persist."[58] Skoll look to make large scale impact with their funding and have a flexible funding and management model. Skoll provide a "continuum of funding" to help grantees "scale their innovations and models." As Renee Kaplan emphasised, the work they fund benefits from openness. Restrictive giving and management processes can prevent their grantees making an impact.[59] As such they use an unrestricted funding model, focusing on identifying outcomes rather than costings. Grantees are able to allocate their

funding where they identify it as being most needed. The focus of their grant management is on a framework of measurable progress to outcomes. In addition to funding flexibly they also aim to have iterative relationships with their grantees, to support them to pivot, where needed, on their journey to making an impact. They do this by developing open and honest relationships and by adopting less risk averse practices so as not to stifle innovation and impact.[60] This is all underpinned by an understanding of those they fund. That making a significant or equilibrium change does not follow a uniform path; grantees need to learn, change and adapt as they work and restrictive policies and practices will not support this.

Example- Geo Change incubator

GEO are looking to "shift the culture of philanthropy from transactional to transformational."[61] They are running a "Change Incubator" pilot programme (18 months) to support funders to "address complex challenges and accelerate the pace of change within their own organisations."[62] This is being done as a peer cohort learning exchange with funders across the USA. It is focused on improving impact and strengthening relationships with grantees to ensure they are more authentic. The programme is designed to be iterative and takes an "individual, human approach."[63] The programme included a competitive application process, funders pay a fee to be part of it, and there is a commitment for them to buy into the process and practice of reflective learning, an expectation to share this learning publically, transparently and on an ongoing basis to become ambassadors of change. I was very interested to hear about funders working and learning together to make a significant change to their work and in particular sharing this publically and look forward to following the journey.

Conclusions

- There is real value in iterative relationships for both funder and grantees. This is a movement to more relational based philanthropy.
- Iterative approaches requires an agile, flexible approach to processes and relationship management
- Transformative relationships need more time and capacity than purely transactional ones.
- General operating support costs are challenging for funders everywhere. The issue of funding them is not just about internal funder policy it also is about funding for success
- There is value in sharing more information about how funders work and develop practice
- Networking groups for funders have the potential to lead to greater effectiveness and impact

Conclusions

"Social challenges are complex, philanthropy can feel like a 19th Century solution to a 21st Century issue"[64]

My Fellowship was not focused on finding a specific solution to an issue rather I aimed to learn from bright spots in practice. I was inspired by the funders and organisations I met with and encouraged by their examples of practice which could fit well in the UK sector. I found lots of commonalities between the UK and North American philanthropic sector and I do not doubt that there will be funders in the UK who are looking at some of the issues I have researched into. I did though attempt to look at practice that I have not seen delivered on a significant scale here and to identify where we might adopt or scale up some of the practices. The funders I met were not uniform they offered different examples of good practice. Some of this may be due to their history, specific working cultures, their funding focus or location. Californian funders for example seemed to be very open to not only funding innovation but striving to be innovators themselves. There was clear focus on funding transformation and ensuring that their processes and approaches were fit for purpose. They have been open to grantees undertaking learning approaches, supporting iterative work and relationships and are embracing failure and transparency. These funders seem to take their cues from their entrepreneur founders and their locations where failing fast and being quick to learn, change and adapt is prevalent. All those I met with offer good examples of practice though regardless of location. The innovative approaches I have set out all link to the aim of developing better relationships to facilitate change and impact. These approaches can foster systemic change, enabling funders and grantees to make a difference.

Principles

* Relational philanthropy- There is a move to a model of philanthropy based on trust and partnership.
* Flexibility- There is a focus on iterative, flexible relationships. Developing processes and policies to enable grantees to be agile and to course correct to achieve their aims.
* Effectiveness- Transparency, failure, more dynamic processes and practice are all about developing grantmaking practice and ensuring that funders are supporting change.
* Learning- Open sharing of knowledge by funders can support development of the sector and issues.
* Time and capacity- All of these innovative approaches require time and capacity. They may require change to working culture.
* Relationships- Transparency is a tool of strengthening trust and relationships of all types (with grantees, peers, stakeholders and the public).
* Connected Funders- There is value in investing time to connect with funding peers. If funders are better able to access information about each other's processes, policies and learning this can and should lead to more opportunities to connect, convene and collaborate
* Connected with grantees- Real value in collaborative relationships for both funder and grantees. To develop transformative relationships demands time and capacity to allow for review of how processes are supporting or preventing this.

Recommendations for the UK

"Innovation doesn't need to mean "new"; it just needs to be new to you and your organization. Look to "bright spots" already emerging inside and outside the field, and don't be afraid to copy shamelessly". [65]

The innovative approaches I have covered in my report can be adapted to support effectiveness and impact, build trust and strengthen relationships in UK funding. I would like to highlight the following recommendations:

Recommendations

- Impose excellence on ourselves as funders. There is no onus on funders to share and learn but doing this can develop consistent approaches and good practice. A lack of obligation is not a rationale for not striving for brilliance.
- Develop cultures that are open to self-reflection and critique. I was impressed by how funders were opening themselves up to criticism. This is not about self-flagellation, it is about improving practice.
- Ask difficult questions. Ask yourself and others what is the best approach to support grantees to make a difference? Do your processes mean you work beside the sector rather than in it? Do your processes support effective change or impact?
- Look to develop practice through knowledge sharing with peers, grantees, do this more and do it publically. This can be about programmes and issues as well as grant making and management practice. I was particularly enthused to see how much learning and knowledge was shared amongst funders whether as part of regular round tables or at affinity groups or by publishing learning and research. The USA in particular has numerous avenues for funders to convene and collaborate and a wealth of resources to develop practice and skills. I can see the value in investing more time for this and there are some good starting points to build upon such as the Early Action Funder's Alliance or the ACF Funder blog which gives some opportunity to share and learn.
- Put failure and transparency on the agenda. These are not one off agenda items, they need to be embedded and part of regular review and evaluation. I would suggest that funders look to North American funders for information and resources as there is lots of information and examples available. There are frameworks, models and tools to use to support work related to failure. I would suggest by starting internally with fail pot lucks and then look to share more publically.
- Share honestly about how you do things well. To develop good practice and move beyond transactional processes there needs to be space to do this. To be better we need to open up to our funding peers about how we work and highlight what we don't do to allow time for new work. Within the non-profit sector there is never enough time to do everything. How do we manage the perpetual cycle of grant rounds, manage our portfolios and ensure that we are fostering and nurturing relationships. Something has to give but rarely do we talk openly in the sector about what we don't do to allow for these essential pieces of relationship management. I suggest putting this on funding forum agendas or creating your own critical friends peer group and start sharing this vital information.
- More discussion about general operating support costs and flexible funding. This is a challenging issue but an important one. The issue of funding these costs is not just about internal funder policies it is about understanding the dynamic and changing context that non-profits work in. It would be useful for funders of all types to engage more on this issue and to share insight.
- Engage with innovators. Make links with other funders in the UK and further afield. Follow them online, participate in forums and webinars. Host discussions with colleagues, trustees and funding peers about the issues. Share this learning.

Appendices– Itinerary

Fellowship meetings 31st August- 25th September 2015

Washington DC

Aaron Dorfman, CEO, National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP)

Michelle Greanias, Executive Director, Grants Managers Network (GMN)

Meghan Duffy, Associate Vice President of Programs, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO)

Nicky Goren, President and CEO, Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation

Maegan Scott, Program and Communications Officer, Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation

Baltimore

Satonya C. Fair, Director - Grants Management, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Norris West, Director of Strategic Communications, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Bob Giloth, Vice President-Centre for Community and Economic Opportunity, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Chattanooga, Tennessee

Katie Wilson, Adjunct Professor, University of Tennessee

Kristy Huntley, Program & Financial Officer, The Benwood Foundation

San Francisco and the Bay Area

Janet Camarena, Director, The Foundation Center- San Francisco

Steve Scholl-Buckwald, Chief Financial Officer, PANNA- Pesticides Action Network North America

Renee Kaplan, Chief Strategy Officer, Integrated Programs, Skoll Foundation

Fay Twersky, Director of the Effective Philanthropy Group, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

June Wang, Organizational Learning Officer, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Kathy Reich, Organizational Effectiveness and Philanthropy Director, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

Vancouver and Victoria BC

Kevin McCort, President & CEO, Vancouver Foundation

Catherine Schissel, Director of Community Investment, Children's Health Foundation of Vancouver Island

Appendices– Resources

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