



Boost Your Impact

3 Techniques to Pack a Punch

If there is a universal desire among funders, I believe it is to increase the impact of their grantmaking. Fortunately, a few smart grantmaking techniques can increase the likelihood of doing so. Better yet, by employing these techniques you can help increase the impact of other funders and organizations. Let's look briefly at these three top aids to successful grantmaking.

Technique 1: Deploy effective grantmaking strategies.

There are three essential steps to an effective grantmaking strategy: research, clarify, and test. To be effective, you must research the field -- the issues and the needs -- to make sure that what you plan to do will have the greatest impact and meet genuine needs. Second, clarify what you want to accomplish and -- equally important -- what you don't want to accomplish. The third step is to test your ideas. Many foundations will run pilots or roll out parts of their grantmaking strategy to determine which efforts should be scaled back and which should be expanded.

By using all of these steps, you will ensure that you are deploying an effective grantmaking strategy and increasing your potential for greater impact.

Technique 2: Evaluate impact.

Foundations tend to talk a lot about evaluation but do little in terms of planning for it. Yet evaluation is a critical technique for increasing impact. That's why I recommend taking the important first step of thinking about how you will evaluate your grantmaking program even as you're planning it. How will you know when you've reached your results? How will you know when you've made a difference? What kind of data do you need in order to track that information? It's important to find an effective evaluator who meets the needs of your program; that is, someone who understands what you're trying to accomplish, is familiar with the community, and understands the issues as well as methodologies.

With this in mind, I would recommend that you not try to evaluate everything. Quite frankly, you don't have all the resources you need to evaluate each grant and initiative, so you need to think strategically about where you want to have the most impact, what you want to learn, and how you will use that information to scale your efforts. I have seen funders ask their nonprofits to provide evaluations and data even for grants of \$5,000 or \$10,000; it's not realistic to expect a nonprofit to evaluate at that scale. To increase impact, be strategic about which projects should be evaluated and which shouldn't.

Technique 3: Communicate results.

This technique should never be overlooked or shortchanged. When you communicate what you've learned and what you've accomplished to your grantees, your stakeholders, the public, and to other people in the field, then they don't have to reinvent the wheel. They can benefit from what you've done and build on your knowledge.

Recently we were working with a community foundation to conduct a site visit, and the person we met with said, "Communication starts the moment you open your mouth and start talking about something." In short, think about your communication strategy from the very beginning. This is often overlooked by funders, usually because they



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don't feel it's important enough to devote the resources. That's unfortunate because, at the end, communication can become the most critical aspect of your grantmaking. If your project can't be understood, it won't be implemented effectively and it won't be replicated.

When planning your communication strategy, I advise disseminating your results as they're happening rather than waiting until the end of your grant program to share what worked. It's often helpful for other funders, organizations, and experts in the field to be aware that you're working on this particular issue, to know how you're approaching it, and to hear about what you're learning as you go.

Of course, when you're communicating results, don't neglect to talk about what didn't work. Foundations often perceive this to be risky, and that is unfortunate. Obviously no one enjoys sharing their dirty laundry. But just as much, if not more, can be learned from talking about what didn't work as from talking about what did. If you truly want to increase impact, don't be afraid to share failures so that other foundations and organizations can conserve their resources and deploy them on effective strategies rather than repeating the mistakes you made.

The most important aspects of smart grantmaking are to develop effective grantmaking strategies, smartly allocate your funding, evaluate your impact, and communicate results. Together, these three pack a powerful punch. If you want to increase impact, I encourage you to examine your grantmaking strategies, evaluation plan, and level of communication. Are you doing the necessary up-front work or are you missing opportunities to strengthen your project?"

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