

A SCAN OF FOUNDATION GRANTMAKING IN GREATER LOS ANGELES

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Summary

With the Great Recession and its impact beginning to recede, The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy interviewed leaders of 20 of the more prominent foundations in Greater Los Angeles to understand how they are approaching their work. We explored how their grantmaking strategies, patterns, and practices have changed over the last five years and the changes, if any, they anticipate in the near term. The 20 foundations in this scan included 11 private grantmaking foundations, four corporate foundations, four community foundations and an operating foundation; four of these foundations are health-focused. The interviews were conducted in November and December 2013.

These foundations, like their counterparts in the region and across the country, are still recovering from the Great Recession five years later. In 2013, seven of the foundations had giving above their 2007 levels, five foundations were about the same as five years earlier and the remaining eight foundations were still below their pre-recession marks. Looking ahead to this year, eight foundations expect to increase their giving from 2013, 11 will maintain giving levels, and one will give somewhat less, with the median change being a 2.5 percent increase.

All of the foundations have changed their grantmaking – to varying degrees – over the past five years. Most of the foundations have responded to changes in economic conditions, though they appear to be more modest and temporary such as shifting giving toward basic community needs, being more focused on capacity building, and increasing general operating support. Among the foundations making more fundamental shifts are the health-focused foundations, who are responding to the opportunities created by the Affordable Care Act, and a handful of foundations that are reacting to changes in organizational leadership.

Over the next few years, current grantmaking strategies, patterns and practices will continue with a modest increase in the number of foundations that intend to expand the use of initiatives in their grantmaking. A number of the foundations welcome unsolicited proposals, while a slight majority does not. Most of the foundations make some multi-year grants although a few have already or will reduce the proportion of such gifts in their grant portfolios. Most of the foundations are willing to make grants to nonprofits for both operating support and capacity building, and many also provide support to capacity-building intermediaries.

Increasingly, these foundations are interested in avenues for greater impact beyond their grantmaking. They indicate a willingness to collaborate with other funders and to partner with government where there are opportunities. Many foundations, particularly those with larger staff, see working directly with grantees to provide technical assistance as a core part of their work and are interested in facilitating knowledge sharing among their grantees through convenings. In addition, a growing number are exploring new vehicles to make an impact such as program-related investments and other forms of mission investing.

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Introduction

Five years after the largest and longest recession in a generation, foundations across the country are still feeling its impact. Even as overall foundation giving and assets have risen from their precipitous declines immediately following the economic collapse, they have yet to reach the record highs of 2007. This is also true for foundations that call Los Angeles home.¹ There is little doubt of the recession's negative impact on the finances and giving of foundations, but it is less clear what the consequences have been for foundation grantmaking strategies and practices over the past five years and possible changes in the years ahead.

In an effort to answer these questions, we have conducted a scan of 20 leading foundations from the Los Angeles region. These foundations include 11 private, independent foundations, 4 community foundations, 4 corporate foundations/giving programs, and one private operating foundation.² The context of these different types of foundations has an important impact on their grantmaking. While private, independent foundations rely on their endowments in determining their grantmaking budgets, the grantmaking of community foundations is heavily influenced by the interests and passions of their donors. Corporate foundations and giving programs depend on the infusion of funds from the sponsoring corporations in setting their grantmaking budgets, while operating foundations focus primarily on delivering programs and only secondarily on grantmaking.

The giving of these foundations ranged from \$3.3 million to \$198 million in 2011, with median annual giving of \$26.7 million. The focus areas of these foundations also vary widely, from the arts to education and from health and aging to human services and community development. Most of the foundations concentrate their efforts solely on greater Los Angeles, but five are active both in the region and beyond. Four of the foundations are dedicated almost exclusively to health.

The leaders of these foundations were interviewed in an effort to understand the impact of the recession on their grantmaking patterns and practices as well as to explore how they might change their approach to their grantmaking in the next few years. We were

¹ For instance, in 2011 total giving of all Los Angeles foundations was \$1.91 billion, or 15% below what it was in 2007, while the total assets of all Los Angeles foundations were \$41.5 billion, or 4.5% below 2007.

² See the Appendix for a list of interview subjects from each of 20 foundations included in the scan. We note that two of the corporate foundations – Blue Shield of California Foundation and Bank of America Charitable Foundation – are headquartered outside of greater Los Angeles but are active and provide substantial support to the region.

particularly interested in their grantmaking approaches and strategies over the previous five years, any anticipated changes in their grantmaking in the next three years, as well as their intent to pursue strategies beyond the grant to create greater impact.

Foundations Interviewed³

Private, Independent Foundations	Community Foundations
The Ahmanson Foundation	California Community Foundation
Annenberg Foundation	Orange County Community Foundation
Archstone Foundation	Santa Barbara Community Foundation
The California Endowment	Ventura County Community Foundation
The California Wellness Foundation	Corporate Foundations
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation	Bank of America Charitable Foundation
The Eisner Foundation	Blue Shield of California Foundation
Joseph Drown Foundation	Union Bank Foundation
The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation	Wells Fargo Foundation
UniHealth Foundation	Operating Foundation
Weingart Foundation	The Getty Foundation

Foundation Giving and Assets

The foundations continue to recover from the Great Recession. Many of the leaders of these foundations said that the recession of 2008 was unlike any of those they had experienced in terms of its scale, duration and overall impact on their foundation’s assets and giving. One leader, who had been through prior economic downturns with the foundation, noted that: “In the past, we always assumed that during [those past recessions] the market would come back, but this time was different.” Another leader said their foundation had moved into a “defensive mode” due to the heavy toll it took on their endowment and the lingering uncertainty in the financial markets. They explained that in earlier downturns the foundation had not reduced giving but had instead increased it at a point “when the nonprofits and the community needed them the most.” However, during this recession they, along with many other foundations, had to pull back on their giving and think through their overarching grantmaking strategy and practices.

The changes in the assets and giving of the 20 foundations over the last five years reflect the recession’s dramatic impact. Total assets of nearly all the foundations fell in 2008 or 2009 from their historic highs in 2007, following a similar pattern to those across the country. Assets of the independent and operating foundations, which rely on their endowments, were most susceptible to the economic downturn. By 2013, total assets in 10 of the 11 independent foundations – as well as the one operating foundation – were still below their 2007 pre-recession levels. Not surprisingly, nearly all 20 foundations reduced their giving at some point from 2007 to 2013, with the greatest negative impact, again, on independent and operating foundations. Despite these struggles, foundations have been

³ The interviews occurred in November and December of 2013. We contacted another four foundations who declined to participate given transitions in leadership and/or ongoing strategic planning processes. The response rate was 83 percent.

increasing their giving over the last three years and total giving was higher in 2013 than 2007 in seven foundations and about the same as it was that same year in five others.

The impact of the recession on giving at the four corporate and four community foundations is a more mixed picture. In 2013, giving of half of the corporate foundations and a majority of the community foundations increased or was about the same as it was in 2007. This is because grantmaking budgets for corporate foundations are largely determined by an infusion of funds from sponsoring corporations and not tied directly to an endowment. Community foundations have endowments but rely significantly on gifts to donor advised funds rather than just movements in the value of the assets in their endowments.

Looking ahead, grant budgets at the foundations will stay the same or increase slightly in 2014 when compared with 2013. Seven foundations will increase their grant budgets modestly in 2014 and 11 will remain about the same as the previous year with one foundation's grant budget decreasing slightly in 2014. Changes in the size of the grantmaking budgets of these foundations generally ranged from a nine percent decrease to a nine percent increase, with median growth of 2.5 percent. One additional health-focused foundation's grant budget will increase appreciably in 2014 to support initiatives related to the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. There did not appear to be any connection between the type of foundation and whether their grant budgets were likely to increase, stay the same or decrease. Nevertheless, the modest increase is an encouraging sign that giving is approaching pre-recession levels.

Foundation Grantmaking and the Great Recession

All of the foundations in the scan changed their grantmaking approaches and practices in some way over the past five years. The souring economy was an important factor among all foundations, while the passage and implementation of the Affordable Care Act was especially instrumental to changes among the health-focused foundations. There were a few foundations where the changes were linked to leadership transitions, either at the executive or board level, more so than the economic climate.

Most (16) foundations made some change in direct response to the recession. For instance, eight foundations said they responded to increased demands in the community by providing different types of grants and grants to "basic need" providers like food banks and homeless shelters. One leader noted: "We looked at how the recession was affecting safety net providers in our community and what we could do to strengthen and sustain them." Six foundations said they had focused or increased their support for general operating grants as a strategy to help grantees survive the recession. One leader noted that they "doubled down" on providing general operating grants that they thought would "keep the doors open." Four foundations responded that they had either reduced the number of multi-year grants in the immediate aftermath of the recession, reduced the size of their grants, or both. A leader noted: "We had so many substantial commitments on the books we simply couldn't make any more."

While the scale and nature of the changes varied considerably, most of the foundations made largely incremental adjustments rather than fundamental changes. Several foundations said they had narrowed their grantmaking to particular aspects of their mission. For instance, one leader noted that they were gradually increasing the number and size of grants for K-12 education and decreasing grants for other areas. Another leader said they were increasingly supporting grantees they had worked with in the past and who had more experience doing the work than new grantees or younger, start-up organizations. Another noted a long-term shift away from helping individual organizations to sector-wide or systems-based change strategies the foundation believed would have a more substantial impact. Several saw their foundation's increased support for general operating grants not as a direct result of the economic downturn but more as a larger evolution in how foundations were approaching their work. Another leader said that their strategy had not changed fundamentally due to the recession: "Did we do something in response to the financial crisis? Yes. But did we make a change? No. We responded but we didn't create any institutional changes... We didn't come out and say; okay we are now going to change our strategy to do this moving forward."

Health-focused foundations are responding to the Affordable Care Act. The four health-focused foundations indicated that they have shifted their grantmaking strategies to respond to the opportunities created by the Affordable Care Act. For example, one foundation is now providing more direct, hands-on assistance to healthcare providers and intermediaries; another foundation is now focusing on building the capacity of communities to "mobilize"; and another is working to engage "hard to reach populations" that are likely to benefit from the law. In addition, three of the four said that they had or are planning to increase their giving to help implement the law. These changes are more pronounced than many of those offered in reaction to overall economic conditions.

Grantmaking Patterns and Practices

Beyond changes in grantmaking approaches, we examined particular grantmaking patterns and practices to see how these changes translated into the type of support that nonprofits received. We were particularly interested in the nature of the support foundations provided to nonprofits such as general operating and capacity building grants, multi-year support, and funding for overhead or indirect costs, as well as the extent to which foundations were willing to accept unsolicited proposals.

The majority of the foundations provide some general operating support. For 11 foundations, operating support accounts for over half of their grantmaking budgets. One leader defined their foundation's approach to general operating support this way: "We are providing funds to organizations where, through our due diligence process, we have determined that they've got the proper management and leadership and governance and planning systems in place to utilize our dollars where they're most needed." Another leader said: "I don't know how best to run their organization; it is not what I do for a living... so I don't try to run their organization. That's their job." The other foundations either do not

provide operating support or do so only for a small portion of their grantmaking and it is not a key part of their grantmaking practice. They also tended to have very specific and well-defined programmatic objectives for their grantmaking programs.

Most of the foundations provide capacity building grants to grantees, and many to capacity building intermediaries, using a variety of approaches. Twelve foundations estimate that capacity building comprises 10 percent or more of their grantmaking budget. Five additional foundations suggest that, if their general operating support is taken into account, they would exceed the 10 percent threshold. Foundation grants directly to nonprofits or to support intermediaries tend to emphasize executive leadership development and financial management. One leader said: “we care more about governance and leadership than we do about the mission.” Another emphasized that they supported capacity building grants because “we think it is important to tell people that investing in your staff development is not frivolous. It is essential to doing good work. It is a mistake to not invest in your people and in your organization.” Some foundations – particularly smaller foundations and those that provide mostly general operating grants – often support capacity building activities implicitly through general operating support. They also tended to be less prescriptive about the types of activities for building organizational capacity. For example, one leader noted: “We ask each of our organizations to do a self-analysis of their own capacity. We tend to ask questions to get them thinking about things.”

A majority of the foundations provide multi-year support, although some have moved away from such grants more recently. Thirteen of the 20 foundations provide multi-year grants with roughly half of the 13 viewing such grants as a key part of their grantmaking strategy. One leader, whose foundation frequently uses multi-year grants, said that such grants “provide efficiencies for both the grantee and the foundation. They allow nonprofits to better plan for the future; retain their staff; and spend less time on reporting or re-applying for funding.” Another leader said that multi-year support allowed both the foundations and grantees to “focus on the core of their work.” On the other hand, some foundations are more reticent to provide multi-year grants and “locking” themselves in over several years. One leader pointed to concern about leadership changes during the grant. Another noted the “delicate balance in providing multi-year support. If we have too many commitments in the future, it is difficult to handle the needs of today.” Another leader described their approach this way: “We have a multi-year vision, but we fund that vision year-to-year.” Smaller private foundations as well as corporate funders tended to prefer annual funding to multi-year support, while the community foundations preferred multi-year grants.

Most of the foundations do not have firm restrictions on funding for overhead/indirect expenses. Thirteen of the 20 foundations either don’t have restrictions on overhead expenses or will negotiate indirect costs with grantees. These foundations prefer to examine how money is being spent. For example, one leader noted: “Our policy is to be reasonable. We really look at the individual situation. And some efforts are going to be higher overhead for various reasons and others are going to be lower.” Another leader said that they instruct program officers to ask grantees for overhead or indirect expenses for program and capital grants. Foundations that provide predominately general operating

grants were less likely to have restrictions. The one area where foundations have a tendency to have an explicit restriction is on the indirect costs of universities.

A slight majority of the foundations focus on foundation-driven initiatives. Twelve foundations do not accept unsolicited proposals or do so only on a limited basis, instead preferring to focus on foundation-driven initiatives. These foundations suggest that their initiatives are a way to “move the needle” on their foundation’s priorities. One leader described their approach this way: “almost everything we do is based on our overarching goals so we want to make strategic investments towards those goals. Many of those investments are in nonprofits but not exclusively and we might fund research and advocacy or whatever else it takes to do that. We’ve moved from a general grantmaking strategy to a much more results-oriented, mostly initiative-driven strategy to get certain things going and moving forward.” The remaining eight foundations do most of their grantmaking through unsolicited, competitive grantmaking processes for the great majority of their grants. One leader suggested that “virtually everything” they fund is unsolicited and that this was an indication of a “truly responsive grantmaker.” Another leader said, that, in combination with being “program agnostic,” that the open process allows their portfolio of grantmaking in any one given year to be a direct reflection of the demands in the community, noting that: “We’re basically saying communities know best what’s in their best interests... not us.”

Grantmaking Ahead

Grantmaking over the next three years will likely be a continuation of current practices, with only modest changes. The scan does not reveal or suggest dramatic shifts in terms of how these foundations will approach their work over the next three years. The majority of foundations say they do not anticipate significant changes in their grantmaking practices. With the exception of the health-focused foundations, leaders see the number and types of program they support as well as the types of grants they provide to remain largely unchanged. Nor will the geographic focus change for most foundations. As one leader noted, even though the recession is technically over, “there is still a lot of insecurity among board members in terms of where things are headed and what might happen in the future.”

Some foundations say they will further define the areas they fund and how they approach that work suggesting a greater focus in their grantmaking. More than half say they expect the total number of grantees to stay the same, with another quarter expecting an increase, and a quarter expecting a decrease. At the same time, one-third of the foundations expect an increase in the number of new grantees, largely as a result of new or expanding program areas. And, a few foundations (3) will move away from multi-year grants. The primary rationale for this was to better manage foundation cash flow and to continually assess and refresh their funding portfolio. Some change is anticipated with regards to further implementation of the Affordable Care Act. For instance, one foundation’s grantmaking budget will grow appreciably in 2014 to support grants and other efforts to help implement the new law, but otherwise dramatic expansions in total giving – or to new issues – appears unlikely.

There are a handful of foundations that are moving to greater use of initiatives. A quarter of the foundations in the scan indicated that they are moving to more initiative-based grantmaking. This focus corresponds with an increase in multi-year grants and a decrease in funding for unsolicited proposals. Community foundations in particular view initiative funding as a strategy to leverage their limited, unrestricted funds and attract more support among their donors toward identified community needs.

Beyond the Grant

In addition to examining emerging grant patterns, foundations are contemplating making an impact beyond their grantmaking through a variety of avenues such as partnerships, technical assistance and mission investing. One leader noted: “We see ourselves as more than a grantmaker and we feel that money is just one lever for change.”

Foundations are open to partnering with other foundations and government. All 20 foundations said they had or were willing to partner with other foundations and more than half said they had or were willing to partner with government. While a couple of foundations see collaborations with either foundations or with government as an integral part of their work, most are open to responding to opportunities that arise as opposed to seeking them out. The increased conversation about partnerships and collaboration in philanthropy has taken hold, particularly in an era of sluggish growth in grantmaking budgets. One leader noted: “we don’t have enough money to provide everything that a lot of nonprofits and the community need. We can help them, but we can’t be their only source of money. Partnerships with either government or other foundations, or both, are an important way to get more leverage.” But most of the foundations are realistic, and cautious, about their promise: “We want to continue to try, to learn and to figure how best to work with others.” Another leader was more reserved: “They take a huge amount of work, are not always effective, and we would go back to them with some caution.”

Some of the larger foundations view themselves as a resource to the work of their grantees by providing expertise and direct technical assistance. The larger foundations are willing to share the expertise of their staffs, either in a particular topical area (e.g., healthcare) or skill set (e.g., policy advocacy), with their grantees. And, almost all of the foundations convene their grantees on a regular or semi-regular basis to share knowledge with one another, seeing it as an important resource for their grantees to learn from one another and for the foundations to learn from their grantees. One leader said they are building their own internal capacity to help grantees directly: “We are reshaping ourselves to provide technical assistance ourselves. We want to do more direct, hands-on work. Our sense is that we can provide more front-end technical assistance and more front-end shaping of our engagement with our grantees, and do a better job of uncovering what they learned and what they did so that we can share that knowledge with others.” Corporate foundation leaders also stressed that, beyond their grantmaking, the human capital within the corporation is a unique and important asset for them to make a difference. They view employee service on nonprofit boards and volunteering as an important responsibility of

the corporate community. As one of the corporate leaders noted: “It’s about giving back, it’s about paying a service to your customer and to your community, which is why board service and employee volunteering are really important to us.”

There is a growing interest in mission investments. Nearly three-quarters of the foundations said they had used or are interested in using program-related investments as a strategy for impact, and almost half said that they have recently discussed mission investing or are interested in doing so. These strategies comprise only a small fraction of the foundations’ activities and are more prospective in most. Nevertheless, they appear to be burgeoning. As one leader explained: “What we’re intrigued by is the idea that you shouldn’t always start with the notion of how can a grant help; you should just start with how can we help and then use the appropriate tools to accomplish that goal.”

Conclusion

The foundations included in this scan are a robust cross-section of the philanthropic institutions working across greater Los Angeles to create greater impact. They vary in size and scope as well as mission and approach, but all are focused on making a bigger difference. Each foundation feels they have their own part to play in impacting the issues and areas where their foundation is focused. Some foundations see their role as strengthening the philanthropic or nonprofit sector or easing the hardship of nonprofits and the communities they serve, but most are driven by foundation imperatives. Even foundations with similar perspectives often approach their work very differently. Some use foundation initiatives as drivers of change while others are more responsive in their approach; some view general operating support as most critical while others focus on building the capacity of organizations through grants to nonprofits or intermediaries or taking on this role themselves. How they create impact, and the strategies that they intend to use to make that impact varies, in part by the nature of their missions, as well as the type of foundation and how it is organized. As some of the leading foundations in the region, they are well-positioned to discuss the changes that the local foundation community has made in their grantmaking over the last five year in the midst of the Great Recession and to signal possible changes on the horizon as foundations continue to come back.

First, foundations in this scan have made some changes in the last five years, but they have for the most part been modest. The shifts in their approach to grantmaking have been incremental, responding to nonprofit needs in the light of foundation imperatives and opportunities that have presented themselves. Many of the foundations have focused on how best to support their nonprofit partners during a period when their endowments dipped and the finances of nonprofit have been squeezed between rising demands and diminished government support. And the health-focused foundations have made investments to help implement the Affordable Care Act so as to expand access to health care.

Second, the foundation leaders that we interviewed have a broad understanding of the value of general operating support and capacity building to achieve programmatic outcomes. Many foundations provide general operating support, fund capacity building, and engage in activities to strengthen the capacity of nonprofits through staff assistance

and knowledge sharing. These practices are viewed as investments in improved programs. Yet, several foundation leaders underscored the continuing challenge of effective board and executive leadership within the nonprofit sector. There is a need to attract and retain executives that are adaptive and tenacious as well as boards that understand their fiduciary responsibilities and provide guidance and support in a meaningful way to their executive. This underscores a need to not only focus on programmatic goals, but the organizations themselves.

Third, foundations are increasingly looking beyond grantmaking to increase their impact. For instance, most foundations indicate that they are open to collaborating with other funders and a majority with government, though few are actively spearheading such efforts. Many of the larger foundations are also looking to new vehicles for making change, such as program related investments and mission investing. It is clear that in an era of recovery and modest growth in grantmaking, foundations are looking for additional avenues to generate greater impact.

Appendix: Foundations Leaders Interviewed

William Ahmanson
President
The Ahmanson Foundation

Fred Ali
President and CEO
Weingart Foundation

Leonard Aube
Executive Director
Annenberg Foundation

Carl Ballton
Chairman and CEO
Union Bank Foundation

Dannielle Campos
Senior Vice President
Bank of America Charitable Foundation

Ronald V. Gallo
CEO
Santa Barbara Community Foundation

Wendy Garen
President and CEO
The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation

Antonia Hernández
President and CEO
California Community Foundation

Steven Hilton
Chairman, President and CEO, *and*
Edmund Cain
Vice President, Grant Programs
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

Shelley Hoss
President
Orange County Community Foundation

Peter Long
President and CEO
Blue Shield of California Foundation

Deborah Marrow
Director
The Getty Foundation

Mary Odell
President
UniHealth Foundation

Joseph F. Prevratil, J.D.
President and CEO
Archstone Foundation

Hugh J. Ralston
President and CEO
Ventura County Community Foundation

Trent Stamp
Executive Director
The Eisner Foundation

Wendy Wachtell
President and CEO
Joseph Drown Foundation

Jonathan Weedman
Regional Vice President
Wells Fargo Foundation

Colburn (Cole) Wilbur
Interim President and CEO
The California Wellness Foundation

Daniel Zingale
Senior Vice President
The California Endowment

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