MAKING THE CASE

FOUNDATION LEADERS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF MULTIYEAR GENERAL OPERATING SUPPORT

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FOUNDATION LEADERS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF MULTIYEAR GENERAL OPERATING SUPPORT

A companion to *New Attitudes, Old Practices: The Provision of Multiyear General Operating Support*

Prepared by Hannah Martin and Kate Gehling

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ABOUT THE CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE PHILANTHROPY

The mission of the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) is to provide data and create insight so philanthropic funders can better define, assess, and improve their effectiveness—and, as a result, their intended impact.

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FORD FOUNDATION

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INTRODUCTION

This piece is a companion to *New Attitudes, Old Practices: The Provision of Multiyear General Operating Support*. The five foundations featured in this piece—The California Wellness Foundation, The Claneil Foundation, Foundation for a Just Society, The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, and Paul Hamlyn Foundation—are among the 43 foundations that participated in interviews for this research. We asked these five foundations for permission to share excerpts of their interviews because they all provide more multiyear general operating support (multiyear GOS) than typical and represent a range of geographies, size, and foundation type.

Our goal in sharing these excerpts is to provide examples for foundations that are thinking about starting to provide or increasing their provision of multiyear GOS. We wanted to give these five foundations the opportunity to share, in their own words, why they provide this support, how considerations of equity fit into their decision-making about which grantees receive this support, any advice they would share with their peer foundations, and more.

We hope these profiles, in companion with *New Attitudes, Old Practices: The Provision of Multiyear General Operating Support*, help foundation staff and leaders make the case for multiyear GOS.

THE CALIFORNIA
Wellness
FOUNDATION

MISSION

To protect and improve the health and wellness of the people of California by increasing access to health care, quality education, good jobs, healthy environments and safe neighborhoods.

LOCATION

Oakland, CA and
headquartered in Los Angeles

YEAR ESTABLISHED

1992

STAFF

40 FTE

2019 ASSET SIZE

$950 million*

2019 ANNUAL GIVING

$43 million in grants and program-related investments

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

State

FOUNDATION TYPE

Health Conversion

* Given the current moment, the California Wellness Foundation's 2020 asset size and annual giving are substantially different from 2019.

INTERVIEWEE

FATIMA ANGELES
Vice President of Programs
Tenure – 22 years

CEP: The California Wellness Foundation provides more multiyear general operating support than is typical. Has the foundation always provided so much of this support or has there been an intentional effort in recent years to provide more?

FATIMA: It was intentional. There was a shift in 2001—it was a definite 180 from how we used to do the work. Before 2001, we made almost all of our grants through foundation-driven, five- to 10-year initiatives. We put out requests for proposals based on the criteria that we identified, folks applied, we selected, and then we closed the requests for proposals.

As the initiatives ended and we engaged in strategic planning, we met with our grantees. We learned that communities were feeling shut out of the resources that this foundation had to offer. That was the turning point.

Since then, we have dedicated ourselves to the principles of responsive multiyear general operating support for both direct service and policy efforts. As a funder committed to advancing social justice, we know we have to provide multiyear support because the changes we want to see take years. Ultimately, because of this approach, we are better and more relevant as an organization.

CEP: How does providing multiyear general operating support help you achieve your goals as a funder?

FATIMA: I think, we can only achieve our mission if the nonprofit organizations of California and the nonprofit infrastructure in California are strong. One of the ways we achieve our goals and our mission is by making grants to other organizations. In a world that is dynamic and ever-changing, we want organizations to be stable, sustainable, creative, and flexible because that's the only way they'll be able to adapt.

Providing general operating support allows them to stay true to mission, innovate if they need to, and improve their organization when necessary. All of that means that they're stronger to do what they need to do. We need them to be amazing, and they have said, "If you want us to be amazing, give us multiyear general operating support."

CEP: How do you think about assessing the impact of these grants?

FATIMA: We look at different kinds of metrics. For example, a $200,000 grant over three years isn't going to change the world; it's going to help an organization stay in the game. That's a win. We think of our grants as contributions; we don't look for attribution. If a grant allows an organization to keep its doors open, and over the course of a year it serves 1,000 people, we don't ask, "Well, 1,000 people, but how many did you serve with our dollars?" Instead, we learn from questions like, "How did our dollars help you achieve your mission?" In cases when we want to learn more about outcomes and impact, we hire external evaluators.

CEP: You were a program officer when the foundation made the switch to multiyear general operating support grants. From your perspective, how does providing these grants change the role of program officers?

FATIMA: At first, I was skeptical. I was worried that it would render me useless.

I was totally wrong—it made me more engaged than ever. We're less insulated as an institution. We get letters every day, so we know what's happening in the community and what's changing. We're

able to track almost in real time what organizations are going through, and then we talk to them about that.

It's been fascinating to better understand how nonprofits do their work. Now, our conversation at site visits isn't about how many people will be served or what will be created with the dollars. The conversation is about what organizations really need to be strong and effective, which is more interesting than counting widgets. It's made me a better citizen, too, because I appreciate the role of nonprofits in our civic civil society more than ever.

And our evolution as a foundation isn't done. Over the last five years, we've set our sights on using every tool in our toolbox to further our mission—that includes raising our voice, advocating for policy change, and making program-related investments. That's critical for making systems-level changes that will make our society more equitable.

CEP: How do considerations of equity fit into decision-making about which organizations to provide with multiyear general operating support?

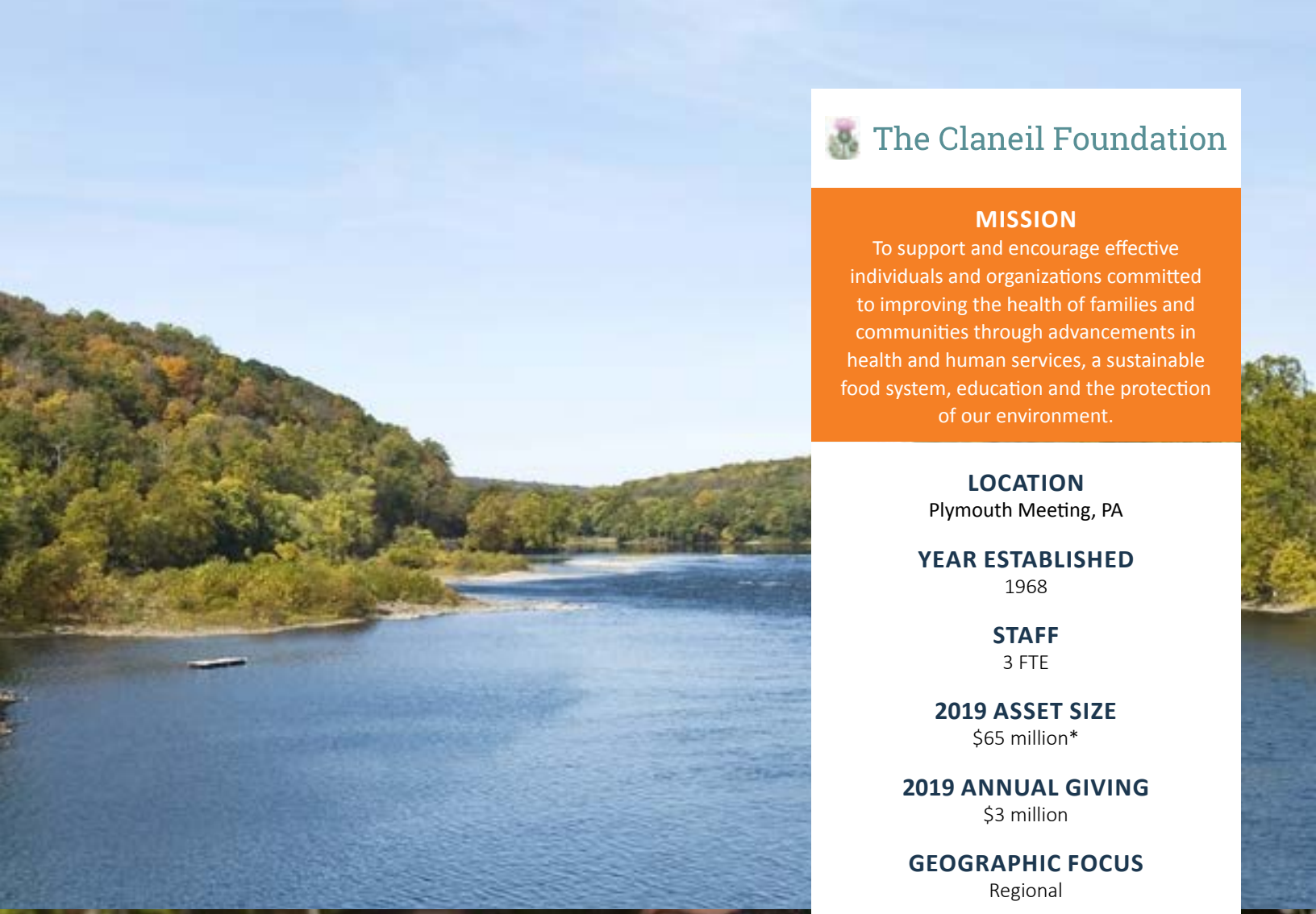
FATIMA: We care deeply about racial justice, which leads us to support organizations led by people of color. When an organization's staff and board reflect the community, the strategies are more likely to be informed by the community's needs, vision, and solutions. However, organizations led by people of color tend to get less support, so part of funding for equity is shifting that dynamic in California's nonprofit community.

CEP: What advice would you give to a foundation leader thinking about providing or upping their levels of multiyear general operating support?

FATIMA: Do it. It's not that hard. There are so many benefits, and it's what organizations are asking for. To me, the question is, "If organizations are asking for it, why aren't we giving it?" After all, they know what they need, and they know what needs to be done.

> **In a world that is dynamic and ever-changing, we want organizations to be stable, sustainable, creative and flexible because that's the only way they'll be able to adapt.**
>
> – Fatima Angeles

> **To me, the question is, 'If organizations are asking for it, why aren't we giving it?'**
>
> – Fatima Angeles



The Claneil Foundation

MISSION

To support and encourage effective individuals and organizations committed to improving the health of families and communities through advancements in health and human services, a sustainable food system, education and the protection of our environment.

LOCATION
Plymouth Meeting, PA

YEAR ESTABLISHED
1968

STAFF
3 FTE

2019 ASSET SIZE
$65 million*

2019 ANNUAL GIVING
$3 million

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS
Regional

FOUNDATION TYPE
Family

* Given the current moment, the Claneil Foundation's 2020 asset size and annual giving are substantially different from 2019.

Photograph courtesy of Real Food Challenge

INTERVIEWEES

MAILEE WALKER
Executive Director
Tenure – 13 years

ANDREA BRETTING
Senior Program Officer
Tenure – 12 years

KAREN RACE
Grants & Communications Manager
Tenure – 11 years

CEP: The Claneil Foundation provides more multiyear general operating support than is typical. Has this always been the case?

MAILEE: We did a reassessment of our grantmaking in 2015 and 2016, and in 2017 we revised all of our grant programs to exclusively provide multiyear general operating support.

KAREN: We found that what our grantees needed and were asking for was multiyear general operating support.

ANDREA: The staff knew that multiyear support and general operating support are best practices in the field and are what the grantees need the most, value the most, want the most.

CEP: How did the staff build board support to make this change?

MAILEE: We asked grantees for feedback and input on our grantmaking practices, and, over and over, they brought up the importance of multiyear general operating support. We shared grantees' quotes anonymously with the board. Several board members had been very supportive of multiyear general operating support previously. Hearing directly from nonprofits about the value of multiyear general operating support was powerful for the whole board. The board saw that with these grants, you can still learn, and you can still build a relationship. It gave them the confidence to provide this type of support.

CEP: What are some of the benefits of providing multiyear general operating support?

MAILEE: Providing multiyear grants helps build relationships with grantees much more than a single-year grant. There's always going to be a power imbalance, but at least with these grants we can have more honest conversations than we would if we only provided single-year project-based grants. We can learn what challenges organizations are facing and how we can be helpful beyond the grant. Organizations can't exist only on project support. Flexible funding is not a luxury, it's a necessity.

ANDREA: It gives grantees flexibility. I hear from the grantees what a relief it was to receive multiyear general operating support. And it's a relief to me, too, to know that with multiyear general operating support organizations can be nimble and respond to the needs in the communities they serve.

CEP: Does providing multiyear general operating support change the way you do your work?

ANDREA: Our timelines changed a bit in that we don't have to start all over again every year. It provides us more time to build relationships with grantees. It doesn't necessarily make the work easier or harder; just different. There is less

emphasis on paperwork and more emphasis on relationship-building and learning.

KAREN: When we were providing single-year grants, our process was very front-heavy, and now the work is spread out through the process. Instead of reviewing letters of intent and proposals every year, we read reports throughout the grant cycle. So, our work looks different, and the timelines are shifted, but it's not that it's harder.

MAILEE: After we made the shift, I felt like I could breathe a little bit more. It takes time to build trust with organizations, and providing this kind of support gave us more time to do that. We could learn more, instead of getting ready for the next grant cycle, and the grantees could learn more, instead of creating a new proposal.

CEP: How do you think about assessing the impact of these grants?

MAILEE: When we were considering providing more of this support, I remember asking a trusted confidante for counsel. I'll always remember the guidance she shared with me. "With general operating support grants," she said, "you can better understand the organization. If you think about it as a car, with project grants you might only see the wheel, and you have no idea that the engine needs repair."

"But with general operating support, you see the whole car because you're looking at everything." With multiyear general operating support, we are looking at the whole entity, not just a piece of it. We don't know that our money went to the window versus the door, but we are investing in the organization as a whole.

CEP: What advice would you give to a foundation leader thinking about providing or upping their levels of multiyear general operating support?

MAILEE: Just do it! None of us at the foundation have wished we were still providing single-year grants. Nor has our board; they really take pride in providing multiyear general operating support grants.

ANDREA: I think that our responsibility, as a sector, is to get out of the way, let grantees do the work they are committed to, and to listen to what they tell us they need.

MAILEE: I agree. The work that our grantees do is complex, and dealing with us should not be the most complicated part of their work. Viewing our role, as foundations, in that way can really inform our grantmaking structure because it builds trust with the organizations we support.

Photograph courtesy of Karen Gowen

> **Hearing directly from nonprofits about the value of multiyear general operating support was powerful for the board.**
>
> **– Mailee Walker**

Photograph courtesy of About Fresh

On assessing the impact of general operating support, my trusted confidante said, 'If you think about it as a car, with project grants you might only see the wheel, and you have no idea that the engine needs repair. But with general operating support, you see the whole car.'

– Mailee Walker

FOUNDATION FOR A JUST SOCIETY

MISSION

Foundation for a Just Society advances the rights of women, girls, and LGBTQI people and promotes gender and racial justice by ensuring those most affected by injustice have the resources they need to cultivate the leadership and solutions that transform our world.

LOCATION

New York, NY

YEAR ESTABLISHED

2011

STAFF

26 FTE

2019 ASSET SIZE

$605 million

2019 ANNUAL GIVING

$44.7 million

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

International

FOUNDATION TYPE

Independent Foundation

Photograph courtesy of African Women's Development Fund

Photograph courtesy of Coalition of Immokalee Workers

INTERVIEWEES

MAITRI MORARJI
Director of Programs
Tenure – 2 years

CEP: The Foundation for a Just Society (FJS) provides more multiyear general operating support than is typical. Why does FJS provide this type of support to so many of its grantees?

MAITRI: Both multiyear and flexible core support have been central principles of our grantmaking approach since our founding in 2011. Our board, which is composed primarily of family and friends of our president and founder, is committed to a vision of long-term, supportive engagement with grantee partners on the ground. For years now, many other feminist funders have been planting the seed for flexible core support. We're standing on the shoulders of those who began this work.

CEP: What benefits do you see to providing this type of support?

MAITRI: One is the ability to plan long term. Flexible core support can cover costs that aren't covered by a lot of other funders, like the hiring of staff for permanent positions rather than short-term project-based positions. If you hire a staff member to work at the organization for the long term, there's an investment in them, and they're also invested in fully understanding where the organization is going as opposed to understanding just one project. Another benefit is that grantee partners have the ability to be adaptive. When the political context or other things change at the local level, they have the ability to adapt how they're using their funds to address emergency needs.

MÓNICA ENRÍQUEZ-ENRÍQUEZ
Program Officer
Tenure – 2 years

MÓNICA: I'll share a good example of the benefits of multiyear flexible support. One of our smaller grantee partners hadn't been able to give a salary increase to its staff since the organization's inception. It didn't have the money, and it didn't want to increase the salaries of only some positions. With our grant, it was able to provide a salary increase for all staff. That makes such a huge difference—for the organization to be able to have more internal sustainability and equity.

CEP: How do considerations of equity fit into your decision-making about which grantees receive multiyear general operating support?

MAITRI: One of our values is that we center those most affected by systems of oppression. We are committed to supporting Black women, Indigenous women, young women, and LBTQ leadership. We want to center the leadership of those voices and communities inside our grantee partners. How that looks is very different in each region. We work with organizations that are based in the regions we support instead of an international organization that is not from the region. We try to understand who is on staff and the identities of the folks who are in leadership. For example, in our U.S. Southeast portfolio, we prioritize organizations led by people of color, and those organizations get flexible core support.

MÓNICA: The equity strategy cannot just be to give flexible multiyear funding. As an isolated strategy, it will not be as successful. We think about how we can make the work that we're supporting more multilayered and intersectional. The types of organizations that we want to support are led by people

Photograph courtesy of Colors Rainbow

> **Flexible multiyear support allows grantees the ability to be adaptive. When the political context or other things change at the local level, they have the ability to adapt how they're using their funds to address emergency needs.**
>
> – Maitri Morarji

who are most affected by systems of oppression and are also using cross-movement or cross-issue perspectives. By virtue of adding those two things together, our grantee partners end up coming from a greater diversity of communities.

CEP: How do you think about assessing the impact of multiyear general operating support grants?

MAITRI: One of the things we consider is the impact we're having on the organizations themselves:

- In what ways are the organizations stronger?
- In what ways are they better able to meet the needs of the communities in which they're working?
- In what ways are they better able to fundraise?
- In what ways are they able to more effectively advocate with decision-makers?

We look at the impact that grantee partners are having around particular issues.

We're also exploring the ability of the groups that we're funding to connect with and be part of movements. We ask how our funding makes the movement stronger and better able to achieve its goals.

CEP: What are FJS's considerations when deciding to provide multiyear general operating support versus organizational strengthening support?

MAITRI: We think about our relationships with grantee partners as being more wraparound. It's not just giving flexible multiyear support. We've found that even when we provide flexible multiyear support, organizations often don't use it for their internal processes. Maybe that's because we're operating often in such a resource-starved context, in terms of where our organizations are located. So, on top of flexible core support grants, we often give funding for specific things. These include building out grantee partners' communications, supporting leadership transitions, supporting strategic planning processes, funding grantee partners to attend conferences, and funding grantee partners to come together as peers and learn and strategize. We do a lot of other complementary funding on top of the core support.

> **The equity strategy cannot just be to give flexible multiyear funding. We think about how we can make the work that we're supporting more multilayered and intersectional.**
>
> – Mónica Enríquez-Enríquez

Photograph courtesy of José Callado

Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation

MISSION

To help people and places move out of poverty and achieve greater social and economic justice.

LOCATION

Winston-Salem, NC

YEAR ESTABLISHED

1953

STAFF

12 FTE

2019 ASSET SIZE

$203 million*

2019 ANNUAL GIVING

$10.7 million

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Regional

FOUNDATION TYPE

Independent Foundation

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* Given the current moment, the MRBF's 2020 asset size and annual giving are substantially different from 2019.

INTERVIEWEES

JUSTIN MAXSON
Chief Executive Officer
Tenure – 5 years

ELENA CONLEY
Chief Strategy Officer
Tenure – 6 years

CEP: The Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation (MRBF) provides more multiyear general operating support than is typical. Why does the foundation provide this type of support to so many of its grantees?

JUSTIN: For going on 20 years, the foundation has had a significant commitment to multiyear general operating grants. To address complicated and systemic challenges, particularly in the south, organizations need access to flexible resources that allow them to grow their capacity. We have a fundamental commitment to building strong organizations and providing them with the resources they need to handle complicated issues and to flexibly adapt their work based on changing contexts.

CEP: What benefits do you see to providing multiyear general operating support?

JUSTIN: Multiyear general operating support engenders stronger relationships and trust that allows us to be in more honest dialogue with our grantee partners. That means we do better work because we get less hyperbole and more reality from our grantees. Multiyear general operating support communicates from us to our grantee partners that we value their work and believe in them and their approach.

ELENA: I also think general operating support grants allow us to see the work from a higher perspective, to really understand where organizations are, and to help them be long-term, sustainable organizations. We get a better understanding

> **General operating support grants allow us to see the work from a higher perspective, to really understand where organizations are, and to help them be long-term, sustainable organizations.**
>
> – Elena Conley

of the organization when we have the larger conversation from a general operating support stance.

CEP: What criteria do the foundation use to decide which organizations receive multiyear general operating support?

JUSTIN: It's the other way around—our default position is multiyear general support grants. Our fundamental approach to grantmaking is about supporting networks that have articulated a body of work where we see a combination of opportunity and the need for capacity. We tend to only provide project grants when the partner has articulated a time-limited set of outcomes for a discrete project. In the last five years, I can't remember a time where we pushed someone from a general support grant to a project grant.

CEP: How do considerations of equity fit into your decision-making about which grantees receive multiyear general operating support?

JUSTIN: Advancing equity, particularly racial equity, is part of why capacity building is so important to the foundation, and why we have a commitment to helping build strong organizations. Structural racism is a major barrier to people of color being able to live the quality of lives they deserve. That fact has fed into the way we think about opportunity and challenges in the south. The work we support in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana is about engaging low- to moderate-income people, particularly people of color, to deliberately build their political power. Roughly two-thirds of the organizations with which we work are led by people of color.

To build the necessary infrastructure, strong organizations, and networks in the south to tackle economic and racial injustice, we start by providing general operating support. General support is critical, particularly for organizations led by people of color, because the groups we support are generally underresourced and need access to flexible dollars to grow their capacity.

ELENA: As part of MRBF's equity frame, we don't have a piecemeal approach to who gets general operating support or make decisions based on budget size or breadth of work. Just because an organization is small doesn't mean that it doesn't have the capacity to move the work and the strategy. Within general operating support grants, we also support capacity building and organizational development work to support smaller organizations.

JUSTIN: We are careful to have a balanced strategy that supports anchor organizations and support organizations that are often, but not always, smaller. And we're conscious to make sure that the anchor organizations we support—particularly in strategies that are primarily about engaging or advancing people of color—are led by people of color.

CEP: What advice would you give to a foundation leader thinking about starting to provide or upping their levels of multiyear general operating support?

JUSTIN: If it's possible to be in a deeper relationship with grantee partners, you'll get a better sense of the way a general operating support grant is helpful—how it supports stronger capacity and more effective work. If you're doing general operating support grantmaking and thinking about relationship building with your grantee partners, I think you'll get better results.

General support is critical, particularly for groups led by people of color, because the groups we support are generally underresourced and need access to flexible dollars to grow their capacity.

– Justin Maxson

RISE - an outdoor performance to celebrate the launch of Brent's year as London Borough of Culture 2020. Photograph courtesy of Getty Images.

phf Paul Hamlyn Foundation

MISSION

To be an effective and independent funder, using all our resources to create opportunities and support social change. We partner with inspiring organisations and individuals to make sure that people facing disadvantage are at the heart of leading change and designing solutions to overcome inequality.

LOCATION

London, United Kingdom

YEAR ESTABLISHED

1987

STAFF

46 FTE

2019 ASSET SIZE

$1 billion / £800 million

2019 ANNUAL GIVING

$60 million / £46.8 million

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

International

FOUNDATION TYPE

Independent Foundation

Beatfreeks is a youth-led creative agency that offer programmes, activities and platforms which empower young people as leaders, creators, decision makers, and mentors. Photograph courtesy of Beatfreeks Associate.

INTERVIEWEE

MOIRA SINCLAIR
Chief Executive
Tenure – 5 years

CEP: Paul Hamlyn Foundation has increased the amount of multiyear general operating support that it provides to grantees over time. Why has it increased its multiyear general operating support?

MOIRA: We have recently refreshed the strategy first launched in 2015. Before this, the foundation provided some core funding and some multiyear funding. In the five years since we launched the new strategy, we have engaged with learning partners, evaluating partners, CEP research, and our grantees and applicants to understand what the sector needs. As a result of those conversations, we've been increasing our multiyear general operating support.

There was also a significant push within the foundation, particularly from staff who joined PHF from the nonprofit sector. Having staff with recent, direct experience working in the nonprofit sector has really informed our practice.

Furthermore, in the United Kingdom, we've been through a very long period of austerity, experiencing cuts in government funding at both the national and local level. That austerity has put an enormous pressure on the sectors we support. That has been a huge influence in providing more multiyear flexible grants. The organizations that we value are really struggling to get core support from anywhere else, and the sectors were weakening as a result.

One of my colleagues would say, "It's no good icing the cake if you don't have any cake to ice." In other words, our work is about maintaining the resilience of these sectors, so that when we come out of the period of austerity, grantees are still there, and they can still deliver the services that we want to see happening for our young people and for the migrant community. There is a real danger that organizations are so stretched and focused on fundraising that they are not able to sustain the projects that they're delivering.

CEP: How does providing multiyear general operating support help you achieve your goals as a funder?

MOIRA: The areas in which our programs are focused—arts access and education, investing in young people, and migration and integration—are complex and multidimensional. We don't expect to see a solution suddenly appear any time soon. Within that context, it feels as though a multiyear approach is completely rational because it allows us and the organizations we're funding to have a much longer time frame to shift the dial.

In some of the fields in which we operate, things have gone backward rather than forward. In the migration sector, we envision a society where people can migrate well and the communities where they're going to be hosted can thrive. At the moment, our government is creating a hostile environment for migrants. People need to regroup and rethink their approach because some of the approaches just haven't been working. You can't fund people in a year to try and address things that are going to take them much longer.

Our increase in general operating support has more to do with thinking about our role as a funder broadly—wanting to be a flexible grantmaker that's responsive to the needs of the organizations that we fund, and recognizing the importance of stability in making those longer-term core commitments. Grantee organizations and their people and leaders are better placed to do the work than us. As an effective grantmaker, we need

Fevered Sleep's Men & Girls Dance is a project celebrating the rights of adults and children to be together, to play together and to dance together. Photograph courtesy of Matthew Andrews.

> **Our work is about maintaining the resilience of these sectors, so that when we come out of the period of austerity, grantees are still there.**
>
> – Moira Sinclair

to make sure that they have the space to do the job that they need to do. Core funding allows those leaders a bit more space to breathe.

CEP: Has increasing its provision of multiyear general operating support changed the work of the foundation's program officers and grants managers?

MOIRA: Making people apply every year for the same thing is exhausting for the people who are applying, and it creates work for our program officers and grants managers. You have to assess applications even if you know the organization really well. I would like our grants managers to spend more time on the relationships, on the learning, on the "what happens next" part of the grant, rather than on the application assessment piece. I want our program officers and grants managers to feel as though they're connected to the work. And providing multiyear general operating support allows this shift to happen.

CEP: What advice would you give to a foundation leader thinking about providing or upping their levels of multiyear general operating support?

MOIRA: I'd say get on with it, actually. I think if you listen with an open heart and an open mind to what the field is telling you it needs, then you'll recognize that organizations need this commitment. You can make life more difficult or simpler for the organizations that you're supporting. One of the ways in which you shift power is by trusting the organizations that you fund. And one of the ways in which you can demonstrate trust is by giving them multiyear funding.

One of the ways in which you shift power is by trusting the organizations that you fund. And one of the ways in which you can demonstrate trust is by giving them multiyear funding.

– Moira Sinclair

My Creative School investigates how schools can effectively embed the arts as drivers of powerful learning experiences. Photograph courtesy of Roger Brown for A New Direction.

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