

MISSION: CEP provides data, feedback, programs, and insights to help individual and institutional donors improve their effectiveness.

WHY IT MATTERS: We do this work because we believe effective donors, working collaboratively and thoughtfully, can profoundly contribute to creating a better and more just world.

CEP's Definition of Philanthropic Effectiveness

Philanthropy can take on pressing challenges that other actors in society cannot, or will not. Given the unique opportunity to deploy tax-advantaged dollars for good, individual and institutional givers alike have an imperative to maximize their effectiveness, and therefore, their impact.

Effectiveness must be grounded in the social, cultural, and historical context of the issues being addressed. Effectiveness also requires an understanding that while a sense of urgency is crucial, results do not always come easily or quickly. Effectiveness necessitates an understanding of the ways in which disparities – including those brought about by discriminatory policies, approaches, and systems – have influenced societal outcomes. Finally, little is accomplished alone; individual and institutional givers should strive to be effective themselves and also in the way they work collaboratively with others.

CEP believes that effectiveness requires the following four mutually reinforcing elements:

1. **Goals** — *what* you seek to achieve
2. **Strategies** — the *ways* in which you work to achieve your goals
3. **Implementation** — what you *do* (e.g., “the work”)
4. **Assessment and Learning** — how you know you’re doing the work effectively

We believe that these elements of philanthropic effectiveness are essential. Yet of course it’s hope, a sense of caring, and a genuine commitment to meaningful change that motivate this work. Values motivate funder goals and approaches, and it’s crucial that funders ensure that their core values are reflected across all of their work.

1. GOALS

Clearly defined, communicated, and well understood by givers, staff, and board (when relevant), and organizations receiving or seeking support

Shared with other donors and organizations, whenever possible

Informed by input from those closest to the issues including, when possible, those directly affected

Chosen with awareness of what other givers, both individual and institutional, are already doing and have tried to do before

Ambitious yet tempered by modesty and humility — characterized by the courage to take on significant challenges and a recognition of the scale of issues being addressed relative to resources and time required to address them



2. STRATEGIES

Rooted in a well-conceived theory of how the strategy leads to goal achievement; a commitment to learning and improvement; and, whenever possible, evidence that the strategy works (whether from relevant science, evaluations, or other data)

Informed by an understanding of the problem or issue, including the social/historical context in which the issue exists — with respect to prejudice and bigotry and particularly the role discriminatory policies, approaches, and systems have played in creating the current context



Grounded in knowledge of what others are doing to address the problem and how the strategy relates to those other efforts, understanding that if a strategy is a giver’s alone, it will fail

As with goal selection, informed by input from organizations and individuals closest to the issue, including those directly affected — recognizing that it is sometimes small, community-rooted organizations (often with leaders from those communities) that are best positioned to be effective in serving particular populations

2. STRATEGIES (cont'd)

Clearly communicated and well understood by those affected as well as those implementing the strategy (e.g., staff, grantees)

Supported with tools beyond giving or grantmaking, such as policy influence and advocacy, communications, collaborations, and impact investing, when relevant

Regularly revised based on ongoing learning, monitoring, assessment, evaluation, and changes in context

3. IMPLEMENTATION

Supported by people with capabilities, skills, and experience matched to the chosen strategies and issues being addressed, which requires careful and continuous attention to diversity of backgrounds, especially in terms of race and culture

Sustained by empowered staff, strong operations, and equitable systems, and processes, including professional development for staff, as relevant

Governed by a board that engages the tough questions, is diverse, focuses on the purpose of the organization, prioritizes what is just and equitable, and brings relevant skills and knowledge to the table

Grounded in demonstrated commitment to high-quality relationships (often, but not exclusively, with grantees), built on understanding and transparency

Undertaken with attentiveness to the potential for unintended or harmful effects on the very people funders seek to help

Informed by the work of other actors, including the pursuit of collaboration and coordination where appropriate

Executed with well-considered grantmaking characteristics, including the provision of multiyear general operating support grants

Funded with an overall grantmaking budget level that is established based on goals, strategies, and contextual factors — rather than a default setting to the minimum mandated level



4. ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING

Balances a focus on rigor and evidence with a recognition that many measures will be imperfect indicators

Includes short- and long-term indicators that are shared externally, when relevant, to inform learning and improvement and to contribute to a greater shared understanding of what works and what doesn't



Includes ongoing assessment of performance, benchmarked against peers whenever possible (e.g., for institutional funders, measures of staff climate, grantee relationships, and board functioning)

Considers the appropriate use of the wide range of evaluation tools that can help test assumptions, build and share evidence, and refine strategy and approach

Supported by regular feedback loops from grantees and beneficiaries to inform learning and improvement

Shows a demonstrated commitment to supporting grantees' efforts to assess their own work

Includes disaggregated data by individual, community, and organizational demographic characteristics to help understand differences in outcomes and experiences

Interested in learning more or chatting with a member of CEP's team?

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