



Trust-Based Philanthropy Curated Knowledge Repository

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1. Context: Why Rethinking Funding Practices

1.1 The Nonprofit Starvation Cycle and the Limits of Project Funding

- Gregory, A. G., & Howard, D. (2009). *The Nonprofit Starvation Cycle*. Stanford Social Innovation Review. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_nonprofit_starvation_cycle
Introduces the concept of the starvation cycle, explaining how chronic underfunding of overheads weakens nonprofits and undermines long-term impact.
- Humentum (2022). *Breaking the Starvation Cycle*.
<https://humentum.org/resources/breaking-the-starvation-cycle/>
Global research analysing inadequate cost coverage and its effects on nonprofit resilience and financial sustainability.
- Center for Effective Philanthropy (2020). *New Attitudes, Old Practices: The Provision of Multiyear General Operating Support*. <https://cep.org/new-attitudes-old-practices/>
Examines the gap between funders' stated support for unrestricted funding and their actual grantmaking behaviour.
- OECD (2024). *No Strings Attached: Making Sense of Flexible Funding in Philanthropy*.
<https://www.oecd.org/development/philanthropy-centre/Philanthropy-no-strings-attached.pdf>
Comparative analysis of flexible funding models and why they matter for philanthropic effectiveness.
- IVAR (2021) *The Holy Grail of Funding: Why and how foundations give unrestricted*
<https://www.ivar.org.uk/publication/the-holy-grail-of-funding/>



Through the voices of trustees and senior staff from 12 trusts and foundations, IVAR argues that whatever your constraints, and however far along the journey you are, it is worth asking: Can we go further in offering unrestricted funding?

- Bridgespan Group, Accelerating the Movement Toward Funding Practices That Strengthen Nonprofits

<https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/accelerating-the-movement-toward-funding-practices>

1.2 Reporting, Control, and Compliance Culture

- Packard Foundation. *Fostering Equitable Grantmaking Through Indirect Cost Coverage*. <https://www.packard.org/insights/perspective/fostering-equitable-grantmaking-through-indirect-cost-coverage/>

Explores how indirect cost coverage can reduce power imbalances and strengthen organisational capacity.

- Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR). *#FlexibleFunders - Open and Trusting Grant-Making*. <https://www.ivar.org.uk/flexible-funders/>

UK-based initiative promoting simplified processes, flexibility, and trust in grantmaking relationships.

- Center for Disaster Philanthropy, *Trust-based philanthropy and the pitfalls of quantitative metrics in effective disaster philanthropy*

<https://disasterphilanthropy.org/blog/trust-based-philanthropy-and-the-pitfalls-of-quantitative-metrics-in-effective-disaster-philanthropy/>

1.3 Pandemic Pledges and Their Legacy

- Center for Effective Philanthropy (2020). *Foundations Respond to Crisis: Toward Greater Flexibility and Responsiveness*. http://cep.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CEP_Foundations-Respond-to-Crisis_Toward-Greater-Flexibility-and-Responsiveness_2020.pdf

Analyses how foundations adapted grantmaking practices during COVID-19 and which changes persisted beyond the emergency phase.

- Council on Foundations / EFC (2020). *COVID-19 Funder Pledges*. <https://www.cof.org/news/covid-19-funder-pledges>

Documents collective commitments by funders to increase flexibility and reduce administrative burdens during the pandemic.

- Alliance Magazine. *COVID-19 and Funding Flexibility*. <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/>

Collection of articles reflecting sector-wide debate on emergency flexibility and longer-term implications for philanthropy.



2. Trust-Based Philanthropy: Definitions, Principles, and Misconceptions

- Trust-Based Philanthropy Project. *Principles and Practices of Trust-Based Philanthropy*. <https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org/>
Core framework outlining the six principles of trust-based philanthropy and their practical implications.
- Trust-Based Philanthropy Project. *Grantmaking Practices - Resource Hub*. <https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org/resources-articles/grantmaking-practices>
Curated collection of practical tools and resources to operationalise trust-based grantmaking.
- Trust-Based Philanthropy Project. *Tools and Practical Resources*. <https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org/tools>
Practical tools and self-assessment resources supporting implementation of trust-based practices.
- Alliance Magazine (2022). *We're Here to Clear the Air on What Trust-Based Philanthropy Is and Isn't*. <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/clear-the-air-what-trust-based-philanthropy-is-isnt/>
Clarifies common misunderstandings around trust-based philanthropy, particularly around accountability and oversight.
- Center for Effective Philanthropy (2020). *The Urgency of Trust-Based Philanthropy*. <https://cep.org/blog/the-urgency-of-trust-based-philanthropy/>
Argues for shifting funder behaviour and relationships as a prerequisite for greater effectiveness.
- Wong, N., & McGrath, A. (2020). *Building a Trust-Based Philanthropy to Shift Power Back to Communities*. Stanford Social Innovation Review. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/building_a_trust_based_philanthropy_to_shift_power_back_to_communities
Connects trust-based practices to power-shifting and community-level outcomes.
- Open Global Rights. *Giving with Trust: How Philanthropy Can Transform Power Relations*. <https://www.openglobalrights.org/giving-with-trust-how-philanthropy-can-transform-power-relations/>
Explores trust-based philanthropy through a global justice and power lens.
- Villanueva, E. (2020). *Decolonizing Wealth*. Penguin Random House. <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/588996/decolonizing-wealth-second-edition-by-edgar-villanueva/>
Examines colonial dynamics in philanthropy and finance, proposing a reparative and relationship-based framework.
- Bosch, I., Eisfeld, J., & Bollwinkel, C. (2018). *Transformative Philanthropy: Giving with Trust*. Dreilinden. <https://giving-with-trust.org/>

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Examines how trust-based approaches can transform donor-recipient relationships and redistribute power.

- Carazzone, C. (2018). *Two Myths to Dispel to Avoid the Agony of the Third Sector*. Stanford Social Innovation Review. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/two_myths_to_dispel_to_avoid_the_agony_of_the_third_sector

Critically analyses two persistent myths in philanthropy that weaken civil society organisations and perpetuate underfunding.

- Stanford Social Innovation Review (2024). *The Strategic Value of Trust-Based Philanthropy*. <https://ssir.org/articles/entry/trust-based-philanthropy-strategic>

Frames trust-based philanthropy as compatible with strategic effectiveness and long-term impact.

3. Funding Practices that Operationalise Trust

3.1 Core Funding and Flexible Support

- Center for Effective Philanthropy. *The Case for Multiyear General Operating Support*. <https://cep.org/insights/general-operating-support/>

Synthesises evidence on the organisational benefits of multiyear and unrestricted funding.

- Oak Foundation (2024). *What Evidence Is There on the Impact of Core Funding?* <https://oakfnd.org/what-evidence-is-there-on-the-impact-of-core-funding/>

Evidence scan summarising recent research on the outcomes of core funding.

- Oak Foundation (2021). *Hedging Against Unpredictability: A Case for General Support*. <https://cep.org/hedging-against-unpredictability-a-case-for-general-support/>

Argues for general support as a resilience-building mechanism in volatile contexts.

- Ford Foundation. *BUILD Program*. <https://www.fordfoundation.org/work/our-grants/building-institutions-and-networks/>

Describes Ford's long-term, flexible investment model combining funding, learning, and organisational strengthening.

- IVAR, Time to end the dominance of short-term grants: The evidence for multi-year funding

<https://www.ivar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Time-to-end-the-dominance-of-short-term-grants-the-evidence-for-multi-year-funding-February-2024.pdf>

- CEP, *Making the Case: Foundation Leaders on the Importance of Multiyear General Operating Support* <https://cep.org/report/making-the-case-foundation-leaders-on-the-importance-of-multiyear-general-operating-support/>

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This companion piece to *New Attitudes, Old Practices: The Provision of Multiyear General Operating Support* features profiles of the California Wellness Foundation, the Claneil Foundation, Foundation for a Just Society, the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

3.2 Organisational Development Funding

- Laudes Foundation et al. (2020). *Funding Organisational Development: A Smart Investment to Multiply Impact*. <https://www.laudesfoundation.org/resources/funding-organisational-development/>

Shares insights from five foundations on investing in organisational development as a strategic lever.

3.3 Reporting, Learning, and Accountability

- Center for Evaluation Innovation. *Equitable Evaluation Framework*. <https://www.equitableeval.org/framework>
Framework for aligning evaluation with equity, learning, and systems awareness.
- Center for Effective Philanthropy. *Learning-Oriented Accountability*. <https://cep.org/insights/learning/>
Resources promoting evaluation and reporting as tools for shared learning rather than compliance.
- Here a full repository by the Segal Family Foundation on template to reframe MEL based on trust
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CMKvLr2ejNOsGArLeJ4KJo2K13X4gu7o>

4. Listening, Feedback, and Speaking Truth to Power

- Center for Effective Philanthropy. *Grantee Perception Report*. <https://cep.org/assessments/grantee-perception-report/>
Enables funders to systematically gather and act on grantee feedback.
- EFC / IssueLab (2019). *Smarter Grantmaking for Grantee Organisations*. <https://efc.issuelab.org/resource/smarter-grantmaking-for-grantee-organizations-conversations-to-have-with-funders.html>
Practical guide to strengthening feedback loops and funder-grantee dialogue.
- GrantAdvisor. *Anonymous Feedback on Funder Practice*. <https://grantadvisor.org/>
Platform enabling anonymous, public feedback on funder behaviour and practices.
- Nonprofit AF. *How Strategic Philanthropy Has Harmed Our Sector*. <https://www.nonprofitaf.com/how-strategic-philanthropy-has-harmed-our-sector-and-why-it-refuses-to-die/>
Critical essay challenging strategy-as-control and its unintended consequences.



5. Participatory Grantmaking and Shared Decision-Making

- GrantCraft (2018). *Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources Through Participatory Grantmaking*. https://grantcraft.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/12/DecidingTogether_Final_20181002.pdf
Comprehensive guide on the rationale, design, and challenges of participatory grantmaking.
- Participatory Grantmaking Community. *Resources Hub*. <https://www.participatorygrantmaking.org/resources>
Community-led platform aggregating tools, cases, and learning on shared decision-making.
- Candid *Participatory Grantmaking Collection*. <https://participatorygrantmaking.issuelab.org/?publisher=Candid>
Curated library of publications documenting participatory grantmaking practice.
- Stanford Social Innovation Review (Podcast). *Participatory Grantmaking: A Shared Approach to Effective Change*. https://ssir.org/podcasts/entry/participatory_grantmaking_a_shared_approach_to_effective_change
Practitioner-led discussion on participatory approaches in action.
- Fund Shared Insight, *Participatory Philanthropy Toolkit*
<https://fundforsharedinsight.org/funder-tools/participatory-philanthropy-toolkit/intro/>

6. Funding Systems Change and Transformative Philanthropy

- Ashoka. *Embracing Complexity: Towards a Shared Understanding of Funding Systems Change*. <https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/insights/embracing-complexity>
Introduces systems-change-oriented approaches to funding and support.
- Ashoka. *Systems Change Crash Course*. <https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/program/systems-change-crash-course>
Accessible learning journey on systems thinking and systems change.
- Funding For Real Change. *Case Study Synthesis Report*. <https://www.fundingforrealchange.com/case-study-synthesis-report>
Synthesis of case studies illustrating pathways toward more flexible and equitable funding.
- Scharmer, O. *Philanthropy 4.0: Giving in Times of Disruption*. https://hdp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Philanthropy-4.0_What-Form-of-Giving-Enables-Transformative-Change_MIT-Otto-Scharmer_2023-1.pdf
Frames philanthropy's role in enabling deep systemic transformation.

7. Emblematic Case Studies

Case studies are selected to illustrate concrete funding practices rather than organisational profiles. Each example, depending on the type of foundation/organisation, highlights how trust, power-sharing, flexibility, and long-term orientation are operationalised in practice.

7.1 Trust-based and Unrestricted Funding

- MacKenzie Scott / Yield Giving. *Large-scale unrestricted and trust-based funding.*
<https://yieldgiving.com/>

Illustrates a radical trust-based approach centred on large, unrestricted grants, minimal application and reporting requirements, and rapid disbursement. Serves as a boundary-pushing reference case for power-shifting and reduced transaction costs, rather than a directly replicable model.

--> [Transformative Gifts: Inside organisations that received MacKenzie Scott Grants](#) by Center for Effective Philanthropy

--> [Emerging Impacts: The Effects of MacKenzie Scott Large Unrestricted Gifts](#) by Center of Effective Philanthropy

7.2 Core Funding and Organisational Development

- Oak Foundation. *People-centred flexible grantmaking and core funding.*
<https://oakfnd.org/grant-making/>

Demonstrates a long-term institutional commitment to core funding combined with organisational development support. Illustrates how sustained, flexible funding strengthens organisational resilience and strategic capacity over time.

- Mava Foundation, *Be an octopus funder – Reflection from engaged donors*
<https://mava-foundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/mava-be-an-octopus-final-2..pdf>

7.3 Participatory Grantmaking and Power Shift

- Headwaters Foundation for Justice. *Trust-based and participatory grantmaking approach.* <https://www.headwatersmt.org/lorem-ipsum-dolor-sit-ametconsectetur-adipiscing-19/>

Exemplifies community-led decision-making through participatory grantmaking structures. Highlights how shifting decision-making power to affected communities reshapes accountability and impact.

- Two Ridings Community Foundation, *Putting people closest to the issues in the centre of funding decision making*
<https://tworidingscf.org.uk/participatory-grant-making-2/>
- ECFI, *Deciding Together York: trusting communities to lead change through participatory grantmaking*



<https://communityfoundations.eu/knowledge-item/deciding-together-york-trusting-communities-to-lead-change-through-participatory-grantmaking/>

7.4 Feminist Funds and Movement-Centred Funding

- Mama Cash. *Feminist, trust-based, and participatory grantmaking*. <https://www.mamacash.org/>

Illustrates how feminist funds operationalise trust-based philanthropy through multi-year core funding, reduced bureaucracy, and participatory decision-making. Demonstrates a movement-centred funding model that redistributes power, strengthens grassroots organisations, and supports long-term social change.

- Fenomenal Funds, Reimagining Power to Build Resilience <https://fenomenalfunds.org/grantmaking/resilience-grants/>

7.5 Participatory and Learning-Oriented Reporting

- Oak Foundation. *Learning-oriented and dialogic reporting*. <https://oakfnd.org/grant-making/>

Experiments with simplified and narrative reporting formats, including joint and oral reporting, to support reflection and learning.

- Laudes Foundation. *Learning-oriented reporting with partners*. <https://www.laudesfoundation.org/>

Frames reporting as a tool for collective learning and adaptation rather than compliance.

- Porticus. *Participation, learning, and accountability*. <https://www.porticus.com/>

Integrates reporting within broader cycles of listening, participation, and evidence-informed learning.

- Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP). *Grantee Perception Report*. <https://cep.org/assessments/grantee-perception-report/>

A structured tool enabling funders to receive anonymous, systematic feedback from grantees, making accountability bidirectional.

8. To Watch

- *UnCharitable* (documentary). <https://unchartedmovie.com/>

Documentary challenging common assumptions about overhead, effectiveness, and nonprofit funding models.

- *Everyone Deserves a Fair Slice* (video). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gELZnORV4U>

Short talk exploring fairness, distribution, and social value.

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Annex to: [Unrestricted Funding: A Practical Guide for Funders](#), Philea 2026