



MEMO

TO: Grantseekers
FROM: Bruce Karmazin, Executive Director
DATE: December 18, 2020
RE: Response to Grantseeker Survey

Welcome to our fifth Grantseeker Survey conducted by independent consultant Iris Krieg and Associates (IKA); previous surveys were completed in 2006, 2008, 2011, and 2016.

Although similar in scope to previous surveys, the 2020 survey included respondents from our Aspiramos Juntos program for the first time, as well as questions about how applicants and grantees are handling COVID-19 and racial justice issues in their organizations. Adding Chicago-area applicants to the survey pool provided illuminating and helpful feedback, especially as The Foundation expands Chicago programming.

On the whole, we were pleased the comments reflect positively on The Foundation, our staff, and the organization's efforts to build and maintain strong relationships with our constituents. We were also grateful to receive comments and findings which challenge us to improve connections, increase our value, and make the LFF experience more effective for the organizations and people we strive to support.

Survey-related Actions:

Although excellent suggestions are scattered throughout the report, IKA's recommendations begin at page 30. Most of the recommendations can be addressed through updates to our website, and by reworking our forms. The following action items are planned or are in progress:

- Collecting and posting to our website photos from newer grantees that highlight their programs as well as the diversity of our grantees.
- Editing LFF web communications with an eye to the specific details that survey respondents felt were lacking or confusing.
- Site visits, which received high ratings in general, will be more carefully explained on the website and in preparation for meetings.
- Revisions to our LOI, Application and Post Grant Report templates will purge unnecessary or repetitive questions.

- *Land Health Community* metrics have been re-written to better inform grantee evaluation. (These new metrics were already incorporated into the Fall 2020 applications.)

Some recommendations we won't execute. It may be that, on balance, our experience suggests they aren't worth the time, as is the case with offering a pre-submit consultation to all applicants. Some recommendations, though they may be helpful to applicants, involve strategy choices which we have made consciously.

Embracing more challenging issues, and responding:

The question of our presence and visibility in Chicago came up in several ways. Some participants suggested we spend more time there and make our presence felt. A number suggested we play a bigger role in convening and connecting grantees to each other and to other funders. While these actions could serve some, The Foundation's profile in Chicago has been a matter of strategy. As a rural organization, our attention is focused on communities downstate that are underserved by philanthropy. That said, this may change over the next few years with the recent launch of our Austin Fresh program.

Race, not surprisingly given the times, surfaced as a meaningful issue in the survey. The question of diversity and inclusion was raised directly in relation to the website, staff, and board representation.

Indirectly, one might infer meaning from the difference in scores between the Aspiramos Juntos and Land Health Community programs on the question of being "knowledgeable about issues and challenges faced by my community." On the other hand, it's not surprising that east central Illinois grantees, with whom we have worked with for many years, rated some aspects of our work more highly.

We take these observations to heart. As a family organization, based in a rural Illinois community, we are – no surprise -- historically white in our leadership and our constituents. However, the events of 2020 have brought home the importance of questioning the assumptions that have led us here.

Unlike many organizations who announced their solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, we remained quiet. Our board has committed to a process to listen and learn and to understand how race and power affect what we do and how we do it – before any pronouncements. We have initiated a learning process to study race and social justice – in addition to our focus on rural equity – to identify action. We have responded to a degree already, prioritizing BIPOC leadership in our grantmaking and engaging people of color in our decision-making committees.

We are deeply grateful to all who participated in the survey and personal interviews. We imposed on you at an incredibly stressful moment. We honor your effort by sharing the full report and with a commitment to act on the recommendations.