

Grant Givers' Movement Discrimination, Prejudice & Isomorphism

A Short Report - December 2018

Before you read anything else... it's important to note that the research referred to in this document was not generated through a scientific survey and nor was it a representative sample – as it was led by a membership body with an open agenda to work to progress in the sector, it was biased both by who it went to and how it was framed.

We would not suggest anyone take the numbers in here as statistical fact. That having been said, in a sector as small as this one, the response was overwhelming, the patterns are clear and the numbers are significant enough that they can not be dismissed. Anyone who wants to do more thorough follow up research would do so with our complete support!

Introduction

In a first of its kind workforce survey in the UK Trust and Foundation sector, over 130 grant-making staff gave their views on issues of Diversity, Inclusion and Voice in UK grant-making.

Many of the findings touch on issues that will already be familiar to those in the sector. However, three key trends that we do not see as having enough of a platform within the sector also came through.

These trends are those of discrimination, prejudice and isomorphism. We hope that raising awareness of these trends will motivate the sector to act.

We hope that in reading this you will be encouraged to share it and, alongside the specific actions we have identified to take, some foundations might take it upon themselves to discuss and reflect on these findings at trustee and executive meetings.

Discrimination

More than 95 instances of prejudice or discrimination in trusts and foundations were recorded within the survey, with 40% of respondents affected.

When asked 'have you ever experienced or directly seen prejudice or discrimination in trusts and foundations based on age, gender, race, disability, sexual identity or any other protected characteristics?' a total of 41 respondents (more than 40% of respondents to the question) said that they had seen or experienced prejudice or discrimination on more than one occasion.

In total, at least 95 instances of prejudice or discrimination were reported from a pool of just 101 respondents. Only 28% said that they had never seen or experienced discrimination in the sector.

Without more information it is difficult to comment on this issue – we hope the sector membership bodies, regulators and leadership will look further into it.

What Happens Next? We are writing to both the Association of Charitable Foundations and the Charity Commission to suggest they follow this up with deeper investigation to establish the nature and level of challenges that exist in the sector. We are also open to advising any foundation that might be interested in funding further sensitive industry research.

Prejudice

70% of survey respondents felt that trustee diversity levels affect which organisations get funded. The same number felt that way about staff diversity. Two-thirds felt that foundation trustee boards' lack of racial diversity affected minority-led charities' fundraising efforts, only 5% disagreed.

These results suggest to us that there is a serious problem of bias against some charities that we feel needs to be addressed.

Two-thirds of respondents actively agreed that a lack of diversity affects the fundraising efforts of charities led by people from minority backgrounds. Only 5% disagreed with this fact. The cumulative experience of those who prepare papers for trustees, build relationships with boards and present funding opportunities to them is that there is prejudice against organisations based on the profile of their executives.

These views were not held by grants team members alone. A minority of respondents to the survey were themselves foundation trustees and senior executives. Of them, the majority also felt that a lack of racial diversity affected minority-led charities' fundraising efforts, that trustee diversity affects which organisations get funded and that staff diversity affects which organisations get funded. None 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that overall the foundation sector currently has strong levels of diversity amongst its trustees.

The UK Foundation conversations around diversity have primarily focused on the positive benefits of diversity – creating a more inclusive environment, more vibrant discussion, living values and bringing in new and different ideas. Our results suggest that the challenge is not just to be ‘more diverse’ in our trustee boards and staff teams but also to be less bias in our funding decisions. There was no suggestion that this bias was conscious (in fact the majority of respondents identified their foundations as ‘inclusive’ places) but that does not make the findings less worrying.

What Happens Next? We suggest a convening of charity and foundation leadership to discuss this point and what specifically can be done to address it and would be happy to invite our membership to offer contributions. We will write to ACEVO, Institute of Fundraising, NCVO, ACF with this suggestion and hope that they are open to following it up.

Isomorphism

An overwhelming 84% of respondents felt that the lack of class diversity of Foundation trustees influences who charities recruit to their own boards. Our interpretation of this feedback is that that some charities launched by working class leaders may feel a pressure to appoint board members who reflect the organisations that finance them over the communities they serve in order to be seen as ‘fundable’.

In a Charity Commission/Office for Civil Society commissioned piece of research undertaken in 2017, it was shown that 75% of charity trustees have household incomes above the national median and that they were disproportionately older, male and white¹. This profile directly aligns with the profiles seen on Foundation boards.

To date, there has been little discussion in the sector about the role of Foundation boards in influencing who is recruited to charity trustee boards. For the first time, those who hold the relationships between Foundations and charities have drawn a direct link between Foundation board composition and charity trustee recruitment.

The impact of such a trend is to create further distance between the communities that charities exist to serve and the power and decision making on how they are served as well as to reduce the levels of community expertise on charity boards.

The conversation around Foundation trustee diversity needs to widen to include a focus on the impact that this may have on charities themselves. This ‘isomorphism’ needs to be addressed as a key sector challenge. If we do not address it, these results suggest we will see more and more charities fill their boards with a privileged minority and, in doing so, further rather than counter power imbalances.

What Happens Next? We suggest a consultation with charities to better understand the extent to which they feel pressure to recruit in the image of their funders. We hope that one of the charity sector industry bodies will lead this work and have written to NCVO and ACEVO in the hope that one will take this up as an area to explore.

¹ See: <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/charity-commission-publishes-major-report-into-trusteeship.html>

About the Grant Givers' Movement

We decided to start the Grant Givers' Movement because we truly believe in the power of foundations to make positive changes in the world. However, we know that many are not as effective as they could be and they are impeded from making those positive changes because of a number of inherent problems, which we will seek to challenge.

The movement is an opportunity for people working in grant giving, who feel passionate about making positive change in and through the sector, to do so with collective power behind them. It's about increasing collaboration, and sharing good and bad practice so we are better equipped to push for change. Ultimately, it's about joining up and improving grant-making from within.

The nature of the situation of those within the movement is that they are not in the positions of power that allow them to make the changes that we would like to see. Alongside the direct actions identified through this document, what we can do is draw attention to these findings and keep them alive until they reach those Foundation executives, trustees, coordinating bodies, sector press, regulators and leadership networks who are in a position to create change. For more information or comment contact us grantgiversmovement@gmail.com.

About the Survey

We had over 130 responses to the survey and a completion rate of 75%.

Over 70% of respondents have paid roles in foundations at non-executive levels, just over 20% were executives and a few trustees and consultants also filled out the survey.

Respondents came from a range of different foundation settings – over 30% have roles in private foundations, just under 30% are employed by public foundations, and just below 20% work for family foundations.

It was prepared by members of the Grant Givers' Movement in response to a meeting where people involved in the movement selected the theme as a critical issue to be addressed in the sector and shared via member networks and social media.