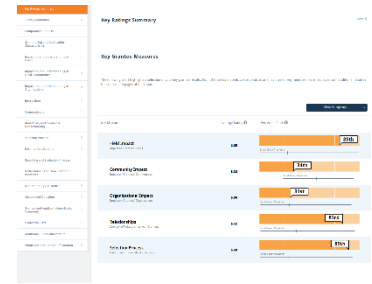


# Key Findings and Recommendations from The Archstone Foundation 2019 Grantee and Applicant Perception Report

Prepared by the Center for Effective Philanthropy

In May and June of 2019, the Center for Effective Philanthropy conducted a survey of The Archstone Foundation's ("the Foundation") grantees and declined applicants, achieving a 77 percent response rate for the grantee survey and 50 percent for the applicant survey. The memo below outlines the key findings and recommendations from the Foundation's Grantee and Applicant Perception Report.

This memo accompanies the comprehensive survey results found in the Foundation's interactive online and downloadable report. Archstone's full report also contains more information about survey analysis and methodology.



## Strong Impact on and Understanding of Grantees' Fields

- ▶ Archstone's grantees provide high ratings for the Foundation's understanding of and impact on grantees' fields, rating the Foundation in the top 20 percent of funders for each.
- ▶ Similarly, Archstone receives exemplary ratings for its advancement of knowledge in grantees' fields, placing the Foundation in the top 10 percent of funders.
- ▶ Grantees also rate more positively than typical for the extent to which the Foundation has affected public policy in their fields.
- ▶ In addition, grantee ratings place Archstone in the top 10 percent of funders for its understanding of their beneficiaries' needs and higher than typical for the extent to which the Foundation's funding priorities reflect those needs.
- ▶ In contrast to these excellent results for field impact —perhaps not surprisingly given Archstone's broad funding across California— Archstone grantees overall rate the Foundation lower than typical for its impact on and understanding of grantees' local communities. Archstone grantees based in LA or Orange County, however, rate the Foundation similar to the typical funder for its local impact and understanding.



*"I was amazed at how Archstone has shaped, influenced and assisted the field of aging. Without them, we would be set back many years." - Grantee*



*“For many years, Archstone was one of the only funders focused on aging, end-of-life care, and palliative care. Their generous stewardship and funding of programs and projects in the field undoubtedly played a role in California's current leading position in the field.” - Grantee*

## Impact on and Understanding of Grantee Organizations

- ▶ Despite receiving higher than typical ratings for the Foundation’s understanding of the challenges grantee organizations face, grantees rate the Foundation lower than typical for its impact on grantee organizations, as well as its understanding of grantees’ strategies and goals.
- ▶ CEP’s research shows that grantmaking characteristics, including grant size, type, and length, are all important predictors of impact on grantee organizations.
  - On the positive, Archstone provides a higher than typical proportion of its grantees with multi-year grants.
  - And Archstone grants are similar in size to those at the typical foundation. However, Archstone grantee budgets are, at the median, substantially larger than those of the typical funder. In turn, Archstone funds a smaller proportion of grantees’ budgets than is typical: two versus four percent.
  - Additionally, regarding grant type, Archstone provides a much smaller than typical proportion of grantees with unrestricted grants; 9 percent versus 23 percent at the typical funder.
  - Three grantees offered suggestions related to Archstone’s grantmaking characteristics — one of the most common themes among suggestions— all citing the need for general operating support.



*“We would also recommend the Foundation consider making more general operating grants as opposed to programmatic grants to boost organizational capacity and give them flexibility to be creative and responsive to their communities.” - Grantee*

## Robust Funder-Grantee Relationships

- ▶ Overall perceptions of the quality of Archstone’s grantee relationships —defined by CEP as 5 related measures of interactions and communications— are higher than 80 percent of funders in CEP’s dataset. Specifically,
  - Archstone grantees rate the Foundation higher than typical for their comfort approaching the Foundation if a problem arises,
  - Grantees rate the Foundation in the top 15 percent of funders for the responsiveness of Foundation staff and how fairly grantees feel they were treated,

- And rate the consistency of the Foundation’s communication resources in the top 5 percent of CEP’s dataset.
- ▶ Declined applicants, in contrast, rate the Foundation lower than typical for staff responsiveness, consistency of Foundation communications, and the helpfulness of individual communications.



*“I have interacted with staff at the Archstone Foundation for more than 10 years. I have found them to be consistently supportive, candid and very helpful. Thank you for your high level of professionalism and improving the access to healthcare in California.” - Grantee*



*“Seeking first-time guidance from the foundation was a bit difficult. We had to leave several messages in order to finally yield a response. When we were fortunate enough to speak with an Archstone Foundation team member, the impression we were left with was that we might be a fit for their grant process. We could not accurately measure whether the staffer felt that our proposed activity [was a good opportunity] for Archstone to invest...”*

*-Applicant*

## Grantmaking Processes

### Selection Process

- ▶ Likely due to the LOI phase of the selection process, Archstone grantees and declined applicants report distinct experiences with Archstone’s selection process.
  - At the median, Archstone grantees report spending 33 hours on the selection process—more time than do the grantees of most funders.
  - In contrast, declined applicants report spending only 10 hours on Archstone’s selection process—fewer hours than at 99 percent of funders in CEP’s dataset.
- ▶ Relatedly, having invested substantial time in Archstone’s selection process, grantees rate its helpfulness in strengthening their organizations/programs higher than that of 90 percent of funders.
  - In contrast, perhaps unsurprisingly given the limited time they invest, declined applicants rate the Foundation in the bottom 20 percent of CEP’s dataset for the same measure.



*“I put a LOT of hours into the preparation of the materials that went to the Board and there were many back-and-forth's with the Project Officer, often under a tight timeline. That was a bit frustrating during the process. However, it did ensure that what got presented to the Board was exactly tailored to the Board's needs, so the end (funding) definitely justified the means. It also meant that I became very familiar with the Foundation's priorities and processes, which has helped me now that we have the grant to be good stewards of the resources.”- Grantee*

## Reporting and Evaluation Processes

- ▶ Regarding the reporting process, grantees provide typical ratings for the extent to which the process was straightforward, relevant, adaptable, aligned with the timing of their work, and a helpful opportunity for reflection and learning.
- ▶ The median Archstone grantee reports spending a typical amount of time —6 hours— on Archstone’s reporting process. Still, in their suggestions for how the Foundation could improve, four grantees —the largest proportion of grantee suggestions— requested that Archstone streamline aspects of the reporting process.
- ▶ CEP’s broader research has shown that discussions about assessment are associated with higher ratings for the helpfulness of funder processes. Archstone’s results reveal positive practices here: A higher than typical proportion, 79 percent, of Archstone grantees indicate having exchanged ideas with the Foundation about plans for assessing results of the funded work. And a typical proportion, 66 percent, indicate having discussed their submitted reports with Foundation staff.
- ▶ One quarter of Archstone grantees specifically indicated having undergone an evaluation. These grantees rate lower than typical for the extent to which the evaluation incorporated their input in its design, as well as the extent to which the evaluation resulted in making changes to the evaluated work.



*“...we would recommend replacing much of the current reporting requirements with informal check-up calls. These would allow program officers the opportunity to quickly garner the same information in a less burdensome manner. It would also potentially help program officers identify other needs and concerns that might be missed in an email.”—Grantee*

## Declination Process

- ▶ Declined applicants give lower than typical ratings for their perceptions of the honesty of the reason provided by the Foundation for declination of funding.
- ▶ A smaller than typical proportion of Archstone declined applicants report having either requested or received feedback.
- ▶ Of the twelve Archstone declined applicants who requested feedback, four indicated that they still did not receive feedback.
- ▶ In their comments, two applicants specifically suggest that Archstone provide a more in-depth explanation for why their application was declined. And six declined applicants —the largest proportion of suggestions— request that Archstone be more specific in its guidelines regarding why an application might not be funded.



*“...when working in the nonprofit field and understanding the limited resources and time that we all have to make our fundraising goals, it would be helpful as a grant seeker to receive at least a minimum of feedback as to whether we should keep trying or not...” – Applicant*

## CEP Recommendations

Based on its grantee and declined applicant feedback, CEP recommends that Archstone Foundation consider the following in order to build on its strengths and address opportunities for improvement:

- ▶ Reflect on which aspects of Archstone’s approach have contributed to such strong perceptions of the Foundation’s impact on and understanding of grantees’ fields, and continue to reinforce these strengths.
- ▶ Similarly, continue to build on the practices that have enabled such positive relationships with grantees, including the responsiveness of Foundation staff.
  - Discuss whether grantee and declined applicants’ divergent experience in their interactions with the Foundation is of concern.
- ▶ Where strengthening grantee organizations is a goal, consider providing general operating support to a larger proportion of grantees—specifically those organizations whose missions and work align most closely with Archstone’s goals.
- ▶ Given the time-intensive nature of the selection process and grantee comments indicating frustrations with the reporting process, seek opportunities to streamline processes, while maintaining their most helpful aspects.
  - Relatedly, continue to discuss plans for assessment and completed reports with high proportions of grantees.
- ▶ Assess Archstone’s declination process, ensuring the clarity of funding guidelines and —taking into account staff capacity and priorities— consider providing feedback to a larger portion of declined applicants where feasible.

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