



June 1, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

Like many who run advocacy organizations or whose foundations seek positive systemic changes, I sometimes wonder whether our work here at NCRP really makes a difference. Are we really influencing how philanthropy is practiced in U.S.?

The short answer is "Yes." I am pleased to share with you the results of NCRP's first ever organizational evaluation, which the TCC Group conducted in 2010. They reviewed internal documents and data, conducted in-depth interviews with more than two dozen sector leaders, and surveyed hundreds of grantmakers and nonprofits. Enclosed is a copy of the executive summary of the evaluation report.

Some of the key findings include:

- 58 percent of surveyed foundations agree that NCRP has raised the level of discourse around exemplary grantmaking practices.
- 64 percent of philanthropy respondents and 77 percent of nonprofit respondents agree that NCRP brings a unique value to the field of philanthropy.
- 46 percent of foundation respondents agree that NCRP has challenged them personally to be more self-aware of their own practices.
- 23 percent of surveyed foundations state that NCRP has motivated/inspired their philanthropy to adopt better grantmaking practices.
- 19 percent of surveyed nonprofits have used NCRP reports to secure more funding for advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement.

Although these results certainly give us reason to celebrate, they also remind us that much more work needs to be done. This has been an important learning experience for us, and the report helped us see significant opportunities for improvement.

Organizational evaluations are typically not shared publicly, but hundreds of people and other organizations have been a part of our work, making this just as much a story of their accomplishments as ours. These numbers represent the hard work and unwavering commitment of dozens of former and current NCRP staff and board members, volunteers and partners for more than three decades. Together, we are helping to ensure that philanthropy contributes in meaningful ways to the creation of a fairer, just and inclusive society.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Dorfman", is written over a light blue circular background.

Aaron Dorfman
Executive Director



**EVALUATION REPORT
FOR THE
NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR RESPONSIVE PHILANTHROPY**

**Final Report
December 2010**

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I. Executive Summary

Introduction

The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) strives to promote philanthropy that “serves the public good, is responsive to people and communities with the least wealth and opportunity, and is held accountable to the highest standards of integrity and openness.”¹ Throughout the committee’s existence, NCRP has served as a watchdog for foundations while advocating for specific grantmaking practices among philanthropies. The ideals that NCRP holds for philanthropy were perhaps most broadly distributed in the group’s 2009 publication, *Criteria for Philanthropy at Its Best* (PAIB). This document set specific benchmarks/aspirational goals for the allocation of philanthropic dollars and specified the proportion of foundations meeting the criteria. To better understand how effective they were in their activities, NCRP hired TCC Group in December 2009 to conduct an outcomes-focused evaluation of its work in order to assess whether and how it achieves its intended effects on the practice of philanthropy.

This evaluation sought to assess the totality of NCRP’s work and follows extensive evaluation planning work that TCC and NCRP jointly embarked on from June through August 2009. In the planning process, NCRP staff provided extensive input into the types of questions they wanted evaluated and potential indicators for measuring impact. The most prominent evaluation questions identified for this evaluation were:

- To what extent are foundations:
 - More aware of and knowledgeable about NCRP good grantmaking practices?
 - Feeling more internal and external pressure to use good grantmaking practices?
 - Valuing and accepting the use of good grantmaking practices?
 - Feeling compelled to act, and are they driven by willingness or pressure?
 - Improving their skills and capacity for good grantmaking?
 - Providing more support to marginalized communities?
 - Making grants in a way that helps nonprofits achieve their missions?

- To what extent is the public more aware of NCRP good grantmaking practices?

- Are additional supports and opportunities emerging to improve grantmaking practices?

- Which NCRP strategies seem most important to achieving the desired outcomes?

Methodology

The evaluation utilized a mixed methods approach, using multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data. Data collection included review of NCRP records, a survey of funders and nonprofits and stakeholder interviews. Data were collected from July to November 2010. Interviewees included a broad range of stakeholders, ranging from external observers, such as academics, to those actively engaged with NCRP. It also included interviewees who had been publically critical of NCRP’s work. All interviews were conducted by telephone. The survey was distributed online to a large set of funders and nonprofits that were compiled using multiple

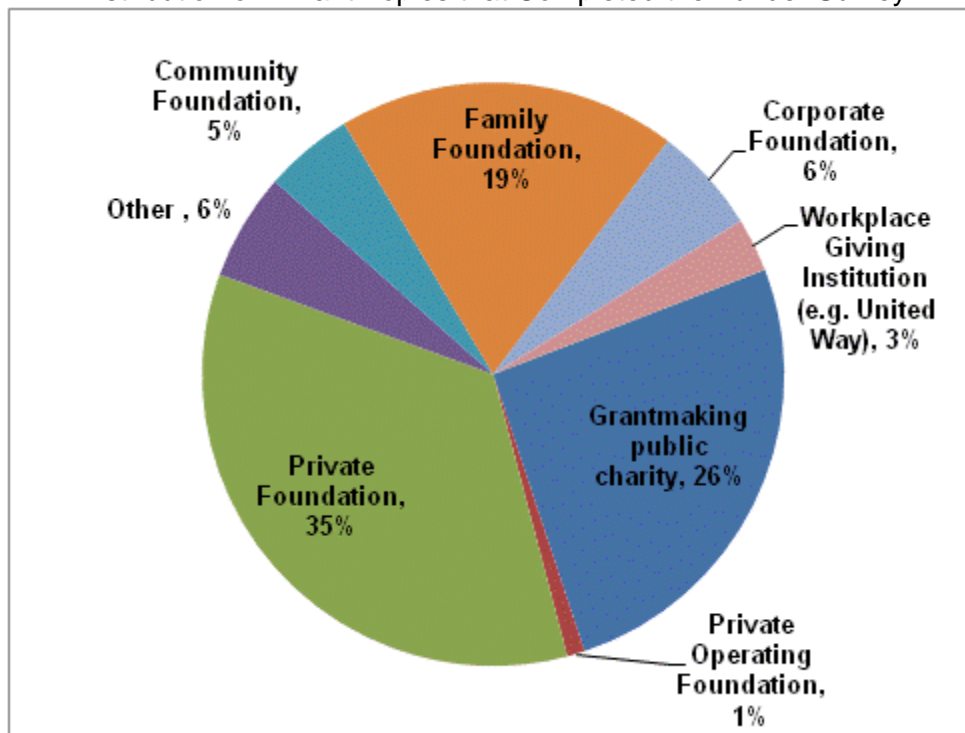
¹ NCRP mission statement, available at www.ncrp.org/about-us

databases, including NCRP’s database as well as an extensive number of respondents identified through non-NCRP sources. Overall, the funder survey was distributed to 8,052 email addresses and yielded 882 useable responses. The nonprofit survey was administered to 8,541 email addresses and yielded 650 useable responses. Survey respondents represented a variety of different stakeholder groups. Table 1 and Figure 1 present survey respondent characteristics by position and type of institution, respectively.²

Table 1
Philanthropy Survey Respondents by Position

	Position
5%	Board/trustee
24%	President/CEO
20%	Vice President/Senior Management (CFO, COO)
37%	Program Officer
14%	Other

Figure 1
Distribution of Philanthropies that Completed the Funder Survey



² Data in the Executive Summary focus primarily on the funder audience, as this is the primary audience for NCRP’s work.

Findings

NCRP aims to influence and change the behaviors of **grantmakers** such that they support and provide grantmaking that predominantly “serves the public good, is responsive to people and communities with the least wealth and opportunity, and is held accountable to the highest standards of integrity and openness.”

Awareness of NCRP, Clarity of Mission and Reputation

NCRP has between a 50 and 59 percent “awareness” rate in the nonprofit sector, with senior leaders being the most likely to have heard of NCRP. Using survey data, 59 percent of foundation respondents and 50 percent of nonprofit respondents reported that they had heard of NCRP. Using just respondents that came from non-NCRP survey lists, 49 percent of respondents reported hearing of NCRP. Foundation CEOs/Presidents and VP/Senior Management were the most likely to have heard of NCRP (73 and 63 percent, respectively) followed by board members and program officers (both just over 50 percent).³ This indicates that NCRP is reaching potential staff decision-makers.

There is strong understanding of NCRP’s broad mission and values but there is also less clarity around specific mission/values and the interrelatedness of the values and the roles that NCRP holds. While interviewees could frequently articulate aspects of NCRP’s mission in the broadest sense, a strong understanding of the mission seemed to be widely lacking, with several noting that NCRP needed to have better clarity in their mission. About half (49 percent) of philanthropy survey respondents that have heard of NCRP agreed they had a strong understanding of NCRP’s mission, values and purpose, with the numbers being slightly higher for nonprofits that had heard of NCRP (64 percent). Respondents were less likely to perceive their colleagues to have an understanding of NCRP’s mission, with 23 percent of philanthropy respondents and 24 percent of nonprofit respondents agreeing that their colleagues have a good understanding of NCRP’s mission/values/purpose. Table 2 presents perceptions of NCRP’s mission from interviewees.

Table 2
Perceptions of NCRP Mission

Academics	Philanthropies	Nonprofits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watchdog (2) • Making philanthropy more accountable/transparent (2) • Raise hard questions/play a role in public debate (2) • An education force for public good and social justice (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watchdog (3) • Push philanthropy to be more inclusive and promote a social justice lens (9) • To be a critic of philanthropy or “pinprick” (5) • Promoting/strengthening advocacy (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watchdog (3) • Advocate for resources toward social change (5) • Push philanthropies on process issues (payout, advocacy, etc.) (3) • Advocate for advocacy (7) • Research and accountability (2) • Convening groups (2)

Source: TCC Group interviews.

³ Nonprofits were not asked to identify their position, so there is no corresponding analysis.

The values of NCRP are clear at a high level, with 48 percent of philanthropy and 73 percent of nonprofit respondents reporting that they agree with those values.

Interviewees from all three groups (philanthropies, nonprofits, and academics) were nearly uniform in accurately naming multiple aspects of the values that NCRP holds: investment in marginalized communities; philanthropic accountability; transparency. Further, of those that had heard of NCRP, 48 percent of survey philanthropy respondents and 73 percent of nonprofit respondents agreed that they believed NCRP's values are appropriate and in the best interest of the sector. The finding for nonprofits is particularly relevant given that one of NCRP's founding objectives was to advocate on behalf of nonprofits. As with findings around the mission, understanding of the values that NCRP holds becomes cloudier when pushed to more specifics. As would be expected, those that reported being members/funders of NCRP had a significantly higher understanding and perceived value of NCRP on every mission/values statement.

Questions about tactics get mixed in with questions about mission. While there was clearly some slight ambiguity around mission, the individuals reporting a lack of clarity around mission frequently seemed to describe more a question about clarity on tactics than actual mission. For example, one questioned if NCRP has a legislative agenda. While one philanthropy that does not fund NCRP indicated they felt that NCRP had an "identity crisis" (lack of clarity and focus around objectives), the other four reporting mission issues came from those that currently fund NCRP, including two that endorsed Criteria.

There are a wide variety of perceptions of NCRP's reputation. Some people reported that NCRP continues to have a reputation as stirring up controversy, being predictable and being independent. Others reported that NCRP is persistent and willing to stand up for issues and has improved its ability to thoughtfully respond. The Executive Director, Aaron Dorfman, is perceived by many to be an effective leader, particularly as it relates to engaging in public debate.

Regardless of feelings on the reputation, NCRP is clearly perceived to occupy a unique niche in the field, though the "niche" may be getting more crowded and its value questioned. Interviewees did not report many others in the field doing similar things to NCRP and 64 percent of philanthropy survey respondents and 77 percent of nonprofit respondents agreed that NCRP brings a unique value to the field of philanthropy. The only entities three mentioned by philanthropy interviewees were the Council on Foundations (COF), especially on the process issues such as boards and payout; the Center for Effective Philanthropy; and Bridgespan. Academic interviewees also mentioned the Aspen Institute, the Foundation Center and Rob Reich (Stanford), but not by more than one interviewee each. Despite this, the space that NCRP has historically filled does seem to be more competitive. One funder interviewee described how organizations like the Greenlining Institute had taken up the more "radical" left-wing that NCRP has historically filled. Additionally, several funders described budget constraints with regard to supporting "field building" type organizations like NCRP, COF, etc. While NCRP funder philanthropy interviewees, for the most part, had clarity on NCRP's niche (even when additional clarification was desired), their personal enthusiasm for this niche was not particularly strong. For example, when asked in what ways they support NCRP and why, six of the interviewees indicated there was a value in having "different" voices in philanthropy and that NCRP was a progressive view that needed to be heard, but only two of these indicated personal value from NCRP or seemed to see them playing a *critical* role in the sector.

In dissecting comments about NCRP’s role, two dichotomies arose that show how the field categorizes potential NCRP roles. These are:

- **Insider vs. Outsider.** The question is whether NCRP is an external “watchdog” or whether it is attempting to be an internal player. One of the interviewees dubbed it “loud voice or collaborator,” and the distinction seems to have large implications for how NCRP might measure effectiveness. If it is an insider, then there is a greater expectation that NCRP would directly influence philanthropies to adopt certain practices. If it is an outsider, it would be more around providing information, raising debate and creating space for change. Data indicate that people perceive NCRP as trying to straddle both roles and question whether this is effective (or even possible).
- **“Process” watchdog vs. “Substance” watchdog.** This point distinguishes between some of the process elements of PAIB (payout, board guidelines, etc.) and advocacy for philanthropy to be more responsive to social justice/disadvantaged communities (social change). It is clear from the evidence that NCRP has more credibility on the social justice issue, with some evidence that the process positions actually end up harming efforts by causing a “knee-jerk” reaction. Three different interviewees indicated that NCRP needed to crystallize the relationship between some of their positions and questions of philanthropic effectiveness for disadvantaged communities.

Perceived Quality of NCRP Resources

Awareness and use of NCRP resources is fairly moderate, with those using the resources perceiving them to be of a high quality; Presidents/CEOs and senior staff were the most likely to use the resources. As seen in Table 3, reported usage for various NCRP resources ranged from 12 percent (blog) to 34 percent (*Criteria for Philanthropy at its Best* and *Responsive Philanthropy*). For every resource presented in the survey, an equal or higher percentage of respondents reported being unaware of the resource. All of the resources were generally reported as useful, with the percent of users reporting usefulness ranging from 74 percent (*Criteria*) to 86 percent (both one-on-one conversations and the series of reports on advocacy). Presidents/CEOs and VP/Senior management staff had the highest on average use of NCRP resources, indicating that NCRP is reaching a very senior staff audience. Board members had the lowest use of NCRP resources, indicating that NCRP has greater difficulty in reaching that less visible philanthropy audience.

Table 3
Philanthropy/Nonprofit Use of NCRP Resources by Type and Perceived Value⁴

	Percent reporting using resource:	Percent of users reporting resource as valuable	Unaware of this resource.
Report: Criteria for Philanthropy at Its Best	34% / 34%	74% / 79%	39% / 37%
NCRP's quarterly journal, Responsive Philanthropy	34% / 41%	83% / 90%	34% / 30%
Series of reports on advocacy, organizing and civic engagement	32% / 44%	86% / 93%	35% / 26%
NCRP's monthly electronic newsletter, Roundup	24% / 30%	83% / 90%	45% / 38%
One-on-One Conversations with NCRP staff	19% / 30%	86% / 93%	40% / 34%
Workshops, lectures, conferences presentations or other Educational Events	16% / 19%	80% / 89%	37% / 40%
NCRP Blog	12% / 18%	75% / 83%	44% / 44%

Source: TCC Group survey of funders and nonprofits. Data represent only those that had heard of NCRP.

NCRP, on the whole, is perceived to have credibility in the resources that they provide, with slightly less credibility for the specifics or research quality and credibility.

Notwithstanding some concerns about perceived bias (e.g., advocacy organization, not a research organization) and significant concerns around the selection of Criteria standards, data indicate that NCRP is generally considered credible. Of survey respondents, 60 percent of philanthropy and 72 percent of nonprofit respondents agreed that NCRP is a credible information source. Nine percent of philanthropy respondents disagreed that NCRP is credible, along with four percent of nonprofit respondents.

NCRP's credibility is enhanced by its board and membership base. Interviewees from the funder, academic and nonprofit groups indicated that the high profile of NCRP board members, especially funder board member, had an "insulating" effect on the organization, allowing NCRP to better push the sector because many of the board members come from credible philanthropies. The board members provide legitimacy to NCRP work and the membership base gives credibility. These two things make it harder for individuals to automatically dismiss NCRP and its work. For example, two academics explicitly felt that Criteria's external credibility was enhanced by having strong endorsements. On the other side, at least two interviewees indicated that Paul Brest's response negatively impacted the credibility of the Criteria report, though it enhanced its visibility, indicating a challenge in the release of large, national reports that are likely to be at odds with at least one or two powerful forces in philanthropy.

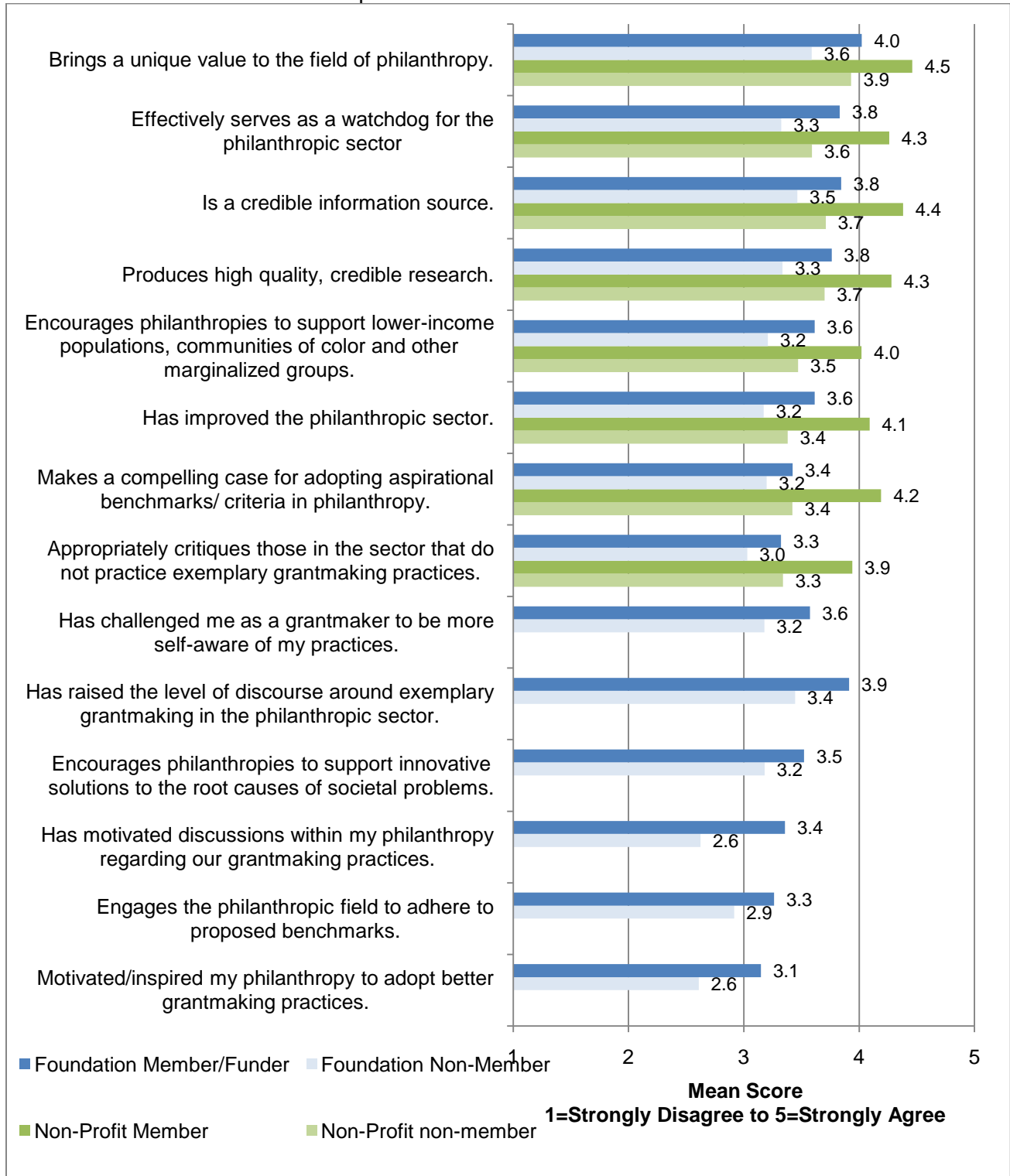
⁴ Nonprofits were also asked about pulse events (webinars)—55 percent were unaware of the resource and only 5 percent had used it (3 percent of which found it useful).

NCRP Effectiveness and Outcomes

People perceive NCRP to be effective in a very broad sense, but are reluctant to ascribe specific outcomes to NCRP. Data seem to indicate that NCRP is effective in fairly intangible/abstract ways that are hard to capture in concrete terms—bringing a unique value to the field; raising the level of discourse; serving as a watchdog. However, on more concrete actions/outcomes people are reluctant to credit NCRP.

The more broad/abstract outcomes associated with NCRP are encouraging discourse and otherwise providing space to the sector to address and change grantmaking practices. A couple of the academics provided an interesting framing of NCRP's impact, indicating that NCRP's work gives cover to others, which allows them to push a similar, though toned-down agenda. For example, one interviewee stated that COF's work on social justice would not have been possible without the more extreme push of NCRP. Two interviewees indicated that they felt the level of dialogue and engagement in hard questions had been enhanced as a result of NCRP's work and 58 percent of philanthropy survey respondents agreed that NCRP had raised the level of discourse around exemplary grantmaking practices. Figure 2 presents other perceptions of NCRP's effectiveness.

Figure 2
Perceptions of NCRP's Effectiveness



Source: TCC Group surveys of funders and nonprofits. Data represent only those respondents who reported hearing of NCRP. Membership numbers exclude those who were unsure.

NCRP has led to some concrete outcomes at the individual and institutional levels. The above finding about more intangible benefits does not imply that NCRP has not impacted some organizations directly. There are multiple stories and pieces of evidence that indicate that some organizations have been directly impacted by NCRP work. These concrete outcomes can be divided into at least five categories:

- **NCRP has increased awareness and knowledge of issues around good grantmaking.** All of the work around increased conversation and dialogue is evidence of increased awareness and knowledge. This is an area where NCRP seems to have excelled.
- **NCRP has increased some attitudes and motivation around good grantmaking.** Once someone has awareness and knowledge a subtle shift must occur toward buy-in or valuing of the information—a shift in attitude and motivation. While these are less widespread than awareness changes, NCRP seems to have had some success in this area. For example, 23 percent of survey respondents agreed that NCRP had motivated/inspired their philanthropy to adopt better grantmaking practices. Further, 23 percent of philanthropy survey respondents indicated they had informed and/or actively advocated for their philanthropy to adopt some version of NCRP’s good grantmaking criteria, and 18 percent reported having discussed the criteria with members of their board. There are some limits on awareness and knowledge improvements that may evidence that attitude shifts are slow to develop. For example, survey respondents reported that only about a quarter of their colleagues had a good understanding of NCRP’s mission, compared to slightly over half of the respondents, themselves. This provides some indirect evidence that NCRP is not being discussed widely among colleagues, perhaps indicating that attitudes have not shifted to the point of this being something perceived as very important.
- **NCRP does not focus much on skills development.** While NCRP provided some one-on-one services, these were largely around enhancing awareness and building motivation. NCRP has not (and does not claim) to have provided skills development about how to implement various grantmaking practices. Providing positive examples of implementation of various practices was something that multiple grantees indicated would be useful to increase both motivation and develop skills—essentially a “how-to” type guide.
- **NCRP may be providing the space for opportunities to practice/implement some good practices.** Along a behavioral change continuum, creating opportunities to practice, experiment, etc. is one of the hardest elements to control for because it usually falls outside the immediate control of the intervention (relying on the broader environment). While this remains partially problematic for NCRP (some minor evidence that some individuals are impeded from implementing good practices due to institutional constraints), the intangibles that were discussed earlier are a critical element to providing the space to explore and try some of the NCRP good grantmaking principles.
- **NCRP is influencing some philanthropies to adopt tangible changes in practice.** When asked about the grantmaking changes that the philanthropies have undergone in the last 12-18 months, the majority of funders did not report any changes or progress related to NCRP’s criteria. Overall, these groups reported greater strides in “strategic” grantmaking or providing more funding to social services as a result of the downturned economy. Hard data of changes in practice will be forthcoming when NCRP revisits the data behind its *Criteria for Philanthropy at Its Best* (PAIB). However, there is some evidence that organizations are directly using NCRP resources to enhance their effectiveness. For example, of philanthropy

survey respondents, nearly one-fifth of respondents (17 percent) said that, yes, they had used NCRP's grantmaking criteria as a guideline for their own allocation of grant dollars. Benefits of change also seem to extend to nonprofits, with 19 percent indicating they had used NCRP reports to secure more funding for advocacy, community organizing and/or civic engagement and 22 percent reporting they had informed and/or actively advocated for funders to adopt some version of NCRP's good grantmaking criteria.

Beyond these specifically attributable findings, there is some evidence that foundations are feeling increased pressure to use good grantmaking practices. For example, 43 percent of philanthropy survey respondents agreed that NCRP effectively encourages philanthropies to support lower-income populations; 46 percent agreed that NCRP has challenged them personally to be more self-aware of their own practices; and 29 percent agreed that NCRP appropriately critiques those in the sector that do not practice exemplary grantmaking and has motivated discussions with their grantmaking institution. Interviewees, however, provided almost no evidence of such internal or external pressure.

NCRP has engaged in a limited amount of policy and legislative action. NCRP has taken a limited number of policy positions over the past 12 month. The policies that they have advocated for were related to tax issues and allocation of the Social Innovations funds.⁵ In addition, their attendance at policy events has also been limited to one in the past year. Outside of NCRP, there has been limited national and state legislative or policy action in the past 12 months regarding issues of importance to the organization. Given its limited scope, there are not enough data to indicate how effective NCRP's policy/advocacy work has been. Policy and legislative strategy is a challenging subject and tactic for NCRP, especially given the timing of their *Criteria*; the Rep. Joe Coto (D-CA) and Greenlining Institute supported legislative efforts; and legislation around the estate tax and excise tax.

Recommendations

Much of the data above indicate that NCRP is having a positive effect through its work. They have fairly high recognition in the sector, particularly among senior staff at foundations, and their work is leading to increased awareness, knowledge and positive behavior trends among funders and nonprofits. There is, however, clearly room for improvement. As a result, we present the following recommendations. Additional recommendations provided by various audiences through the data collection are not included, but represent a wide range of interesting and valuable ideas.

- **Continue efforts to clarify NCRP's mission, vision and values and hone the message for communicating these.** This includes ongoing consideration of NCRP's role as an insider or outsider of philanthropy and the roles of "process" watchdog vs. "substance" watchdog. While TCC is not recommending any particular selection, we do recommend clarifying NCRP's role to the broader philanthropic community.
- **Reinforce efforts to clarify mission with members.** While increasing clarity of mission for external audiences in general appears to be warranted, we recommend that NCRP focus

⁵ NCRP submitted detailed comments on the distribution and implementation of the Social Innovation Fund Programs; endorsed principles supporting the restoration of a robust estate tax; and supported COF's revenue neutral proposal of 1.39% non-variable tax.

specifically on clarifying outreach to members, particularly newer members and consider ways to build clarity of mission for new members that will come on in the future.

- **Consider more frequent and high profile examples of philanthropies utilizing good grantmaking practices.** The evidence seems to indicate that philanthropies may respond to seeing their peers put into action certain practices. While there were limited examples from interviewees of how NCRP might currently be doing this, one example is the GCIP reports which seem to resonate with audiences because they show how advocacy can be done effectively and what its impact could be.
- **Have a very clear strategy around policy engagement.** Existing data show relatively few forays into policy by NCRP. However, as discussed in the PAIB section, external stakeholders perceived NCRP to be unclear on its policy position (i.e. if it would desire policy regulation). While we are not in a position to recommend what NCRP's strategy around advocacy should be, we do recommend a very clear strategy around policy engagement, with the high possibility that NCRP would clearly articulate their position to the field. For example, if NCRP were truly not interested in pursuing regulatory changes (rather opting for more of a self-regulation of the sector) it would likely be in its best interest to state this very clearly as this would mitigate many fears about NCRP. However, we also recognize that the potential "threat" of policy (even if not explicitly stated as such) may enhance the visibility of NCRP and its issues, and, as such, NCRP may want to leave the strategy ambiguous in the public sphere. If NCRP chooses the latter, it should be done very deliberately with a clearly laid out strategy because of the other implications it has for how NCRP will be perceived in the field.
- **Continue to have a diverse board, leveraging the philanthropy board members in particular.** The diversity of the board appears to give NCRP credibility, including funders and nonprofits. Having a diverse and active set of funders on the board might be used more expansively to engage other philanthropies that might otherwise feel that NCRP does not understand the complex funding environment of many philanthropies.
- **Make a better connection between NCRP's Criteria for good philanthropy and how these relate to increased effectiveness of philanthropy.** NCRP's PAIB report was robust and generally seemed to engage its audience. What was less clear to the broader audience was why these particular benchmarks would enhance philanthropy beyond what they are currently doing. We recommend that NCRP consider ways to better make the case for the individual criteria, such as case examples, clear impact descriptions of the consequences of not meeting the benchmarks, etc.
- **Continue to enhance regional outreach.** In the last couple of years it seems that NCRP has increased its work at the regional level. However, there appears to be extensive opportunity for further outreach, be it through funder affinity groups, regional associations of grantmakers, etc. As NCRP works at the local/regional level, funders become directly engaged with NCRP and are more likely to see the relevance of the information to their own daily work.