

# Blandin Foundation Grantee Perception Report

## Progress and Changes from 2005 through 2019

Prepared by the Center for Effective Philanthropy

---

*Over the last decade of work with the Blandin Foundation (Blandin) – including five surveys of grantees (in 2005, 2008, 2011, 2015, and 2019) and four surveys of Blandin staff (in 2006, 2011, 2015, and 2018) – the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) has provided Blandin with data on how it is viewed by key stakeholders. The reports from these surveys highlighted strengths and opportunities in Blandin’s work, relationships, processes, and structure compared to other foundations.*

*This brief memo presents CEP’s summary of Blandin’s changes and progress across the Foundation’s five Grantee Perception Report (GPR) surveys from 2005 through 2019. This summary provides one set of perspectives to help the Blandin Foundation reflect on the structures, values, and processes necessary to guide its work for the future. In this memo, Blandin’s findings are compared to CEP’s dataset of more than 250 funders whose grantees CEP has surveyed.*

---

### Overview

- ▶ Since 2005, ratings from Blandin Foundation’s grantees have shown a positive and continuous trend of improvement.
  - Compared to Blandin’s last grantee survey in 2015, Blandin grantee perceptions in 2019 trend higher for several measures throughout the GPR, including perceptions of the Foundation’s impact, aspects of relationships, and helpfulness of the selection process.
- ▶ Blandin grantees in 2019 also rate higher than grantees of the typical funder in CEP’s dataset for the Foundation’s impact on grantees’ local communities, fields, organizations, and their relationships with the Foundation.
  - In open-ended comments, many grantees share examples of Blandin’s impact on their communities, writing that “Blandin Foundation is a leader in innovation and collaborative efforts in our community” and that Blandin “is one of the most important organizations in the community of any kind.”
- ▶ Similar to the trends by grant category in 2015, ratings from Local grantees in 2019 trend higher for certain measures compared to Rural Minnesota grantees.
  - Local grantees rate significantly higher for their perceptions of Blandin's impact on and understanding of their local communities, awareness of their organizational challenges, the extent to which they agree that Blandin convenes diverse leaders, and agreement that they perceive Blandin to be an organization/partner that is accessible.

## Perceptions of Blandin’s Impact on and Understanding of Grantees’ Communities

- ▶ Blandin grantee ratings in 2019 are the most positive compared to any of the Foundation’s past grantee surveys, and now place Blandin in the top 10 percent of CEP’s dataset, for perceptions of its impact on their local communities.
  - Grantees rate more positively than typical, and similar compared to 2015, for Blandin’s understanding of their local communities.
  - In comments, grantees add that “The impact that the Foundation has had in our community is outstanding,” and that “Blandin’s focus on rural and equity initiatives is unique and very needed.”

## Impact on Grantees’ Organizations and Assistance Beyond the Grant

- ▶ In 2019, grantee ratings place Blandin in the top 15 percent of CEP’s dataset for perceptions of the Foundation’s impact on their organizations.
  - Blandin grantees rate similar compared to grantees at the typical funder for the Foundation’s understanding of their strategy and goals, as well as the challenges facing their organizations.
- ▶ Similar to 2015 and all past GPRs, Blandin grantees report receiving a median grant size of \$50K and a grant length that is similar compared to grantees of other funders.
  - The 35 percent of Blandin grantees who report receiving grants of \$100K or larger rate significantly higher compared to other grantees for several measures throughout the report, including perceptions of the Foundation’s impact on and understanding of their local communities and organizations.
- ▶ Compared to the average funder in CEP’s dataset and in the Foundation’s custom cohort, Blandin provides a similar proportion of grantees with the most intensive patterns of field-focused or comprehensive assistance beyond the grant.
  - Blandin grantees who receive any form of assistance beyond the grant rate significantly higher for perceptions of the Foundation’s understanding and impact. In addition, grantees who report receiving the most intensive patterns of non-monetary support from Blandin rate significantly higher for several measures, including strength of relationships, understanding, and custom questions related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## Strength of Relationships with Grantees

- ▶ Since 2005, Blandin has been rated higher in each subsequent GPR for the strength of its relationships with grantees.
- ▶ Blandin grantees in 2019 rate the overall strength of their relationships with the Foundation in the top 25 percent of CEP’s dataset.

- Grantees rate higher than typical for their perceptions of fairness, responsiveness, transparency, comfort approaching Blandin, consistency of communication, and Blandin’s openness to ideas from grantees about its strategy.
- ▶ One area of change since 2015 is related to the patterns of grantees’ interactions with the Foundation. Blandin grantees in 2019 report less frequent and less reciprocal contact with their program officers compared to past GPRs.
  - Grantees who report contact at least a few times per year, or more reciprocal initiation of contact, rate significantly higher for aspects of Blandin’s understanding, responsiveness, communication, transparency, and helpfulness of the reporting process.
- ▶ Across funders, CEP’s research finds that two of the strongest predictors of funder-grantee relationships, and subsequently perceptions of impact, are overall understanding of grantees and their contexts, as well as a funder’s overall transparency.
  - Blandin grantees rate in the top 15 percent of CEP’s dataset for the Foundation’s overall transparency.
  - Blandin is rated similar to the typical funder for it’s overall understanding of grantees and their contexts, and in suggestions for the Foundation 10 grantees (the largest proportion) encourage Blandin to continue to deepen its understanding of their communities, contexts, and organizations, as well as fund different types of organizations.

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- ▶ In 2019, Blandin Foundation added a set of custom questions to the GPR focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- ▶ Grantees strongly agree that the Foundation is committed to diverse and underserved populations, and that the Foundation demonstrates a strong commitment to the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
  - Grantees also strongly agree that their grant and their work with Blandin has enhanced their organization's ability to engage diverse populations in their work.
- ▶ More than two-thirds of grantees report using their Blandin grant to serve groups that represent a broad range of ages, ethnic/racial identities, or current poverty experience. In addition, more than half of grantees report using their grant to serve groups that represent a mix of gender identity, disability or impairment, or sexual orientation.

## Blandin Processes

- ▶ Overall, many grantees describe Blandin’s processes as "straightforward" and “easy.”
- ▶ Grantee ratings trend higher compared to 2015 and all past GPRs, and are now more positive than typical, for the helpfulness of the Foundation’s selection process.
- ▶ Blandin grantees also rate more positively than typical for the extent to which the reporting process was adaptable, relevant, and aligned appropriately to the timing of their work.

- ▶ A smaller than typical proportion of Blandin grantees report exchanging ideas with the Foundation about how to assess the funded work, or having a substantive conversation about their submitted reports.
  - The half of grantees who report engaging in these reporting and assessment activities rate significantly higher for the extent to which Blandin’s reporting process was a helpful opportunity to reflect and learn, as well as many other measures throughout the report.
- ▶ Half of Blandin grantees (a typical proportion) report that the cost of their evaluation was not funded by the Foundation, and grantees rate lower than typical for the extent to which the evaluation incorporated input from their organizations, resulted in changes, or generated information they believe will be useful for other organizations.
- ▶ On average, Blandin grantees report spending less time on Foundation processes compared to grantees of most other funders: 12 hours on average for proposal and selection, and 4 hours on average per year for monitoring, reporting, and evaluation.

## Summary of 2019 GPR Recommendations

Based on its grantee feedback in 2019, CEP recommends that Blandin Foundation consider the following in order to build on its strengths and address potential opportunities:

- ▶ Reflect on which aspects of Blandin’s values and approaches have contributed to strong perceptions of impact on grantees’ local communities, and continue to reinforce these strengths.
- ▶ Explore opportunities to further deepen Blandin’s understanding of grantees’ communities, contexts, and organizations.
- ▶ Discuss approaches to facilitate the more frequent and reciprocal patterns of interactions with grantees that are associated with even stronger relationships.
- ▶ Work with grantees to strengthen the Foundation’s approach to reporting and assessment, including through exchanging ideas with grantees about how to assess the funded work, having a substantive discussion with grantees about their report(s) when possible, and funding the cost of evaluations.

## Methodology

The Center for Effective Philanthropy surveyed 136 local and rural grantees of Blandin Foundation during February and March of 2019. CEP received 90 completed responses for a 66 percent response rate. CEP surveyed the Foundation’s grantees in February and March of 2015, 2011, and 2008, and March and April 2005, receiving 67, 72, 78 and 80 percent response rates respectively.

## Contact Information

**Austin Long**  
 Director  
[austinl@cep.org](mailto:austinl@cep.org)

**Terah Ehigiator**  
 Analyst  
[terahe@cep.org](mailto:terahe@cep.org)

