

# Paul Hamlyn Foundation

## Qualitative Analysis of Grantees' and Declined Applicants' Perceptions of Paul Hamlyn Foundation in 2022

Jonathan Price, Sarah Eberhardt, Andy Curtis  
August 2023

The logo for the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, consisting of the lowercase letters 'phf' in a white serif font, set against a dark blue square background.

# Qualitative Analysis of Grantees’ and Declined Applicants’ Perceptions of Paul Hamlyn Foundation in 2022

---

## Table of Contents

1. Executive summary .....	2
2. Introduction .....	5
3. Grantee perspectives on PHF’s impact.....	7
4. Grantee perspectives on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).....	13
5. Grantee and declined applicant perspectives on the quality of PHF’s processes, interactions and communications .....	18
6. Suggestions by grantees.....	26
7. Suggestions by declined applicants .....	30
8. Implications for our practice .....	34
Acknowledgments .....	36
Appendix – Detailed methodology .....	37

# 1. Executive summary

---

Every four years, Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) commissions a survey to gather feedback from grantees and declined applicants about their perceptions of the Foundation, including in areas such as our impact, the application process, their engagement with the Foundation during the course of their grant, and diversity, equity and inclusion. The survey enables us to monitor trends over time, understand our strengths and identify issues, which inform continuous adaptation and improvement. The survey, which generates both quantitative and qualitative data by asking closed questions (asking respondents to rate the Foundation on various measures) and a small number of open questions, was most recently conducted in 2022 by the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP).

**This paper provides a comprehensive analysis by PHF of the feedback provided by grantees and declined applicants in the survey's open-ended questions.** It has been an in-depth listening exercise, which aims to supplement the analysis of quantitative data undertaken by CEP in their previously published [memo](#); and develop a detailed understanding of our grantees' and declined applicants' perspectives, and what they need and want from PHF. By reading, coding and analysing every single response, we are able to hear the voices of grantees and declined applicants, giving them an opportunity to share their experiences and views in their own words.

We intend to use this analysis to inform action planning across a wide range of areas of our practice, in order to drive improvement, and to be a better funder.

We analysed the data thematically and by sentiment, with the assistance of qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. Where sample sizes allowed, we were also able to analyse some trends by PHF fund and leadership profile.

## Key findings

The full paper is structured in five sections, each focusing of the responses to the survey's open-ended questions in turn: perceptions of PHF's impact; suggestions of how PHF could do more to further diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI); perceptions of the quality of PHF's processes, interactions and communications; suggestions by grantees for improvements; and finally, suggestions by declined applicants for improvements. In this executive summary we highlight five crosscutting themes, which pinpoint and describe specific areas for improvement, and identify what people find most valuable about PHF's practice in order to build on these strengths.

### *Community*

Across multiple questions, respondents highlighted PHF's role facilitating connections across organisations, fields and funders. PHF has the power and positionality to convene and connect, to provide space but also to be proactive and strategic, such as supporting collaborative peer learning, connecting sectors and bringing funders together to coordinate and strengthen fields. The vast majority of observations about our connecting role were positive, however a small number of respondents felt that PHF could do more to proactively connect and convene organisations and funders. Respondents highlighted diversity, equity and inclusion as a specific area in which PHF could add value through convening and building partnerships.

### *Take a leap*

Respondents to our survey perceived PHF to be risk-taking, innovative and providing thought leadership that drives change in our specialist fields. PHF is known for supporting unpopular work, and our status and reputation gives credibility and stability to these fields. A link is made by many respondents between our flexible, long-term approach to funding and the ability of grantees to experiment, try new things and take risks. Some respondents noted a desire for PHF to take a more active role in influencing, and to show leadership and model behaviour in the area of diversity, equity and inclusion.

### *Transparent and accessible operations*

Grantees and declined applicants valued PHF's thorough decision-making process and recognised the challenges of making funding decisions. As expected, feedback from declined applicants focused on the application process and was much less positive than the feedback from grantees. There is appetite for a simplified application process, partly to improve access for smaller organisations. The most significant priority for respondents, however, was for clear funding criteria and guidance. Furthermore, declined applicants felt that the time it takes to prepare an application warrants more detailed and specific feedback, which would help them improve future applications for PHF and/or other funders.

### *Centre equity and justice*

Respondents suggested a number of ways in which PHF could further its commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion: targeting or ring-fencing funding for minoritised-led organisations; opening up channels for meaningful involvement in our practice and decision-making for minoritised groups; increase our support for grantees' focus on equity and justice by growing our grants plus offer in this area; and diversifying PHF's staff and board.

## *Relationships*

PHF's style of grants management is seen positively by grantees. Respondents perceive the Foundation to be supportive, genuine and knowledgeable in our specialist fields. There is a high level of trust and our emphasis on learning, flexibility and allowing adaptation in response to insight is valued. Grantees characterised our relationship as a partnership, challenging traditional power dynamics. There are a few areas that respondents feel need attention: our responsiveness; ensuring contact is sustained during staff transitions and beyond the end of a grant; and getting out and about, visiting grantees in their own spaces to deepen our relationships and understanding of their work.

*“Positive social change is a rich and endless tapestry, sometimes social entrepreneurs are a single thread and sometimes they are a complete pattern, but they are never the whole. The Foundation provides the stability of a weaver’s framework, a mill for the workers and a gallery from which to appreciate the bigger picture of the tapestry they work closely upon. A common room to banter and share. The patronage helped me dispel some of the imposter syndrome, replacing self-doubt with belief and confidence. Providing a workbench and tools so I could work my craft, could go out and literally take on the policy makers and be an irresistible force against immovable objects, but more PHF added a sense of belonging and community. I will continue to push the boundaries.”*

## 2. Introduction

---

Every four years, Paul Hamlyn Foundation commissions a survey to gather feedback from grantees and declined applicants about their perceptions of the foundation, including in areas such as our impact, the application process, their engagement with the foundation during the course of their grant, and diversity, equity and inclusion. The survey enables us to monitor trends over time, understand our strengths and identify issues, which informs continuous adaptation and improvement. The survey was most recently undertaken in 2022 with the support of the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP).

The survey generates both quantitative and qualitative data by asking closed questions (generally asking respondents to rate the foundation on a number of measures on a scale of 1-7), and a small number of open questions, allowing respondents to provide written, open-ended feedback in these areas. The 2022 survey included the following four open-ended questions:<sup>1</sup>

- i. Please comment on the most important impact the Fund is having on your field, community, or organisation
- ii. The Foundation is committed to centring diversity, equity and inclusion within its work and developing its anti-racist practices. PHF knows there is much more for them to do on these issues and are interested in your views as to how the Foundation might improve its own practice and better support others. What types of actions could the Foundation undertake to further diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- iii. Please comment on the quality of the Foundation's processes, interactions and communications.
- iv. What specific improvements would you suggest that would make the Fund a better funder?

CEP produced a [memo](#) summarising the results of the survey which should be read in conjunction with this paper. CEP's analysis focuses primarily on the quantitative responses (the closed questions), with less in-depth analysis of a sample of the qualitative responses (the open questions). However, CEP also provides the full set of anonymised qualitative responses to enable foundations to conduct their own in-depth analysis. This is the first time PHF has taken up this option and **this paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the feedback provided by grantees and applicants in the survey's open-ended questions.**

### 2.1. Why do this analysis?

It is important for PHF to read and understand all comments written by grantees and declined applicants, who took their valuable time to respond to the CEP survey. Conducting a comprehensive analysis of this feedback enables us to develop an in-depth picture of our grantees' and declined applicants' perspectives and understand their experiences of engaging with the foundation. In addition, the analysis also provides us with an easily

---

<sup>1</sup> Three of the questions are standard questions used by CEP, however, the second question focusing on DEI was a bespoke question phrased by PHF.

accessible 'data bank' of grantee and declined applicants' views categorised by multiple topics (and searchable by fund/leadership).

Secondly, by reading, coding and analysing the qualitative responses, this supplements CEP's largely quantitative analysis of the survey findings, ensuring the overall analysis is multi-method. For example, the quantitative data indicate that respondents feel PHF has impact on many different levels, and the qualitative data illuminate in which areas they feel foundation has most impact.

We intend to use this analysis to inform action planning across a wide range of areas of our practice, in order to drive improvement, to be a better funder and to respond to what grantees and declined applicants want and need. The analysis will provide greater insight for the grants team in understanding certain aspects of quantitative data, which provide an indication of respondents' experiences and feelings, whereas the qualitative data provide the detail.

## **2.2. Methodology**

To systematically analyse the responses to the open-ended questions, we uploaded the open-ended survey responses to NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, and used this to organise and explore the data by developing a coding framework and categorising responses accordingly.

We asked grantees broad questions with no prompts or examples, and repeated responses of the same or similar themes were clearly identifiable across the questions. NVivo enabled us to analyse trends by respondent characteristics (i.e. fund and leadership profile) and any significant trends are included in the findings. For some questions, we also coded responses by sentiment to understand whether respondents had positive, negative or other perceptions. In our analysis we have tried to show the frequency with which various themes appeared in the responses.

A more detailed outline of our methodology is provided in the appendix.

## 3. Grantee perspectives on PHF's impact

---

This section details our analysis of 375 grantee responses to the following question focusing on PHF's impact: *Please comment on the most important impact the Fund is having on your field, community, or organisation.*

In a large number of responses, grantees expressed only a sentiment about PHF's impact, whilst some went on to highlight specific areas where we are (or are not) having impact. Where grantees gave examples of PHF's impact, they were more likely to be positive, whilst more negative comments tended to provide little detail or rationale.

We categorised these responses into nine main themes, outlined in sub-section 2.3 below.

### 3.1. Overall perspectives on PHF's impact

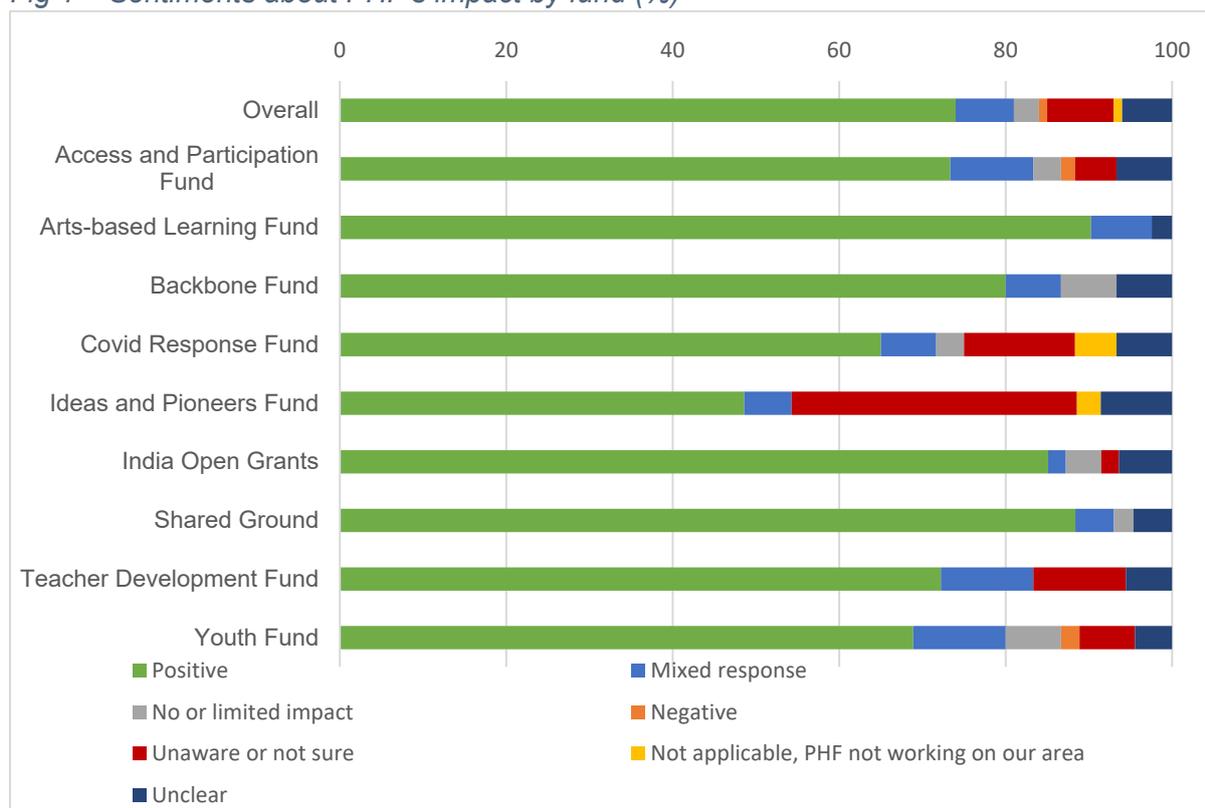
Grantees seemed to have interpreted this question in one of two ways, and sometimes both: firstly, by focusing on the impact organisations are able to have because of the financial resource provided by the foundation i.e. grantees' impact; and secondly, by thinking about the direct impact of PHF e.g. because of the non-financial support organisations and fields have received from PHF staff, or via grants plus support facilitated by the foundation, or because of outputs/activities delivered by the foundation in support of the fields in which we are working. Where relevant we note these distinctions in our analysis.

Quantitative data from the CEP survey showed that grantees' ratings for the Foundation's impact on their organisation is similar to the median funder in PHF's custom cohort and higher than the typical funder in CEP's dataset of over 300 funders. Perceptions of grantees and declined applicants on the Foundation's impact on, and understanding of, their fields are in line with the typical funder in CEP's dataset, with grantee perceptions significantly higher than in PHF's 2017 CEP survey.

We categorised responses to this question by the **sentiments** of respondents, in other words, whether their comments about PHF's impact were positive, negative or something else. Seventy-four percent of responses were positive; 7% of responses combined positive and negative sentiments; 4% of respondents felt that PHF either had no impact, limited impact or negative impact; 8% were unsure about PHF's impact and in 6% of answers it wasn't clear which sentiment was being expressed.

Only significant differences in sentiment by fund were identifiable amongst Ideas and Pioneers Fund and Covid Response Fund grantees, with higher proportions of respondents being unaware/not sure about PHF's impact or not being applicable, because PHF is not working in their area. This is not unexpected because of the breadth of focus in these two funds, beyond the main fields in which we have considerable expertise.

Fig 1 – Sentiments about PHF’s impact by fund (%)



### 3.2. Field, organisation or communities?

Respondents were most likely to refer to PHF’s impact on their organisation or field, and only rarely mentioned our impact on their community or beneficiaries. Where grantees explicitly mentioned PHF’s impact on communities, it was usually an indirect impact resulting from our financial support to grantee organisations. The majority of comments highlighting impact on communities were from India fund grantees.

*“The Foundation...influences our sector primarily at the level of the community (especially women) and also us at the institutional level. With the support of the Foundation, we were able to inspire and support our team to do different things... as a result of which there has been an increase in women's strength and awareness of their rights. With the support of the Foundation, we have also been able to engage [other stakeholders] in the community with our program.”*

### 3.3. Main themes on impact

We have ordered the top nine themes by the frequency of observations within grantee responses, from most to least (see Fig 2 below for details). Some themes group together similar observations, and the vast majority focus on PHF’s impact at field or organisation-level. There is a high level of consistency in grantee responses, giving us a clear picture of how grantees perceive PHF’s impact on our fields and grantee organisations. Further, we

frequently see multiple themes within single responses, showing the multiple connections and causal relationships *between* themes.

*“Positive social change is a rich and endless tapestry, sometimes social entrepreneurs are a single thread and sometimes they are a complete pattern, but they are never the whole. The foundation provides the stability of a weavers framework, a mill for the workers and a gallery from which to appreciate the bigger picture of the tapestry they work closely upon. A common room to banter and share. The patronage helped me dispel some of the imposter syndrome, replacing self-doubt with belief and confidence. Providing a workbench and tools so I could work my craft, could go out and literally take on the policy makers and be an irresistible force against immovable objects, but more PHF added a sense of belonging and community. I will continue to push the boundaries.”*

Fig 2 – Impact themes by number of respondents



### 3.3.1. Facilitating connections

Around one in five respondents associated PHF’s impact with our **connecting and convening** role. This was by far the most common observation. We have grouped together similar observations under this heading (with only subtle differences). They encompass convening, facilitating introductions, encouraging strategic connections across fields and connecting funders. The common thread linking all these observations is that PHF provides the ability for grantee organisations to be more than the sum of their parts.

*“The Foundation ...play[s] a very important role convening and connecting organisations to enable more effective collaboration and coordination around shared objectives. I think that this convening role is hugely important because funding alone can only do so much if system-wide issues within the sector are not simultaneously addressed (such as the systemic disincentives that sometimes get in the way of effective collaboration between different organisations).”*

The vast majority of observations about our connecting role were positive, however a small number of respondents felt that PHF could do more to proactively connect and convene organisations and funders. Grantees are aware that PHF has convening power, and where this is being used, grantees noted in particular the added value of sharing analysis, knowledge and good practice, and facilitating collective learning.

A similarly frequent group of comments highlighted arguably a more strategic type of connecting and convening work: encouraging partnership working, developing peer support infrastructure and supporting grantees to work towards common goals.

A smaller but significant group of comments noted PHF's strategic role in connecting sectors or policy areas, most notably arts and education, and to a lesser extent migration and tech/digital.

Another notable group of comments highlighted PHF's connections with other funders. This enabled PHF to connect grantees to other funders and widen access to support. Grantees noted our role bringing funders together in order to coordinate and strengthen fields, however a minority view here suggested that our field building potential is not fully realised.

### 3.3.2. Research and learning

The next most notable theme was PHF's learning role, with almost one in eight respondents highlighting our emphasis on **evidence and learning** as a key impact at field and organisational levels. A high proportion of observations were positive (93%) and were predominantly shared by grantees of the two main arts funds.

Most observations focused on field-level impact, although a significant number focused on the impact of PHF's evidence and learning at organisation-level. In regards to the latter, respondents highlighted the positive impact of PHF's evidence and learning support scheme and more generally our grants management support enabling them to develop robust approaches to evaluation. Respondents noted that PHF's funding of **research** creates impact in our fields, even though we are only making this possible via our grants.

In keeping with the first theme, the most common observation here was our role in proactively supporting collaborative and peer learning, usually via grants plus activities such as learning networks/partnerships.

The most common impact noted about PHF's approach to evidence and learning was on organisational strategy and development, knowledge production in specific areas, most notably arts education, the arts sector and asset-based working.

### 3.3.3. Taking risks and supporting innovation and unpopular work

PHF's willingness to take **risks** and support innovative and unpopular work was cited by a significant number of grantees across a broad range of funds. Ninety-seven percent of

responses were positive. They noted that the impact of this approach to grant-making leads to new ideas, drives change, increases effectiveness and allows for failure as part of the change process. It was also seen as vital to the sustainability of important areas of work. A link is made by many respondents between our flexible, long-term approach to funding and the ability of grantees to experiment, try new things and take risks.

#### 3.3.4. Thought leadership driving strategic shifts

A group of observations focused on PHF's role driving strategic shifts in the fields in which we work. This group of observations was most commonly noted by grantees of the Shared Ground Fund followed by the Arts Access and Participation Fund. All comments were positive.

*"PHF are a key funder of arts and culture and therefore has a strong influence in our field. The conscious change in policy from PHF to prioritise social justice causes (alongside the implementation of Arts Council's Let's Create) has definitely changed the way in which our sector talks about our work. Some of this can feel a bit tokenistic, but I think the foundation seems to be very good at identifying authenticity."*

The role was described by grantees as providing **thought leadership**, challenge, 'big thinking' and progressive vision, which create a vehicle for change.

#### 3.3.5. Reputation and status

*"The status of the funder has had a huge influence on stakeholders and partners seeing the value and impact of our work."*

"Kudos", "status", "prestige", "marker of quality": a number of terms used repeatedly to denote PHF's **reputation**, particularly in the arts field,<sup>2</sup> and its effect on grantee organisations. The most commonly cited impact of PHF's reputation at organisational level was the **status** our funding confers on grantee organisations. Several go on to say that this marker of status then enables them to secure further support from other funders. Finally, a group of respondents argue that PHF's support of underfunded areas of work gives stability and credibility to those fields.

#### 3.3.6. Influencing

The next most frequent theme to emerge was **influencing**. Slightly over half of these responses refer to the influencing organisations are able to do with PHF funds, and slightly under half refer to influencing activities PHF undertakes directly. Apart from our influence on the organisations we fund, Government is the most commonly referred to audience for our influencing work, followed by sectors and other funders. Again, responses were predominantly positive about our work in this area, although a small number of grantees

---

<sup>2</sup> These terms were used mostly by respondents of the two main arts funds (75%).

suggested that the foundation could use its power and resource to have more influence than it currently does:

*“The Foundation is a major influence in the field. The Foundation is very careful not to overstate its influence, but I think it plays a major convening role and is a valuable voice. Whilst I understand the reticence to push itself forward, I do think that if it wanted to the Foundation could take a more proactive role and this would be welcome as its expertise is very valuable.”*

PHF’s support for organisations and specific fields was seen to be influential on the views and strategies of other funders, building credibility and sustainability via a wider pool of supportive foundations.

One notable observation is that India Fund grantees commented that guidance and capacity building support from foundation staff had put them in a position to be able to influence policy.

### **3.3.7. Capacity building**

A smaller theme that emerged from grantee responses was the **capacity building** support provided or facilitated by PHF. This impact was felt at organisational level and helped with leadership development, organisational development, fundraising and evaluation. A number of respondents reflected on the positive impact of peer learning which had been instigated by the foundation.

All responses were positive and almost half came from grantees of the India Fund.

### **3.3.8. Supporting lived experience leadership**

A small group of comments (again all positive) highlights PHF’s role in advocating for **lived experience leadership**, particularly in the field of migration. Grantees noted that PHF had challenged thinking in the sector, helped to take this agenda forward and led to more support for small, grassroots organisations.

### **3.3.9. Asset-based approach**

**Asset-based or strength-based approaches** were referred to on a number of occasions. PHF (and specifically its Youth Fund) is seen as a champion of this approach, enabling organisations to understand, embrace and embed it in their work. All comments were positive.

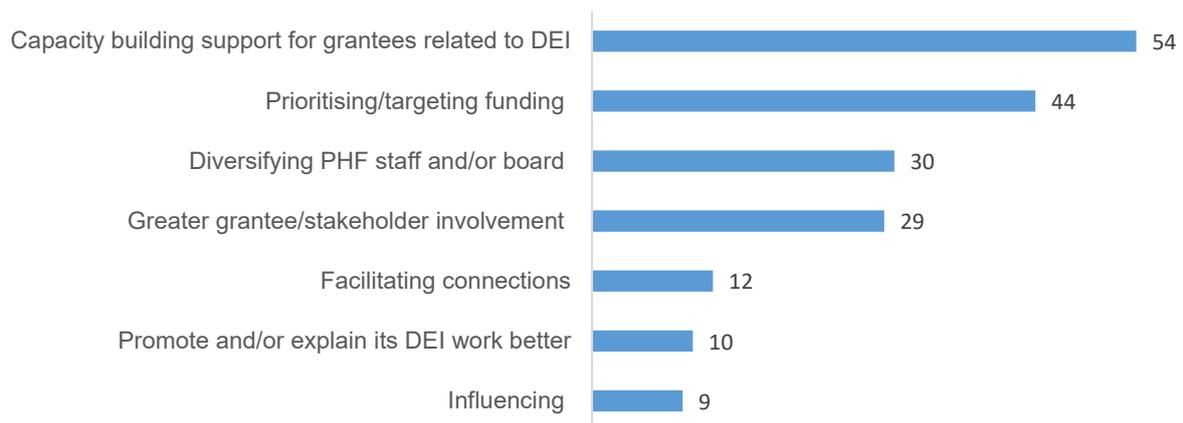
## 4. Grantee perspectives on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)

---

This section details our analysis of grantee responses to the following question focusing on DEI at PHF: *The Foundation is committed to centring diversity, equity and inclusion within its work and developing its anti-racist practices. PHF knows there is much more for them to do on these issues and are interested in your views as to how the Foundation might improve its own practice and better support others. What types of actions could the Foundation undertake to further diversity, equity, and inclusion?*

There were 275 responses, predominantly suggestions for improvements, although a small proportion either took the opportunity to state a positive perception of PHF’s DEI practices or stated they did not know enough to make a comment about it. Diverse themes were identified, and comments often covered multiple themes.

Fig 3 – DEI themes by number of respondents



### 4.1. Main DEI themes

Each of these frequently occurring themes are explored in order of most cited.

#### 4.1.1. Capacity building for grantees related to DEI

The largest cluster of comments encompasses a range of themes linked by the suggestion that PHF could support grantees in a non-monetary way (i.e. not a grant) on their own DEI journey.

Some grantees suggested supporting organisations to diversify their senior leadership team and trustees, including around recruitment. This included training to help with **developing recruitment polices and processes**.

*“Possibly offer support with how we as an organisation change and update our current recruitment processes so that the process is more accessible and reaches under-represented groups.”*

Sometimes this was especially connected to making organisations more inclusive for those from minoritised groups. Related to this is advocating for training/support to enable **leadership development** in the organisations around DEI. There were other suggestions around help with policies more generally for an inclusive workplace, and for commissioning **diversity and inclusion training** for grantees.

*“The Foundation could possibly commission training in DEI issues related to disadvantaged communities it supports or wishes to outreach.”*

#### **4.1.2. Prioritising/targeting funding**

The second largest cluster of suggestions centred around **targeting or ring-fencing funding for minoritised groups**. Some argued that targets should be set within existing funds, whilst others suggested having **a new separate fund** for specific groups, including Black and minoritised groups.

*“Fund organisations led by people with lived experience of structural oppression and/or organisations who build anti-oppression work into their organisational strategy.”*

The targeting was not always based on organisational/leadership profile, but also on organisational size, often referring to small organisations working at local-level.

*“We also feel the Foundation should ring fence funding for the many small organisations that are the bedrock in communities but which have limited recourse to grants from mainstream funders.”*

#### **4.1.3. Diversifying PHF staff and/or board**

The next largest theme relates to diversity at PHF.<sup>3</sup> Some grantees questioned how diverse PHF’s Board is, whilst others noted that in their experience **PHF did not seem to have a diverse staff body**, particularly in terms of racial background, although comments also highlighted a range of other characteristics, including gender, disability and age. This suggests that PHF needs to continue monitoring and diversifying its staff and Board, as well as communicating how it is making progress in this area. Linking to the previous theme, some suggested agreeing targets for the diversity of staff and Board at PHF:

---

<sup>3</sup> Please note PHF staff and trustee diversity data are available on our website: <https://www.phf.org.uk/about-phf/staff-and-trustee-diversity-data/>

*“It would be good to see the proportion of the Foundation's Board, Senior Team and staff who identify in the categories you ask of grantees, and what their targets/approach to this is.”*

Respondents noted that diversifying staff improves access to the foundation for minoritised-led organisations:

*“My organisation only began to have a meaningful dialogue with PHF and many other funders (excluding PRS Foundation who have been brilliant from the very start!), when Black people were working within the funders grant giving teams. It's a prime example of lived experience and understanding creating opportunities.”*

#### **4.1.4. Greater grantee/user involvement**

A significant number of grantees made suggestions around how PHF could bring in the voice of minoritised communities – including via **user/stakeholder involvement** - to inform our DEI practice and grant-making decisions. The varied suggestions range from consultative exercises and entities, such as consultations and advisory groups, to initiatives and structures that have genuine decision-making power.

*“Creation of consultation groups or subsidiarity boards / working groups of people with lived experience.”*

*“Commit to releasing some of its endowment for the benefit of marginalised communities and individuals and enable them to have decision making powers over investments and grants. Make grant funding truly participatory in nature.”*

There was a distinct subtheme of drawing on the expertise of organisations working in the area of racial justice, and ensuring genuine involvement of minoritised groups, not performative actions:

*“Work with orgs who are trying to tackle these issues - who can show they are. Not just those with nice statements.”*

*“Nothing about us, without us' - this is something we try hard to embed... Elevate the voices of people who are marginalised, engage with them at the start, work with communities to develop your practices, rather than consult afterwards. Inclusive governance and employment practices - less than 6% of people with learning disabilities have any sort of paid job for example. Be the change you want to see.”*

#### **4.1.5. Facilitating connections**

A number of suggestions were made regarding PHF's role in supporting the fields in which grantees are working. Firstly, there was a group of suggestions around building more formal **partnerships** in the DEI space, and secondly, support for PHF creating spaces where organisations might come together.

*“The foundation's role as a partnership maker - bringing together organisations from across different fields to increase the impact of both. Partnership working unlocks new networks and approaches.”*

#### **4.1.6. Communicating PHF’s DEI work**

Twenty-two grantees responded to this question by saying they were not aware of PHF’s DEI work. Some suggested that a lack of knowledge about PHF’s work/progress on DEI was an issue in itself, and that PHF should be more open and transparent about our DEI work.

*“I don't feel I know enough about what the foundation is doing beyond what I can see on their website. I think adopting a proactive approach to communicating this work and listening to feedback from grantees and the communities they serve is important.”*

Whilst PHF publishes progress regarding our DEI action plan on its website, these responses suggest our communication of this could improve.

#### **4.1.7. Influencing**

Some respondents noted a desire for PHF to take a more active role in influencing, to show leadership, model behaviour and use its voice more to influence change in the area of DEI. This included committing to provide a platform to amplify the exposure of grantees and other organisations.

*“I would like to see a public commitment to anti-ableist practices and to disabled leadership.”*

*“The Foundation could be a more public advocate for the social change that sought. It can provide a platform for beneficiary organisations to make their case for diversity, equity and inclusion in their individual areas of activity.”*

## **4.2. Differences by leadership group**

All CEP respondents were asked about their organisation’s leadership group and the responses were cross-tabulated to see whether there are differential experiences. The CEP memo demonstrated this was the case overall, with Black and minoritised groups-led organisations, as well as deaf, disabled and neurodivergent-led groups, having less positive experiences and perceptions of PHF.

In this analysis, we have looked at whether there were differences in the suggestions around improving DEI practice at PHF by organisational leadership profile. Table 1. below presents the most frequently cited themes outlined above and the percentage of grantees from each leadership group that made a suggestion categorised under this theme. The table ranks the

above themes according to how frequently they were chosen by those led by Black and minoritised groups.

There should be caution about placing too great an emphasis on relatively small numbers,<sup>4</sup> but what the data suggest is that there is a *noticeable difference in terms of suggestions made around DEI*. For example, nearly a quarter of grantees led by Black and minoritised groups suggested targeted funding compared to only 13% those without any minoritised leadership (e.g. the “other/no response” category); just over a fifth of Black and minoritised groups advocated greater user/grantee involvement, compared to 6% of those in other/no response category; and just under a fifth of Black and minoritised groups suggested PHF diversify its staff and board, compared to 8% of the other/no responses.

These data, despite their limitations, certainly suggest there are differences in priorities around DEI by leadership profile and should be explored further as part of PHF’s DEI work.

*Table 1. Suggestions around improvements in DEI by leadership group*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Black and minoritised led groups (%)</b>	<b>Deaf, disabled, and/or neurodivergent led groups (%)</b>	<b>Racial Inequity and Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent led groups (%)</b>	<b>Other/No Response (%)</b>
Prioritising/targeting funding	24	14	33	13
Grantee and or user involvement	22	9	27	6
Capacity building for grantees in relation to DEI	20	18	0	20
Diversify PHF staff and/or board	18	14	13	8
Facilitating connections	6	5	0	4
Communicating PHF’s DEI work better	4	5	0	4
Influencing	2	5	7	3

<sup>4</sup> The subgroups had the following number of respondents: Black and minoritised led groups (51); Deaf, disabled, and/or neurodivergent led groups (22); Racial Inequity and Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent led groups (15); and other/No Response (187).

## 5. Grantee and declined applicant perspectives on the quality of PHF's processes, interactions and communications

---

427 grantees and 254 declined applicants responded to the question: *Please comment on the quality of the Foundation's processes, interactions and communications.*

This open-ended question often elicited responses that touched on different topics, and sometimes included both praise and criticism, as well as suggestions for areas of improvement. Therefore, the following analysis is of the responses, or parts of responses, rather than individual respondents.

Categorising responses to this question by sentiment, that is, whether they were positive or negative, shows a marked difference between grantees and declined applicants.

Overall, 80% of responses from grantees were positive and just 15% were negative. Meanwhile, 37% of responses from declined applicants were positive and 59% were negative.

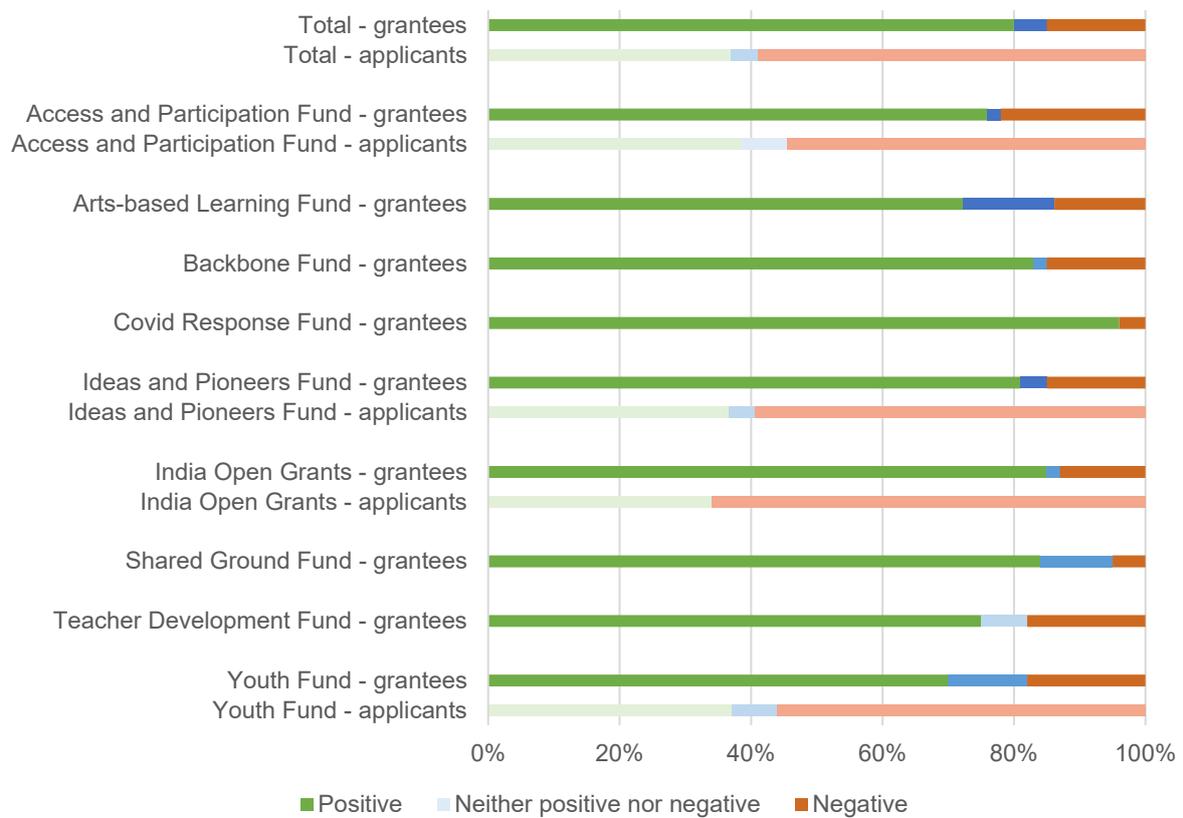
Figure 4 shows the breakdown by fund,<sup>5</sup> which suggests that there is not a huge variation for either grantees or declined applicants by fund.

Covid Response Fund grantees were the most likely to be positive (96%), which likely reflects the particular nature of this Fund as part of PHF's rapid and responsive approach to Covid; see [Review of PHF's Covid Response Fund](#).

---

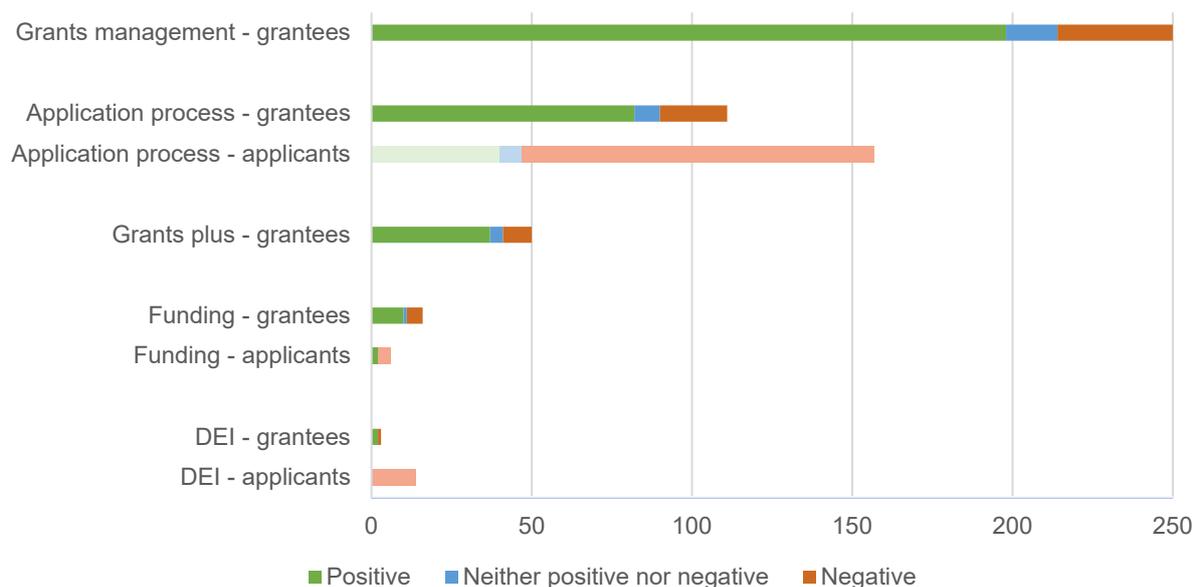
<sup>5</sup> Whilst the total sample includes declined applicants from ABL and TDF, they are not included in Fig 4 as their relatively small sample size would make it misleading. For more detail on the sample, please see the appendix.

**Fig 4 - Grantee and declined applicant sentiments on the quality of PHF's processes, interactions and communications by fund**



The main topics that respondents commented on in their answers can be categorised into five broad areas, with themes listed under the broad areas. The following chart shows both the topics that grantees and declined applicants commented on, and the sentiment of these comments.

**Fig 5 – Grantee and declined applicant sentiments on the quality of PHF's processes, interactions and communications by area**



Grantees were most likely to focus on various aspects of grants management in their responses and declined applicants were most likely to focus on the application process. Grantees made positive comments in 79% of comments about grants management, and 74% of comments about grants plus and the application process. In contrast, only 25% of declined applicants' comments about the application process were positive, which aligns with CEP's analysis in their memo.

Responses about grants management, the application process, grants plus and DEI are discussed in further detail below. Opinions about funding are analysed together with responses to the question about suggestions in section 5.

### 5.1. Grants management

Only grantees comments on grants management. Figure 6 shows the most frequently mentioned sub-themes within the area of grants management, and whether the comments were positive or negative.

Fig 6 – Grants-management related responses by sentiment



Grantees were largely positive when describing some aspects of **engagement, interaction or communications** with PHF staff, and when doing so were usually talking about their relationship with their grants managers. Terms relating to “supportive” and “responsive” were most frequently used (48 comments), followed by those relating to “efficient”, “clear” and “straightforward” (33 comments). Grants managers’ understanding and knowledge about both the grantee’s work and wider sector were praised as “really valuable” and resulting in a “genuine” relationship.

A number of respondents spoke of experiencing a **partnership** with their grants manager, rather than the traditional power dynamic of the funder-grantee relationship, with one grantee describing this relationship as being “based on shared values and interests”. A

grantee described how PHF staff “put the power in our hands” whilst also providing helpful feedback and advice. Several respondents spoke of the relationship involving a high level of **trust**, where the grantee feels both “trusted to do a good job with our grant” and able to raise any issues that may occur in an “honest and open dialogue”.

Relatedly, PHF’s “**learning focused approach**” with its emphasis on “the need for reflection and experimentation” was praised. Similarly, the value of there being flexibility for adaptation in response to reflection and learning was noted:

*“I value PHF's understanding that things change/don't always work out as planned and that the honesty of sharing is a useful learning curve for all. Many funders want boxes ticked and there is an implication you will be penalised if they're not. PHF's attitude is to explore why.” (Grantee)*

Three quarters of grantees’ comments related to **reporting and monitoring** were positive, many referring to PHF’s flexible and hands off approach, whilst also feeling that “the foundation is genuinely interested in what we are doing”. Focusing on what has been learnt means that grantees are not expected to answer “set questions” or achieve “quantifiable and predetermined outcomes”. Instead, reporting was described as “informal”, not overly “rigid” or “strict” in format. Some respondents praised PHF for accepting reporting already being generated for others, so saving them time and resources.

*“The yearly required reporting is free enough to allow us to get to the nitty gritty of what is really important as we see it - allowing us to think through what we have done and learned through a reflective process that is helpful to project development and which avoids unnecessary paperwork.” (Grantee)*

However, one corollary of a light touch approach can be that grantees feel that they are given too much autonomy and insufficient support or guidance. As one grantee put it, “it is nice to be trusted to get on with things” but this shouldn’t be at the expense of “a relationship with the funder.” Fifteen comments from grantees indicated that they found PHF staff to be at times **unresponsive** and/or showing a lack of interest in engaging with their work. Communications were described as “extremely challenging”, responses to queries as “extremely slow” and examples were given of receiving no acknowledgment or feedback after repeatedly sending a final report or a video showing impact of the grant.

A number of grantees commended PHF staff for their knowledge and **understanding** of their sector and spoke of their interest in and willingness to learn about the grantee’s work. However, this was also an area of improvement highlighted by respondents, a number of whom were particularly keen for PHF to visit grantee organisations more often (see sections 5 and 6 below).

A particular area of criticism which came up (13 comments) was a poor experience after a **change of contact** following a grants manager leaving PHF. Several respondents described a lack of handover followed by little communication, resulting for instance in the feeling that a previously positive relationship is now “on hold”. This reflects findings from CEP’s

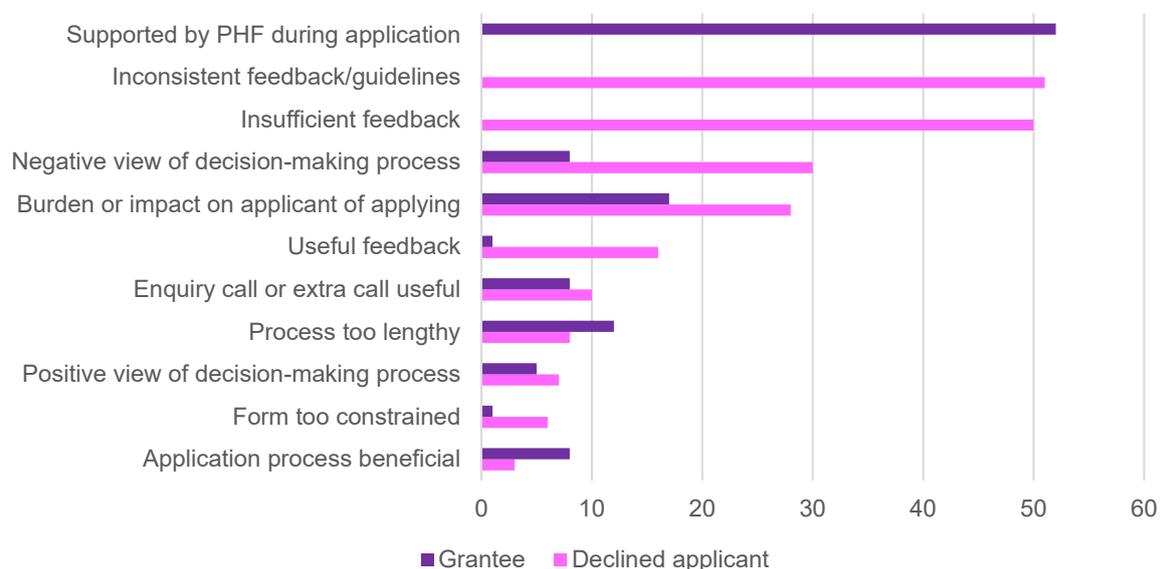
quantitative survey which found that grantees who indicated having a contact change in the past six months rate significantly lower for aspects of understanding, relationships, communications, and processes.

*“...our key contact for the first year ... was brilliant ... it felt like we developed a relationship, she understood and cared about the project ... After [she] left ... we were handed to someone else and then someone else. We didn't have a face-to-face introduction with our new contact and it felt harder to build a relationship between PHF and the project. There was very little communication between PHF and the project for a good while ... When we submitted our final report - we sent it 5 times to two different members of staff and still haven't heard anything at all ... not even an acknowledgement that they've received our report let alone any feedback.”*

## 5.2. Application processes

The next most discussed topic was the application process, with declined applicants making almost 150 comments related to this, compared to 110 by grantees. There is considerable overlap here with declined applicants' responses to the suggestions question, which is explored in more depth in section 6 of this paper. By definition, declined applicants had a different experience of the application process to grantees, since it ended with a negative decision. Reflecting this, three quarters of declined applicants' comments on the process were negative, whilst three quarters of grantees' comments were positive.

Fig 7 – Application related responses by grantees and declined applicants



Most notably, grantees were most likely to describe feeling **supported by the Foundation** during the application process, whilst no declined applicants mentioned this, instead being most likely to be critical of the feedback received on their application. Declined applicants were most likely to feel that **insufficient feedback** was given or that the **feedback and/or guidelines or criteria were inconsistent or contradictory**, for instance declination

reasons were given that did not align with the funding criteria. Under a third of these comments described feedback as both lacking and inconsistent.

Criticism of the feedback received also often included a complaint about PHF's **decision-making** process. It was suggested that there was a lack of clarity and of transparency, with one declined applicant suggesting that receiving funding from some Funds is like "being a 'club' - and it is not always clear how to become a member!"

Nearly a third of the comments indicating that the criteria or feedback were inconsistent were from declined applicants to the Ideas and Pioneers Fund. Declined applicants repeatedly noted that it was disappointing to be turned down because their "brand new" idea was "too developed" or "too much of a clear idea", whilst at the same time being expected to "answer so many questions about it".

Comments touching on issues with application feedback often highlighted that this was particularly frustrating because of the resources required to complete the application, and also to respond to follow up questions and requests for more information. Both declined applicants and grantees highlighted the **burden or impact** on declined applicants of applying, highlighting how time-consuming the process was for them and the drain on "valuable resources", particularly from the frontline of smaller charities.

Whilst a very small number of respondents suggested that the length and thoroughness of the application was reasonable or proportionate to the funding being requested, slightly more grantees and declined applicants described it as overly long. On the other hand, a few declined applicants suggested that the process was too constrained to enable them to fully answer the questions.

The application process was not seen entirely negatively by declined applicants. Whilst disappointed by the funding decision, 16 declined applicants were positive about the feedback received, describing it as "specific and helpful", the process as fair and "the reasons were valid". Eight grantees and three declined applicants commented that the process itself, although time consuming, was **beneficial** to the organisation in some way, for instance helping to hone the project, develop an evaluation framework or even shaping the way the organisations works.

Over 50 responses from grantees described receiving **support** from PHF prior to and during the application process. As well as commenting on the usefulness of information available online, PHF staff were described as "willing to listen", wanting to "nurture" the application, "believing in" their project or organisation, and seeking to give an application "the best chance of success". This was achieved by ensuring that guidelines and criteria were clear, seeking to gain a mutual understanding of each other's objectives and expectations for potential funding, and establishing whether there was appropriate 'fit'. This support was also described as being offered in an empowering and respectful manner:

*"...They made it very clear that this was our project and that we were the ones with the on-the-ground and local knowledge about our participants and needs. They*

*brought their national knowledge to this skilfully, and helped us to focus on the needs of the application process and criteria without ever asking us to change what we wanted to do.” (Grantee)*

The opportunity to discuss applications with PHF staff before or during the process was described as “invaluable”, saving time and resources and, from one grantee’s perspective, may have “made the difference between our getting and not getting a grant.” There were also grantees and declined applicants who wished to have such conversations but were disappointed not to be able to.

### 5.3. Grants plus support

Taking an inclusive interpretation of the phrase ‘grants plus’ support<sup>6</sup> resulted in around 50 grantees’ responses (and a similar number of suggestions, see section 5) being categorised as referring to some element of grants plus support. Grantees were generally very positive:

*“I am always struck by the expertise offered by Foundation staff on the subject area - above and beyond grant management - and by the willingness to act as a partner - making very helpful suggestions, introductions, etc.” (Grantee)*

Reflecting responses to the impact question (see section 2), four fifths of grantees who mentioned PHF’s role as a **convener** bringing together grantees and those working in similar areas were positive about it. The small number of negative comments were largely related to the challenges of remote networking and online meetings. The Youth Fund Learning Network, Shared Ground residential, TDF cohort days and more generally opportunities to interact with and learn from other grantees were all mentioned positively. One grantee mentioned being supported by PHF to develop their project “as part of a wider initiative” which has led them to working with new organisations.

**Evaluation support** was received particularly well and credited with leading to changes across grantees’ work and organisations, for instance one grantee spoke of it leading their organisation to build evaluation and data collection into their work. Evaluation consultants were described as being “professional”, “very informed” and providing “vital ‘external eyes’ ... in the role of a critical friend”. A handful of comments referred to **organisational or individual development**, generally in the sense of valuing it and suggesting a need for more (see section 5).

### 5.4. Diversity, equity and inclusion

Just three grantees referred to DEI related topics in their answer to this question, including the accessibility of application and reporting processes and the value of lived experience. Meanwhile, 18 declined applicants touched on issues related to DEI in their responses,

---

<sup>6</sup> We define ‘grants plus’ support as: *structured non-financial support facilitated by funders for their grantees as an additional element to their grant, which can include organisational/individual development, evidence and learning, field building, convening and communications.*

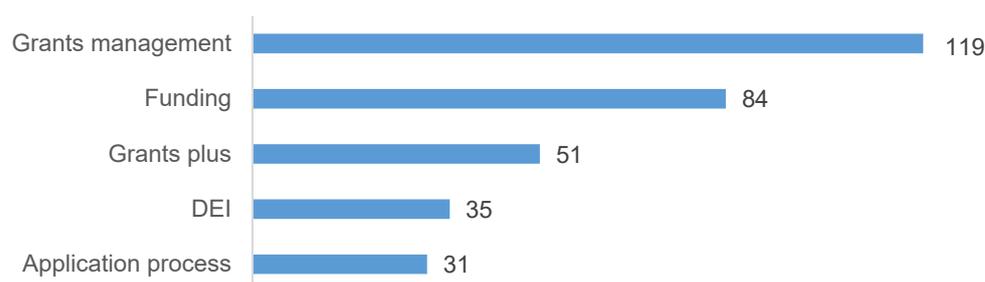
where similar points were made to those discussed in section 6.8, such as the importance of understanding intersectionality. In particular, it was highlighted that PHF should take more effort to ensure that the application process is not biased against smaller, grassroots and marginalised groups which might lack the expertise and resources to meet the demands of the application process as it currently stands.

## 6. Suggestions by grantees

---

309 grantees responded to the question: *What specific improvements would you suggest that would make the Fund a better funder?* Their responses lent themselves to being analysed using the same broad areas as responses to the quality of processes, interactions and communications question (section 4). Suggestions categorised by the following main themes are discussed below, with the exception of suggestions related to DEI which are discussed in section 2.

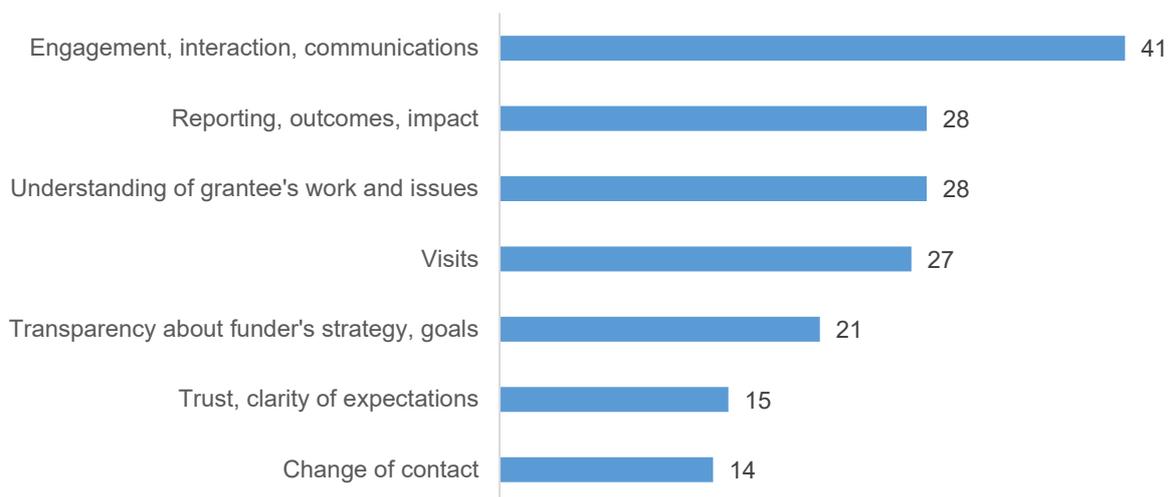
Fig 8 – Grantees’ suggestions by theme



### 6.1. Grants management

Reflecting the pattern in responses to the quality question, grantees were most likely to make suggestions relating to aspects of grants management.

Fig 9 – Grants management related grantees’ suggestions by sub-theme



Reflecting the small number of grantees’ comments describing a lack of responsiveness from PHF staff (see section 4), suggestions were made for more regular and closer **interaction** and engagement with grantees.

Similarly, whilst PHF’s approach to **reporting** and monitoring was largely seen positively, the same areas that some grantees praised PHF for doing well were highlighted as areas for

improvement by others. For instance, some advocated for a criteria-fied reporting process, clear expectations and greater flexibility surrounding reporting requirements.

A similar number of suggestions relating to the need to **understand grantees' work** as those relating to reporting were given. Highlighting the limitations of reporting at providing real insight into grantees' work and perspectives, the value of **visiting grantees** was repeatedly mentioned. This was described by one respondent as "the greatest way to understand" grantees' work.

Reflecting PHF's intentions to take a more user-centred approach, one grantee recommended drawing more on user experience:

*"The Foundation would benefit greatly from drawing in the end-user experience to inform its understanding of the grantees and, to some extent, strategy. Sometimes it feels that the Foundation does 'virtue-signalling' and the real struggle of the work with people and communities is somewhat underappreciated ... This conflict between real life on the frontline and some more sophisticated views from the Foundation (that occasionally may come across as slightly detached) cause internal conflict in grantees when communicating with staff." (Grantee)*

The importance of a close relationship, achieved through more interaction and a close understanding of priorities was also related to suggestions about the importance of **transparency** and clear expectations.

In relation to the criticism over the poor experience after a **change of contact** (see section 4) suggestions were made for more effective hand-overs between Foundation staff, smoother communication with newer staff, and more "check ins" or regular engagement.

## 6.2. Funding

Over 80 suggestions were made by grantees related to funding in some way, most often in relation to continuation funding (31 comments) or longer-term funding (28 comments).

Highlighting a wish for **continuation funding**, several grantees spoke of the importance of a PHF grant to their organisation (particularly those receiving a significant proportion of their annual income through multi-year core funding) which heightens the importance of planning for the end of the grant. A lack of clarity around whether or how to re-apply to PHF were highlighted, as well as concerns about the length of the application process. Several grantees noted that the gap between funding ending and being able to reapply results in loss of "momentum and staff", as well as making long-term planning difficult. One grantee described a lack of "guidance on how to continue a dialogue" about potential further funding and the difficulty of establishing "what can and cannot be funded for further work".

Over a third of the suggestions for **longer-term funding** were made by India Open Grants Fund grantees. Several spoke of the need for grants of at least ten years, to enable

organisations to become self-sustaining and/or because PHF is financing grants in unpopular areas such as grassroots work on gender-based inequality and violence.

15 grantees highlighted the value of **unrestricted** or core funding, noting its importance for flexibility and stability. It is interesting to note here that more grantees highlighted the importance of continuation and longer-term funding than unrestricted funding.

It was suggested that PHF could do more to collaborate or “**forge relationships**” with **other funders** working in the same areas, with some suggesting PHF could influence other funders to also make longer-term unrestricted grants, and others highlighting the potential for PHF to help current grantees secure funding from elsewhere.

A small number of respondents described how their work was ‘**between funds**’, and that PHF could be clearer about how declined applicants should decide which fund to apply for, as well as making more connections between work in different funds:

*“There seems to be a siloed approach between departments where grant activity, which is relevant to a number of different funded areas of PHF, but which sits within one funded area, is not shared and connections are not made.” (Grantee)*

### 6.3. Grants plus support

Grantees’ suggestions relating to grants plus support were most likely to relate to convening (32 comments), or organisational and individual development/capacity building support (19 comments).

Over a third of suggestions relating to **convening** were about the possibilities for greater learning opportunities, as well as enabling potential collaborations and opportunities for peer support. Specific suggestions were also made relating to TDF cohort activities, such as the need for more advanced scheduling of interviews and meetings with associated practitioners; greater clarity around the amount of contact time required by networking sessions to better enable grantees to build participants’ capacity into the budget; and sharing content of sessions in advance to help encourage partners to attend.

A few grantees made suggestions related to support for **organisational and individual development/capacity building** and particular areas on which they would benefit from receiving external expertise, such as staff wellbeing, or developing practice and policies in relation to issues such as racial or gender inequity. One grantee spoke of the need for a mentor or coach to help address problems and develop solutions rather than just signposting. Although **evaluation** support (mentioned seven times) was largely seen very positively, one grantee suggested that the consultants offered were too limited in terms of their areas of specialty.

Fourteen grantees made suggestions related to PHF’s **influencing** or field building work, ranging from encouragement to use its position to do more advocacy work, to the recommendation that funders should focus on funding rather than influencing, which was

seen as “really not helpful”. From the pro-influencing perspective, it was suggested that PHF “has a more influential voice and can bring the conversation into places that community organisations cannot” in terms of advocating for systemic change. There was also a sense expressed by a small number of respondents that PHF could be better at communicating its wider programme, vision and strategy.

#### 6.4. Application process

Around 30 suggestions by grantees related to the application process in some way. Two thirds of these relate to the **burden or cost** of the process on declined applicants, or the process being too lengthy. Solutions offered included providing more support, for instance through conversations with PHF staff before and during the process or allowing more flexibility. One grantee also suggested that small organisations could be offered a “bursary towards our time in completing the application”, whilst another suggested that grants managers should be empowered to make decisions on grants following visits and interviews with potential grantees.

The issue of whether the process can be simplified for existing grantees was also raised:

*“I fully understand - and respect - the need for accountability but ... bearing in mind our successful track record, [our organisation] might have been trusted a little bit more ... [instead of requiring] an unnecessarily protracted grant application process. Greater clarity about precisely what needed to be substantiated by what evidence would have been appreciated.” (Grantee)*

## 7. Suggestions by declined applicants

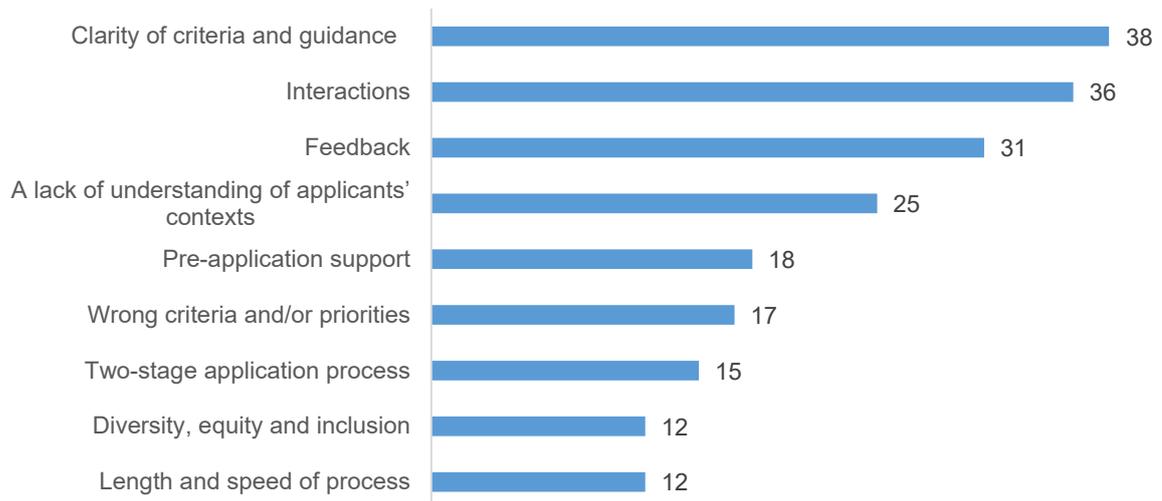
---

We received 211 responses from declined applicants to the question: What specific improvements would you suggest that would make the Fund a better funder?

Most of the responses highlighted areas for improvement with the application process and/or eligibility criteria or priorities. The responses comprise a mixture of declined applicants' views of where they feel PHF has gone wrong and specific suggestions for how to improve policy and practice, and there is a significant overlap in themes here with sections 4 and 5.

We include below the main areas for improvement noted by respondents to this question, starting with the most commonly cited area for improvement. Around 10% of respondents to this question noted that they were satisfied with their experience of applying to PHF and had no suggestions for improvement.

Fig 10 – Declined applicants' suggestions by theme



### 7.1. Clarity of criteria and guidance

The most common suggestion from declined applicants was for **greater clarity of criteria and guidance**, with almost one in five raising this as an area for improvement. This echoes findings highlighted in CEP's summary memo. A small number mentioned that the criteria were interpreted inconsistently by staff; that there was a lack of clarity around what is meant by 'early stage ideas' in the Ideas & Pioneers Fund; and a lack of clarity around PHF's geographical priorities. The need for more and clearer guidance was highlighted, with suggestions to share successful applications so that declined applicants can get a better idea of what might constitute success and to provide more of a steer around the amount to apply for.

Almost half of the comments under this theme were from unsuccessful Arts Access and Participation Fund declined applicants.

## 7.2. Interactions

The second most frequently mentioned theme related to **declined applicants' interactions with PHF**, although noting here an overlap with pre-application support, a theme highlighted below. A common suggestion was for declined applicants to have access to pre-application conversations with a member of staff where this had not been available. A small number of declined applicants suggested that PHF should host events or webinars where declined applicants can speak to the foundation about their ideas or proposals.

Respondents noted that they wanted more contact and a stronger relationship with PHF during the application process. Some had experienced a lack of responsiveness and timeliness in their interactions with PHF during the application process. Some requested 'better communication' but it was not clear whether they were referring to contact, guidance, feedback, information or something else. A small number of respondents suggested that PHF should be more open, accessible, transparent and/or honest in its communications.

## 7.3. Feedback on declined applications

*"More specificity to [PHF's] feedback would be useful. We felt we were very close to meeting all the criteria and understand that funds are limited but given the time it takes to make a full application more detailed feedback would assist us to develop. I appreciate this constitutes the foundation's time but it would demonstrate real sector leadership if PHF was known for offering specific feedback to assist organisation develop 'better' applications." (Declined applicant)*

The third most common suggestion made by declined applicants was for more detailed and specific **feedback on declined applications**. Some noted that despite being given a declination reason they still did not understand why their application had been declined as they felt they still met the criteria. A small number of respondents suggested that providing in-person feedback would be preferable. A 'hunger for greater feedback' is a major theme highlighted in CEP's summary memo, which noted that nearly one-fifth of declined applicants did not receive a reason for their declined application. Forty-five percent of declined applicants requested feedback, but did not receive it, a notably higher proportion than at the average funder.

Some declined applicants felt that the time it takes to prepare an application warrants more detailed feedback. A rationale given for this is that it helps organisations improve for next time or for applications to other funders.

## 7.4. PHF's understanding of declined applicants' context

A significant group of respondents felt that **PHF did not understand their organisation, issue, geographical context and/or communities**, and this was an explanatory factor for their application being declined. Some highlighted in particular the lack of understanding of the differing contexts in devolved nations or rural areas, with two calling PHF's perspective "London-centric."

Just as grantees highlighted the importance of visits from PHF staff, one of the most common suggestions made by declined applicants is that PHF should undertake field visits, either as part of the application process or more generally to develop a better understanding of the context in which organisations are working, with some going on to suggest that PHF should also meet beneficiaries and/or communities during these visits. These suggestions were particularly common amongst unsuccessful India Fund declined applicants.

### 7.5. Pre-application support

A number of similar suggestions among declined applicant responses can be categorised as **pre-application support**, although there is an overlap here with the findings in the interactions section above and in particular the popular suggestion for wider access to pre-application enquiry calls.

Many of the comments highlight a general need for more pre-application support. Some more specific suggestions include being clearer about what declined applicants are expected to include in applications; giving a stronger steer of an declined applicant's chances of success before submission; giving a bursary for small organisations for the time it takes them to prepare a second stage application; and giving interim feedback on draft/first stage applications so that organisations can make improvements as part of the application process (although noting here a similarity with suggestions in the below section on the two-stage application process).

A few respondents felt more general and longer-term support could be provided to organisations who are declined to strengthen the fields the foundation supports.

### 7.6. PHF's criteria and/or priorities

A small number of declined applicants felt that PHF should **change their criteria and/or priorities**. The most common observation here was that the foundation should be prioritising small, grassroots organisations, and this requires the foundation to recognise the value of the work small organisations do more than it currently does. Other suggestions were that PHF should be funding more frontline support; and that its geographical priorities were not right, with declined applicants feeling that their area had been deprioritised unfairly.

### 7.7. Two-stage application process

Where respondents mentioned PHF's **two-stage application process**, comments were generally supportive, however, some respondents thought that requiring both a video and written application for the Ideas and Pioneers Fund was excessive.

Two main groups of suggestions were made with a view to reducing the burden on declined applicants.<sup>7</sup> Firstly, several respondents felt that the length and/or depth of either first or

---

<sup>7</sup> Please note, application processes differ from fund to fund.

second stage wasn't right, with slightly more feeling that the first stage could be shorter and streamlined. On the other hand, a smaller number of comments suggested that the first stage application hadn't given them enough space to make their case and one respondent felt that the second stage could be lightened. The second group of comments argued in favour of an online or in-person interview, somewhere in the application process, to give organisations an opportunity to talk about their work in addition to, or instead of, a written application.

### **7.8. Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)**

A group of comments from declined applicants can be classified as relating to **diversity, equity and inclusion** and these are echoed in other sections of this report, particularly section 3. They include: greater precision and nuance is needed in PHF's definitions of DEI; funding for minoritised groups should be prioritised; greater consideration of DEI, intersectionality and/or specific minoritised groups in the decision-making process; and PHF should diversify its staff who have decision-making power. Additionally, there was concern that the application process disadvantages minoritised groups, including as a result of video applications.

### **7.9. Length and speed of application process**

A small number of declined applicants commented on the **length and speed of the application process**. The decision-making process was described as overly slow and the application forms as too long, dense and/or complicated. Some respondents noted that the application process was too demanding for small organisations in particular.

## 8. Implications for our practice

---

This paper provides an in-depth analysis of grantees' and declined applicants' perceptions of PHF at a moment in time: 2022. By categorising their comments into themes and sentiments, we are doing some work of interpreting and contextualising, however ultimately, it provides a summary of what grantees and declined applicants think about PHF, not what we think about the foundation or what we think we should do. Triangulating this analysis with the quantitative data presented by CEP in their memo provides a robust body of learning for PHF to work with.

The feedback of grantees and declined applicants shows us their priorities as well as what they think are PHF's strengths and weaknesses. The powerful evidence in this paper is a resource and a tool to help inform our continuous improvement - for example in areas such as DEI, relationships, grants plus, the application process and influencing - and should be used in any discussion we are having about these areas. Grantees and applicants have provided a number of ideas and suggestions, and it is now our responsibility to consider them in light of limiting and other contextual factors. Some of these suggestions contradict one another and we may find that implementing some is not feasible. However, what's important now is to make decisions using evidence about what grantees and declined applicants actually think rather than our assumptions of what they think.

Overall the feedback provided by grantees is positive and there is so much to feel proud of. There were lots of positive comments and PHF staff singled out for the transformational impact they'd had on organisations. The sentiment analysis in this paper shows encouraging figures and echoes the positive findings in CEP's quantitative analysis. It is no surprise that feedback from declined applicants is more challenging (CEP note this is the case across their wider sample) and their suggestions provide useful food for thought.

Below we highlight a small number of the most powerful messages conveyed by respondents to the survey, including both strengths to build on and areas for us to consider improving.

- **Community** – grantees strongly associate PHF with our role supporting a community of multi-dimensional relationships, between grantees, funders and other stakeholders. We have the positionality, power and resource to bring people together so they are more than the sum of their parts. This supports peer learning, collaboration and field building. This role is valued highly and there is a suggestion we could do more of it, including specifically in a DEI context.
- **Take a leap** – grantees perceive PHF to have leadership functions within our fields that drive innovation, produce ideas and new thinking, and champion unpopular work. We have a strong reputation and are influential. We should be modelling exemplary behaviour in areas such as diversity, equity and inclusion.
- **Transparent and accessible operations** – while grantees and declined applicants value our thorough decision-making process, there is appetite for a simplified

application process (including to improve access for smaller organisations), more specific feedback, clearer criteria and consistency.

- **Centre equity and justice** – priorities for our grantees and declined applicants include opening up channels for meaningful involvement in our practice and decision-making for minoritised groups, growing the DEI focus of our grants plus offer and growing our support for small organisations to achieve a more equitable approach to grant-making.
- **Relationships** – grantees value the supportive, trusting and flexible relationships we have with them. Some attention is needed around staff transitions and in-person contact.

## Acknowledgments

---

This report was written by Jonathan Price, Sarah Eberhardt and Andy Curtis, members of PHF's Evidence and Learning Team. We would also like to thank Adrienn Kovacs for support developing the coding framework in the early stages of this research process; and Kirsty Gillan-Thomas and Louisa Robinson for their work setting up the survey with the Center for Effective Philanthropy. Most importantly, we would like to thank all of our grantees and declined applicants who used their valuable time to provide feedback and suggestions to PHF.

## Appendix – Detailed methodology

---

### The sample

The CEP surveys, conducted in May and June 2022, achieved a 64 percent response rate for grantees and 34 percent response rate for declined applicants, resulting in a sample of 598 grantees and 358 declined applicants.

The following table shows the sample for three of the questions by Fund. Backbone and Covid Response Funds do not have declined applicants and Shared Ground declined applicants' comments were not analysed as the sample size was deemed too small to ensure confidentiality.

	Impact	Quality of processes		Suggestions	
	Grantees	Grantees	Declined applicants	Grantees	Declined applicants
<b>Total</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>211</b>
Access and Participation Fund (APF)	62	75	63	53	49
Arts-based Learning Fund (ABL)	43	48	15	30	12
Backbone Fund	16	18	N/A	11	N/A
Covid Response Fund	61	75	N/A	50	N/A
Ideas and Pioneers Fund	35	38	56	34	38
India Open Grants	50	51	63	44	63
Shared Ground Fund	43	47	0	36	0
Teacher Development Fund (TDF)	18	19	9	13	7
Youth Fund	47	56	48	38	42

Where specific funds are drawn out in the analysis, we have taken into account the proportion of fund-specific responses to the whole sample.

### How we analysed the data

The three members of PHF's Evidence & Learning team took responsibility for reading and analysing the responses to different questions.<sup>8</sup> Raw survey data were obtained from CEP and to ensure respondents' confidentiality, they provided responses to each question separately, so we were unable to analyse how the same respondent had answered across the different questions. For the same reasons, CEP were also only able to share one identifying characteristic (e.g. fund, leadership profile) for each respondent. For the impact, quality of processes and suggestions questions we chose to identify respondents by Fund as

---

<sup>8</sup> Impact and declined applicant suggestions (Jonathan), DEI (Andy), processes and grantee suggestions (Sarah)

we thought colleagues would find it useful to identify trends at Fund level. For the DEI question, we chose to identify respondents by leadership profile as we thought this would provide the most useful analytical lens.

Data were imported into qualitative analysis software, NVivo, and categorised (or 'coded') under commonly recurring themes. In our analysis, we highlight frequently occurring themes (given the high number of responses to the quality question, they have been organised into broad areas and themes under these areas).

### **Limitations**

This analysis in this paper does not enable a comparison with a cohort of other funders unlike the analysis possible with CEP's quantitative dataset. This is also the first time PHF has analysed the CEP qualitative data in this way and so we cannot compare with results from previous years.

This analysis benefited from the internal knowledge and understanding brought by the Evidence and Learning Team. At the same time, reflexivity is an important aspect of qualitative research, that is, acknowledging that as a researcher, you are inevitably part of the research process and therefore attempting to be aware of our own biases and opinions that we brought to the analysis.