

Grantee Voices

Strengthening Collaboration by Listening to Our Grant Recipients

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PREPARED FOR
LAWSON
FOUNDATION

PREPARED BY
grantbook

Acknowledgements

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About Grantbook

Grantbook is a boutique consultancy that works exclusively with grantmakers and nonprofit foundations, enabling them to leverage digital technology alongside grantmaking best practices to activate and demonstrate their impact.

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Executive Summary

This joint initiative of The Counselling Foundation of Canada, Lawson Foundation, and Laidlaw Foundation aims to demonstrate **transparency**, foster **learning**, and strengthen **collaboration** by collecting and analysing feedback from grant recipients. Grant recipients are indispensable partners in achieving the foundation's mission. Open dialogue and honest feedback are central to

effective partnership, and while we strive to be responsive and open, we also know that it isn't always easy to tell a funder that there is room for improvement. Grantbook was engaged to collect and synthesize confidential feedback about grant recipients' experiences of working with the foundation.

Overall Results in Focus Areas (Lawson Foundation)

Relationship

Respondents had positive views of their relationship with the foundation in the areas of interaction, communication and sharing problems that arise. The foundation is seen as extremely flexible and accommodating. There is a desire for more frequent but less formal communications and forms that could allow for more direct and open communication.

Organizational capacity and non-financial support

Understanding the internal challenges of grant recipient organizations was the area where the foundation had the least positive views. However, connections to partners, events, advice, and other support given by the foundation are seen as helpful.

Impact on the field

The foundation is seen as understanding the work of the organizations they fund, and the complex realities those organizations work in. The long-term impacts of grants include allowing the work to be seen by others.

Cohort approach

Half the respondents were part of a Lawson Foundation cohort, a peer network of grant recipients. Overwhelmingly, the comments about the cohort approach were positive. They were seen as informative and built great networks.

Results Summary

Praise From Grantees

*The fact that this was a multi-year grant **made a huge difference** to our capacity to plan more medium-term.*

*They are **approachable, understanding, knowledgeable and professional**. Our interactions and conversations are based on respect and integrity.*

Response Rate:

80%

58/60



*They were **truly interested in developing the sector** and worked hard to bring a group of people and projects together that could lay a foundation for that.*

Areas for Improvement

Giving more support for fundraising

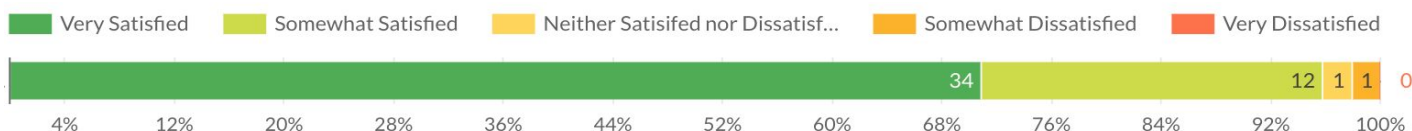
Give support for new leaders who are less familiar with the needs of a funder

More frequent and informal communication. E.g. site visit, regular phone calls

Response Summaries

Relationship

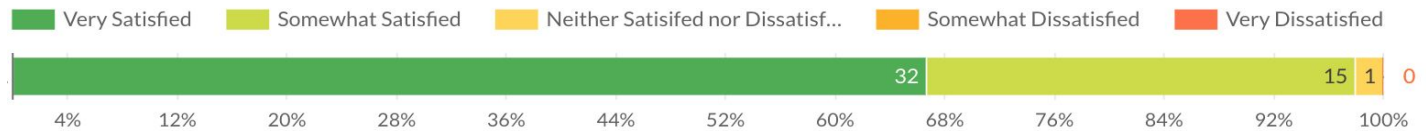
How satisfied are you with the Foundation's communication and interaction with you and your organization? **Average score: 4.65/5**



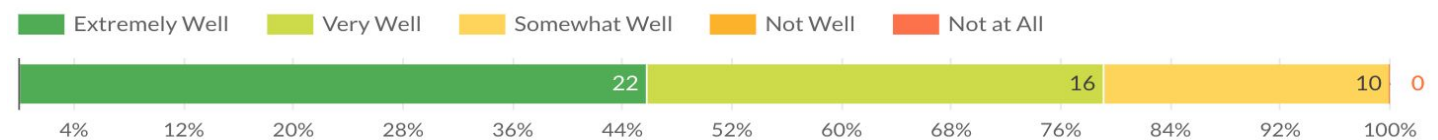
Response Summaries

Relationship, cont'd

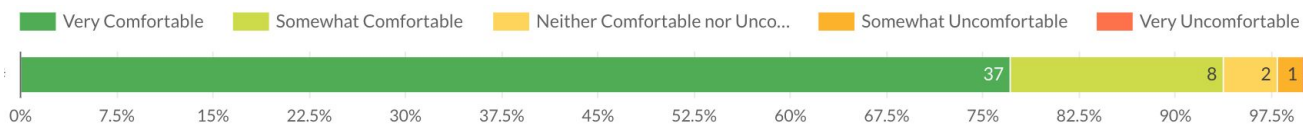
How satisfied are you with your understanding of the foundation's strategy and goals?
Average score: 4.65/5



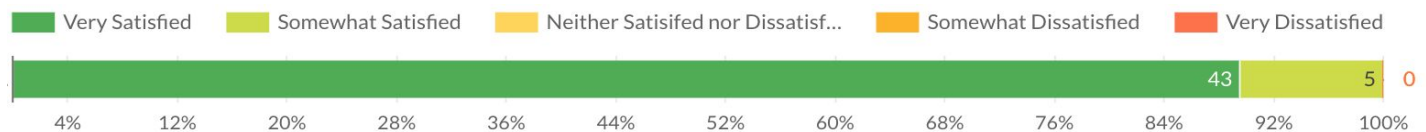
How well does the Foundation understand your organization's strategy and goals?
Average score: 4.25/5



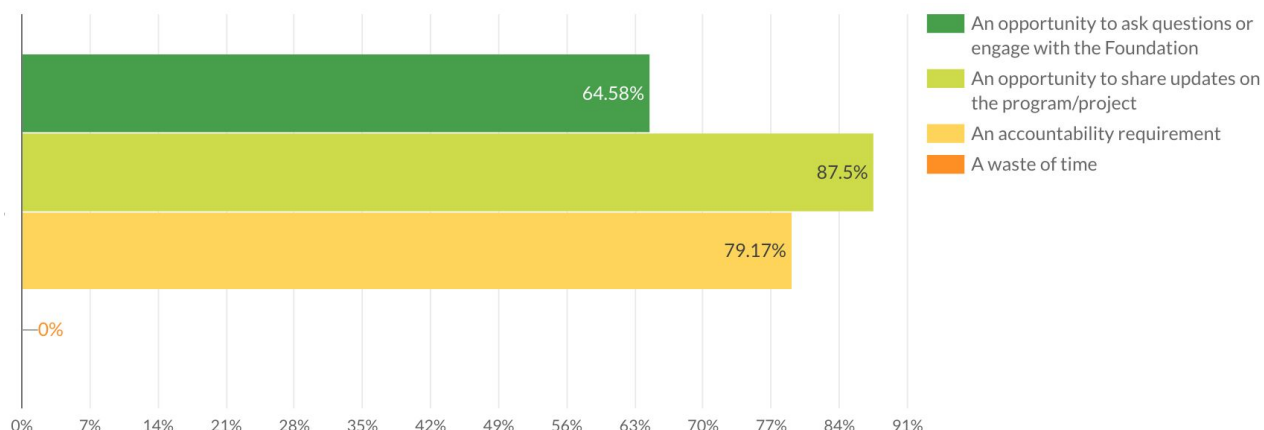
How comfortable are you sharing with us whether a problem has arisen or whether something has not worked as planned? **Average score: 4.69/5**



How satisfied are you with the foundation's flexibility in terms of accommodating change (e.g., changing deadlines, budgets, or deliverables)? **Average score: 4.90/5**



How do you view our reporting process?

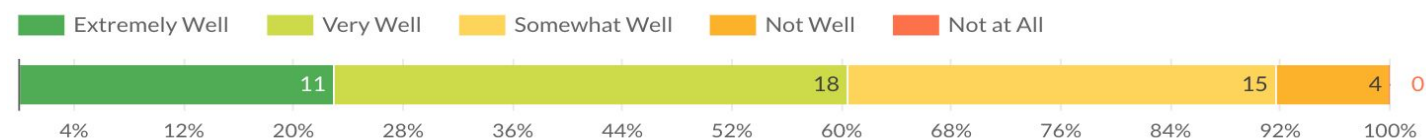


Response Summaries

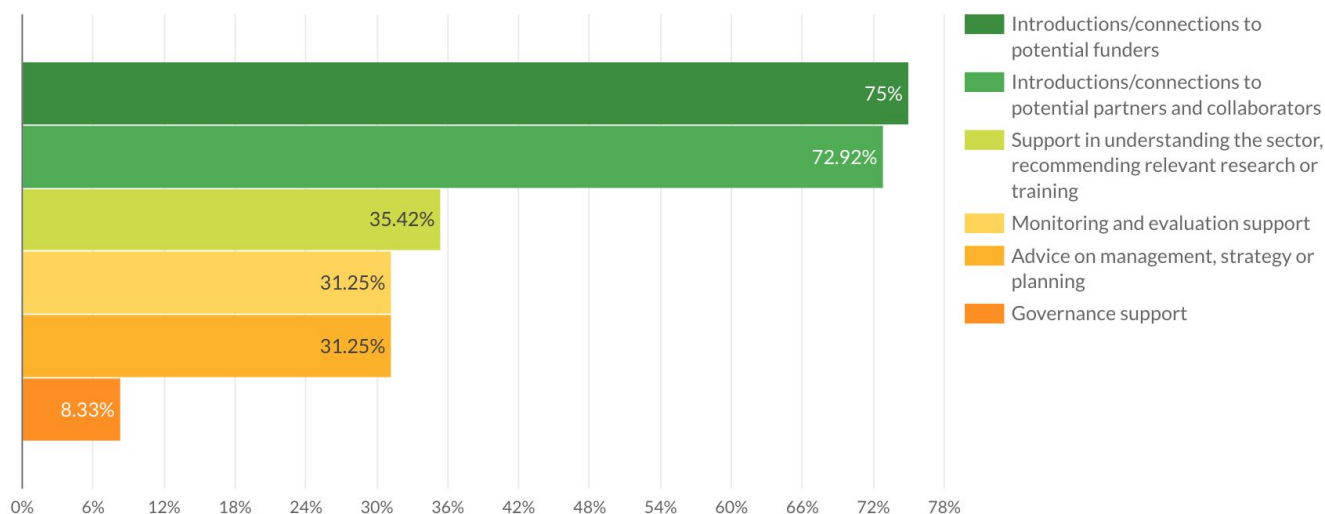
Organizational capacity and non-financial support

How well does the Foundation understand the internal challenges that your organization is facing?

Average score: 3.75/5



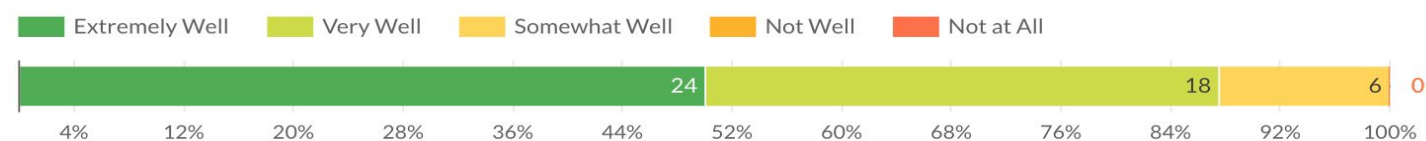
What kind of non-financial support would be most helpful to you?



Impact on the field

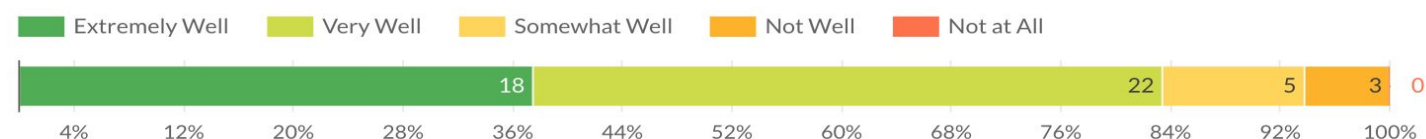
How well does the Foundation understand the work that your organization does?

Average score: 4.38/5



How well does the Foundation understand the complex realities and context in which you work?

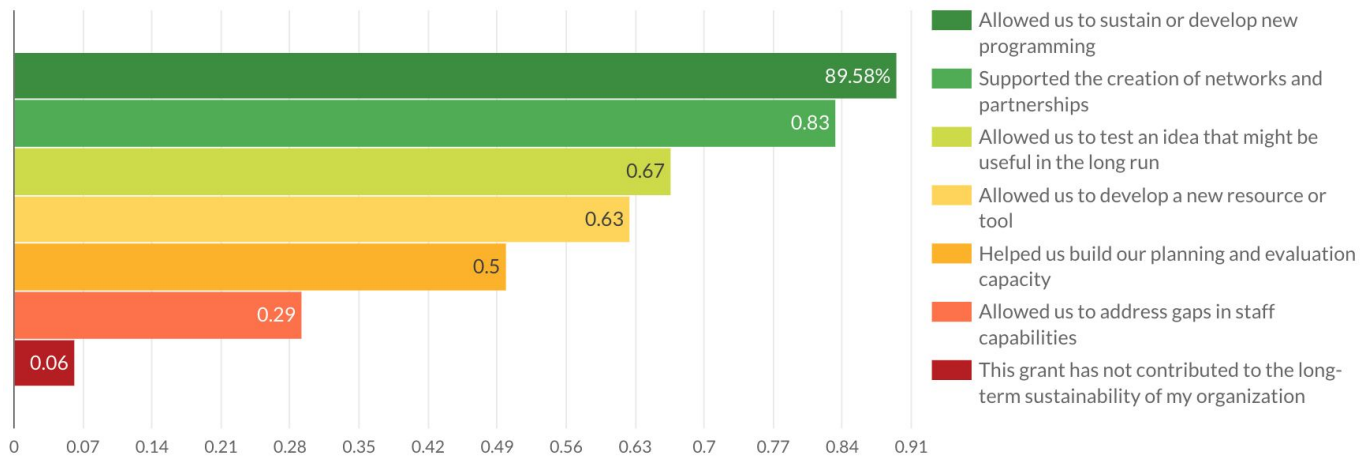
Average score: 4.15/5



Response Summaries

Impact on the field, cont'd

How has this grant helped the long-term sustainability of your organization?



Introduction

Objective

This joint initiative of The Counselling Foundation of Canada, Lawson Foundation, and Laidlaw Foundation aims to demonstrate **transparency**, foster **learning**, and strengthen **collaboration** by collecting and analysing feedback from grant recipients.

Guiding Principles

Grant recipients are indispensable partners in achieving the foundation's mission. Open dialogue and honest feedback are central to effective partnership, and while we strive to be responsive and open, we also know that it isn't always easy to tell a funder that there is room for improvement.

GrantBook was engaged to collect and synthesize confidential feedback about grant recipients' experiences of working with the foundation. Through this initiative, we hope to achieve:



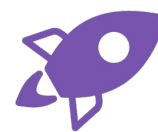
Enhanced Collaboration

Fostering alignment, trust,
and engagement with our
stakeholders



Transparency & Learning

Transparency and
accountability to the
community and wider sector



Action

Usable data and insights
so the Foundation can
champion internal change

A Collaborative Approach: Three Peer Foundations



The Counselling
Foundation of Canada

LAWSON
FOUNDATION

LALDLAW
FOUNDATION

The Counselling Foundation of Canada, Lawson Foundation, and Laidlaw Foundation partnered in this joint project to solicit feedback from recent grant recipients.

The objective was to better understand how grant recipients really feel about their interactions and relationship with their funder. In undertaking this project collectively, the three foundations designed a set of common questions and contracted Grantbook to independently administer the survey on their behalf.

This approach allowed for the opportunity to expand the survey pool, gather richer data, and ensure that grant recipients felt comfortable providing honest feedback. It also allowed the foundations to learn from each other regarding their strengths and weaknesses and highlight where areas of commonality exist.

To ensure the privacy of the respondents, the foundations did not have access to individual responses or any personally identifiable information.



Context: Why now?

Funders gathering feedback from grant recipients via a survey is not new in the world of philanthropy. Perhaps the most well-known example of this is the Center for Effective Philanthropy's (CEP) [Grantee Perception Report](#), which over 300 foundations (mainly in the U.S.) have used.

The need for foundations to be fair and transparent in their operations and to recognize that they play a role in the well-being of the organizations they support is stronger than ever. More and more foundations are beginning to understand the power dynamics that can come into play when funding is a key part of conversations with grant recipients.

However, in Canada, the number of foundations, particularly smaller foundations, who have actively sought grant recipient feedback in a deliberate and structured way and then publicly shared their results is limited.

Foundations who want to be responsive and help their grant recipients succeed to the best of their ability must therefore make the time and space for grant recipients and other partners to have a voice and provide honest feedback.

Formal, independently run feedback surveys, such as this one, are one step in the process.

Further Reading

- [Funders that Don't Seek Feedback Are Out of Excuses](#)
- [Soliciting Grantee Feedback: A Benefit to Both Sides](#)

Focus Areas

This survey focused on three common aspects of the grant recipients' experiences across the three foundations. Focusing on these areas allowed the opportunity to gather more meaningful data, ask both quantitative and qualitative questions in each category, while balancing the need to keep the survey concise.

Relationship

The foundations value strong relationships that emphasize open and honest dialogue. Identifying areas of strength and weakness in the relationship with grant recipients is critical to strengthening partnership. This focus area unpacks relationships by asking questions about the communication, approachability, and mutual understanding.

Organizational capacity and non-financial support

Aside from grant dollars, foundations play a role in other ways to help support their grant recipients to succeed, both as an organization and through effective programs. This focus area looks at how grant recipients view this work.

Impact on the field

Ultimately foundations are seeking to make positive social and environmental changes in a complex system. Foundations rely on their grant recipients who are closest to the communities they serve to help them understand the realities of the field and the difference they are making through their grants. This focus area explores how well the foundations are able to understand their impact.

The value of Lawson's cohort approach and events

Some Lawson foundation grant recipients are part of a cohort approach which is a network that support each other's work and shares project learning, challenges and successes. This focus area looks at the effectiveness of this model.

Methodology & Response Rates

Survey population

All current and past grant recipients who have received funding from a core strategic areas of the foundation giving from 2016-2018 were included in the survey. Unsuccessful applicants for grants, and grant recipients from over two years were not included in order to keep the data collected focused and relevant. Only one individual response per grant recipient was considered for the final response rate.

Survey structure and design

Making sure the survey was able to capture meaningful data was balanced by the desire to make the survey manageable for respondents. Long and poorly designed surveys have lower response rates and yield poor data. The average respondent took less than 13 minutes to complete the 15 questions.

Lawson Response Rate:

80%

(48/60)



Average Response Rate:

71%

(115/155)

Results

Relationship

How satisfied are you with the Foundation's communication and interaction with you and your organization?

Lawson Score	Average Score
4.65 _{/5}	4.63 _{/5}



What could the Foundation do to improve the quality of communications and interactions with your organization? What could the Foundation do to make site visits more useful?

Areas For Continued Excellence	Suggestions For Improvement
<p><i>We clearly appreciated the support of the foundation and the exchanges we had with its stakeholders. We could scarcely hope for more.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More frequent and informal communication. "We did phone calls years ago, but this hasn't happened in recent years" "This would allow some open communication regarding any barriers" Response times from the foundation could be improved - staff seem stretched and are unable to respond in a timely fashion. Building safe, trusting, and honest communication is needed. There is desire for safe spaces for disclosing challenges. "Direct and open communication was difficult" More transparency about Lawson's strategy and work. "Be direct about if future funding can be expected" "Is there a newsletter where there are updates?"

Relationship, continued

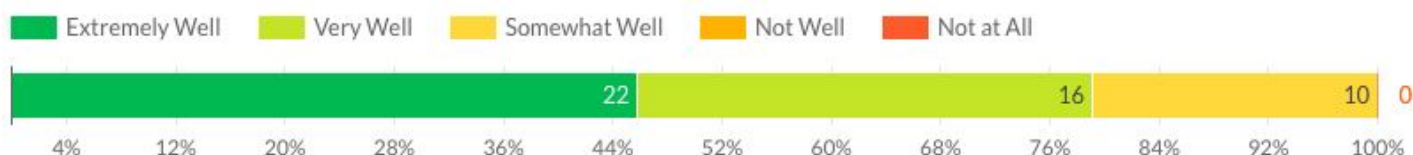
How satisfied are you with your understanding of the foundation's strategy and goals?

Lawson Score	Average Score
4.65 _{/5}	4.58 _{/5}



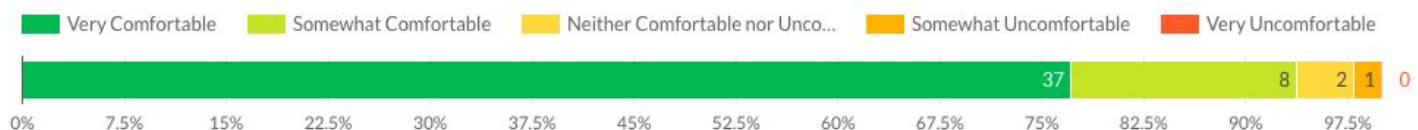
How well does the Foundation understand your organization's strategy and goals?

Lawson Score	Average Score
4.25 _{/5}	4.04 _{/5}



How comfortable are you sharing with us whether a problem has arisen or whether something has not worked as planned?

Lawson Score	Average Score
4.69 _{/5}	4.52 _{/5}



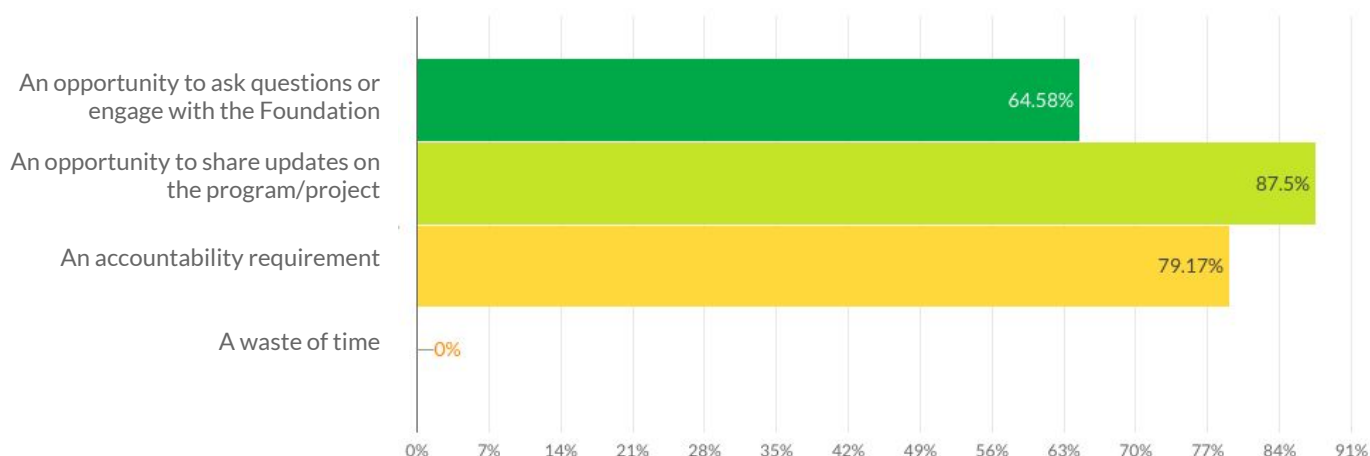
Relationship, continued

How satisfied are you with the foundation's flexibility in terms of accommodating change (e.g., changing deadlines, budgets, or deliverables)?

Lawson Score	Average Score
4.90 _{/5}	4.86 _{/5}



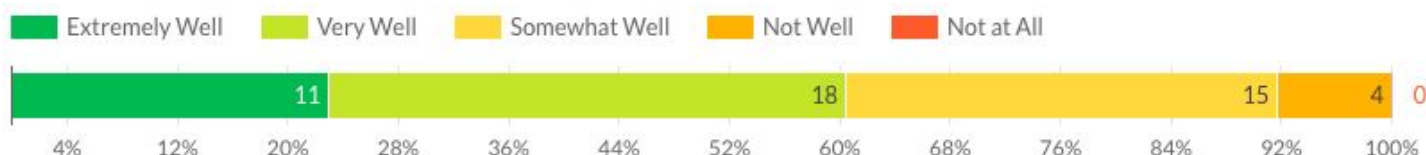
How do you view our reporting process?



Organizational Capacity & Non-Financial Support

How well does the Foundation understand the internal challenges that your organization is facing?

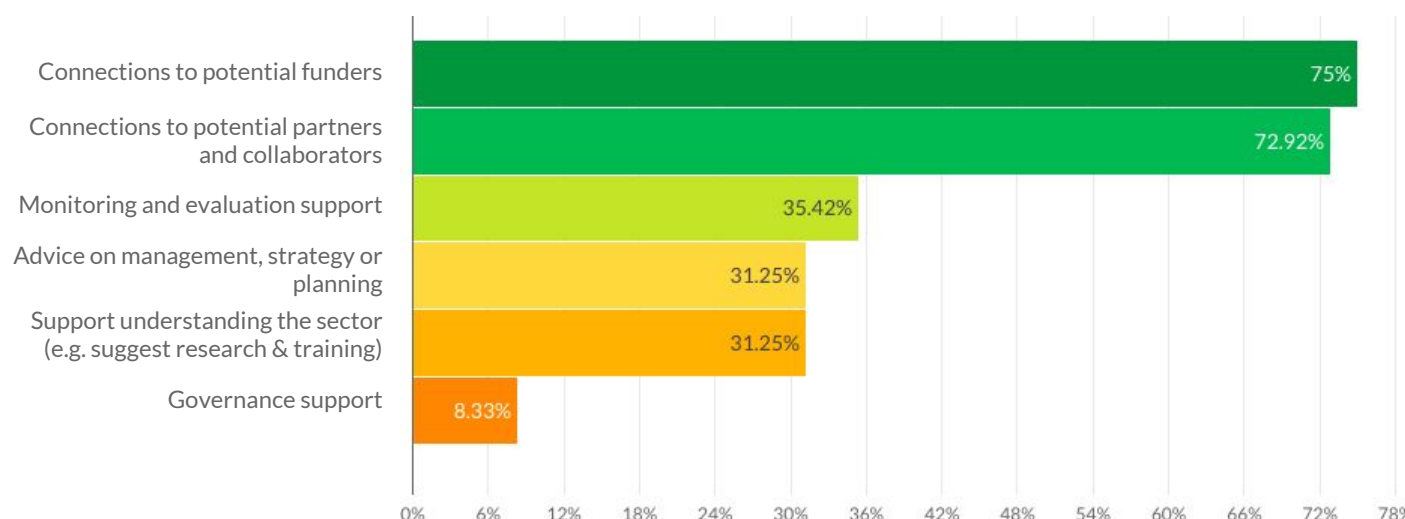
Lawson Score	Average Score
3.75 _{/5}	3.53 _{/5}



What, if any, non-financial support have you received from the Foundation that was particularly useful?

- Connections to partners
- Events*
- Strategic Advice
- Connections to funders
- Knowledge sharing
- Evaluation support
- Cohort Approach
- Planning support
- Connections to government decision makers and policy advice
- Championing the work being done
- "Providing inspiration"
- Opportunity to work in partnership on broader issues
- Participation in the grant-making process
- Mentorship

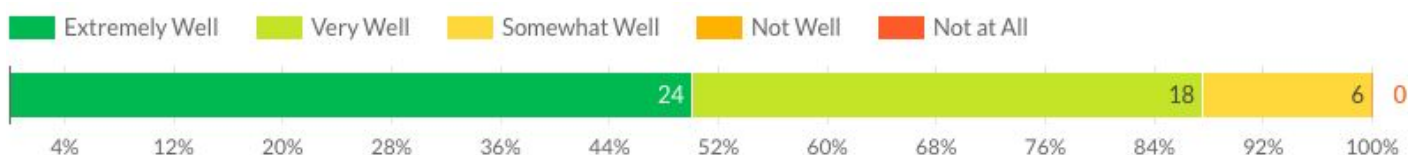
What kind of non-financial support would be most helpful to you?



Impact on the Field

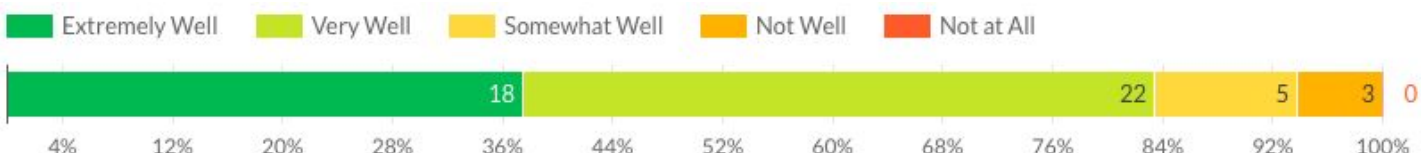
How well does the Foundation understand the work that your organization does?

Lawson Score	Average Score
4.38 _{/5}	4.20 _{/5}

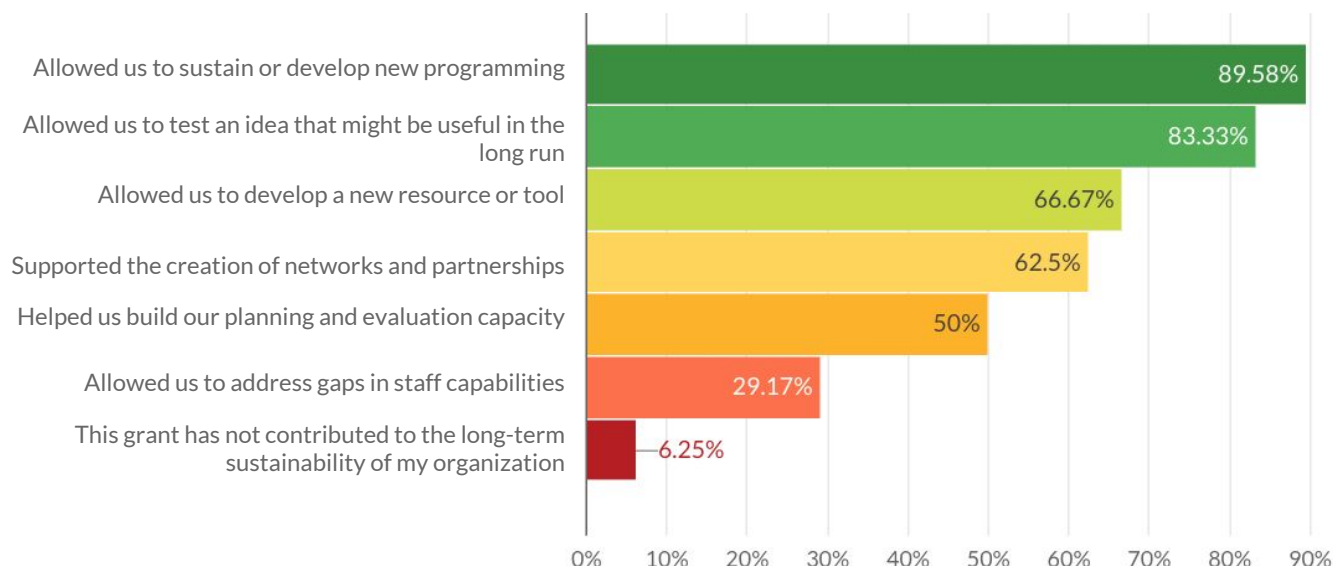


How well does the Foundation understand the complex realities and context in which you work?

Lawson Score	Average Score
4.15 _{/5}	3.98 _{/5}



Has this grant helped the long-term sustainability of your organization?



Impact on the Field, continued

The Foundation has provided **both funding and PROFILE** for our project, which has helped our credibility significantly.”

The fact that this was a multi-year grant made a **huge difference** to our capacity to plan more medium-term and allowed us to **achieve important milestones** we would not have been able to realize otherwise.

Enabled experimentation and vetting of an idea without a prohibitive amount of evaluation. Now able to approach other funders who require this level of detail for future funding.

Flexible investment in **the creation of an entirely new program** of research.

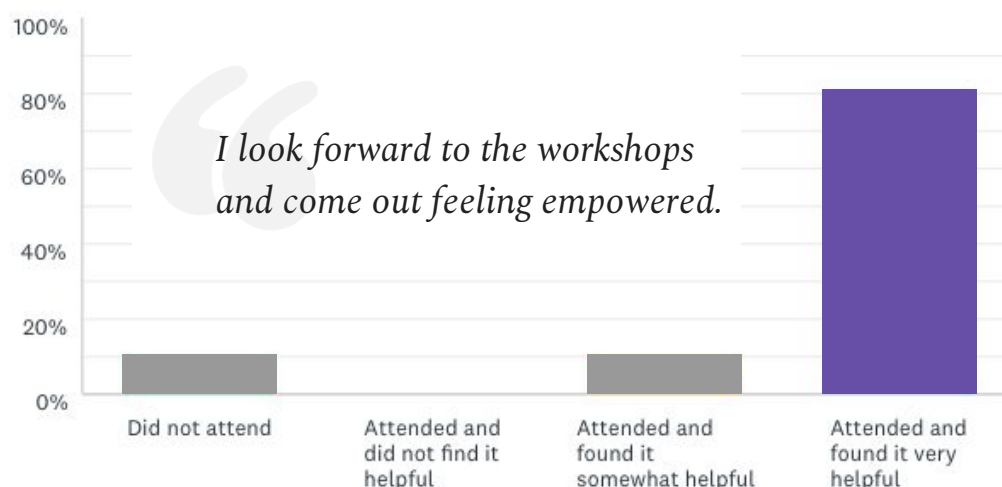
By having the foundation support for two years **we were able to demonstrate the need for the program**, and through the program and feedback we confirmed the need for stability of the work. However, for small organizations it is not possible to expect the sustainability of this work. Continued funding was a challenge.

The grant was really the underpinnings for us to begin a positive relationship with our First Nation communities. With the grant, we started the research program with one community. We now have [multiple] communities and all were made possible by the initial funding Lawson provided.

The grant program created **excellent opportunity for junior scientists** to develop interpersonal and professional relationships, build project and volunteer management skills for the [...] communities they are a part of. This grant has enabled these scientists to **ignite and strengthen academic and community partnerships** and **encouraged the development of innovative community service**, community-engaged learning and/or civic engagement projects in partnership with [their] community.

Convening Events Organized by Lawson

Have you participated in a convening event organized by the Lawson Foundation (e.g. workshop, roundtable, strategy session)? If so, was the event helpful?



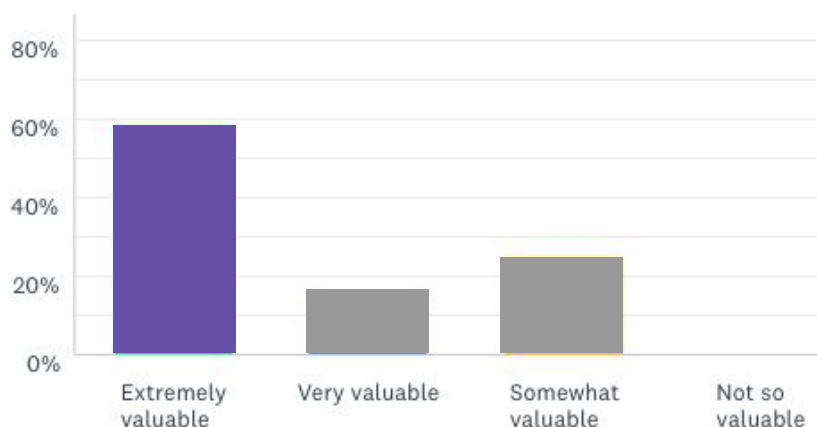
Areas For Continued Excellence	Suggestions For Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bringing together academics and the community to find areas of common interest Informative Helpful for considering the broader context Excellent opportunity for relationship-building Great networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More effort into creating a safe space would allow for more open dialogue (this could be done through unconventional sites for events).

These events were mentioned as particularly useful: Annual meeting, Learning exchange, grant holder meeting, Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conversation, Early Childhood Development session

Cohort Approach

Nearly half (23/48) the respondents were part of a Lawson Foundation cohort and were asked this additional question:

As part of a Lawson Foundation cohort, how valuable was the cohort to your work?



Areas For Continued Excellence

Overwhelmingly, the comments about the cohort approach were positive.

- Bringing together academics and the community to find areas of common interest
- Informative
- Helpful for considering the broader context
- Excellent opportunity for relationship-building
- Great networking

Suggestions For Improvement

- Sharing project results with cohorts

Lawson fills a gap left by the federal and provincial levels.

General Comments

Areas For Continued Excellence	Suggestions For Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating and supporting connections with others • Supportive • Knowledgeable • Communication • Flexible • Collaborative • Gives strategic insight • Innovation • Clear • Understanding • Thoughtful • Long-term • Integrity • Being action-oriented • The academic-community partnership • Approachable • Mentorship • Honest 	<p><i>Help researchers to network and build upon small projects. The Foundation is clearly invested in its research grantees and it is felt how much they are rooting for your success which has never been my experience with another granting agency.</i></p> <p><i>Lawson Foundation has a cutting edge approach. The combo of grant and impact investment was truly a game changer for our project.</i></p> <p><i>They were truly interested in developing the sector and worked hard to bring a group of people and projects together that could lay a foundation for that. The quality of the people at the foundation was impressive and that helped in knowing they were there for you and your work.</i></p> <p><i>We appreciate the support of the Lawson Foundation and more specifically, the staff. They are approachable, understanding, knowledgeable and professional. Our interactions and conversations are based on respect and integrity.</i></p>

General Comments

What specifically do you wish the Foundation did differently? e.g. Things you have seen other funders do that we might consider adopting.

- Longer multi-year grants i.e. 3 years
- More support for fundraising
- Resource the staff team more
- More opportunities for collaboration
- A yearly meeting with foundation staff
- Online Grant Portal
- Working more closely with schools.
- A overall strategic plan
- Support for new leaders, who are less familiar with the needs of a funder

One of the good things of the foundation is also a detriment in some ways. Their funding focuses change every few years - which means that your line of research etc. that may have been applicable, may no longer be. To be honest - I wish more funders operated like the Lawson Foundation versus the other way around.

I think it is important to have **anti-oppression training** for all grant holders.

Provide ongoing updates from a sector level on issues the Foundation has delved deeply in.

Bringing together those who are working in similar spaces and could learn from each other.

Word Cloud



What's Next

While we are heartened to know that respondents generally feel we are doing our jobs well, we know there is room for improvement.

Over the coming weeks, we will take the time to process the information we have received and develop a plan of action. We will share our learning and plans as we go and are always happy to chat about our process.

Going forward, the three foundations have committed to the goals of sharing, transparency, and learning to develop strategies for action.

The three foundations also believe this project may offer a model for others in the philanthropic sector who wish to better understand how they can engage with and support their grant recipients.

We will look for ways to tell our story with our peers in the philanthropic space to encourage more engagement and feedback with our nonprofit and charitable partners.



Appendix: Survey Questions

How well does the Foundation understand the following? (5-Extremely well, 4-Very well, 3-Somewhat well, 2-Not well, 1-Not at all)

1. The work that your organization does
2. The complex realities and context in which you work
3. Your organization's strategy and goals
4. The internal challenges that your organization is facing

How satisfied are you with the following? (5-Very satisfied, 4-Somewhat satisfied, 3-Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 2-Somewhat dissatisfied, 1-Very dissatisfied)

5. The foundation's flexibility in terms of accommodating change (e.g., changing deadlines, budgets, or deliverables)
6. The Foundation's communication and interaction with you and your organization
7. Your understanding of the foundation's strategy and goals
8. How do you view our reporting process? (*Select all that apply*)
 - An opportunity to ask questions or engage with the Foundation
 - An opportunity to share updates on the program/project
 - An accountability requirement
 - A waste of time
9. In what ways, if any, has this grant helped the long-term sustainability of your organization? (*Select all that apply*)
 - Allowed us to sustain or develop new programming
 - Helped us build our planning and evaluation capacity
 - Supported the creation of networks and partnerships
 - Allowed us to address gaps in staff capabilities
 - Allowed us to develop a new resource or tool
 - Allowed us to test an idea that might be useful in the long run
 - This grant has not contributed to the long-term sustainability of my organization

10. How comfortable are you sharing with us whether a problem has arisen or whether something has not worked as planned? (5-Very comfortable, 4-Somewhat comfortable, 3-Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable, 2-Somewhat uncomfortable, 1-Very uncomfortable)
11. What kind of non-financial support would be most helpful to you? (Select up to three)
- Advice on management, strategy or planning
 - Monitoring and evaluation support
 - Support in understanding the sector, recommending relevant research or training
 - Introductions/connections to potential funders
 - Governance support
 - Introductions/connections to potential partners and collaborators