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Laurel Pendleton
La Clínica de La Raza Inc.

Michael Y. Moon
California State University

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Reframing Assessment of Grantee Perceptions: Reconsidering Effectiveness With Broader International Stakeholder Engagement

Laurel Pendleton, M.P.A., La Clínica de La Raza Inc.; and Michael Y. Moon, Ph.D., M.B.A., California State University

Introduction

Stakeholder engagement is important in philanthropy because it allows grantmakers and grantees to pool their respective resources more effectively to address their shared target issues (Bourns, 2010; Enright & Bourns, 2010). We propose extending stakeholder engagement for inclusion in grantee perception assessment. In this article, we use the hypothetical case study of "the Ethiopian Fund" to illustrate the need to broaden the notion of grantee perception as a crucial element of assessing grantmaker effectiveness.

Because the core of grantee perception assessment involves tensions at the intersection of intra- and interpersonal and organizational worldviews, the added complexities of cross-cultural engagement through international settings are both challenging and enlightening. Cross-cultural assessment is challenging because the sometimes vast divergence of assumptions and expectations among different cultures can turn even the most straightforward philanthropy projects into sociopolitical hazards. Yet, such vast cross-cultural divergence may generally be enlightening because it can be seen as different from the divergence between grantmakers and grantees that operate in the same country as only a matter of degree rather than type. In other words, broadening the notion of grantee perception, while critical in international philanthropic settings, is also deeply relevant for same-country philanthropy.

To clarify, we wish to be as explicit as possible about how two core concepts, stakeholders

Key Points

· Stakeholder engagement is important in philanthropy because it allows grantmakers and grantees to pool their respective resources more effectively to address their shared target issues.

· As more and more foundations and other grant-making entities venture into the expansive world of self-evaluation, it is prudent that these methods be examined in light of international funding relationships.

· In order to better understand how these tools and methods can be used internationally, we outline the opportunities presented when using frames as one basis for decision-making in complex situations.

· Using the hypothetical case of a U.S. funder seeking to understand grantee perception in East Africa, we present a matrix of considerations and questions that allow grantmakers to account for the local reality of grantee perceptions.

· By actively engaging all stakeholders involved in the process, international grantmakers can begin to adapt these tools to meet their cross-cultural needs, while limiting bias and unexamined counterproductive assumptions.

and reflexive reframing, are used in this article. The degree of a grantmaker's sensitivity to cross-cultural perceptions of her or his myriad philanthropic activities is a critical aspect of international grantmaker effectiveness. This type of sensitivity expands assessment methodology beyond linguistic translation of standardized assessment tools. To grasp the intricacies of meaning that are the context of perceived grantmaker

But to manage areas of potential grantmaker bias, grantmakers must reach beyond focusing solely on grantees, looking both outward to a wider stakeholder network and inward to a sustained pursuit of self-conscious skepticism about one's worldviews through reflexive reframing.

effectiveness, a rich, immersive understanding similar to ethnographic fieldwork is necessary. But to manage areas of potential grantmaker bias, grantmakers must reach beyond focusing solely on grantees, looking both outward to a wider stakeholder network and inward to a sustained pursuit of self-conscious skepticism about one's worldviews through reflexive reframing. By stakeholder, we refer to a person or a group of people, such as an organization or community, holding an interest in the grantmaker's activities. It is not necessary for the stakeholder, such as communities similar to the grantee community, to be directly affected by these philanthropic activities. By reflexive reframing, we mean an open-ended process of self-conscious sensitization to the constructs that allow one to make sense of the world (e.g., Weick, 1995). Insights emerging from reflexive reframing become actionable through the continual process of grappling with one's own effects on an observed condition. Adopting a reflexive approach to philanthropic activities may expand a grantmaker's capacity to identify and account for potential harm resulting from not attending to such assumptions, biases, and blind spots. Exploring the stakeholder network of a grantee project while engaging in persistent reflexive self-consciousness allows grantmakers to achieve an understanding that is more justifiable than one constructed solely or primarily from grantee survey responses.

The next section provides a brief review of the link between grantee perception and grantmaker effectiveness. We then introduce the practice of reflexive reframing to broaden our understanding of how we work with our stakeholders and why. Finally, we present a table of sample questions that can guide the grantmaker's reflexive-reframing processes to get closer to a core question about defining effectiveness: What is it about our pursuit of effectiveness that really makes us effective?

Evaluation as an Evolving Practice

Over the past several decades, the practice of grantmaking has undergone numerous fundamental changes. With shifting funding priorities across a broad spectrum of targeted recipients, from delivering direct social services to advocacy and research, foundations have a long history of driving social change. Although there is no question that social change has occurred, questions remain on how well foundations and other forms of philanthropy have functioned to support these changes.

Defining the outcomes of foundations' projects and their operations has been one significant area of recent focus. Evaluation has generally been used to define the outcomes of foundation grants, but the scrutiny was typically focused outward toward the programs and agencies that they fund. Gradually, foundations are beginning to understand the need for introspection in measuring and reflecting on their own behaviors and actions.

Within the last ten years, this shift in focus has been toward foundation operations and their value. Various agencies and consulting firms have developed tools and strategies for defining and quantifying this value. One of the best-known organizations currently studying foundation operations and impact is the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP), which continues to refine the tools used in its Grantee Perception Report. Over the past 10 years, CEP has supported the improvement efforts of more than 200 foundations across the U.S. Other players in the field include the Urban Institute Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy as well as work done through

consulting firms like Keystone, which we will highlight below, and FSG Social Impact Advisors. Projects through FSG include work done with the James Irvine Foundation to create an evaluation kit for trustees (2009) as well as a recently created report focused on engaging stakeholders in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Leviton, Preskill, & Jones, 2009). Ultimately, these measures, often highlighting grantee perception in an effort to define whether or not a foundation may be deemed effective, have been largely concentrated within the U.S. Adapting these tools and strategies to help support international philanthropy, while taking into account challenges of cross-cultural translation (Hughes & DuMont, 1993), is an important logical extension. Evaluating grantee effectiveness in international projects is a useful endeavor; however, the remainder of this article highlights the need to carefully reconsider the relationship between assessing grantee perception and drawing conclusions about grantmaker effectiveness in such projects.

Assessing Grantee Perception of International Grantmaking

When assessing cross-cultural grantee perceptions, grantmakers should consider actively engaging with these grantees (Enright & Bourns, 2010) as a core strategy of the assessment process for two reasons. One is methodological and addresses issues of cross-cultural validity and actionable understanding of grantee perceptions. The second reason, related to the first, is ideological and addresses the larger issues of how mainspring concepts such as "grantee perception" and "effectiveness" are defined, who is involved, and why. This second reason is ideological because the process of deciding what "effectiveness" refers to and what constitutes "grantee perception" and how its assessment will be used ascribes who has the authority (and power) to make such decisions.

Consider the hypothetical case in this paper, the Ethiopian Fund (TEF). This small fund is based in California and focuses on various community development projects related to education and financial development in Ethiopia. Recently, the board of directors started to review the past 10

years of grantmaking and noticed some serious areas of concern. As the cultural sphere in Africa continues to change, the fund has begun to question its significance and impact. Fund staff are extremely interested in interviewing grantees to solicit input, but they are aware that cross-cultural issues will require them to be cautious in their approach. By searching out some background and tools, TEF can begin to formalize what it means to make an effective impact on the communities of East Africa.

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To begin, one must start with a basic understanding of "effectiveness." Stanley Katz (2005) contends that effective philanthropy "focuses on the measurement and evaluation of foundation efforts, programs, impact, and performance" (p. 127). This definition illustrates effective foundation giving as extensively multifaceted, something that cannot be narrowed down to one concise formula.

For TEF, this could present complex problems. There are myriad ways to examine one's impact and there are many different ways to begin the process of self-reflection. Hermand and Heimovics (1994) state that "judgments about organizational effectiveness, then, involve sense-making and implicit negotiation in a highly complex and interactive process" (p. 88). By taking this holistic approach to the measurement of effectiveness,

it becomes clear that research and evaluation of foundations must account for the social constructedness of effectiveness as an objective.

> *Various impediments to effective philanthropy range from lack of generosity as a cultural norm to tax incentives and regulations (or a lack of such standards) surrounding philanthropy that may cause donors to be wary of formalized philanthropic efforts.*

Easterling and Csuti (1999) highlight the reality behind socially constructing foundation evaluations. In their research, they state that "unless a foundation defines its own critical questions, evaluation becomes a ship without a rudder, aimlessly sailing from one issue to another, occasionally bumping into things, and leaving foundation staff with the sense that they have been on an interesting but meaningless journey" (p. 11). According to these authors, the strongest reason to pursue evaluation is the "ability to stimulate learning, improvement, and wise decision-making" (p. 12).

In order to achieve these key objectives, Francie Ostrower (2004) notes that "foundations must impose a set of disciplines upon themselves to ensure that they are regularly and systematically evaluating their performance" (p. 9). Her recommendations highlight that "to make effectiveness a priority, perhaps the best thing any foundation can do its to imagine that it must reapply to renew its own funding by showing that it is an effectively functioning organization" (p. 10).

By way of pursuing and examining this field of self-evaluation and grantee feedback internationally, we look again to the Ethiopian Fund. As it begins to evaluate itself, it can gain insight from other international grant projects. In a recent study, "The Status of and Trends in Private Philanthropy in the Southern Hemisphere" (Dulany & Winder, 2001), research has revealed the diversity of obstacles that influence effective philanthropy outside of the United States and Europe. In it, Dulany and Winder note that "the culture and history of a given country or region impacts the ease and velocity of movement toward institutionalized philanthropy" (p. 5). Various impediments to effective philanthropy range from lack of generosity as a cultural norm to tax incentives and regulations (or a lack of such standards) surrounding philanthropy that may cause donors to be wary of formalized philanthropic efforts. Finally, past experiences may also lead certain cultures and groups to view foundations and nongovernmental organizations with suspicion not usually felt in more industrialized nations. Histories of corruption and uneven power sharing lead many to hesitate before fully making use of the resources at their disposal.

With this understanding that evaluation is necessary, albeit complex, researchers have begun to create tools in order to make support readily available.

Frames, Perspectives, and Bias

Underpinning any evaluation effort is a theory or set of theories. Valuing certain characteristics and actions over others asserts the relative importance of specific phenomena as indicators of whatever is being evaluated. For philanthropy, the notion of "theories of change" has recently become popular as the grantmaker's explicit acknowledgment of theory underpinning philanthropic activities. Not only is such explicit acknowledgement important for consistent follow-through on funded initiatives, but it is also a signal that the grantmaker is attempting to understand what makes such initiatives effective.

The rather loose application of the term "theory" in relation to such grantmaking efforts, however, may concern those who understand theory as a systematic outcome of scientific method and strict experimental control. Perhaps "models of change," to convey the more typically descriptive

and opportunistic nature of successful philanthropic interventions, may be more precise. However, we may agree to a broader use of "theory" to highlight the importance of each project as an opportunity to collect data to test our theories of change.

Theory offers an opportunity to construct meaning and understanding through provisional interpretations of what we have gathered about the complexity around us (e.g., Sherman & Peterson, 2009). We can make sense (Weick, 1995) of what we experience, data that we collect, and unfolding events based on interpretive frameworks. Some of these frameworks come in the form of theory. Other frameworks involve stakeholder perspectives.

Stakeholder perspectives are important because they are a "piece" of what we do. They are key parts of the larger metasystems for which grantmaking exists. For example, Senge's (1990) approach to systems theory expands our search for "root causes" of problems by examining how various organizational stakeholders that are typically outside of the problem-solving system might be contributing to a network of system interactions underlying problems that flare up in specific subsystems. Grantmakers can borrow from this idea by better understanding how grantmaking organizations are hubs in complex networks that play a part in relation to other parts that also interpret the grantmaking organizations in terms of their own problem-solving systems.

Therefore, our stakeholders can provide invaluable information from the vantage point of their parts of the network as well as how they interpret grantmaker activities viewed through their respective frames of reference. Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal (2003) describe implications for the use of frames as one basis for decision-making in complex situations. Although the authors present a specific set of frames, for our purposes their rationale for the use of frames to facilitate decision-making is most useful. Implications for managers and decision-making when using frames, essentially as lenses through which to interpret contextual complexity, include embrac-

ing alternatives to traditional "one best way" hierarchies of valuing funder rationality over others' values systems. Table 1 highlights some of the traditional perspectives of managers in contrast to perspectives representing approaches by managers who might use frames to make sense of complex situations.

> *Grantmaking organizations are hubs in complex networks that play a part in relation to other parts that also interpret the grantmaking organizations in terms of their own problem-solving systems.*

The framing approach does not preclude the use of traditional managerial tools, but it does advocate resisting the use of such tools without considering alternatives that may lie in the blind spots of traditional management approaches. The irony of the framing approach is that it is really a frame-breaking approach; it is not so much a particular frame that holds primacy as a consideration of contrasting frames of reference that may yield powerful insights on complex situations that the use of a single frame (or approach or set of tools) might miss.

Case Study

Returning to the Ethiopian Fund case example, we see a foundation that is actively searching for a way to break out of the traditional frames of evaluation. This fund, founded out of a movement that encourages education for women and economic development, focuses primarily on supporting projects related to community infrastructure. Grantees include agencies that support after-school programs and training centers, as well as community projects that sustain small businesses. By its nature, this fund functions with extensive crossover and collaboration with local government.

TABLE 1   (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 17)

How Managers Think	How Managers Might Think
Limited view of organizations (attributing all problems to individuals' flaw and errors)	Holistic framework encourages inquiry into a range of issues (people, power, structure, symbols)
Regardless of a problem's source, managers choose rational and structural solutions (facts, logic, restructuring)	An array of options that includes bargaining, training, celebration as well as reorganization
Managers value certainty, rationality, and control all the while fearing ambiguity, paradox, "going with the flow."	Develop creativity, risk-taking, playfulness to respond to life's dilemmas and paradoxes, focusing as much on finding the right question as finding the right answer, finding meaning and faith amid clutter and confusion.
Leaders often rely on one right answer and one best way; they are stunned at the turmoil and resistance they generate.	Leaders need passionate, unwavering commitment to principle, combined with flexibility in understanding and responding to events.

Support for this fund comes from a donor circle of young professionals that give through the Greater Sacramento Community Foundation. Contributions to TEF are restricted to professionals under age 40, and various fundraising activities occur throughout the year. The board of directors is elected every two years from a diverse group of local community members; the chair is a board member who has more than three years of service. Most recently, new research on evaluation and grantee perception has grabbed the attention of donors and the topic has made its way to the board for discussion.

Assets for TEF stand at about $557,000 after 10 years of existence. Although the fund focuses a majority of its efforts on education, the board will consider special outside projects if members of the community initiate them. Currently this fund supports limited projects that have defined, quantitative outcomes. These outcomes include highlighting tangible ideas like the financial profits that come from business projects or the rate that student grades benefit from increased educational support. Frequently, the board insists that results be reported in its specific spreadsheet format, so that the hard data can be easily manipulated and compared.

Although this simple formula for evaluating the success of grants has made the job of the board very easy, it has come with some costs. Some of the long-term grantees of TEF have become so re-

liant on the fund that they have stopped creating innovative programs. Many other worthy projects are not getting funded because their efforts are too abstract and hard to measure with mere numbers. Recently, a board member expressed dismay at the fact that many of the funding applications had started to look like carbon copies of past proposals.

In reality, this board member has started to understand that the success of TEF is not simply tied to how many entrepreneurs are trained or how much birr (Ethiopian currency) they bring home. The success story must include realities such as how often women from the training program are able to partner at previously male-only commerce celebrations and events, and how they are perceived in those roles. Success in these community development projects should include the idea that although some projects are difficult to quantify, they are just as – if not more – important than the projects that reliably provide hard data.

As TEF thinks about making changes to its funding and approach, it must consider how to evaluate the current situation. Board members have concluded that an evaluation of TEF grantees is one of the best ways they can open communication, but the project is not an easy one. Considering the diverse perspectives that come with such a complex idea, it becomes apparent that evaluating funding across cultures leads to a lot of questions about what equals success.

TABLE 2

How managers think	How managers might think	Sample questions that may provide alternative frames for managers when constructing evaluations
Limited view of organizations (attributing all problems to individuals' flaw and errors)	Holistic framework encourages inquiry into a range of issues (people, power, structure, symbols)	· What population are we funding? Are they unique? If so, according to whom and on what basis? · How do cultural aspects of these agencies look to us, and us to them? · What are we introducing into this community (consciously and unconsciously) that affects the dynamics of the problem?
Regardless of a problem's source, managers choose rational and structural solutions (facts, logic, restructuring).	An array of options that includes bargaining, training, celebration as well as reorganization.	· What sort of "good citizen" role are these agencies playing, if they are? · What do the grantees really want to talk about (especially topics in our blind spots)? · In addition to the rational issues (i.e. lack of technology), what alternatives might we consider? · What roles do symbols, emotions, and loyalties play (including for us)?
Managers value certainty, rationality, and control all the while fearing ambiguity, paradox, "going with the flow."	Develop creativity, risk-taking, playfulness to respond to life's dilemmas and paradoxes, focusing as much on finding the right question as finding the right answer, finding meaning and faith amid clutter and confusion.	· Who seems the least affected by these issues? Who seems the most affected by these issues? · What has been working? What hasn't been working very well? · How might solutions be part of the problem? · Where are the passionate people, and what makes them so? Can we ignite more passion? · What do workers dream about regarding these community problems? · Why isn't this more fun?
Leaders often rely on one right answer and one best way; they are stunned at the turmoil and resistance they generate.	Leaders need passionate, unwavering commitment to principle, combined with flexibility in understanding and responding to events.	· Are the agency teams united? Is there a wide diversity of ideas? · Is everyone at the agency engaged and interested in the results? Are we providing opportunities and resources to gather answers from every level of the agency? · Have we created a judgmental and defensive environment that discourages (or punishes) independent thinking? How can we do better?

The Ethiopian Fund is aware that assessment tools have been created for these types of projects, but it is unclear that these tools, which have been created in the West, will bring a true reflection of the reality of their situation. It is not just the international locale that throws new and interesting issues into the arena of effective philanthropy and grantee perception; one must include the reality of individual and cultural dynamics. Whether the foundation is working with agencies that are entirely based in their local area or it is working with cross-cultural projects, grantors must take steps to address assumptions and bias while evaluating the circumstances.

One example at TEF is its work with various innovative programs that are supported in part by the local government. When TEF is ready to solicit grantee feedback from these types of agencies it will likely question the validity of responses, as many political researchers consider the Ethiopian government to be corrupt. Staff at agencies that are tied to government funds may feel pressure to respond with positive reports that fail to reflect the actual situation for fear of reprisal, as has been witnessed in areas such as Zimbabwe. In order to establish an accurate reflection of these projects, TEF must examine its situation through various frameworks, highlighting the political aspects and

influences and how those roles might affect its approach and the responses of the grantee agencies.

Table 2 presents a framework, based on Table 1, that expands the lines of inward and outward inquiry that grantmakers may follow to examine considerations beyond established practices through reframing. Ultimately, funders, like TEF, face numerous realities that they must review in order to help outline an informed basis for cultural sensitivity in these evaluations. By making use of the groundwork outlined in Table 2, funders across cultures will be better equipped to generate their own project-relevant ideas on how to view situations from different frames (often using more than one frame at a time). Through these processes, foundations and the agencies that work with them can establish dialogue to strengthen and improve community outreach in all its forms.

When compiling questions and response-generating formats for their grantees, they can reflect on their unique position within the target community rather than placing their blind faith on prefabricated questionnaires. This is the sort of epistemic work needed to create a culturally relevant, situation-specific format to gather meaningful and actionable data on its improvement efforts.

As TEF considers the questions in Table 2, its board members can begin to formulate an evaluation rationale and methodology that is most useful for their efforts. When compiling questions and response-generating formats for their

grantees, they can reflect on their unique position within the target community rather than placing their blind faith on prefabricated questionnaires. This is the sort of epistemic work needed for TEF to create a culturally relevant, situation-specific format to gather meaningful and actionable data on its improvement efforts.

Reframing Grantee Perception Assessment as Technology of Reflexive Praxis

Stepping back from the particulars of this case study, our call to broaden the assessment of grantee perception as a dialogical process is based on the notion of "reflexive praxis." By reflexive, in the most general sense, we mean that one's grounds for any process of understanding includes sustained scrutiny of one's assumptions, biases, and effects on the focus of analysis (Moon, under review). From a grantmaker's perspective, how one makes *a priori* decisions about one's frame of reference, assumptions about the nature of foundation-stakeholder relationships, and the study of grantee perception should be scrutinized through continual reflexive frame-breaking and reframing to understand how preconceptions impose grantmaker-centric strictures on stakeholders. Frames of reference are the momentary operationalized perspectives that we use to make sense of the world. Bolman and Deal (2003) have used the concept of "lens" to characterize such frames. The impetus for reframing one's practices in the midst of complex, dynamic situations is reflexive inquiry.

By praxis, we refer to an orientation to one's activities that resists the tendency toward repetitive practice. Praxis moves beyond practice when one takes responsibility to persistently inquire about the rationale for one's activities. Praxis is the attentive reconsideration of practices that leads to mindful (Weick & Putnam, 2006) revision of what had previously been routine. In some cases, praxis may be emblematic of the pioneering efforts that lead to established practice.

From a utilitarian perspective, any defined approach to the reframing process is a sociocultural technology (Lianos, 2006) that grantmakers could

utilize and through which tools and applied heuristics may be developed. Note, however, that reframing paradoxically resists its own role as technology by simultaneously embracing the static sense of frame, as in picture frame, and an active, open-ended sense of framing renewed, as in changing the picture or even the frame itself.

To better understand this idea of reflexivity, we may consider Chris Argyris' (1991) notion of "double-loop learning." According to Argyris, organization members should reflect on their own behaviors and actions in order to understand how they may affect the organization and how it functions. Specifically, he makes the point that "the very way we go about defining and solving problems, can be a source of problems in its own right" (p. 100). This is particularly important as we relate to international grantmaking, because we can begin to understand that evaluation cannot be done without first understanding how each stakeholder contributes to the reality of the evaluation process.

Furthermore, Argyris (1991) develops the idea that "effective double-loop learning is not simply a function of how people feel. It is a reflection of how they think. That is, the cognitive rules or reasoning they use to design and implement their actions" (p. 100). As grantmakers continue to strive toward understanding their role in effective philanthropy, both domestically and internationally, they must take into consideration that their ideas and actions can contribute to perceived problems throughout the evaluation process. By using reflexive praxis and double-loop learning to reframe and redefine this new reality, grantmakers can create a clearer definition of what effective philanthropy means. Ideally, such reflexive praxis has no method, no ideological commitments, and no pre-established routines.

When the grantmaker engages in reflexive praxis through reframing, the self-conscious inquiry about the role of his or her philanthropic practices opens possibilities for deeper awareness about the foundation's limits as one stakeholder in the community. The roles that the foundation plays and does not play in concert with the other

actor-stakeholders is a critical area of grant-maker self-knowledge. Unlike traditional theater productions, however, the actors write the script in real time. Enacting one's roles responsibly – and effectively – requires reflexive praxis. One of philanthropy's gifts to grantees who are mired in the daily realities of our communities' challenges is to encourage and enable them to reframe and eventually dislodge destructive common-sense notions and established practices; such a process parallels reflexivity.

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Expanding Domestic Use of Reflexive Praxis

Although TEF is a hypothetical case and will not allow for further review in the implementation of these tools, recent work highlights the need for applying these domestic concepts on an international scale. In 2009, Keystone, a consulting firm with offices in the United Kingdom and South Africa, took on the task of modifying tools from the Center for Effective Philanthropy for use in an international setting. The modification has al-

lowed us the opportunity to review an attempt at internationalizing domestic methods without the use of framing. The resulting report, "Assessing Grantmaker Performance Through Grantee Feedback in East Africa," highlights many of the challenges addressed in this article and helps confirm the need for reflexive reframing and praxis in the creation of evaluation tools.

In a very real sense, grantmakers are stewards of a collection of resources – such as funds, expertise, pooled data based on focused and (hopefully) incrementally improved methods – within the context of complex communities that face challenging, wicked problems (Sherman & Peterson, 2009). And, in a very real sense, stakeholders are also stewards of their respective and no-less valuable resources – such as firsthand knowledge of problems and shortcomings of solutions; local, personal, and professional investments that require networks of deep and extensive relationships in the communities; and committed individuals dedicated to addressing community issues.

According to the report, Keystone worked hard to adapt the tools created by CEP but acknowledged that

we still underestimated how different the contexts in fact are. The risk of misinterpretation of questions is higher than among professionally staffed and more survey-literate charities in the USA. What to ask and how to ask it needs to be acutely sensitive to these problems. (Keystone, 2009, p. 51)

Although this first attempt was not as successful as originally hoped, it has revealed the need for deeply considered reframing. The expectation is that the information gathered will prove to be of great importance for future efforts. As we move forward in pursuing an expanded repertoire of techniques and methodologies for successfully working with international grantmakers and grantees, we can take the data gathered here as a starting point for future developments.

Conclusion

Assessing and monitoring grantmaking effectiveness is unquestionably a critical aspect of responsible philanthropy. In a very real sense, grantmakers are stewards of a collection of resources – such as funds, expertise, pooled data based on focused and (hopefully) incrementally improved methods – within the context of complex communities that face challenging, wicked problems (Sherman & Peterson, 2009). And, in a very real sense, stakeholders are also stewards of their respective and no-less valuable resources – such as firsthand knowledge of problems and shortcomings of solutions; local, personal, and professional investments that require networks of deep and extensive relationships in the communities; and committed individuals dedicated to addressing community issues – that are unique and crucial to grantmakers' efforts to realize effective philanthropy.

In this article, we have suggested that the overall approach grantmakers take to understand the relationships between grantee perception and philanthropy, in general and on the basis of individual funders, signals to the grantee community how best to partner with grantmakers. Yet, definitions of perception, effectiveness and just how important perception is for the grantmaking mission are often operationalized *a priori,* essentially held constant as independent variables while data are

collected. This raises a Procrustean conundrum for philanthropists: By what and whose measure is perception indicative of effectiveness? That is, while the purpose of assessing grantee perception is to improve interaction and communications between grantmakers and grantees, the assumptions underlying the standardized operational definitions reify, symbolically and institutionally, an operational demarcation and potential obstacle between the practice of philanthropy and actual grantee experience.

International grantmaking, in particular, faces this challenge because of the added geopolitical and sociocultural assumptions woven into surveys and other social science methodologies that can propagate ethnocentric bias. Using the hypothetical case of the Ethiopian Fund, we presented a table of sample questions to facilitate a grantmaker's reflexive praxis about TEF's effects on the target communities and the localized embeddedness of grantee perceptions. Such reflexive praxis can help the grantmaker frame a dialogical approach to grantee perception and holistic understanding of philanthropic effectiveness.

By taking the time to prepare for serious intellectual engagement, philanthropy can become increasingly prepared to handle the most pressing global issues. Whether grantmakers are engaged in advocacy and action at home or abroad, the concepts of reframing and using reflexive praxis provide an outline for inquiry and learning for all players involved in the process of grantmaking. Building on this foundation can help shed light on a variety of philanthropic situations and issues that have previously been untouchable. Although there is still much to be discovered in the reality of philanthropy and grantmaking, this small step can help prepare for a stronger and more stable future of social action and engagement.

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Laurel Pendleton, M.P.A., *is annual fund administrator for La Clínica de La Raza Inc.*

Michael Y. Moon, Ph.D., M.B.A., *is assistant professor of public affairs and administration at California State University, East Bay. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Michael Y. Moon, Department of Public Affairs and Administration, California State University, 25800 Carlos Bee Boulevard, Hayward, CA 94542 (email: michael.moon@csueastbay.edu).*