

Key Findings and Recommendations from Imaginable Futures’ 2022 Grantee Perception Report

Prepared by the Center for Effective Philanthropy

In February and March of 2022, The Center for Effective Philanthropy conducted a survey of Imaginable Futures’ grantees and investees (hereinafter “grantees”). The memo below outlines CEP’s summary of key strengths, opportunities, and recommendations. Imaginable Futures’ grantee perceptions should be interpreted in light of Imaginable Futures’ goals and strategies.

This memo accompanies the comprehensive survey results from 53 respondents (a 65% response rate) found in Imaginable Futures’ interactive online report at <https://cep.surveymethods.org> and in the downloadable online materials, including grantees’ written comments. Imaginable Futures’ full report also contains more information about survey analysis and methodology.

Context

To best fit Imaginable Futures’ funding context, CEP fielded two versions of the 2022 Grantee Perception Report - the “grantee survey” to Imaginable Futures’ non-profit grantees and the “investee survey” to its for-profit investees – to accommodate specific customizations to terminology and questions. Given the similarities across the two versions, all grantee responses were combined to create Imaginable Futures’ overall set of results and then placed into CEP’s comparative dataset. Where applicable, data from only the grantee survey is specified as feedback from “non-profit grantees.”

In addition, while this is Imaginable Futures’ first Grantee Perception Report as an individual philanthropic entity, Imaginable Futures’ grantees were also formerly surveyed by CEP in 2014 as part of Omidyar Network. Because grantees were asked to think about Omidyar Network as a whole in the 2014 survey, Imaginable Futures’ 2022 feedback should not be interpreted as directly comparable to previous feedback. That said, at Imaginable Futures’ request, CEP has provided the 2014 grantee data from 2014 in the full online report, and trends¹ over time are noted throughout this summary.

¹ In order to perform statistical analysis, CEP requires at least 10 respondents per group. Ratings from groups with less than 10 respondents are examined for trends, defined as differences of at least 0.3 from the overall rating. Ratings described as “significantly” higher or lower reflect statistically significant differences at a P-value less than or equal to 0.1.

Solid Perceptions of Field Impact and Understanding

- ▶ Grantee perceptions of Imaginable Futures’ impact on their fields are more positive than in 2014, now placing Imaginable Futures in line with the typical funder² in the overall dataset and in its cohort of peers.
 - Imaginable Futures also receives higher than typical ratings compared to the typical funder in CEP’s dataset and its custom cohort for its understanding of grantees’ fields and the needs of the people and communities they serve.
- ▶ Furthermore, grantees provide higher than typical ratings for the extent to which Imaginable Futures has advanced the state of knowledge in their fields, with grantees describing Imaginable Futures as a “great contributor to learning and systems change in the area of education” and as “a key actor” that grantees can “rely on as a consultant [who is knowledgeable] about the sector.”



“We've really appreciated the reports, events and comms that IF have been doing as a thought leader in this field.”

Strong Understanding of Grantees’ Organizations and Provision of Non-Monetary Support

- ▶ Ratings for Imaginable Futures’ understanding of grantees’ organizational goals and strategies, contexts, and its organizational challenges are all higher than typical and within the top 10 percent of CEP’s dataset.
- ▶ Interestingly, grantees’ ratings for Imaginable Futures’ impact on their organizations trend lower than in 2014 and are now lower than typical.
- ▶ Grantmaking characteristics are often related to perceptions of a funder’s impact on grantee organizations, with grants that are relatively large, multi-year and/or for general operating support are associated with higher ratings of impact.
 - Imaginable Futures provides awards that are much larger than typical - \$510K compared to \$272K at the median funder in its custom cohort – and these grants cover a larger than typical proportion of grantees’ organizational budgets. The median operating budget of Imaginable Futures grantees has decreased since 2014 but is still larger than typical among funders in its custom cohort.
 - Additionally, nearly 80 percent of non-profit grantees report receiving multi-year grants, placing Imaginable Futures at the top of its custom cohort and near the top 20 percent of CEP’s overall dataset.
 - Importantly, about half of non-profit grantees report receiving multi-year unrestricted funding, placing Imaginable Futures at the top of its custom cohort. Mirroring CEP’s

² Throughout this summary, Imaginable Futures’ ratings are defined as higher than typical when it is rated above the 65th percentile in CEP’s overall dataset, lower than typical when it is rated below the 35th percentile, and typical when ratings fall in between those thresholds.

research, non-profit grantees receiving multi-year unrestricted grants rate significantly higher for Imaginable Futures' impact on their organizations. These grantees also have significantly more positive perceptions for Imaginable Futures' impact on their fields, the clarity of Imaginable Futures' approval process, and its approachability, responsiveness, trust, and compassion.

Provision of Non-monetary Assistance

- ▶ Beyond financial funding, funders can strengthen organizations in their provision of non-monetary support. Over two-thirds of Imaginable Futures grantees report receiving non-monetary support, and the majority describe it as a major benefit to their organization or work.
 - Furthermore, grantees that report receiving non-monetary support rate significantly higher on many measures, including for Imaginable Futures' impact on their fields, understanding of and impact on their organizations, Imaginable Futures' staff responsiveness, approachability, trust, compassion, transparency, and openness to ideas.
- ▶ Perhaps unsurprisingly, when asked about the elements that define a successful funding partnership, grantees most frequently select a mixture of financial and non-financial support, such as tapping into new funders' networks (83 percent), facilitating partnerships with key stakeholders (73 percent), and access to convenings and/or communities of practice (60 percent).
- ▶ In their suggestions for how Imaginable Futures can improve, just over a fifth of grantees encourage Imaginable Futures to continue to build on its provision of non-monetary assistance, making it the most common theme. Specifically, grantees call for convenings (n=4) and resources to build organizational capacity (n=2).



"If staff is engaging with us on various other levels which is so beneficial: facilitating key introductions to potential funders/ allies/ like-minded organizations, advising us on how to set-up...systems, [providing support and engaging with our organization and events]."

Frequent Interactions with Opportunity to Strengthen Communications

High-Quality Interactions Rooted in Values and Supported by Frequent, Reciprocal Contact

- ▶ Grantees provide higher than typical ratings for how comfortable they feel approaching Imaginable Futures if a problem arises, and their ratings place Imaginable Futures in the top 3 percent of CEP's dataset for its openness to their ideas.
 - Imaginable Futures also receives ratings in the top 15 percent of the dataset for the extent to which Imaginable Futures exhibits candor about grantees' work, respectful interaction, and compassion for those affected by the funded work.
 - Relatedly, grantees provide very positive feedback (rating, on average, above a 6 on a 1-7 Likert scale) for the extent to which Imaginable Futures exhibits all six of its core values, especially 'Compassionate Changemakers'.
 - Ratings for staff responsiveness and for the extent to which Imaginable Futures exhibits trust in grantees' staff are in line with those at the typical funder.

- ▶ Grantees report very frequent and reciprocal interactions with Imaginable Futures. Nearly all grantees report having contact with Imaginable Futures at least once every few months, compared to 82 percent at the typical funder, and a larger than typical proportion – over 80 percent of grantees – indicate that contact was reciprocal or initiated by Imaginable Futures.



“They are deeply respectful of our organization, and this showed in every conversation, interaction and request.”

Room to Improve Clarity and Consistency of Communications

- ▶ While grantees’ perceptions of Imaginable Futures’ overall transparency are more positive than typical, ratings for the clarity of the communications about its goals and strategy have trended down since 2014 and are now similar to typical.
 - Ratings for the consistency of its communications are virtually unchanged since 2014 and remain lower than typical.
- ▶ Interestingly, one specific activity is associated with more positive perceptions of communications: the 26 percent of grantees who report Imaginable Futures staff visited their offices or programs in-person rate significantly higher for the clarity and consistency of Imaginable Futures’ communications, as well as its responsiveness and approachability.
- ▶ In written comments, six grantees ask for more clarity regarding Imaginable Futures’ strategy. For example, one grantee writes, “It would be helpful for Imaginable Futures to share more about their strategy, successes, and failures....”

Substantial Streamlining of Processes

- ▶ Compared to 2014, Imaginable Futures’ grantees now report spending substantially less time on required processes over the course of the grant – 32 hours compared to 130 hours – positioning Imaginable Futures as one of the more streamlined funders in its custom cohort.
- ▶ Importantly, given more streamlined processes and large awards, grantees receive a larger than typical dollar return for the time they spend on Imaginable Futures’ processes, placing Imaginable Futures at the top of its custom cohort.
- ▶ Perceptions of Imaginable Futures’ selection and reporting processes are also generally positive.
 - Grantees continue to rate Imaginable Futures’ approval process as more helpful than typical and provide typical ratings for the extent that the approval process is an appropriate level of effort given the amount of funding received.
 - In addition, the reporting process emerges as a strength for Imaginable Futures, with grantees finding the process more relevant, straightforward, and adaptable than typical.



“The processes to get and renew funding has been very smooth and also closely integrates with our existing work and workflow, rather than requiring separate processes.”

CEP Recommendations

Based on its grantee feedback, CEP recommends Imaginable Futures consider the following in order to build on its strengths and address potential areas for improvement:

- ▶ Celebrate Imaginable Futures' deep understanding of grantees' fields and organizations, and work to codify and reinforce the elements of Imaginable Futures' practices and culture that have contributed to these strong ratings.
- ▶ Facilitate internal discussions about the impact, if any, Imaginable Futures aims to have on grantees' organizations. Also, continue to reflect on how Imaginable Futures can continue to grow its provision of non-monetary support, and develop ongoing mechanisms for grantees to share the types of assistance their organizations most need, such as facilitating partnerships and providing access to convenings and/or communities of practice.
- ▶ Seek opportunities to improve the clarity and consistency of Imaginable Futures' communications about its goals and strategy.
 - Review how Imaginable Futures shares information about its goals and strategy, including on its website and in its funding guidelines, and identify areas that could be clearer or updated to reflect recent strategy shifts.
 - Given open and trusting relationships with grantees, use interactions to reinforce Imaginable Futures' strategy and connect its longer-term goals to grantees' funded work. Reflect on the pieces of in-person site visits that may contribute to more positive perceptions of communications, and brainstorm ways to transfer those aspects to other interactions.
 - Develop resources and/or trainings that could help promote more consistent messaging about Imaginable Futures' strategy. Consider whether additional written resources would be beneficial to staff and to grantees, or consider setting expectations about the frequency and ways in which teams of staff are sharing Imaginable Futures' goals and strategy.
- ▶ Maintain and build on Imaginable Futures' growing strength of streamlined processes, and determine how to embed aspects that make processes straightforward and adaptable into permanent practice.

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