

Key Findings and Recommendations from The Raymond John Wean Foundation 2025 Grantee Perception Report

Prepared by the Center for Effective Philanthropy

Overview

The Center for Effective Philanthropy is pleased to share the results of The Raymond John Wean Foundation's 2025 Grantee Perception Report.

- ▶ In May and June of 2025, the Center for Effective Philanthropy conducted a survey of The Raymond John Wean Foundation's ("the Foundation's") grantees, achieving a 62 percent response rate. This memo outlines CEP's summary of key strengths, opportunities, and recommendations from The Raymond John Wean Foundation's Grantee Perception Report ("GPR"). The Foundation's grantee perceptions should be interpreted in light of its goals, strategy, and context.
- ▶ Overall, this feedback reflects many strengths for the Foundation. Grantees describe the Foundation as a "great partner and a wonderful [funder]" with a clear "focus on [its] values and goals," including "being a beacon in the community for racial equity and diversity."
- ▶ Key strengths that emerge in this set of grantee feedback include the Foundation's notable impact on and leadership in the Mahoning Valley – bolstered by a clear commitment to advancing racial equity and inclusion, valuable capacity building support for grantee organizations, and clear, consistent communications about the Foundation's work.
 - Compared to the Foundation's most recent GPR in 2017, grantee ratings have *significantly improved*¹ on some measures related to the Foundation's impact and understanding.
- ▶ Grantees also raise areas for opportunity in their feedback, including providing more opportunities for grantee collaboration and shared learning, strengthening aspects of funder-grantee relationships, and adapting the Foundation's grantmaking processes to be more streamlined, clear, and helpful for grantees.

Notable Impact on Grantees' Communities and Clear Commitment to REI

Grantees view the Foundation as a crucial funder in the Mahoning Valley with a clear, demonstrated commitment to advancing racial equity and inclusion (REI) in the region. In written comments, grantees describe the Foundation as "a leader in the model for philanthropic support of place-based community development" that "centers racial equity" in all of its work.

- ▶ Reflecting these comments, grantee ratings have *significantly improved* from 2017, and now place the Foundation in the **top 3 percent** of CEP's dataset, for their perceptions of the Foundation's impact on their local communities.

¹ Throughout this summary, the Foundation's ratings are defined as higher than typical when average ratings are above the 65th percentile in CEP's overall dataset, lower than typical when they are below the 35th percentile, and typical when ratings fall between those thresholds. Ratings described as "significantly" higher or lower reflect statistically significant differences at a P-value less than or equal to .1.

- The Foundation is also rated in the top 10 percent of CEP’s dataset, and at the top of its custom cohort, for grantees’ perceptions of the Foundation’s understanding of the needs of the people and communities with whom grantees work, representing another significant improvement from 2017.
 - Looking forward, when asked about which of the Foundation’s strategic priorities can have the most impact in their communities, grantees most often select Economic Opportunity (32 percent of grantees) and Community Revitalization (26 percent).
- ▶ Closely linked to the ways that the Foundation creates impact in grantees’ communities is its commitment to racial equity and inclusion. The Foundation is rated amongst the **top 1 percent** of funders in CEP’s dataset for grantees’ agreement that the Foundation has clearly communicated what REI means for its work and demonstrates an explicit commitment to REI in its work.
- Grantee comments corroborate these ratings, where they write that that “the Foundation’s commitment to equity... sets a standard that many organizations look to for guidance” and that “most people who know of the Foundation associate it with equity, particularly racial equity.”



“The Foundation has a significant and visible impact on my local community, particularly in the heart of Warren and all throughout the Mahoning Valley. Its presence is deeply felt, as it provides essential support to nearly every nonprofit and grassroots organization in the area. This support empowers local groups to carry out meaningful work that strengthens, uplifts, and builds a more vibrant and resilient community.”

Robust Provision of Assistance Beyond the Grant

A crucial component of the Foundation’s impact and strategy is the capacity building support it provides to grantee organizations. Ninety-one percent of grantees report receiving at least one form of assistance beyond the grant from the Foundation – a larger proportion than over 90 percent of other funders in CEP’s dataset.

- ▶ Most often, grantees report receiving support for racial equity and inclusion assistance (e.g., training or facilitation related to REI, REI expertise; 75 percent of grantees), and supportive services (e.g., access to training and development opportunities; 44 percent of grantees).
 - In their perceptions of this support, grantees provide typical ratings for their agreement that the support met an important need for their organizations and/or programs. However, grantee ratings place the Foundation in the bottom quarter of CEP’s dataset for their agreement that the assistance beyond the grant was a worthwhile use of the time required of them.
- ▶ When asked specifically, in a custom question, about which of the Foundation’s Capacity Building programs they’ve participated in, the majority of grantees indicate having participated in the Foundation’s Race Equity and Inclusion Training Phase I program (84 percent) and Resident Engagement Workshops (59 percent).
 - Importantly, grantee ratings indicate that they find each of these programs *extremely valuable* – providing average ratings for their value above a 6.40 on a 7-point scale.
- ▶ Written comments from grantees underscore the importance of the Foundation’s focus on capacity building. They write that the Foundation’s “workshops and events are essential to providing valuable learning opportunities” and teach grantees “invaluable skills like collaboration, capacity building, and

how to be a better leader.” Overall, they write, this support “advances [grantees’] ultimate impact on the community.”

- ▶ Looking forward, grantee feedback indicates a desire for even more opportunities for collaboration and shared learning. When asked about which Capacity Building resources grantees would be *likely* to use, they most often select networking opportunities (93 percent of grantees indicate they would use this resource), collaboration with other nonprofit organizations (91 percent), and peer-learning opportunities (86 percent).



“The Foundation’s commitment to equity, and capacity-building sets a standard that many organizations look to for guidance. The Foundation’s investment not only provided the necessary resources but also validated to the leadership within our organization, the importance of addressing long-standing disparities.”

Positive Perceptions of Impact on Grantee Organizations

Grantees provide strong ratings that place the Foundation in line with the typical funder in CEP’s comparative dataset and in the Foundation’s custom cohort for the Foundation’s impact on their organizations.

- ▶ In their perceptions of the Foundation’s understanding, grantees provide typical ratings for the Foundation’s understanding of their organizations’ strategies and goals. Ratings have *significantly improved* from 2017, and now place the Foundation in the top 10 percent of CEP’s dataset, for perceptions of the Foundation’s understanding of the social, cultural, or socioeconomic factors that affect grantees’ work.
- ▶ One way in which the Foundation impacts grantee organizations is through the grants it provides, which have distinct characteristics across its grant types.
 - Grants in the Foundation’s Community Investment portfolio have a median size of \$86K to organizations with an annual budget of \$1.6M – both of which are typical relative to CEP’s dataset. This stands in contrast to grants in the Foundation’s Resident Engagement portfolio, which have a median size of \$5K to organizations with an annual budget of \$70K, which are amongst the smallest in CEP’s dataset.
 - When it comes to the type of funding grantees receive, 57 percent of Community Investment grantees (a larger than typical proportion) report receiving unrestricted funding, while about 20 percent of Resident Engagement grantees (a typical proportion) receive this type of grant support.
- ▶ Some grantees offer suggestions related to the Foundation’s grantmaking characteristics, representing a top theme in written suggestions for improvement. For example, they ask for “additional clarity... around how funds can be used within the boundaries of the specified program being funded.”
- ▶ As the Foundation continues to consider ways to best support grantees through challenges in 2025, over one-half of grantees cite a decrease in funding levels as their most pressing concern related to the current political climate. In written comments, grantees write that they “have concern about reduction or elimination of funding” that “can really affect [grantees’] ability to serve [their] community effectively.”



“The Wean Foundation has been stellar in their support of our work... They have been integral to the organization's launch and growth, and their commitment remains key particularly in these times and with the changes in reduction to funding across many categories.”

Mixed Perceptions of Funder-Grantee Relationships

Grantees hold Foundation staff in high regard, describing them as “professional,” “supportive,” and “welcoming.” Overall, as one grantee writes, “the Foundation’s approach to engagement and communication helped build trust and made the process feel collaborative rather than transactional.”

- ▶ Grantee perceptions of their interactions with staff have generally improved from 2017, where applicable. For example, grantees now provide higher than typical ratings for their comfort approaching staff if a problem arises and for the extent to which the Foundation is open to ideas from grantees about its strategy. Ratings are now typical relative to CEP’s dataset for the responsiveness of Foundation staff.
 - However, on some other measures related to funder-grantee interactions, ratings are less positive. Grantees provide lower than typical ratings for the extent to which the Foundation exhibits candor about its perspective on grantees’ work, and ratings are near the bottom of CEP’s dataset for the extent to which the Foundation exhibits trust in grantees’ staff.
- ▶ Of note, nearly one-quarter of grantees (a larger than typical proportion) report having experienced a recent change in their primary Foundation contact, and some grantees note challenges with these transitions in their written comments.
- ▶ On another important dimension of funder-grantee relationships – the Foundation’s communications – grantees hold positive perceptions. Grantees provide higher than typical ratings for the clarity of the Foundation’s communications about its goals and strategy, the consistency of communication resources, and for grantees’ understanding of how their funded work fits into the Foundation’s broader efforts.
- ▶ When asked, in a custom question, about how the Foundation can demonstrate that they’ve listened to grantee input, grantees most often select being open and sharing the findings of this survey with them (58 percent select this option) and incorporating their input into the Foundation’s work (55 percent).



“[Staff are] super approachable and quick to respond, creating a really supportive environment. I appreciate the regular updates that keep me in the loop, and the information is always clear and easy to understand. Still, it would be great to see a bit more transparency in the decision-making process—like sharing insights on how choices are made or giving more feedback on applications.”

Opportunity to Streamline and Refine Grant Processes

Grantee feedback indicates an opportunity for the Foundation to streamline and refine its application and reporting processes to be clearer, more helpful, and more straightforward.

- ▶ Overall, improvements to the Foundation’s processes represents a top theme in grantees’ written suggestions. Grantees most often ask for the Foundation to streamline aspects of its grant processes, as “some of the questions on reports/applications are repetitive,” and to prioritize “consistent, regular conversations and feedback” about grantees’ work.

- ▶ At the median, grantees who receive Community Investment grants report spending 30 hours (a typical amount of time relative to CEP’s dataset) on Foundation-required processes over the lifetime of their grants. Resident Engagement grantees, on the other hand, report spending 10 hours on processes.
 - Still, grantees across grant types provide lower than typical ratings for the extent to which the application process was an appropriate level of effort given the amount of funding received. In written comments, grantees note that “the applications have [become] more detailed and require much more time to complete.”
- ▶ More broadly, grantees overall provide lower than typical ratings for the extent to which the application process was a helpful opportunity to strengthen the efforts funded by the grant and for the Foundation’s clarity and transparency about the application process requirements and timelines.
 - Grantees also experience more pressure than is typical of other funders in CEP’s comparative dataset to modify their organizations’ priorities in order to receive funding from the Foundation. This is particularly true of Resident Engagement grantees, who experience more pressure during the application process than grantees at over 90 percent of other funders in CEP’s dataset.
- ▶ When it comes to the reporting process, grantees also hold less positive perceptions. Ratings place the Foundation in the bottom quarter of CEP’s dataset for the extent to which the reporting process was straightforward, relevant, and adaptable.



“Overall the communication is very strong. One recommendation is to allow more time from the point of invitation to apply until the grant application is due.”

CEP Recommendations

Based on this grantee feedback, CEP recommends that The Raymond John Wean Foundation consider the following to build on its strengths and address potential opportunities for improvement:

- ▶ Celebrate exceptionally positive perceptions of the Foundation’s impact on grantees’ local communities and commitment to advancing REI. Reflect upon the choices, values, and approaches the Foundation has used to achieve these strong perceptions and ensure they are clearly understood and codified internally.
- ▶ In designing and building upon the Foundation’s Capacity Building programs, identify opportunities to integrate grantee collaboration and shared learning as a common component across these offerings.
- ▶ Reflect upon areas in which grantees hold less positive perceptions of their interactions with the Foundation, particularly related to trust and candor. Engage with grantees to better understand why these perceptions may exist, and how the Foundation may adapt its practices to better exhibit these values.
 - Relatedly, to demonstrate that the Foundation is listening to grantee feedback shared through this survey, prioritize sharing the results of the GPR with grantees, including intended next steps, based on their input.
- ▶ Review the Foundation’s grant processes and identify areas that can be refined to be more straightforward, helpful, and less redundant. Given the relatively small size of the Foundation’s grants,

focus on aspects of the application process that can be streamlined to be more consistent with the effort required of grantees.

- Additionally, reflect upon the comparatively heightened pressure that Resident Engagement grantees experience during the application process and create practices to make this process feel more collaborative, trusting, and helpful.

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