

The Hyams Foundation, Inc.

September, 2011

Dear Hyams Foundation Grantees:

On behalf of the Hyams trustees and staff, I am writing to thank each of you who responded to the anonymous survey of Foundation grantees that was administered by the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP). We truly appreciated the time you devoted to answering the survey questions and to providing many additional comments.

Since that time, CEP has reviewed and summarized the survey results, and Hyams staff has had a chance to discuss them with the trustees. As in 2005 when Hyams last did the CEP Grantee Perception Report (GPR), your feedback was compared with the responses of grantees of other foundations that have used the GPR. This time, your ratings were compared with those of 262 foundations from across the country as well a smaller group of 13 foundations more similar in size to Hyams. CEP is especially interested in this comparative data as it has found that, in general, grantees tend to rate their funders highly.

One hundred nineteen Hyams grantees were surveyed by CEP and 84 responded for a response rate of 71%. This rate was similar to those of other foundations. The following summarizes those areas that grantees saw as the Foundation's strengths along with areas needing improvement. Each topic is followed by a "response" section that shares our thoughts to date about how we might address the latter issues and draws upon the insights of CEP staff who have worked with many foundations in assessing their GPR results.

Survey Results:

- Grantees rated the Hyams Foundation's understanding of their fields, understanding of their local communities and impact on their organizations above the median for other funders. The Foundation's understanding of grantees' fields was rated higher than 90% of other funders, as was the Foundation's effect on public policy in grantees' fields. Grantees also rated Hyams above the median funder in terms of advancing knowledge in grantees' fields. However, when it came to assessing the Foundation's impact on both grantees' fields and their local communities, the Foundation was rated similarly to the median funder. This was the case as well when grantees assessed Hyams's impact on their ability to sustain the work funded by a grant in the future.
- The GPR also explored the nature of funder-grantee relationships, and this feedback also was generally positive both in absolute terms and in comparison to other funders. Areas that were addressed included fairness of treatment by the Foundation, comfort level in approaching the Foundation and responsiveness of Hyams staff to grantees. Responses also were above the median in terms of clarity of communication of goals and strategy, helpfulness of the selection process and helpfulness of the Foundation's reporting/evaluation process in strengthening funded groups. We also learned that the consistency of the Foundation's communications was only similar to the median foundation and that grantees felt more pressure than other foundations' grantees to modify their priorities in order to create a proposal that was more likely to receive funding.

Our Initial Responses:

- On the whole, we believe that many of the overall high ratings from this survey reflect the Foundation's current strategic plan and its focus on three clear goals and related funding strategies. This has allowed the Hyams staff to work with specific grantees in a more intensive way over time. That said, we believe that the Foundation could do more to impact grantees' fields and communities. While the survey did not identify specific ways we might do this, we believe that the Foundation needs to improve how it communicates about its grantees' work and the issues and communities we all care about. We recently hired a communications consultant to work with the Foundation to create an overall communications plan. We will be reaching out to grantees for feedback on our communications goals and strategies later this year and will value your reactions and suggestions. We also will work to ensure that our communications are more consistent, regardless of whom grantees interact with at Hyams, and we will give more thought to how certain grantees may feel pressure to alter their own priorities in order to receive funding from the Foundation.
- Another way we believe that we can do more to strengthen the fields we are engaged in is to increase support for the infrastructure that builds capacity and promotes effective practices within these fields. One example of this is the work that Foundation staff is currently engaged in with grantees and fellow funders of community organizing and grassroots leadership development. Another is the group support that we will continue to provide to our *Teen Futures*' grantees while also identifying a clear policy agenda for this work. Within the affordable housing area, two other examples are the additional assistance that Hyams provides to grantees involved with transit-oriented development along the Fairmount Line and the Foundation's support of Boston LISC.

Survey Results:

- The final area of the GPR focused on what CEP calls "non-monetary assistance" or "assistance beyond the grant". CEP groups this type of assistance into three areas – "management assistance" (e.g. advice related to strategic planning or performance measures); "field-related assistance" (e.g., facilitating collaboration or sharing research/best practices); and "other assistance" (e.g., advice on board development, technology, communications). In terms of management assistance, a higher proportion of Hyams grantees received assistance with the development of performance measures than did grantees of other funders, and Hyams grantees rated this area of assistance as the most helpful, followed by strategic planning and general management advice. A higher proportion of Hyams grantees also reported receiving field-related assistance than is typical, with encouragement/facilitation of collaboration being the most frequent. Accessing research on best practices was rated as the most helpful. On the whole, and consistent with CEP's findings from the GPR over the years, those grantees that received the largest number of "assistance beyond the grant" activities gave the Foundation the highest overall ratings.
- Related to "assistance beyond the grant", the proportion of Hyams grantees that received assistance in securing funding from other sources was larger than 90% of funders in CEP's database. (Almost half of Hyams grantee respondents reported receiving this type of assistance.) However, the impact of this assistance was rated significantly below the median funder.

Our Initial Responses:

- We have thought long and hard about how Hyams can help increase grantees' sustainability. We are well aware of the importance of providing general operating support, ideally at higher levels, as well as multi-year funding. And applicants also can now request technical assistance funding to strengthen organizations and promote longer-term sustainability when applying for operating or program funding.

However, like any funder, Hyams has finite resources, and if we make more multi-year grants at higher levels, it is likely that fewer organizations will receive support unless the Foundation's endowment grows significantly. As we have discussed this challenge with the trustees, our best sense is that Hyams needs to ensure that it provides consistent and multi-faceted support to those grantees that are most aligned with its funding strategies while also being open to supporting communities, especially in the grassroots leadership development area, that are emerging.

- The issue of sustainability also is related to grantees' access to other funding sources and how the Foundation can help to facilitate these relationships. As the survey results showed, Hyams staff is more engaged than other funders in helping grantees secure funding from other sources, but it appears that this support is not as helpful as we would like it to be. One of the challenges is that the number of local foundations interested in supporting public policy advocacy and community organizing is limited. Hyams staff is committed to continuing to reach out to funding colleagues to share the value of its grantees' work.

We would greatly value any reactions to this letter or further thoughts about the GPR. We also recognize that Hyams currently is undertaking a major change with the implementation of a new online application and grant reporting system, and we welcome your feedback on that as well. We did see several comments from the survey about an online process being more efficient for grantees, and we truly hope that it will be! However, we also know that anything new will have some "kinks", and our applicants will be in the best position to identify and suggest how best to address them.

Thank you so much again for participating in the Center for Effective Philanthropy's GPR survey process. It has helped us to see more clearly the practices that we need to continue and the areas where we could improve. While the Foundation considers a variety of indicators to determine if it is fulfilling its mission and achieving its goals, how we are perceived by and add value to our grantees will remain an important priority. We also will continue to stay in touch with you as we grapple together with the larger challenges, and opportunities, of the current economic environment

On behalf of the Hyams trustees and staff, I wish each of you a productive and fulfilling fall season.

Best regards,



Elizabeth B. Smith
Executive Director