



## Community Perception Survey Findings

September 2021

### Overview of Results

In June 2021, organizations that applied for funding from Sand Hill Foundation (SHF) in 2019, 2020, and/or 2021 were invited to participate in an on-line Community Perception Survey. The purpose of the survey was to better understand, from a user perspective, Sand Hill Foundation's impact on the field and local communities within San Mateo County and the northern part of Santa Clara County.

If you participated, thank you! The feedback our non-profit partners provided has offered us valuable guidance regarding shifts the foundation can make to more deeply impact the community and improve our grantmaking practices.

The survey was one key part of a strategic planning process in 2021 focused on deepening our foundation's commitment to equitable opportunity in San Mateo County. We believe that our community's local ecosystem of nonprofits plays a critical role in supporting low-income families as they navigate economic, social, environmental, and racial barriers to prosperity. The stronger our individual local nonprofits are and the more effectively they collaborate, the greater their capacity will be to deliver what's needed to ensure the people who live and work here can thrive.

The following are specific areas we are considering for increased investment:

### Impact in the Community

- 1. Center on capacity-building for locally-focused non-profit organizations** – SHF has a history of providing capacity-building support for a range of projects and through general operating support. Many survey respondents indicated SHF's ability to make an impact in the community is the result of supporting non-profit capacity. SHF will explore ways to expand its current approach to capacity-building.
- 2. Expand partnerships and leverage networks** – Many survey respondents noted the value SHF brings to their organization and San Mateo County when SHF staff go beyond providing financial support and help to connect people, organizations and resources. SHF will explore ways in which staff can deepen its role as a bridge-builder and connector, and leverage local networks.

### Grant Making Process

- 1. Improve communications** – Many survey respondents noted the importance of SHF's open and responsive communication, however not *all* survey respondents reported the same

experiences. Grant seekers would like more information articulated about funding priorities on SHF's website and grantees would like more opportunities to directly communicate what they are learning/doing with SHF and other grantees. SHF will work to strengthen communications for both grant seekers and grantees.

**2. Embed feedback loops in our practice** – The information we received through this process was enormously valuable and we are truly grateful for the time nonprofit staff took to complete the survey. As an organization, we commit to continuing this feedback practice in future.

## Methodology

A total of 222 individuals were invited to participate in the survey and 122 responded<sup>1</sup>. It was requested that organizations submit only one survey to represent their perspective.

Survey respondents included organizations that:

- Received grant funding from SHF (70%) and organizations that were not funded (30%)<sup>2</sup>,
- Received funding in the past from SHF (70%) and organizations that newly received a grant from SHF (25%),
- Are headquartered in San Mateo County or northern Santa Clara County (72%) and organizations headquartered elsewhere (28%).

Every sector SHF funds (i.e., afterschool programs, education, environmental education, youth development, health/mental health, housing, and asset building/economic development) was represented in the survey.

Survey respondents represented organizations with various operating budget sizes, ranging from under \$499,999 (13%) to those with budgets \$15+ million (21%).

## Analysis of Survey Results

The survey was designed to illuminate community partner perceptions related to SHF's:

1. Impact in the community,
2. Future opportunities to deepen impact, and
3. Grant making process.

An analysis of results in each of these areas follows.

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<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to determine the exact response rate as some individuals invited were from the same organization and some individuals were funder colleagues and not necessarily previous/current grantees.

<sup>2</sup> Of the 36 survey respondents not funded by SHF in the past 2.5 years, all indicated working in a field that SHF funds and 20 are headquartered in SHF's service area.

## **1. Impact in the Community**

Responses to several multiple choice questions indicated community partners' perceptions of SHF's impact in San Mateo County and northern Santa Clara. The majority of respondents indicated SHF is making a positive impact (either a great deal or a lot) as demonstrated in the table below.

<b>Impact Statement</b>	<b>% of Total Respondents Indicated 'A Great Deal or A Lot'</b>	<b>% of Grantees Indicated 'A Great Deal or A Lot'</b>	<b>% of Non-Grantees Indicated 'A Great Deal or A Lot'</b>
<b>SHF's grantmaking reflects an understanding of needs among intended beneficiaries.</b>	64%	84%	15%
<b>SHF understands the field.</b>	60%	79%	14%
<b>SHF's helps their organization achieve its goals.</b>	57%	80%	0%
<b>SHF is advancing its mission.<sup>3</sup></b>	55%	84%	18%

Respondents from organizations that received a grant from SHF in the past couple of years (86) more commonly answered in the affirmative to the questions related to impact than those survey respondents that did not receive a grant from SHF (36).

Respondents were asked to comment on the impact Sand Hill Foundation is having on the field, community, and/or organization. Most comments centered on SHF's impact on the *organization*. Two strong themes emerged:

1. SHF's grants are valuable to organizations – especially when the grants are flexible, multi-year, and able to meet organizational capacity needs (e.g., capital, website, participate in collaborations, support operations, etc.).
2. Engagement with SHF staff and other community partners is appreciated -- It was commonly noted that SHF positively impacts organizations by foundation staff being knowledgeable about community needs and resources, serving as a thought partner, and participating in collaborative community efforts.

See the Appendix for a sample of open-ended responses related to the Foundation's impact.

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<sup>3</sup> Sand Hill Foundation's mission is to support local families as they navigate life's pathways towards economic stability, health and well-being, higher education, environmental safety, and joy in nature.

## **2. Future Opportunities to Deepen Impact**

Respondents were asked what, if any non-monetary assistance SHF could offer to help organizations further their mission (respondents provided their top two types of assistance). The most common responses in order of priority were:

1. Assistance securing funds from other sources
2. Communication/marketing/publicity assistance
3. Introductions to leaders in the field
4. Use of SHF facilities

There was no difference in the type and the priority level of non-monetary assistance among grant recipients and non-grant recipients. Both groups of respondents expressed the same interests.

Respondents were asked to comment on the specific improvements SHF could make to become a better funder. Two strong themes emerged from the open-ended responses:

1. More communication from and engagement with SHF, and
2. Maintain or increase the availability of multi-year funding and general operating support.

Suggestions related to improving communication from and engagement with SHF included:

- Improve website to more clearly articulate goals and funding criteria,
- Share data and what staff are learning from grantees and other community leaders, and
- Provide more opportunities to connect with staff about funding priorities, feedback on grant reports submitted to the foundation, reasons for application denials, exchange ideas, etc.

In addition, several respondents noted an interest in Sand Hill Foundation playing more of a leadership role by connecting grantees to resources, influencing other funders, and connecting grantees to one another.

See the Appendix for a sample of open-ended responses related to suggestions for improvement.

## **3. Grant Making Process**

Several multiple choice questions were asked to better understand experiences with SHF's grant making process, interactions with staff and communications strategies. The majority of respondents indicated positive experiences, as demonstrated in the table below.

<b>Statements Related to Grant Making Process</b>	<b>% of Total Respondents Indicated Agreement with Statement</b>	<b>% of Grantees Indicated Agreement with Statement</b>	<b>% of Non-Grantees Indicated Agreement with Statement</b>
<b>SHF staff respond to phone calls and emails in a timely fashion.</b>	79%	89%	52%

SHF is very or extremely <b>transparent.</b>	60%	74%	23%
SHF's goals and strategies are very of extremely <b>clearly communicated.</b>	57%	68%	29%

Respondents from organizations that received a grant from SHF in the past couple of years more commonly answered in the affirmative to the questions related to the grant making process than those survey respondents that did not receive a grant from SHF.

61% of the total survey respondents indicated they felt ‘no pressure at all’ to modify their organization's priorities in order to create a grant proposal that was likely to receive funding (69% of grantees and 39% of non-grantees expressed no pressure at all).

The majority of survey respondents (90%) indicated a decline or clear commitment for funding was made within 2 months or less after the grant proposal was submitted.

Respondents were asked to comment on the quality of Sand Hill Foundation's processes, interactions, and communications. The vast majority of respondents who completed this question expressed:

- Very positive interactions with staff,
- Appreciation for the streamlined grant process,
- The value of multi-year funding, and
- Communication with SHF staff is clear and timely.

See the Appendix for a sample of open-ended responses related to the quality of SHF’s processes and interactions.

We welcome further questions, ideas, or feedback about our survey. Contact Jennifer Perez Brown at [jennifer@sandhillfoundation.org](mailto:jennifer@sandhillfoundation.org).

## Appendix

A sample of open-ended responses to three questions is provided below.

### **1. Please comment on the impact Sand Hill Foundation is having on your field, community, or organization.**

- Sand Hill Foundation has done a great deal to support the health and well-being of our community through its generosity and consistency. The Foundation is a trusted partner that advances our mission, shares productive insights, and understands grantees' needs. The Foundation has, frankly, the best grant processes for grantees.
- Sand Hill Foundation has set the bar high! What a pleasure it is to work with this Foundation. They have taken the time to get to know all aspects of the areas they fund, and I would consider our SHF friends to be EXPERTS in the field.
- Through the wellness collaboratives, Sand Hill has given our community an opportunity to build an accessible network of support for marginalized youth and families. Sand Hill has provided us with resources, tools, and thought partnership which has been essential to our success with this new strategy. They have also given us resources to encourage us to prioritize staff self-care! Their holistic understanding of mental health is rare and so important.
- I know that their staff is very open to hear about what goes on in the fields and trenches and they are flexible on the type of support we request to respond to our community needs and to change systems of oppression.
- Our partnership is having a huge impact both monetarily in helping organizational growth and sustainability as well as conveying the importance of mental health to our board, other funding sources and the general community.
- Sand Hill is extremely knowledgeable about the local needs of our community. The Foundation did an excellent job in pivoting to support the needs of organizations during the COVID crisis, taking into account specific wishes or organizations in terms of funding.
- Flexible funding is gold and their understanding of the client base evident.
- We have more clarity in mission, a new vision statement, and strategic and fundraising plans that would not have been possible without this support; thank you!
- Sand Hill gets it. They understand the intersectionality of issues and are thoughtful and collaborative partners. It does strike me that they could convene their grantees once a year to spark cross collaboration and intentional partnerships.
- Sand Hill's small capital grant program solved an important issue for our nonprofit and was something many other funders would not have considered, but it's vital to our everyday operations and being able to replace it has been a big morale lift for our staff in a difficult year
- Sand Hill Foundation understands that legal services are critical to the economic stability and health and well-being of our immigrant families.
- Sand Hill Foundation is always at the leading edge of the field we are in. From forming best practices to creating working community, SHF finds a way to stay relevant and important through every shift and turn in our mission.

## **2. What specific improvements would make Sand Hill Foundation a better funder?**

- It would be great to spend more time exchanging ideas and resources with other grantees.
- It would be great to get a clearer vision of this funding strategy long term. There are challenges with building a collaborative systems level change when we aren't clear of funding opportunities beyond the 2 year contract. Ideally, it would be great to know of opportunities for longer term funding to better build a collaborative model around that.
- Share more of who and what projects they are funding. Sharing data about their funding. Sharing stories of their grantees with their donors.
- We would appreciate periodic meetings to assess fit, especially as funding priorities change.
- Continued multi-year funding to help with forecasting.
- Quarterly or semi-annual check in calls are preferable to written reports because we can ensure that we are really addressing the foundations questions. Reports require a lot of preparation and some guess work as to what the funder really wants to know about a particular grant. Meetings or calls enable a better dialogue and ensure the right staff are available to giving targeted and meaningful feedback about the funded project.
- Help others be more like you!
- Go out and lead a collaborative that brings more funding alongside their initiatives. In other words, other Foundations should not duplicate efforts, but rather join and align with the learnings and grantmaking practices of SHF.
- You're doing well overall. I encourage you to continue to embrace a sort of radical transparency in your grantmaking practices. Bravo!!
- The move to general operating/unrestricted funding for some of the grants would be greatly beneficial to nonprofits, as it demonstrates trust in the nonprofit and allows nonprofits to have flexible funding to meet unforeseen circumstances.
- The biggest improvement would be to make certain the website actually reflects what the Foundation will fund.
- Provide more feedback on grant denials, what we can do better, if we should reapply or if we shouldn't, other funders to go to, etc. That would be invaluable. Thank you for all you do and for seeking feedback!

## **3. Please comment on the quality of Sand Hill Foundation's processes, interactions, and communications.**

- Honestly 10 out of 10!
- Grant processes are the best; effective and efficient reporting format. Interactions are supportive, encouraging, genuine, and productive.
- Sandhill has been very welcoming, transparent, and responsive. We've appreciated the opportunities to get to know the staff, access their support, and provide feedback.
- The process is simple. It may help to have call check-ins between the grant proposal and the report. Like a mid-term call.
- Sand Hill is one of the easiest and most responsive granting agencies we work with!

- The grant application process was simple and easy to understand. The portal was user friendly and when there was any tech related issue the staff was very quick to respond and assist. Upon award, communication was quick and efficient. Great experience.
- Even providing the opportunity to comment via this survey is a great way to collect our honest feedback.
- We appreciate the frank and no-ego approach of the interactions.
- Although the precise reason that my organization was not funded could have been clearer, overall, my experience with Sand Hill Foundation does stand out as positive compared to the bulk of grants to which my organization has applied. I have a direct contact at Sand Hill who is very responsive. Something that I do not have at most other foundations.
- We appreciated the foundation proactively issuing a COVID-19 response grant, trusting us based on our long relationship to use the funds wisely rather than asking us to submit a proposal while we were stretched thin.
- Application was easy. Staff was helpful. Process overall was good. We were not funded though.
- Sand Hill Foundation's processes, interactions and communications are always exemplary; I always feel empowered, supported and encouraged in my dealings with them.
- Incredibly supportive team of professionals. We feel appreciated by them for the work we do and their partnership is important to our work.
- It has been a real pleasure. Many of the organizations that we request grant funding from are difficult and time consuming to work with. Speaking to the ED or CEO of these organizations is nearly impossible and seeing the hands on and reachable status of Ash McNeely has been refreshing, welcomed and truly amazing. Her commitment to grantees and our community is unrivaled in the 1.25 years I have been in this position.
- SHF is responsive, flexible, understanding, and has been a pleasure to work with.
- Our communications with Sand Hill has been positive and supportive. The staff has been responsive to questions and provided valuable feedback.
- High quality.

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