Key Findings and Recommendations from
The Denver Foundation 2018 Donor Perception Report
Prepared by the Center for Effective Philanthropy

In February and March of 2018, the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) conducted a survey of The Denver Foundation’s (“TDF” or “the Foundation”) donors, achieving a 28 percent response rate. The memo below outlines the key findings and recommendations from the Foundation’s Donor Perception Report (DPR). Donor perceptions should be interpreted in light of the Foundation’s context, goals, and recent changes in strategy.

This memo accompanies the comprehensive survey results found in the Foundation’s interactive online report at https://cep.surveyresults.org and in the downloadable online materials. The Foundation’s full report also contains more information about survey analysis and methodology.

Overview and Foundation Context

- Overall, donors have positive perceptions of The Denver Foundation and provide ratings similar to donors of the typical community foundation in CEP’s dataset across many report measures, including for their overall satisfaction.

- TDF is distinct in CEP’s dataset for much higher than typical donor engagement with the Foundation’s resources. Additionally, donors rate the Foundation in the top 35 percent of CEP’s dataset for its overall transparency and the extent to which it is well-known amongst their friends and family.

- Seventy-seven percent of donors, a slightly lower than typical proportion, report plans to give to the Foundation in the future. Donors who have communicated their charitable goals, have a designated contact, experience the Foundation as highly responsive, would like at least some assistance with their giving decisions, or who use certain Foundation resources are significantly more likely to plan to give in the future.

- When asked to suggest specific improvements for TDF’s work, the largest proportion of donors mention aspects of the Foundation’s grantmaking strategy, including broadening its focus areas, greater attention to donors’ individual giving needs, and increasing the number of affinity groups.

- The Foundation’s giving patterns differ from those of the typical foundation in CEP’s dataset. Nearly three-quarters of TDF’s annual giving is done via donor-advised funds, compared to 51 percent at the typical community foundation.

  - Perhaps relatedly, many donors emphasize the ease of giving to/through TDF as a key strength. When asked to describe TDF in one word, donors most commonly use “efficient.” And in their open-ended comments, donors praise TDF’s “administrative efficiency” and “great portal for donor advisors,” and note the “ease of making charitable gifts.”

- There are no consistent significant differences in donors’ ratings when segmenting donors by Fund Size, Fund Age, Fund Type, or Fund Class.
Engagement with TDF Resources

- Ninety-two percent of donors, a proportion in the top five percent of CEP’s dataset, report using at least one of TDF’s resources to achieve their charitable giving goals.

- Donors most frequently report using ease of transactions (gifts in and grants out) and quarterly fund statements as resources, and they also rate these as two of the most helpful resources to achieve their charitable giving goals.
  - A third of donors report using TDF Connect as a resource to achieve their charitable giving goals, and they also find it to be one of the most helpful TDF resources.
  - Notably, just under half of donors (a higher than typical proportion) report using TDF’s events as a resource, and these donors rate significantly more positively for their likelihood to recommend the Foundation and the extent to which TDF makes them feel more connected to the community and enhances their knowledge of issues they care about.

- Donors’ open-ended comments and ratings indicate an opportunity to even further build on the Foundation’s available resources.
  - Eleven donor suggestions (the second most frequent category) request even more, or different types, of Foundation resources, including more opportunities for collaboration with other donors and/or non-profits and more events.

Impact on the Metro Denver Community

- CEP’s research across community foundations finds that donor perceptions of a foundation’s impact on and leadership in the community are strong predictors of their overall satisfaction.
  - TDF receives ratings similar to the typical funder in CEP’s dataset for both of these measures.
  - When asked for the most important reasons donors have given to or through the Foundation in the past three years, nearly 45 percent of donors (a larger than typical proportion) indicate it was to make an impact on a specific issue or in a particular area of work.

- Additionally, when asked how well-known the Foundation is amongst their friends and colleagues in the Metro Denver community, donor ratings place TDF in the top third of community foundations in CEP’s dataset.
In a custom question, when asked to select different types of content that they’d be interested in reading in communications from the Foundation, donors most frequently express interest in reading about the impact of TDF programs in Metro Denver.

- In addition, when asked about which outcomes they are most interested in when attending events held by TDF, donors most frequently select learning about specific issues or impact areas as their desired outcome.

However, TDF receives lower than typical ratings that place the Foundation in the bottom third of CEP’s dataset for the extent to which working with the Foundation makes donors feel more connected to the Metro Denver community and the extent to which TDF enhances their knowledge of issues they care about.

Certain patterns are associated with significantly more positive donor perceptions of these community-related measures.

- The 40 percent of donors who report receiving information related to the Foundation’s impact on the Metro Denver community monthly or more often rate significantly more positively on some survey measures, including the extent to which the Foundation makes them feel more connected to the Metro Denver community and enhances their knowledge of issues they care about.

- The quarter of donors who report first learning about the Foundation through a professional advisor rate significantly higher on some survey measures, including TDF’s impact on and leadership in the Metro Denver community.

- Donors who report using TDF events or staff as a resource rate significantly higher for the extent to which the Foundation makes them feel more connected to the Metro Denver community and enhances their knowledge of issues they care about.

Donor Interactions and Communications

Interactions with Donors

- Donors perceive TDF to be highly transparent, rating the Foundation in the top 20 percent of CEP’s dataset for this measure.

- Furthermore, TDF receives ratings similar to the typical community foundation for the responsiveness of staff, a measure that CEP’s research has shown to be one of the strongest predictors of overall donor satisfaction.

The Denver Foundation has been in the forefront in their Strengthening Neighborhoods initiative and in its advocacy for inclusiveness. It has also collaborated with other concerned citizens to research the problem of homelessness and establish an innovative funding approach with its Social Impact Bond financing package for building affordable housing.
- Donors who experience the Foundation as highly responsive (rating a seven on a seven-point scale) rate significantly higher for a number of report measures, including aspects of their overall satisfaction and likelihood to recommend the Foundation, and are significantly more likely to give to TDF in the future.

- Two-thirds of donors, a slightly lower than typical proportion, report having a designated contact at the Foundation.

  - Donors with a designated contact rate TDF significantly higher for some report measures, including their overall satisfaction and the extent to which TDF makes them feel more connected to the Metro Denver community, and are significantly more likely to give to TDF in the future.

- Additionally, when asked for their desired type of relationship with the Foundation, 57 percent of donors, a typical proportion, indicate that they want to be self-sufficient and use the Foundation mostly to manage funds.

  - These donors report significantly lower usage of a number of TDF’s resources, and a significantly lower proportion report having communicated their personal charitable goals to the Foundation. These ‘self-sufficient’ donors also rate significantly lower for their likelihood to recommend the Foundation, the responsiveness of staff, and are significantly less likely to give to TDF in the future.

**Donors’ Personal Goals**

- Nearly two-thirds of donors (a higher than typical proportion) indicate that they have communicated their personal charitable goals to the Foundation.

  - These donors rate significantly higher for some report measures, including their overall satisfaction and likelihood to recommend the Foundation, and are significantly more likely to give to TDF in the future.

  - Still, these donors rate the extent to which the Foundation understands their goals less positively than typical.

- A minority theme in donors’ comments suggests that TDF might deepen and demonstrate its understanding of donors’ individual giving needs.

  "I think the Foundation’s greatest strengths are its commitment to improving the lives of people in the Metro Denver area and the professionalism and responsiveness of its staff.

  More, but very brief, contact from TDF staff on a check-in basis. This is going to promote additional giving and help me encourage my acquaintances to go to TDF."

**Future Giving Plans**

- Seventy-seven percent of donors, a slightly lower proportion than typical, indicate plans to give to the Foundation in the future.
• The majority of these donors report that they will continue to give through making additional contributions to a previously established fund or to involve their family in a program of giving.

• Of the donors who do not plan to continue giving to TDF, over a third (a typical proportion) report that the primary reason is that their gift/fund was a one-time contribution.

Donors who fall into the patterns of interactions and communications with the Foundation below are significantly more likely to plan to give to the Foundation in the future:

• Donors who would like to use to use TDF for some assistance with giving decisions from or as a partner for advice.

• Donors who have communicated their personal charitable goals.

• Donors who have a designated contact at the Foundation.

• Donors who experience the Foundation as highly responsive (rating responsiveness a seven on a seven-point scale).

• Donors who use GIVE magazine as a resource for achieving their charitable giving goals.

• Donors who use research on nonprofits in the community provided by the Foundation as a resource for achieving their charitable giving goals.

CEP Recommendations

Based on its donor feedback, CEP recommends The Denver Foundation consider the following in order to build on its strengths and address potential opportunities for improvement:

• Reflect on ways that the Foundation can provide or adapt its resources for donors who are seeking to be self-sufficient to even further help them guide their own giving through TDF.

• Ensure that fundholders know who their fund managers are to facilitate customized services. Additionally, continue to prioritize facilitate TDF staff responsiveness when donors have a question or need assistance.

• Prioritize opportunities to deepen and demonstrate understanding of donors’ charitable goals and issues that they care about. Additionally, explore capacity to hold more issue-specific events and to more frequently highlight TDF’s impact on the Metro Denver community in donor communications.

• Respond to donor suggestions by providing and communicating about opportunities for them to connect with each other and organizations in the community.

Contact Information

Austin Long, Director – Assessment & Advisory Services
(415) 423-3287
austinl@cep.org

Emily Radwin, Senior Analyst – Assessment & Advisory Services
(617) 254-1104
emilyr@cep.org