

# **Courage in Practice:**

## **Five Principles for Peak Grantmaking**



# Philanthropy's Potential

For philanthropy to realize its potential, PEAK Grantmaking is helping our members **move from conversation to action**. We need to act with courage to advance big ideas like equity and inclusion, narrowing the power gap in our sector, being authentically engaged in our communities, listening and learning from our partners, and living out our values in our practice.

Created by and for our members, the Principles for Peak Grantmaking is our call to action to **transform the practice of philanthropy into the practice of principled grantmaking**.

Starting with the release of this white paper, and following with a rollout of newly refined, competency-based talent development programs and resources, our goal is to champion and support grantmakers in putting each of these five guiding Principles into practice and help them launch a sector-wide movement.

For nearly three decades, our members have joined PEAK Grantmaking in a quest for more equitable, effective, and efficient practices. Through those endeavors, we've seen that grantmakers have the power to implement big ideas and help lead practical, sustainable, real-world transformation in philanthropy and society.

With a collective burst of courage, we can shed outdated policies that erode trust rather than build it, and in the process redirect resources from administration to mission—leading to greater impact and more communities served.

This is our call to action: Let's **view practices as integral to strategy** and support them with the full weight of our knowledge, values, and resources.

Let's **mobilize the expertise of grants management professionals** to improve how grants get made.

Let's **embrace these principled practices on behalf of our organizations and grantees**, share our plans and our progress, and work together to power a movement.

PEAK Grantmaking is here to support you every step of the way to **put these principles into practice** through action plans, case studies, how-to guides, year-round peer learning events, and our annual convening.

***"Narrowing the power gap begins with the Foundation's values. We strive to act with humility and modesty, approaching our activities with respect for our partners, an understanding that solutions reside with those we serve, and recognition of the privilege inherent in philanthropic work."***

**—Barr Foundation**

# Moving From Conversation to Action

PEAK Grantmaking believes that a set of principles is needed to support grantmakers in their efforts to **make practices a strategic imperative** within their organizations. The five Principles for Peak Grantmaking will help you implement more effective, efficient, and equitable grantmaking practices. The result will be more principled and courageous grantmaking across philanthropy.

Designed with practical application in mind, the five Principles promise to

- serve as benchmarks against which to test everyday activities, foregrounding considerations that can get lost in the daily work;
- inspire a shift in thinking, whereby it's understood that *how* grants are made—just like what and who they go to—affect staff, grantees, grant applicants, partners, and the larger community;
- provide a common language, lens, and approach that can unify a variety of departments and institutions;
- generate greater information sharing and collaboration across teams and departments that play a role in funding grants; and
- update and energize grantmaking practices in accordance with values agreed upon by grants management professionals, funders, and grantseekers.







## Tie Practices to Values

**Link grantmaking practices with grantmaker values, integrating values throughout every aspect of grantmaking to propel the mission.**

Grantmaking practices that reflect an organization's values, aspirations, priorities, and point of view are the basis for trusting relationships between grantseekers and grantmakers.

As the champions of grantmaking practices, grants management staff are positioned to support their organization to tie practices to values and set strategic goals related to improving grantmaking practices.

Board members and senior leaders at grantmaking organizations should provide the space and flexibility for grantmaking staff to lead the way in aligning practices with values.

### Key questions

- What are your strategic goals for improving your grantmaking practices?
- How should your grants management function and roles be structured to support equitable and effective grantmaking?
- How can you approach organizational change courageously when you identify grantmaking practices that are misaligned with organization values?
- What skills and knowledge does your team need to tie your grantmaking practices to your organization's values?

PEAK Grantmaking calls on funders to thoughtfully examine how their values are reflected in their practices and ensure consistency between what they say and what they do.



## Narrow the Power Gap

**Use practices and policies to help narrow the power gap between grantmakers and grantseekers, and value equally the resources each brings to the partnership.**

Grantmaking achieves its broadest impact through partnerships based on trust and respect, ascribing equal value to the experiences, resources, and needs of each partner.

Grantmakers that respect the grantee experience employ excellent customer services and two-way feedback. They rightsize the grantmaking process for each grantee's type, size, and experience, deploying flexible practices that account for their unique resource profile.

Grants management professionals can implement practices and policies that build trust and redefine the power balance.

Board members and senior leaders should commit to building power and capacity within their nonprofit partners, and make space for solutions that come from applicants and grantees.

### Key questions

- How can your grantmaking practices build respectful and trusting relationships with your grantees?
- What could it look like in your organization to rightsize the grantmaking process or implement more flexible policies and practices?
- How does the structure of grant awards help—or hinder—your grantees?
- How can you use feedback from your community and grantees to improve your grantmaking process?

PEAK Grantmaking calls on grantmakers to adopt policies and practices that cede power, generating more balanced partnerships.



**Build grantmaking practices and policies that minimize bias and support decisions that promote justice, inclusion, and equity.**

Structural bias is rooted in policies and practices that advantage some people and disadvantage others. Grantmakers sit at the intersection of power and privilege in the philanthropic sector. As such, they have a unique responsibility to implement grantmaking practices that promote equity and inclusion.

Grants management professionals have the power to ensure policies and practices do not broaden existing inequities, but rather strengthen support for marginalized communities.

Board members and senior leaders at grantmaking organizations should work to increase the diversity of grant decision-makers and strengthen the trust between donors and their communities.

**Key questions**

- What approaches can you use to mitigate the impact of bias on your grant decisions?
- How can the demographic data you collect support insight, impact, and equity?
- How can you bring a diversity of voices into grantmaking decisions?
- How can you find and support organizations led by those most impacted by an issue?

PEAK Grantmaking calls on grantmakers to assess their policies and practices and adjust them to minimize bias, reduce disparities, and be more inclusive.



**Manage all entrusted resources—people, finances, reputation, time—with care to balance stewardship with an agile approach to risk.**

Responsible stewardship is a hallmark of effective grantmaking practices, contributing to public confidence and increasing grantmaking impact. Responsive stewardship means identifying and managing risks, rather than avoiding them. This involves anticipating and adapting to change of all kinds, sharing grantmaking information openly, using technology and data effectively, and serving as facilitators of the grantmaking process rather than guards of the assets.

Grants professionals can connect the dots among knowledge, systems, and relationships to assess and manage risk, seeking creative solutions to remove barriers to impact.

Grants professionals and leaders must have serious conversations about what it means to be responsive, take risks, and understand the context in which their grantees work.

**Key questions**

- How can you embrace risk and innovation in your grantmaking practices?
- How can you be a more open, accessible, and transparent grantmaker?
- How can you most effectively use technology to support your grantmaking process?

PEAK Grantmaking calls on grantmakers to reframe risk and to recalibrate their vetting process to make it more transparent, more trust-based, more nonprofit- and community-centered, and less burdensome.



## Learn, Share, Evolve

**Contribute to building sector-wide knowledge and seek wisdom from others pursuing change and impact.**

Grantmakers increasingly are called on to learn, partner, collaborate, and amplify lessons across issues, fields, and sectors. Grantmaking practices should be designed to manage and share knowledge productively, in ways that inform grantmakers, grantees, and the social sector more broadly.

Grants professionals translate data into information and the knowledge needed to improve practices, strategies and impact.

Grants professionals and leaders at grantmaking organizations should use data and knowledge to push their grantmaking strategy and achieve greater impact.

### Key questions

- What information can be unlocked from grants and knowledge management systems to improve practices, strengthen strategies, and synergize learnings?
- How can you more equitably evaluate grant outcomes?
- How can you adopt alternative methods to collect information in ways that align with how the grantee measures impact and reduce the burden of reporting?
- How are you reconciling principles of open data and privacy protection?
- How do you collaborate with other funders to advance knowledge?
- How does your organization demonstrate its commitment to learning with and from grantees and sharing that learning internally and externally?

PEAK Grantmaking calls on grantmakers to design practices that promote learning and share knowledge to contribute to the sector's impact.



***"To cultivate individual and collective DEI capacity, we are committing to a sustained effort that includes an organizational assessment, individual and group training and coaching, and refining both internal processes and external relationships. The ultimate goal is to infuse a DEI lens into everything we do."***

**—Bainum Family Foundation**



# Lead the Way

We need courageous and competent leadership to fulfill the aspirational work of philanthropy. Lead the way by adopting the five Principles for Peak Grantmaking. Create a team to own the work that goes into realizing them. Demonstrate your courage with bold support. We will support you every step of the way.

**Develop a plan for implementing the Principles at the personal and organizational level, and using them to improve your practices.**

Articulate your desired outcomes, commit to a few steps in the first year, and build from there. Each organization's plan will be different, reflecting the appropriate timing, order, and level of engagement for its grants management professionals and grantees. Update your plan with at least one new commitment annually.

**Share your plan and your progress—the good, the challenging, and the insightful—for others to learn from.**

We're eager to hear about how you and your organization are putting these Principles into practice. Email us at [principles@peakgrantmaking.org](mailto:principles@peakgrantmaking.org).



**Take advantage of PEAK's resources to help you put the Principles into practice.**

Our extensive and continuously growing portfolio for our members and the sector is designed to guide you in applying each Principle to your work and throughout your organization. *Find them all at [peakgrantmaking.org/principles](https://peakgrantmaking.org/principles).*

## Action planners

These overviews of practices to consider implementing will help grants managers understand the varied aspects of the grantmaking process, and open up discussions for changing them.

## How-to guides

These tools can be used by grants management professionals to lead their teams and leaders through discussions about improving practices and the benefits of more principled grantmaking.

## Case stories

These in-depth stories from the field, developed with member foundation leaders, provide an inside view of the transformation that the Principles for Peak Grantmaking have enabled.

## Samples and templates

Sample policies, procedures, processes, and checklists are available in an easy-to-use format so you can copy, paste, and modify them to suit your organization's needs.

**Learn with colleagues through community convenings and partnerships.**

We bring Principles-centered learning opportunities to our community through year-round convenings and to the sector through partnerships in the philanthropy-supporting space.

## In-person and online learning

PEAK's live and on-demand virtual learning events and courses provide training and insight into grantmaking practice to improve your knowledge, skills, and competencies. In addition, these forums provide opportunities to explore your questions with peers and sector experts. *Visit our events calendar at [peakgrantmaking.org/events](https://peakgrantmaking.org/events) and access on-demand resources at [peakgrantmaking.org/resources](https://peakgrantmaking.org/resources).*

## Grants Management Professional Competency Model

Fulfilling the potential of the Principles depends on developing competencies that enable a person or team to manage and maintain a practice. Use our model to identify the professional knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to implement principled practices. *Download it now at [peakgrantmaking.org/competency-model](https://peakgrantmaking.org/competency-model).*

## Annual convenings

All of the Principles are embedded throughout the programming at PEAK's annual convening. Join your colleagues and learn how you can put the Principles into practice. *Learn more at [peakgrantmaking.org/annual-convening](https://peakgrantmaking.org/annual-convening)*

# The Promise of Principled Practice

It is within the power of every grantmaker to prioritize practices, set strategic goals to improve them, and evaluate practices as critical indicators of progress. The Principles for Peak Grantmaking have been created as a point-by-point call to action for any organization that wants to take up this challenge and fully achieve philanthropy’s promise.

The Principles are meant to represent the values of our sector and to integrate the knowledge, experience, relationships, and ideas of all grantmaking professionals. Apply them thoughtfully, and you can realize shared power, deeper trust, and broader support among the nonprofits and communities you serve.

When you start with the grantee in mind, **new approaches and greater levels of impact** will follow.

By acting more equitably and responsively, you can more successfully **meet the specific needs of communities**, and narrow opportunity, achievement, and resource gaps.

Carefully reconsider your standards for fiscal responsibility and embracing risks, and you can free your people to pursue **creative new approaches that achieve bolder programmatic aims** while maintaining stewardship duties.

Adopting the common language, lens, and approach established by the Principles, we can foster **new and unexpected connections** across organizations, helping concentrate resources on complex issues that no one organization can address alone.

Field-wide change may not happen quickly; leading change in any organization, not to mention across a sector, is never easy. However, by working together—grants management professionals, grantmakers, grantees, grantseekers, partners, and philanthropy-supporting organizations—we can power this movement to **elevate the importance of practices across the field, align around a shared set of principles, and propel a new era of philanthropy.**

# Acknowledgments

The following people and the organizations they represent have graciously contributed to the development and completion of this foundational document. Everyone at PEAK Grantmaking offers our deepest thanks for their time, effort, and expertise.

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# Methodology

This work has been a collective effort, drawing knowledge and power from the diversity of our field. Rooted in conversations with grant management professionals from all types of funding institutions, lessons learned from years of grantmaking, and the data gleaned from a multitude of grantees, the Principles for Peak Grantmaking have already captured the imagination of many in the field.

Throughout 2017 and 2018, PEAK Grantmaking learned in collaboration with members of our regional chapters, members from regional grantmaking associations, and other philanthropy-supporting organizations. We engaged volunteer working groups in deep and thoughtful conversations around each principle, specific practices tied to each, and the changes that would be most impactful. We compiled past research, reviewed external studies, and undertook new investigations.

Throughout, our committed board of directors helped us push further, reach deeper, and aim higher.

Once all our findings had been analyzed, we arrived at the five interrelated, overarching Principles for Peak Grantmaking. Our conclusion: We are certain that applying these Principles to grantmaking practices will lead to more equitable and impactful outcomes.



We will continue to do the work to identify what these Principles look like in action: what funders who live the Principles do differently from their colleagues, and how others can replicate their practices. Look for this additional work from PEAK Grantmaking, set to be released through 2019 and beyond.



# About PEAK Grantmaking

PEAK Grantmaking is a member-led nonprofit association supporting funding organizations and philanthropy professionals. Our members form a vibrant community that advances shared leadership and learning across the philanthropic sector.

Collectively, we advance PEAK's mission to transform philanthropy by elevating the field of grants management and empowering grants professionals to lead the way in operationalizing equity-centered, values-driven grantmaking practices.

*Learn more at [peakgrantmaking.org](https://peakgrantmaking.org) and follow @PEAKgrantmaking on Twitter.*



**"We're living out our values if we're a community foundation led and informed by the expertise of our grantees. Taking their lead gives us more credibility and trust, and there is inherently more buy-in all around when there is a process of co-creation."**

**—Brooklyn Community Foundation**



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