

# Strategies for Aligning Practices and Values

To transform the practice of philanthropy into the practice of principled grantmaking, we worked with our members to develop five Principles for Peak Grantmaking—Tie Practices to Values; Narrow the Power Gap; Drive Equity; Learn, Share, Evolve; and Steward Responsively. *Learn more at [peakgrantmaking.org/principles](https://peakgrantmaking.org/principles).*

## Tie Practices to Values

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



# Effective grantmaking organizations deliberately connect the "how" of grantmaking to values, strategy, and impact.



Grantmaking practices are often the lens through which grantseekers experience grantmakers' values. Practices bound inextricably to an organization's values can lay the foundation for trusting relationships, met expectations, and true partnerships – as well as better, more sustainable outcomes.

As the champions and owners of grantmaking practice, grants management staff are positioned to align practices with values by setting strategic goals – the kind outlined in this document – and working with the entire organization to achieve them.

Grants are everyone's business. Programs, operations, finance, and executive staff must work together to analyze grantmaking practice, hold thoughtful conversations about the most effective way to make grants, and agree to shared strategic goals. Board members and senior leaders must commit to their values, then provide the space and flexibility for grantmaking staff to lead the way in developing strategic goals.

## **Leaders agree: Grantmaking practices matter.**

90% of grantmaking staff and leaders, from organizations of all sizes, believe a grant's ultimate success is affected moderately (25%) or very much (65%) by grantmaking processes and structure.

Three recommendations for successful alignment efforts:

## Recommendation #1: Develop strategic goals related to improving your grantmaking practice.



To strengthen grantmaking, everyone at the organization must be willing to delve more deeply into how grants get made. Though the fine details of grantmaking aren't the focus of foundation leadership, successfully tying practices to values requires CEOs and senior staff to take an active role. If they help determine how grantmaking either supports or detracts from organization values, they can then take the concrete steps needed to align them.

Effective organizations make sure that conversations about practice are part of staff and board meetings, that strategic plans reference effective practice, and that grantmaking processes are evaluated and strengthened using data.

**"We had a president who really wanted to understand how we were operating our grants and managing our programs from beginning to end. We could lead the charge, but that question was coming from the highest level, urging us to achieve greater consistency and alignment."**

**—Marc McDonald, Vice President, Integration - President's Office, AARP Foundation**

**Key question:** *If you were to create a strategic goal related to improving your grantmaking practice, what would you suggest?*

Review the five **Principles for Peak Grantmaking**, and you'll find a framework for developing specific strategic goals that help tie practices to values. You can:

- **Tie Practices to Values** by reviewing your grantmaking processes to ensure alignment with your values.
- **Narrow the Power Gap** with grantees by eliciting feedback, providing great customer service, and streamlining application processes.
- **Drive Equity** by eliminating bias in the review process, collecting and using demographic data responsibly, and implementing more equitable grantmaking practices.
- **Learn, Share, and Evolve** by improving your reporting practices, establishing more equitable evaluations, assessing your own practice, and sharing what you learn from your grantee partners to help build the field.
- **Steward Responsively** by reconsidering your approach to risk management, being transparent with your community, and using data and technology to improve and align internal efforts.

## Recommendation #2: Recognize that grantmaking staff are integral to the realization of your organization's values and strategy.

In successful alignment efforts, leaders think continuously about the connection between the vision—the impact they want to achieve—and the real-world operational implications of that vision. With their real-world, front-line experience, grants management staff are the ideal partner to help them bridge the gap.

Positioned "upstream" in the decision-making process, grants managers can help the organization develop practices that embody values like equity, power-sharing, learning, and entrepreneurship. When someone with a keen understanding of grantmaking practice is at the table, they can spot potential complications, situations that will require additional preparation or staff time, and more effective ways to structure a grant.

Without this upstream engagement, grants management staff can easily find themselves having to say "no" to decisions that were already made or—worse—expending valuable time and energy to correct unforeseen situations that could impact relationships with grantees.

- For more ways to get practical about aligning practices and values, check out our **HOW-TO GUIDE | Reflect and Align Values with Practice** (exclusive to Organization Members).

***"We view grants management staff as key partners in the development of strategy. They can identify where there's risk, where there might be obstacles in a plan we're considering. There are strategic flags that they can wave if they're brought in at the right point in the process."***

**–Fay Twersky, Vice President,  
Hewlett Foundation**



**Key question:** *How should your grants management staff be positioned internally to encourage equitable and effective grantmaking practices?*

**Organizations with grants management at the leadership table tend to:**

- Include goals for strengthening grantmaking in their strategic and annual plans
- Discuss the process by which grants are made at staff and board meetings
- Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the grantmaking process

# Recommendation #3: Provide grantmaking staff with training and development opportunities that will aid them in tying practices to values.

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Highly effective and efficient grantmaking practices don't just happen: They are the product of thoughtful design.

To advance changes in that design, grants managers need to gather data, make a compelling case, navigate the organizational culture, rework entrenched business processes, communicate with internal and external stakeholders, and test new processes—all while making grants.

Today's grants management professionals are acquiring new skills and knowledge to tackle this kind of complex and sensitive work. Finding and keeping grants managers with the right skill sets—hard and soft—may mean adjustments in salary scale, management levels, and other disruptions to the traditional "org chart."

**"Talent is a hot-button issue. Knight decided the Grants Management position required new skill sets like process management, process efficiency, and technological expertise, as well as strategic vision. My biggest piece of advice is to have someone at the top who looks at the whole system strategically—not just trying to maintain it, but always flexible, always looking at iterative system improvements."**

**—Dan Schoenfeld, Director, formerly Grants Administration, Knight Foundation**

**Key question:** *What skills and knowledge does your team need to tie your grantmaking practices to your organization's values?*

- Check out PEAK Grantmaking's **Grants Management Professional Competency Model** (publicly available) to assess and advance the knowledge, skills, and abilities on your team.
- Read our **HOW-TO GUIDE | Lead the Conversation: How Grants Management Professionals Can Tie Practices to Organization Values**
- PEAK Grantmaking's members are leading the way forward in their organizations. We're highlighting two Case Stories here that developed out of our conversations with members, which offer a practical look at how these grantmakers are working to make grants management practices more integrated and strategic—including what got them started, what they've learned so far, and how their efforts will evolve in the future.
  - **CASE STORY | From Words to Action at Bainum Family Foundation** (exclusive to Organization Members)
  - **CASE STORY | Building from the Values Up at Disability Rights Fund & Disability Rights Advocacy Fund** (exclusive to Organization Members)
- Join us, and share your journey, questions, and insights in our **Principles Community of Practice**, a CONNECT community forum (exclusive to Organization Members)



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Practice meets purpose at PEAK Grantmaking, a member-led national association of more than 4,000 professionals who specialize in grants management for funding organizations. Our members come together to form a vibrant community of grantmaking practice that advances shared leadership and learning across the sector. By cultivating resources, learning opportunities, and collaborations across the philanthropic spectrum, we champion grantmaking practices designed to help funders of every size and type maximize their mission-driven work through living their values.

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