

# Key Findings and Recommendations from Omidyar Network 2021 Grantee Perception Report

Prepared by The Center for Effective Philanthropy

*In February and March of 2021, The Center for Effective Philanthropy conducted a survey of Omidyar Network’s (“ON”) grantees. The memo below outlines CEP’s summary of key strengths, opportunities, and recommendations. Omidyar Network’s grantee perceptions should be interpreted in light of its goals and strategies, as well as the major global disruptions preceding and continuing through the survey period.*

*This memo accompanies the comprehensive survey results from 98 respondents (a 53% response rate) found in ON’s interactive online report at <https://cep.surveymresults.org> and in the downloadable online materials.*



*Omidyar Network’s full report also contains more information about survey analysis and methodology. CEP analyzes results of this survey by demographic characteristics of respondents. A summary of these findings, as well as other DEI-related measures can be found in your interactive report at <https://cep.surveymresults.org/DEIGranteeDemographics>.*

## Overview

- ▶ CEP has previously surveyed grantees of Omidyar Network three times, with the most recent prior survey conducted in 2014. The intervening period has been one of substantial change resulting from a strategy shift in mid-2019, including a revamping of grants management and operations, and substantial staff turnover in the past two years.
- ▶ In general, ratings of Omidyar Network have remained consistent or improved from its last grantee survey in 2014. Notably, grantees now rate Omidyar Network significantly more positively for its:
  - Effect on public policy
  - Understanding of factors that affect grantees’ work
  - Grantees’ comfort approaching ON if a problem arises
  - Transparency
  - Staff responsiveness
  - Clarity of communications
- ▶ While there are no consistent, significant differences in ratings when segmented by ON theme, Cross-Cutting Programs grantee ratings trend lower compared to other themes on about half of the survey measures, particularly regarding relationships, communications, and understanding. Strategy grantee ratings trend lower on about a third of survey measures.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ratings described as “significantly” higher or lower reflect statistically significant differences at a P-value less than or equal to 0.1. Subgroup ratings described as “trending” higher or lower reflect average results that differ by 0.3 points or more on a 7-point scale, and do not refer to statistical testing.

## Building Understanding and Momentum in Grantees' Fields

- ▶ When it comes to questions related to ON's impact on grantees' fields, ratings are mixed. When specifically asked about ON's overall impact on their fields, grantee ratings remain in the bottom quarter of the dataset. However, ratings are more positive and trending upward on other key measures related to ON's approach to impact. Grantees also acknowledge that ON is "a relatively new player" in their fields and that the impact of the funded work has yet to be "finalized and undertaken."
- ▶ Importantly, grantees view ON as having a stronger than typical influence on advancing knowledge in their fields, and they provide significantly higher ratings than in 2014 – now in the top third of the dataset – for ON's effect on public policy.
  - Grantees value these efforts: when asked about the top three roles they believe Omidyar Network should play in order to maximize impact, a third of grantees selected, 'Commissioning, supporting, and sharing research that advances knowledge in the field.'
- ▶ Also trending upward from past survey results, Omidyar Network grantees recognize its solid understanding of their fields, placing ON in line with the typical funder in CEP's overall dataset.
- ▶ In keeping with positive perceptions of ON's growing influence, grantees also validate its approach. Among a series of statements about characteristics grantees might associate with Omidyar Network, grantees' strongest association is 'Takes risks and supports innovation.'
  - In a custom question, just over half of grantees (the largest proportion) believe ON should maintain this approach and focus efforts on 'Advocating for grantees by engaging other funders and providing initial funding that 'de-risks' opportunities for other funders.'
- ▶ These sentiments also came through clearly in written responses, with grantees highlighting Omidyar Network's efforts to "get past the usual suspects" and "test the boundaries of thinking" through "experimenting with different ways of embracing the changing realities of the sociopolitical world," which has resulted in "leading the field in a positive direction by setting priorities, highlighting the importance of the field, connecting organizations and hopefully bringing more funders into the space."
  - In particular, grantees describe the tangible effects of how ON's "priorities, grantmaking, and leadership" have "helped ignite and shape vigorous debate," "influenced government policies," and how they "open up space for strategically-guided innovation at the intersection of power-building and policy development."

### VALUABLE NON-MONETARY SUPPORT

- ▶ Nearly three-quarters of ON grantees – a much larger than typical proportion – report receiving non-monetary support during the grant period. Of these grantees, a larger than typical proportion indicate that it provided a major benefit to their organization or work.
  - Non-monetary support is often referenced in grantees' comments about ON's impact, where grantees highlight its ability to make "the whole far greater than the sum of its parts" by making connections among grantees, "bringing different organizations to the table," and "connecting the dots across a range of coverage areas."
- ▶ In an open-ended question about ways ON could be a better funder, nearly a fifth of grantees (the second largest theme in suggestions) mention the opportunity to continue to build on this valuable

non-monetary support. Grantees primarily ask for increased opportunities to collaborate with and learn from other grantees and assistance securing additional funding from other funders.



*“We see Omidyar’s leadership in building and connecting communities of funders and practitioners. Omidyar helps build and expand network of funders and connect those of us working in the field to thought leadership opportunities and convenings.”*

## Solid Organizational Impact with Opportunity to Lengthen Grants

- ▶ Omidyar Network grantees provide typical ratings for ON’s impact on their organizations.
  - Similarly, grantee ratings of ON’s understanding of their goals and strategy, its awareness of grantees’ organizational challenges, and its understanding of the context in which they work are in line with those at the typical funder in CEP’s dataset and ON’s cohort of peer funders.
- ▶ CEP’s broader research has shown that grant characteristics – specifically size, length, and whether the grant was restricted – are often strong predictors of perceptions of impact on grantee organizations. Omidyar Network grants are both larger and more often for unrestricted support than is typical – placing ON in the top 30 percent of CEP’s dataset for each.
- ▶ In contrast, ON’s average grant duration is short and has significantly decreased since 2014. ON is now in the bottom ten percent of CEP’s dataset and has the shortest grants among its cohort of peer funders.
- ▶ In their suggestions for improvement, 30 percent of grantee comments related to grantmaking characteristics – primarily requests for longer term grants (n=10) as well as larger (n=3) and more unrestricted grants (n=3). One grantee, for example, explains the importance of larger, longer grants, considering “the issues that [ON] want[s] to address are systemic and require many years of work.”



*“Omidyar Network provides generous grants.... This has enabled the approach to competition topics to be agile and adaptable, without being overly constrained by red tape, both in our organisation but also others.”*



*“I think the key thing overall is that our ability to rise to the occasion during a crisis actually depends on all the work that we do before the crisis occurs. It would be great if Omidyar could make some long-term commitments to infrastructure building, particularly at the state level.”*

## Improved Relationships with Opportunity to Sharpen Communications

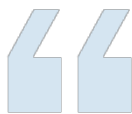
### IMPROVED RESPONSIVENESS AND APPROACHABILITY WITH FREQUENT, RECIPROCAL INTERACTIONS

- ▶ As expected, 2021 results show a high amount of staff turnover at Omidyar Network, with nearly a fifth of grantees reporting a change in their main contact in the six months prior to the survey. Combined with the larger than typical proportion of first-time grantees, data suggest many Omidyar Network relationships are relatively new.

- ▶ Importantly, compared to 2014, grantees provide significantly higher ratings for staff responsiveness and for their comfort approaching ON if a problem arises. Ratings for responsiveness are now typical and those for approachability are now higher than typical and are the highest in ON’s cohort of peers.
  - Ratings also place ON at the top of its custom cohort and in the top quarter of the overall dataset for its openness to grantees’ ideas about its strategy, the extent to which ON exhibits trust in grantees’ staff, and for the extent to which ON exhibits respectful interaction.
- ▶ As in years past, grantees report interacting with their main contact much more frequently than grantees at the typical funder. Grantees who report more frequent contact each rate ON significantly higher across key measures in the survey. Most grantees indicate that there is a roughly equal balance between them and ON about who initiates their interactions, though the small minority who report that ON initiates the balance of interactions do provide higher ratings.
- ▶ CEP analyses all responses by respondent demographic characteristics, and findings show that on several measures respondents identifying as women<sup>2</sup> rate significantly lower than those identifying as men. In particular, women provide lower ratings for ON’s approachability, openness to their ideas, candor about its perspectives on their work, commitment to combatting racism, and on 7 of 12 custom statements about their associations with ON’s approach, including, for example that ON “Recognizes and listens to expertise from grantees and the field with humility.”

#### ROOM TO BUILD ON IMPROVED COMMUNICATIONS

- ▶ Omidyar Network receives significantly more positive ratings than in 2014 for its overall transparency, now in line with the median funder in CEP’s dataset.
- ▶ In 2021, grantees also rate significantly higher than in 2014 for the clarity of ON’s communications about its goals and strategy, yet still lower than the typical funder.
  - Similarly, ratings are less positive than typical for the consistency of ON’s communications and for the extent to which grantees understand how their funded work fits into Omidyar Network’s broader efforts.
- ▶ In their open-ended suggestions for improvement, 16 percent of grantee suggestions (10 suggestions) requested more clarity from ON, most often about ON’s goals and strategy and how they fit into that vision. One grantee, for example, explains that a better understanding of ON’s “angle” and “recent journey” would provide helpful context for their work.



*“Throughout the process, I have found ON staff to be incredibly direct and transparent. They welcome honest, open conversations, and are eager to support their grantees in being successful. Communications and interactions were purposeful, productive, and efficient.”*

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<sup>2</sup> Survey respondents are asked to share their gender identities in a check-all-that-apply question. As part of its standard analysis, when the number of respondents allows, CEP also compares ratings from respondents who select multiple gender identities, “non-binary,” “gender non-conforming”, and “prefer to self-identify” to ratings from respondents who select “woman” only and who select “man” only. Fewer than 10 ON grantee respondents selected multiple gender identities, “non-binary,” “gender non-conforming,” and “prefer to self-identify,” and so they were not included in this analysis.



*“Communications about wider priorities and grant commitments would be helpful.”*

## Streamlined and More Helpful Processes

- ▶ Grantees’ experience with ON’s grant processes mark some of the largest changes since 2014.
- ▶ ON grant requirements are substantially more streamlined than in 2014; grantees now report spending just 24 hours at the median on funder requirements over the grant lifetime, compared to 130 hours in 2014.
- ▶ Relatedly, despite a substantial drop in ON’s median grant size, Omidyar Network grantees continue to receive a higher than typical monetary return for every hour they spend on ON processes, placing ON in the top 20 percent of the dataset.
- ▶ In addition to this streamlining, processes are also more timely and rapid; seventy percent of grantees (compared to only 39 percent in 2014) report waiting less than 3 months between proposal submission and clear commitment of funding.
- ▶ Furthermore, grantee experiences with the selection process have improved.
  - Ratings for the helpfulness of ON’s selection process are trending up compared to 2014 and are now more positive than typical.
  - Grantees also report experiencing significantly less pressure to modify their organization’s priorities than in 2014, providing ratings that move ON from one of the highest-pressure funders to the bottom quarter of lowest-pressure funders.
- ▶ Considering the large proportion of first-time grants (65 percent), a larger than typical proportion of grantees indicate that they have not participated in reporting nor evaluation processes. The 60 percent of grantees who did go through the ON reporting process provide ratings that are in line with or higher than typical for its straightforwardness, relevance, and helpfulness.
  - In particular, ratings for the adaptability of ON’s reporting process are exceptionally strong, placing ON in the top five percent of the overall dataset and at the very top of its peer cohort.



*“ON has been very flexible with us and this has been incredibly helpful. They were very open to different proposal and report formats, so no pressure to fill out detailed forms with limited word counts (so refreshing!).”*



*“Omidyar is best in class in philanthropy. Its processes optimize the culture of trust that philanthropy should have with its grantees. The process of getting the grant really honored the precious time of our staff...and the reporting processes are straight forward and meld well with the internal tracking we are already doing within our organization.”*

## Recommendations

- ▶ Recognizing ON's relatively new strategies for impact in grantees' fields, consider how ON's specific decisions and values have already contributed to strong advancement of knowledge and effect on public policy, and ensure the most important factors are maintained moving forward.
- ▶ Now that Omidyar Network's strategies have been solidified, ensure that full consideration is given to providing multiyear grants where possible and appropriate to the goals of the funded work.
- ▶ Acknowledging staff turnover and newer grantee relationships, explore approaches to improve communications.
  - To improve the consistency of communications, develop practices to ensure that content is well-aligned across different venues - across staff, across teams, and across written materials.
  - To improve grantees' understanding of ON's goals and strategy, ensure staff are sharing up-to-date strategies with grantees, and seek opportunities to initiate discussions with grantees about how their funded work fits into ON's broader efforts.
- ▶ Taking into consideration measures on which women provided lower ratings, reflect on opportunities to demonstrate approachability and candor, and to emphasize a culture of openness and listening to grantees.
- ▶ Maintain and build on the growing strengths of ON's selection and reporting processes, including aspects that enable these processes to be timely, streamlined, low-pressure, and adaptable to grantee circumstances.

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