

**The Stewardship Council's  
Survey of Grant Applicants**

**Key Findings and Recommendations**

**December 2007**

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## Introduction

In Fall of 2007, The Stewardship Council engaged Blueprint Research & Design, Inc. to conduct a survey of its grant applicants over the past two years (2006-2007). The Council received 603 applications over the past two years and awarded 95 grants. The Stewardship Council was interested in better understanding the quality of its relationship with applicants as well as making improvements to its programs and operations.

The survey was designed to gather feedback about the application process as well as provide the Stewardship Council with more information about their applicant pool. Specifically, the survey asked about:

- Satisfaction with the Stewardship Council's purpose, application process (including the online submission), and responsiveness
- The activities in which the applicants engage to be culturally relevant to the populations they serve
- The processes that applicants use to collect data on their youth participants.

## Method

The Stewardship Council administered an online survey from late October to early November 2007. All organizations who had applied for one or more grants from the Stewardship Council were invited to participate. Of the 477 grant applicants invited, 142 responded to the survey for a response rate of 30%, which is typical for this kind of survey. Organizations which filed multiple applications with the Stewardship Council over the past two years were asked to participate in the survey only once.

The data provide meaningful context as the Stewardship Council learns from its first two years of grantmaking. The Council should keep in mind, however, that the data reflect those grant applicants who responded to the survey, not all of the Stewardship Council's grant applicants. It is possible those with strong views—either favorable or not—were more likely to complete the survey. There may be something in common about those applicants that did not respond that the survey would not have captured.

## Profile of Survey Respondents

Among those grant applicants who participated in the survey, one-third (34%) reported having received one or more grants from the Stewardship Council. Two-thirds (66%) had not received any grants.

The annual organizational budget sizes respondents reported were varied:

- Over one-quarter reported budgets of \$150,000 or less
- 15% reported budgets between \$150,001 and \$500,000
- 19% reported budgets between \$500,001 to \$1,000,000
- 40% reported budgets of \$1,000,000 or more

Respondents were scattered throughout the Stewardship Council’s service area:

- Roughly 43% were located in San Francisco and the Bay Area.
- Another 15% were from the northern Central Valley.
- Just over 10% were based in each of Sacramento and the South Coast.

## Key Findings

### On the Right Track

Grant applicants overwhelmingly agree—90%—that the Stewardship Council is on the right track with its grantmaking strategy. Ninety-two percent indicated that they believe the Council is addressing an important need in their community.






The Stewardship Council is on the right track to connecting underserved youth with the outdoors.

### Council’s Outreach is Effective

The Stewardship Council has devoted significant resources to its outreach to potential applicants, and survey findings indicate that this attention has paid off. One applicant described the Council’s success in outreach as the reason the grantmaking is as competitive as it is – approximately six applications for every grant made. The survey found that the most common way applicants learned of the Council was through communications from the Stewardship Council itself. Fifty-nine percent of the 142 respondents originally learned about the Council through outreach meetings (21%), electronic communications (23%) or a physical mailing (16%). Thirty-five percent reported learning about the Council through a colleague in the environmental/outdoor education field. Seven respondents (5%) found the Council through the Foundation Center.


### High Ratings on Responsiveness

A strong majority of applicants agree that the Council is clear in communicating its grant program guidelines and agree that the Council was responsive to their questions and requests (92% and 90% respectively). Ninety-four percent (94%) felt comfortable approaching the Council if they had a problem.

-  The Stewardship Council was clear in communicating its grant program guidelines.
-  The Stewardship Council was responsive to my questions and requests.
-  My organization was comfortable approaching the Stewardship Council staff if we had a problem.

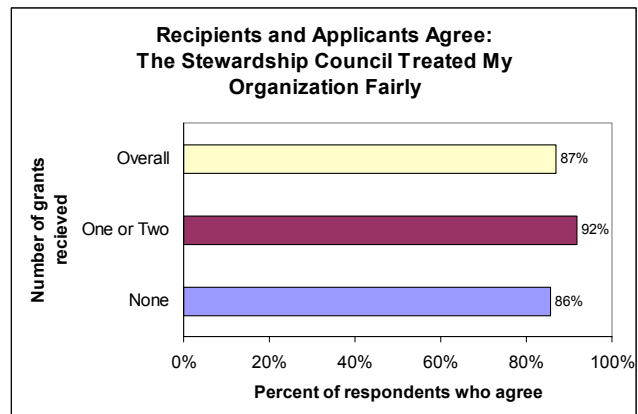
### More Communication Desired

Although high numbers of applicants believe that the Council communicates well, a smaller majority agree that the Council kept their organization informed of the progress of their grant request—78%. Although Council’s outreach and communication is on the whole positive, this less effusive response to the Council is in line with the unusually high number of comments made regarding unsuccessful attempts to contact Council staff, via both email and phone. Many unsuccessful applicants wanted feedback on their proposals and were frustrated that they could not get this. Due to the high number of applications received, the Council is not in a position to confer with each applicant about their proposal. However, steps to be more transparent about the decision-making process could help remedy some frustration.

-  The Stewardship Council kept my organization informed of the progress of our grant request.

### Applicants Feel Process is Fair

Survey findings indicate that the grantee selection process works well. Eighty two percent (82%) of all respondents were satisfied with the application process, and 87% agree that the Council treated their organization fairly. Even 86% of those that were denied grants believed that they were treated fairly (while 92% of those receiving grants believed so). It is also worth pointing out (although not surprising) that those applicants who were denied funding were less agreeable in general about the Council’s responsiveness and communications than those that received grants.



### Simple Application Process, but Dissatisfaction with Cybergrants

Survey respondents reported many glitches and frustrations with the online application process such as losing data, problems uploading documents, inability to save input, or word limitations (some reported improvements from their first time applying however). Interestingly, applicants agreed that the process was easy to navigate and was simple (87% and 85% respectively), but comments about the glitches and limitations pervaded nonetheless.



In general, applying to the Stewardship Council was simple

A large majority (81%) also agreed that the process was about the same or just as simple as applying to other foundations.

### Cultural Relevance is a Priority for Many Applicants

The Council has been grappling with what it should expect of its grantees and their cultural relevance to the populations they serve and work with. The survey findings indicate that the Council's expectations about what organizations can do about cultural relevancy are realistic and at the same time indicate the Council has an opportunity to help organizations become more culturally relevant. Of the activities related to increasing cultural relevancy (see table below), at least half of the respondents are currently undertaking most of the practices with one exception: reflective board composition. Other less widely implemented practices include: reflective staff composition, staff diversity training, and community listening sessions (all currently addressed by less than 60% of respondents). For most practices, approximately half of those that are not currently implementing them intend to do so in the upcoming year. For each practice, an average of about 20% of respondents reported that they are not currently undertaking the specific measures nor have plans to do so. Overall, it appears that the Council is on the right track in making cultural relevance a priority.

**Which of the following statements describes your organization?**

	This statement fits our organization's <u>current practice</u> .	This statement describes our organization's <u>intent</u> in the following year.	Neither
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Our staffing composition reflects the racial/ethnic characteristics of the youth we serve.	57%	21%	23%
Our staffing composition reflects the socioeconomic characteristics of the youth we serve.	57%	17%	26%
Our program curriculum content is specific to the different cultures we serve.	68%	16%	16%
Our staff is multi lingual.	67%	18%	15%
Some of our staff are trained to address cultural differences among youth.	77%	14%	10%
Some of our staff are trained to address cultural differences between staff and youth.	65%	21%	14%
We hold “listening sessions” with our constituents	59%	21%	21%
We hold staff diversity trainings or support staff in participating in diversity training hosted by other organizations.	58%	19%	23%
Our board composition is reflective of the population we serve.	47%	32%	21%
Our organization’s written policies state a commitment to cultural relevance.	67%	11%	23%
We reach out to multiple cultural venues when we post job announcements.	75%	5%	20%

Budget size does not seem to determine the level of activities undertaken to become more culturally relevant. Organizations with budget sizes between \$500,000 to \$1 million per year were more likely to report engaging in the activities to become more culturally relevant than those with budgets of more than \$1 million, and those with budgets below \$500,000. The sample’s smallest organizations – those with annual budgets under \$150,000, were least likely to be engaging in the practices.

**Challenges for Gathering Program Data**

The Council has also been grappling with obtaining information from its grantees on the time spent with the youth they serve. Survey findings indicate that the Council might continue to experience challenges with getting adequate data. The survey revealed that many programs do not collect basic demographic data about their youth or the number of sessions and hours that each youth participated – this was true for all organization sizes, though those with budgets between \$150,000 and \$500,000 were somewhat more likely to collect these data. These survey findings may suggest unrealistic expectations about gathering evaluative data and a burden on grantees in supplying these data. The Council could consider providing technical assistance to its grantees on collecting basic data on its participants.

## Recommendations

### Suggested Changes to Grantmaking Process

- Provide applicants with more frequent updates on the status of the review process.
- Post a variety of details about previous year grant applications to the Council’s website.  
For example:
  - The number of applications received and number of grants made
  - The total grant dollars requested and total grant dollars available
- Provide various links on the Council’s website:
  - Best practices with respect to cultural relevancy
  - How to access demographic information such as free/reduced school lunch and census data
- To increase the Council’s transparency, post the grantmaking decision criteria.
- Consider other online application options. In the meantime, provide a “tip sheet” for completing the application in Cybergrants, addressing commonly named problems.

### Suggested Changes to Non Grantmaking Activities

- Hold various technical assistance (TA) workshops with grantees and public workshops on the following topics:
  - Becoming more culturally relevant – particularly board and staff diversity development. The Council should share its own process for trying to be culturally relevant.
  - Sessions for collecting evaluative program demographic and intensity data.
- During its outreach sessions, the Council should clarify expectations about personalized feedback on applications.



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