



The Counselling
Foundation of Canada

Funding Recipient Feedback Report

January 2024



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Introduction

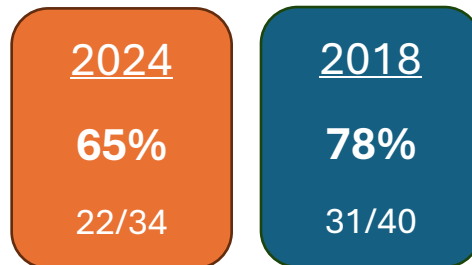
In January 2024, The Counselling Foundation of Canada conducted a survey of its recent funding recipients to gather feedback on its processes and identify areas for improvement. As a Foundation, we are committed to learning how we can best provide support to the communities we serve. We know achieving our mission is not something we can do alone so it is important for us to know whether our best intentions translate into being an effective and supportive grantmaker in the eyes of our funding recipients.

This is the second time the Foundation has done a survey of its funding recipients. In 2018, The Foundation, in collaboration with the Lawson Foundation and Laidlaw Foundation, did a similar survey to learn from each other's experiences and identify best practices. That survey was conducted by an external third party and we published the results on our [website](#). At that time, the results were both an affirmation of some of the things we thought we did well as well as an opportunity to hear about some gaps and learn about possible new ways of working.

In 2018, the survey helped feed into a strategic planning process for the Foundation. Likewise, in 2024, we have begun a strategic planning process and these results will help us to plan for the future.

In this report, we share the feedback our funding recipients provided to us as well as benchmark them to our 2018 results where applicable (we asked some new questions in 2024).

Response Rate



It should be noted that the results found in this report are from a subset of our funding recipients as reflected in the response rate above. As such, we know there may be things we're missing. In addition, while we include our 2018 results and denote the change compared to our 2024 results with either a ↓ or ↑ symbol, in many cases the results are similar, which makes it difficult to know whether our actions were the cause of a change. Regardless, the overall direction of the results combined with the qualitative comments leave us feeling reassured that we asked the right questions and that respondents were able to share their thoughts with us (although we are conscious that we did not use an external partner to do the survey this time around, which may have left some contacts to feel some unease at sharing their feedback).

In general, we were pleased to see that most of our funding recipients valued our approach to grantmaking and the support we provide. Nonetheless, there are always areas for improvement and respondents noted a few places where we could be more intentional with our work. What follows is

a summation of the high-level takeaways for us at The Foundation as well as the results from the survey.

What we learned

Respondents want us to continue to take a relationship-driven approach to grantmaking that is grounded in trust and open communication.

The results tell us that we are mostly moving in the right direction when it comes to our intention to be open and transparent about our practices, respectful of funding recipient's time, and available to chat and learn.

Many respondents noted that we do particularly well when it comes to our efforts to communicate, listen, and engage with them in a way that minimizes the power dynamics inherent in any funding relationship.

Areas for improvement

Some respondents noted that there is more we could learn and understand about their work and what is going on in their communities through more intentional outreach. While we do have an annual check-in, usually tied to a reporting timeline, and occasionally may chat informally at other times throughout the year, we can be more intentional with our approach. This includes:

- Better utilizing our [newsletter](#) to communicate Foundation news as well as other information from our network.
- Prioritizing more in-person site visits or meetings (when convenient for the funding recipient) to help build relationships and get a better understanding of the work on the ground.
- Communicating out more regularly our strategy and goals so those that share our interests can more easily see how they might align as well as offer feedback.

Our support has been helpful in many ways, which speaks to a need to continue to offer flexible funding. At the same time, there continue to be areas where the Foundation could offer additional support.

The Foundation, given its limited resources, has emphasized supporting new initiatives that address challenges either in a manner that has never been done before (i.e., a new idea), builds upon existing approaches in an original way (i.e., a new method), or deals with chronically under-served populations. Examples of innovative approaches include:

- Using traditional teachings to make a difference today;
- Applying a new theory or project model to address an existing problem; or
- Relying on emerging technology as part of an intervention model.

At the same time, we've noticed a need for our funding to go beyond narrowly defined projects and programs to also include some capacity support. Since 2018, this has been something we've internally strived to encourage and support with our funding recipients.

Areas for improvement

Like in 2018, respondents want us to do more to help make introductions to other funders. One way in which we've tried to support making connections is through our website where we've compiled a [list of funders](#) who operate in a similar space to us. Our reporting templates also include a question that asks funding recipients to let us know if we can help make an introduction to anyone in our network that they think we might know. However, we can do more to stay attuned to what is happening among our peers and more proactively seek to make connections.

Another way we can further support our funding recipients and help to make connections is through CERIC's annual [Cannexus](#) conference, which the Foundation supports. While many of our funding recipients have previously attended or presented their work at Cannexus, many others have not whether due to timing, financial constraints, or for other reasons. As this is a priority event for the Foundation, we can do more to make it easier (both in terms of communication about submission and registration deadlines as well as offering financial support) for our funding recipients to consider attending or presenting in the future.

Changes since 2018

In the 2018 report (p21), respondents noted a few general suggestions for improvement some of which show up again in the 2024 data (e.g., "having more updates from the foundation"). However, there were two points raised where the Foundation has made some notable shifts which do not show up in the 2024 data but are worth speaking about. These include:

- "Considering partnering with other funders to larger collaborative grants"

Since 2018, the Foundation has intentionally done more work with and through other funders. For instance, the Foundation is a founding member of the [Toronto Workforce Funder Collaborative](#), which aims to strengthen workforce development across the Greater Toronto Area. The Foundation also played a supporting role in the establishment of (and continues to provide financial support) the [Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund](#), which emerged out of the pandemic and is guided by Indigenous Peoples. The Foundation was also an early supporter of the [Annauma Community Foundation](#), the first community foundation in Nunavut. Going forward, we will continue to be open to new ways of working with others to provide support.

- "Consider impact investing"

The Foundation has provided a loan guarantee for several years to [Windmill Microlending](#), which provides affordable loans to skilled newcomers, and, in 2021, made its first impact investment via a social impact bond to support the YMCAs of Quebec's [Alternative Suspension program](#), which helps students to reintegrate into school. The Foundation has now developed a formal investment policy for impact investing and will begin to use its assets to make further impact investments in the coming years.

Survey results

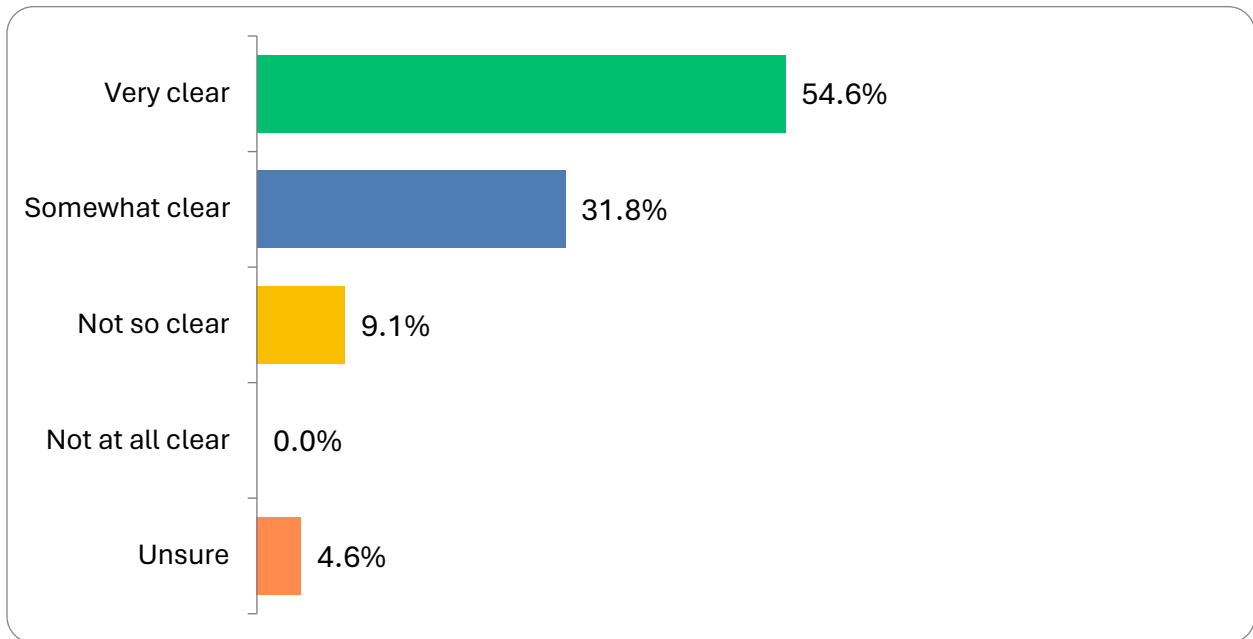
Foundation's strategy and goals

The Counselling Foundation of Canada is a private family foundation based in Toronto, ON (the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, Petun, Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Mississauga Anishinaabe of New Credit) that champions life-long learning and career development for people in Canada. We provide funding to support initiatives in Canada from coast to coast to coast that help young people with their career development.

Our Mission

The Counselling Foundation of Canada champions life-long learning and career development that empowers people in Canada to develop their skills and talents.

Based on what you know about the Foundation, how clear are the Foundation's strategy and goals?



2024 avg. score: 4.32/5 ↓

2018 avg. score: 4.85/5

Feedback

- “It was not clear to me at the outset that counselling primarily referred to educational counselling. I suppose that might be a result of my limited view of counselling from the past.”
- “We appreciate the way the Foundation has explicitly linked its overall goals (promoting career development and life-long learning) with equity, inclusivity, and reconciliation as necessary components of achieving those goals.”

- “The Foundation has some of the clearest goals and calls to action I have seen across many other initiatives. There is clearly a lot of intention and care that has been put into the work being done and it is hugely appreciated.”
- “The strategic statement seems to deviate from the goals - or the goals need to align better the strategy/statement.”
- “Make it easily available to your stakeholders.”
- “CFC's goals have a Pan Canadian focus and alignment with the CERIC conference unifying a Canadian voice for education and research in career development.”
- “I appreciate the open transparency and ease of access of finding the Foundation's strategy and goals.”
- “The foundation's name definitely throws people off. Think a somewhat tighter scope of interests, of more clearly publicly defined would help.”
- “Supporting Indigenous Charitable and Philanthropic Sectors.”
- “The Foundation's specific strategy re: supporting charitable organizations.”
- “I think the Foundation's goals are reasonably clear; however, career development can be a very broad objective and I wonder about the extent to which this can be clarified or objectives prioritized?”
- “The strategy and goals of the Foundation seem to fill a niche within Canada, as there are no other foundations (that I am personally aware of) focusing solely on supporting youth with career development.”
- “The resources on your website have become a lot more useful recently. Thank you.”
- “The Foundation's goals are abundantly clear - building career capacity!”

The Foundation’s understanding of funding recipients

How well do you think the Foundation wants to understand the following:



Strategy & goals
 2024 avg. score: 4.27/5 ↑
 2018 avg. score: 4.08/5

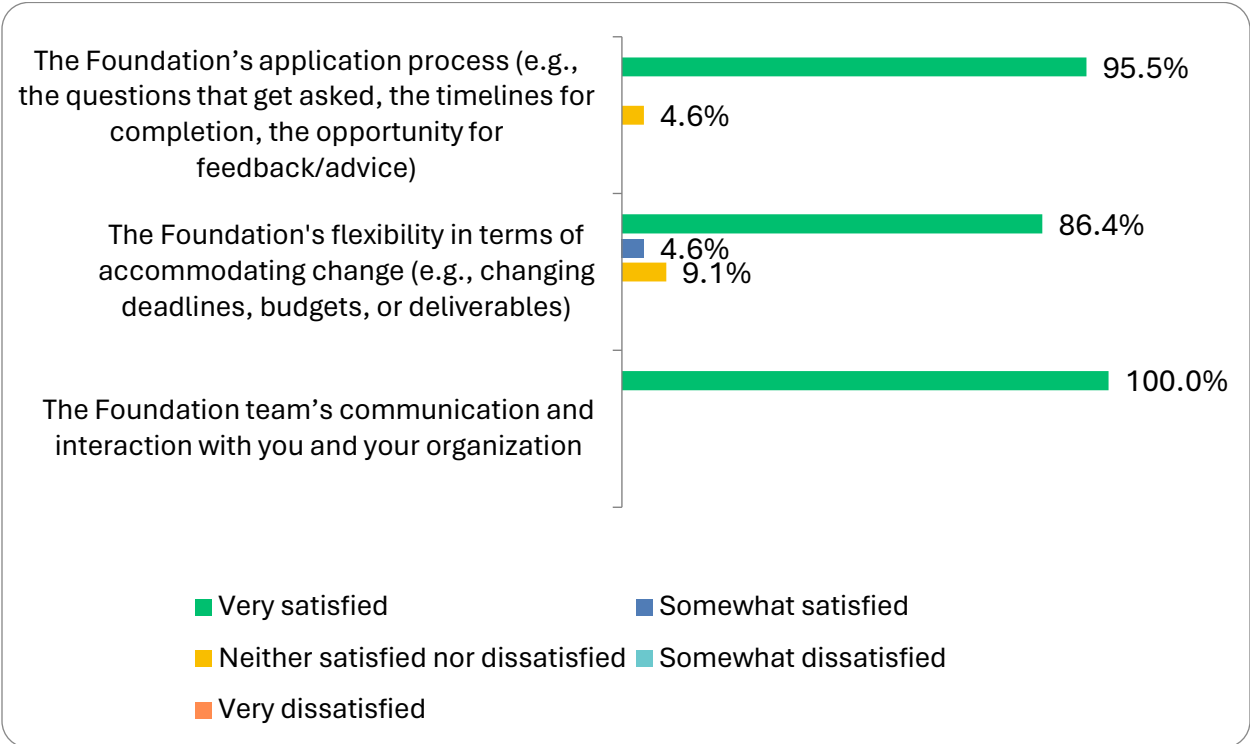
Internal challenges
 2024 avg. score: 4.22/5 ↑
 2018 avg. score: 3.6/5

Complex realities & context
 2024 avg. score: 4.27/5 ↑
 2018 avg. score: 3.99/5

Your work
 2024 avg. score: 4.36/5 ↑
 2018 avg. score: 4.23/5

Processes

How satisfied are you with the following:



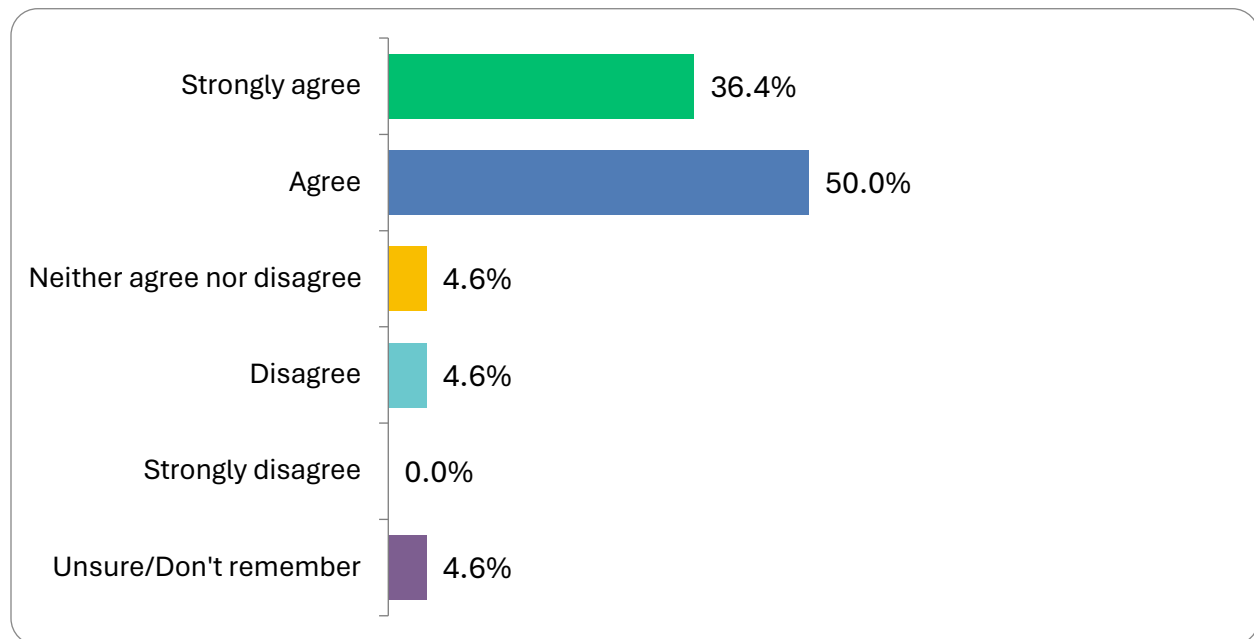
Application process
 2024: 4.91/5

Flexibility
 2024: 4.77/5 ↓
 2018: 4.85/5

Communication
 2024: 5/5 ↑
 2018: 4.7/5

Grant application

The amount of time it took for me to complete the grant application was reasonable.



Feedback

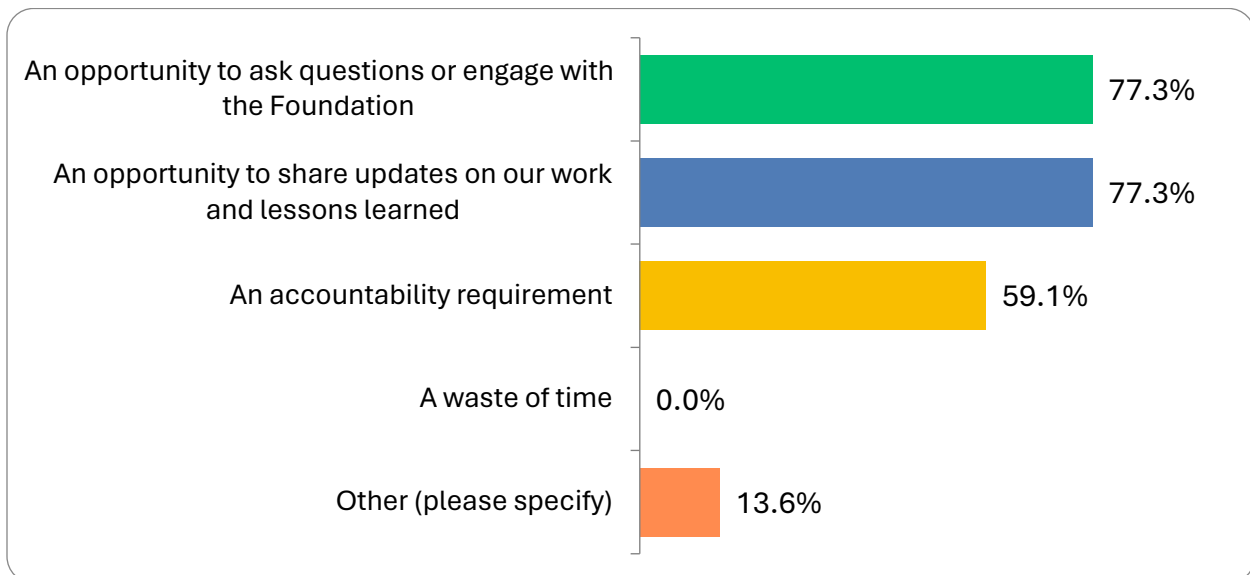
- "I appreciated the individualized approach, both to me as a person leading and in relation to the uniqueness of our organization."
- "Since the CFC supports a very broad range of initiatives and activities, the application and reporting formats also have to be very general. Given the very specific nature of our project, sometimes we get a bit bogged down in how much detail to communicate about the 'technical' side of it."
- "It was easy to communicate because our programs help young people explore the types of careers that they might not otherwise be aware of, through inspiring career mentors that share their personal and educational journeys."
- "The Foundation's priorities are very clearly mapped out on its website, and our organization was able to benefit from connecting with staff during the application process to further discuss alignments and get clarity where needed."
- "No, the process is always clear, the staff are very knowledgeable and we are clearly aligned."
- "From what I understand, the board of the Foundation found it difficult to understand the 'systems change' focus of our application. It was great communicating with staff about our work but there seemed to be a bit of a disconnect between the staff's knowledge of systems change and the importance of it and the board's understanding."
- "The CFC team was very accessible in responding to questions and need for clarification on the submission process and provided structured guidance in supporting the process."
- "I found the foundation and staff members were very keen to uphold their commitment to the Declaration of Action and Indigenous community applicants."
- "Yes, it was very easy to set up a meeting and chat with someone."
- "The opportunity to reach out to staff to introduce our program and have a follow-up conversation before submitting the LOI was extremely helpful and valued by our program"

leads. It provided the opportunity to better understand the Foundation’s goals and align those initiatives within the program that could mutually benefit with this partnership.”

- “No. Building Indigenous career capacity was an ‘easy sell.’”
- “Not sure that is fixable - we are an unusual organization, not necessarily obviously aligned with the Foundations goals, but I was grateful for all the work the team did to listen and communicate — a very strong level of personal engagement and relationship.”
- “The staff and leadership understood we were in a leadership transition but needed support to continue to implement our capitalization strategy.”
- “The Foundation simplifies things exceptionally well. Communication is clear and they feel like a substantive partner in this initiative.”
- “We were privileged to receive multi-year funding. I'm not sure that I approached our alignment with Foundation's goals in the way that I would with other funders. I assumed it would.”

Reporting

How do you view our reporting process? Select all that apply.



Other (please specify)

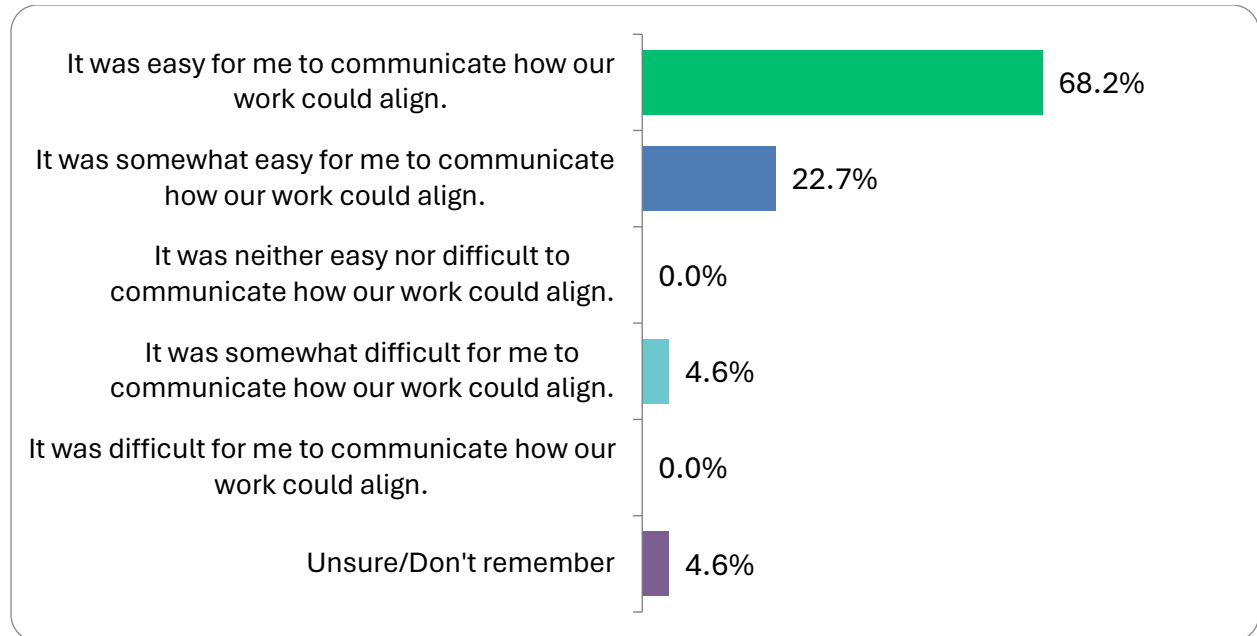
- An opportunity to deepen our relationship.
- We appreciated the timely feedback from CFC on reports was appreciated.
- A little heavy, but not unreasonable.

2018

- 87.1% - An opportunity to share updates on the program/project
- 87.1% - An accountability requirement
- 64.5% - An opportunity to ask questions or engage with the Foundation
- 0% - A waste of time

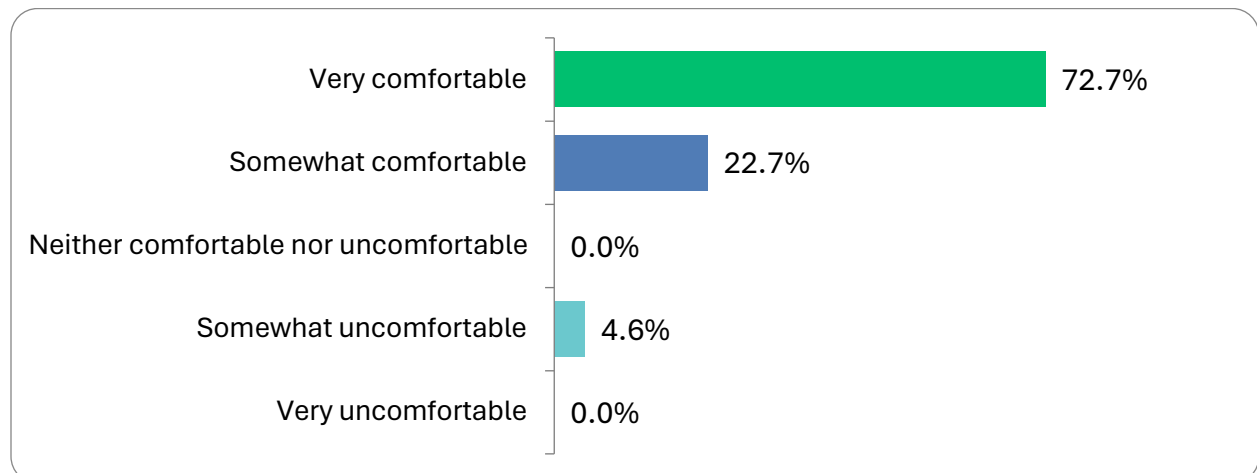
Communications

How easy was it for you to communicate how your organization's work aligned with the Foundation's funding priorities?



Sharing challenges

How comfortable are you sharing with the Foundation whether a challenge has arisen or whether something has not worked as planned?



2024 avg. score: 4.63/5 ↓

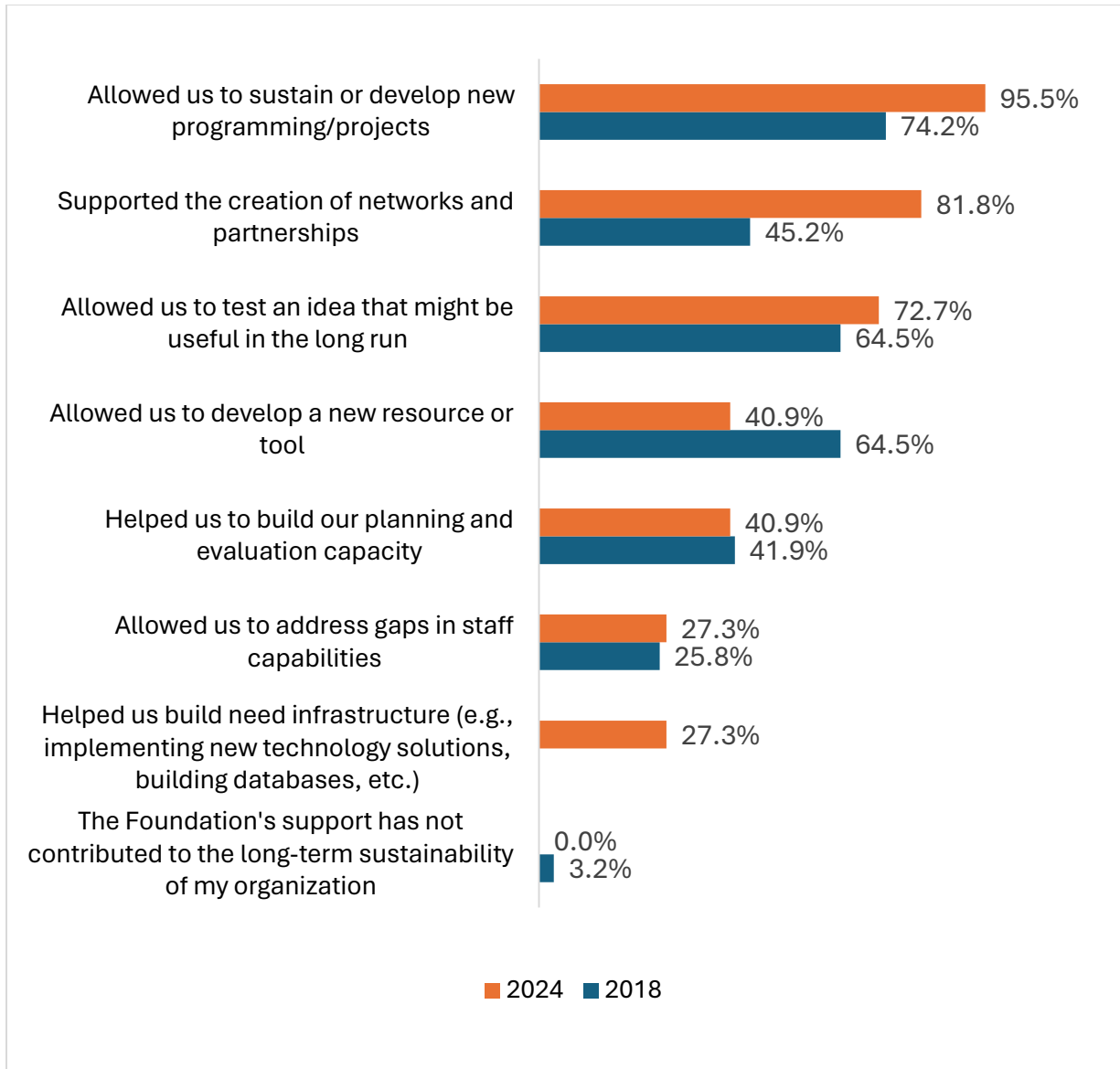
2018 avg. score: 4.71/5

Feedback

- “It’s vulnerable and feels like a risk to share challenges, no matter how awesome the organization and the relationship. It’s good to keep that in mind on both sides. Taking a humble approach has helped us, I think. And your willingness to listen deeply, ask some gentle questions, and accept the humanity of it means it felt less risky and there was more trust built.”
- “The nature of our project is such that plans and mid-range goals have sometimes had to change over the course of the project. The CFC has been extremely understanding and flexible regarding these challenges and we have always felt comfortable discussing them with the CFC.”
- “When the pandemic hit, and we had to adapt our programs to virtual, we were very comfortable sharing the challenge and what are adaptations were.”
- “[Staff] are so open and willing to connect to have real conversations about challenges is something I highly value. There are not a lot of funding relationships that create the space for true, open, and authentic dialogue without feeling there might be repercussions.”
- “Throughout the time we’ve been connected with the Foundation, we have always felt that open communication is not just accepted but also appreciated. Conversations with [staff] have shown that they both approach this work in a way that is grounded and realistic, focusing on forward momentum and creative problem solving when challenges arise and pivots are required.”
- “Just that they understood that we were going through a leadership transition and got a sense they believed we would make that transition.”
- “There is always a power dynamic between funders and those receiving funding (worry that challenges will negatively impact funding). But the Foundation has been very open and interested in our successes and challenges.”
- “Organizations are more likely to share their challenges when there is a trust-based relationship in place, and they know that the funder will look for ways to support rather than to punish. I think it is important for philanthropic organizations to create space for grantees to share their challenges. With a culture of openness, we can learn and grow from our collective challenges and successes.”
- “The Foundation has been willing to support and fund exploratory ideas and as a result, challenges and assumptions will evolve and change. The security of being able to share and suggest alternatives is what makes for true systems change and a supportive, curious funder is a key ingredient. In our experience the Counselling Foundation has been that funder.”
- “Challenges lead to better outcomes. Communicating and learning from process issues always provide opportunities to strengthen an approach or outcome.”
- “We are always grateful for the open and frank dialogue we can have with Foundation staff.”
- “I do not feel any reticence on that front. Failed or poorly executed or unsatisfying or partially successful initiatives are always major learning opportunities that I do not feel shy about disclosing or discussing.”
- “Foundation is responsive and available.”
- “Organizations are more likely to share their challenges when there is a trust-based relationship in place, and they know that the funder will look for ways to support rather than to punish. I think it is important for philanthropic organizations to create space for grantees to share their challenges. With a culture of openness, we can learn and grow from our collective challenges and successes.”

Understanding our impact

In what ways, if any, has the Foundation's support helped the long-term sustainability of your organization? Select all that apply.



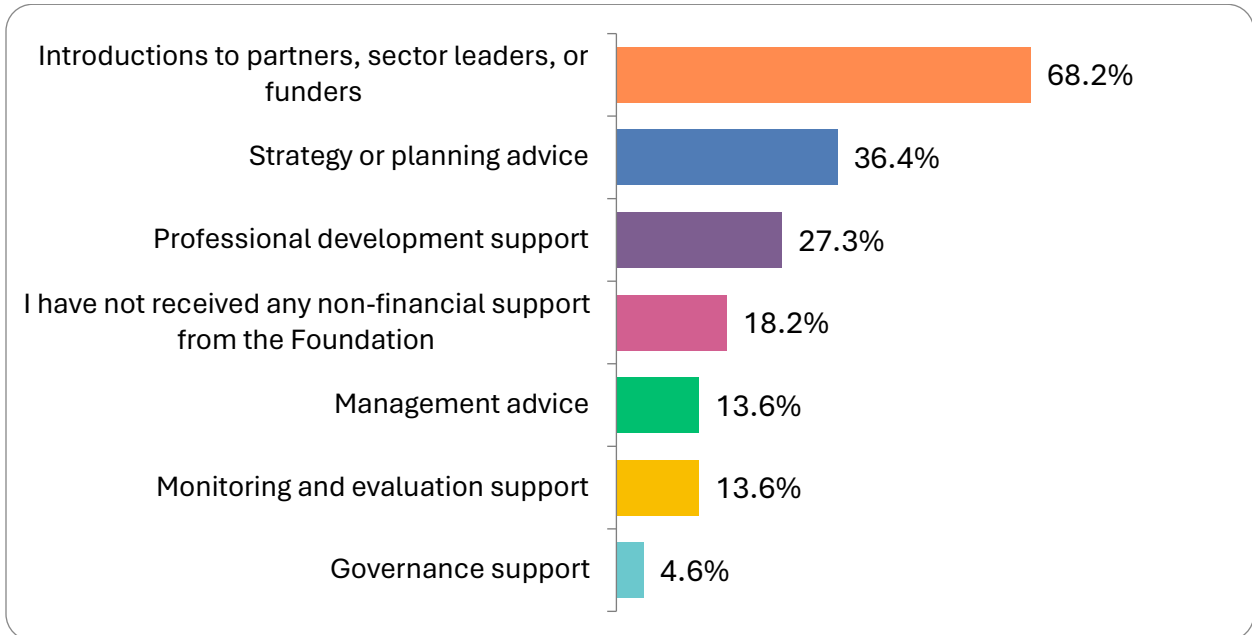
Feedback

- “The support was very useful in leveraging other supporters. The credibility and legitimacy that your support brought to us was significant, and helped us a lot in our startup work. Also, the trust you had in us allowed us to showcase that to others, so you became a model for them, and a model supporter of ours. This trust-based modelling also was welcome in showing us what can be possible with our own work in supporting other organizations in a similar vein.”
- “The CFC has consistently supported our organization for a number of years. Knowing we can rely on that support has made a big difference in being able to plan boldly and has

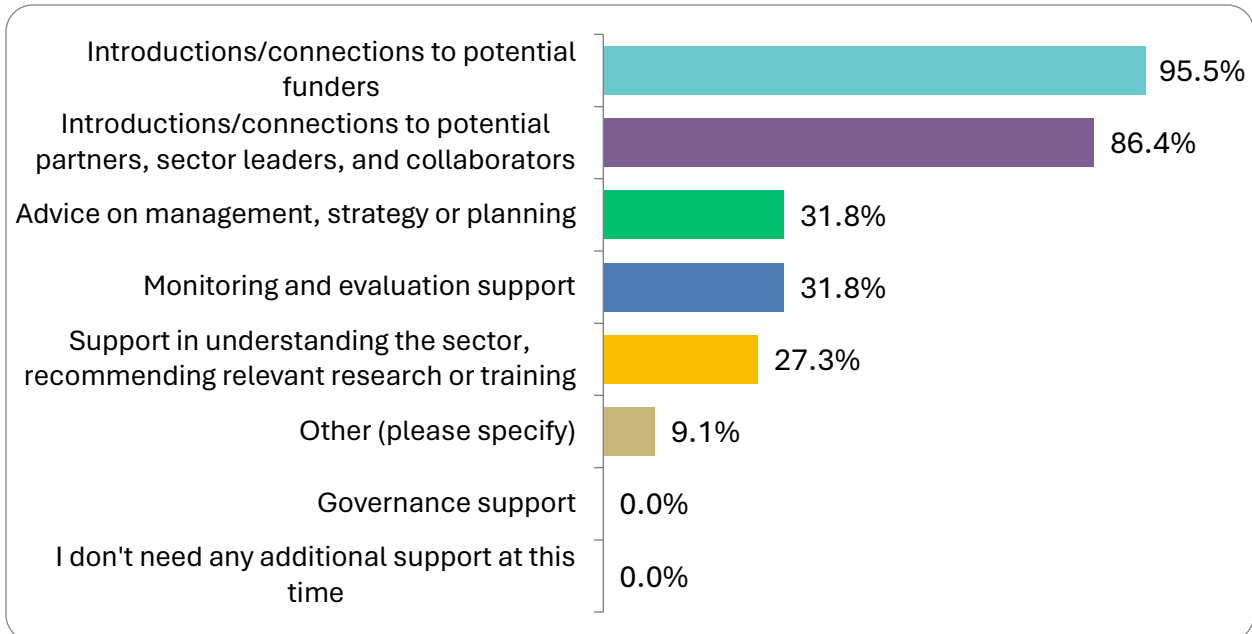
helped move a very ambitious project forward more smoothly than we might have expected.”

- “We were looking to increase our reach into schools, and the virtual delivery model worked very well in reaching thousands of youth (including the underserved areas).”
- “The Foundation’s support has helped us to develop and maintain two core wrap-around activities that are crucial to the programming that we offer (Wellness and Coaching and Entrepreneurship Design). The financial support enabled us to hire the skilled professionals who were needed, and the advice from the Foundation allowed us to position them to engage with their research community through conferences (e.g., Cannexus conference) to share the results of the wrap-around activities with the broader community.”
- “The application is very repetitive and unnecessary long. The reporting could be more personal, maybe a sharing circle instead of a paper report?”
- “The partners in the 4 College Alliance benefited from the support of the CFC in forging a community of practice bringing forward exemplary programming in service to marginalized communities.”
- “The Foundation's support for general operating expenses is critically important!”
- “Having the ability to hire staff that can increase our organization's ability to deliver its programming by exploring a variety of funding sources as been extremely helpful.”
- “The Foundation understood our story on how we started.”
- “We are always grateful that the Foundation is willing to take risks and be the first out of the gate to support new ideas / initiatives.”
- “It has really helped fill a critical gap in our work. We are curious to see how the 2-year project turns out - at the 1/2 way point it is very promising, but needs a good push.”
- “Multi-year grants allow us to plan into the future and financial stability, these are required to be able to achieve longer-term goals beyond an annual time horizon.”
- “The Foundation’s impact is truly immeasurable. You've significantly contributed to our capacity--you've helped us build a new strategic plan that is risky and bold. You've also helped us build our DEI capacities through the development of our JAIDE plan. You're helping us to build new partnerships and networks--this is significant.”
- “The trust-based approach the Foundation has taken to support our organization is helpful in enabling us to achieve our organizational goals.”
- “The Foundation was an original founder of our organization and was critical to enabling us to develop proof of concept, to grow and to test new approaches. Without the Counselling Foundation of Canada's willingness to make a risky, long-term investment we would not be as impactful as we are today.”
- “Our project is an investment in the long-term decolonization of BC's marine scientists. It was deeply appreciated that the Foundation could see the long-term benefits as we do.”
- “Without the investment from the Foundation we would have been unable to research, develop, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of our employment and career development work with current and former youth in care and Indigenous youth. Based on the success of our projects we have been able to expand our work and engage several new funders. I can say with complete confidence that our program expansion and key developmental insights would not have been possible without our partnership and investments from the Counselling Foundation of Canada.”
- “Just very happy to receive support, and that everyone we've communicated with at the Foundation has been very open and welcoming.”

What, if any, non-financial support have you received from the Foundation that was particularly useful? Select all that apply.



What kind of non-financial support would be most helpful to you? Select up to three.

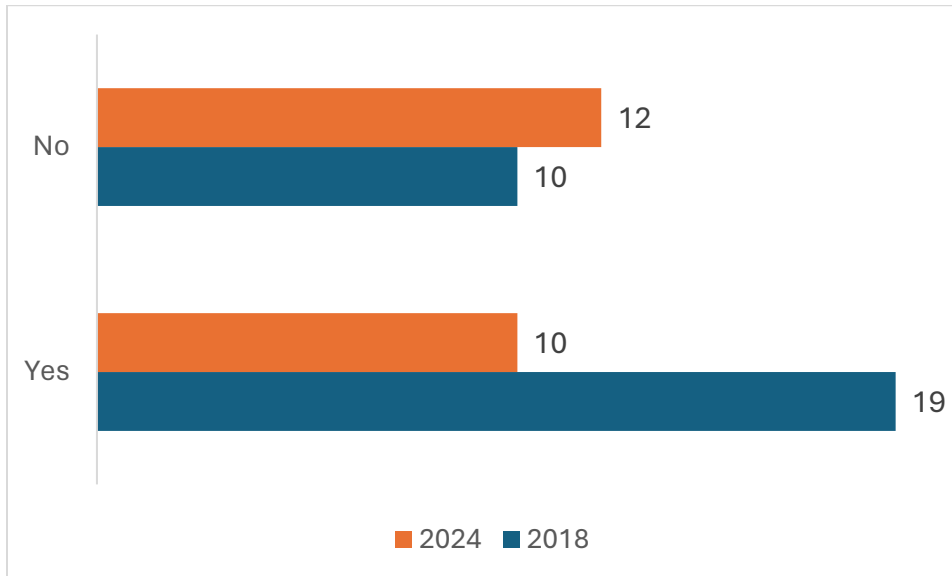


Other (please specify)

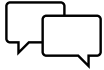

- “Broad conversations about what the foundation is hearing and seeing across the sector.”
- “Two votes for Introductions/connections to potential funders.”



Cannexus

Have you previously attended Cannexus, Canada's bilingual National Career Development Conference run by CERIC?



What would make you more likely to consider attending in the future?

 <p>More awareness and having earlier communication</p>	<p>"We sadly missed the advertising around this year's convention dates and were unable to attend. We have since signed on for their updates so we won't miss out in the future, but it would be fantastic to receive an email reminder from the Foundation to help lessen the odds of this critical information being missed."</p> <p>"Would need more information about it and lots of lead time to plan it in the calendar."</p> <p>"Timely sharing of upcoming conference deadlines and agendas and ways to contribute as a delegate and presenter."</p> <p>"More direct contact about the event with significant lead time."</p> <p>"I need to learn more about Cannexus to be able to meaningfully answer this question."</p>
 <p>Having more financial support</p>	<p>"Grants that cover the entire cost of attending including, ticket, travel and accommodation."</p> <p>"The cost of travelling, hotel accommodations and registration at the conference is prohibitive. Also the conference is not specifically related to our work."</p>

	<p>“Costs for travel and accommodation can be prohibitive. A bit of a travel grant (maybe available) would be helpful.”</p>
 <p>Seeing a stronger connection to our work</p>	<p>“A direct connection to skills training and development.”</p> <p>“Direct connection to our work, and just taking the time to prioritize attending.”</p> <p>“Better engagement with that world - we 'd need to more fully understand where the connections make sense, given our somewhat anomalous approach.”</p>
 <p>Making it a funding requirement</p>	<p>“If it was a funding requirement so that the time off could be justified to leadership.”</p>

Success stories



“I was invited by the Foundation to attend the very first Cannexus and at the time our organization was operating on a very tight budget. We decided, based on the invitation from the Foundation, that it would be an important opportunity from a number of standpoints - this led to 10 years straight of attendance at Cannexus, numerous presentations and opportunities for collaboration and partnership that are too numerous to count - it was the best money we ever spent at a time when flexible spending was non-existent.”

“Cannexus is always a great opportunity to share our work with a broad audience as well as connect with potential partners and funders. We are always happy to attend Cannexus.”

“We participated and were keen to do so to help share the work and data from our Wellness and Coaching Series.”

“One of my senior staff attended annually. A connection made at Cannexus led to a highly exciting and impactful program we are running that combines employability/transferable skills development with basketball.”

Areas of Strength

What are some things you think the Foundation does particularly well?

"Recognizing nuance. Listening deeply and responding. Being supportive. Basically having an ethos of counselling. :)"

"Responsiveness to questions, view of the big picture and willing to listen."

"They do more than "write the cheque" to funded organizations. They look to understand the needs of organizations and work to help find solutions by doing introductions or sharing leads on other funding opportunities. I feel like staff at the Foundation actually care about the work we do and want to do what they can to help us be successful."

"Lots - expertise and knowledge of the industry, support for valid research related to the work we do, promotion of professional development and partnerships, collaboration opportunities, and of course investment in emerging program development and implementation."

"Taking risks on new ideas/initiatives, supporting systems change & sector wide initiatives, connecting grantees to other funders & potential partners, having a candid and supportive relationship with grantees."

"Excellent communication and relationship building - strong sense that the Foundation is interested on a deeper level than most."

Areas for improvement

What specifically do you wish the Foundation would do differently? E.g., things you have seen other funders do that we might consider adopting.

More communications/marketing

- Brand is not all that well-known
 - Better use of the newsletter
- More of a social media presence

More storytelling

- Highlight funding recipients to increase their exposure to other funders and help applicants gain further insights into our priorities
 - Share how pilot programs successfully transition to long-term sustainable programs
 - Share stories of failure

Lay out your equity framework for grantmaking more clearly

Explore other funding approaches

- A specific "sector strengthening" grant stream
- Unrestricted funding that allows organizations to fund what is needed most

Site visits & more informal discussions