Focused Conversation

Talking Trust-based:
Creating spaces for honest conversations between funders and community nonprofits

IE FUNDERS ALLIANCE

Trust-Based Philanthropy

Values

1. Work for systemic equity
2. Redistribute power
3. Center relationships
4. Partner in a spirit of service
5. Be accountable
6. Embrace learning

Trust-based philanthropy is an approach to grantmaking that **emphasizes building trusting relationships between funders and nonprofit organizations.** It aims to **shift the power dynamics** inherent in traditional philanthropy and **create a more equitable and collaborative funding environment**.
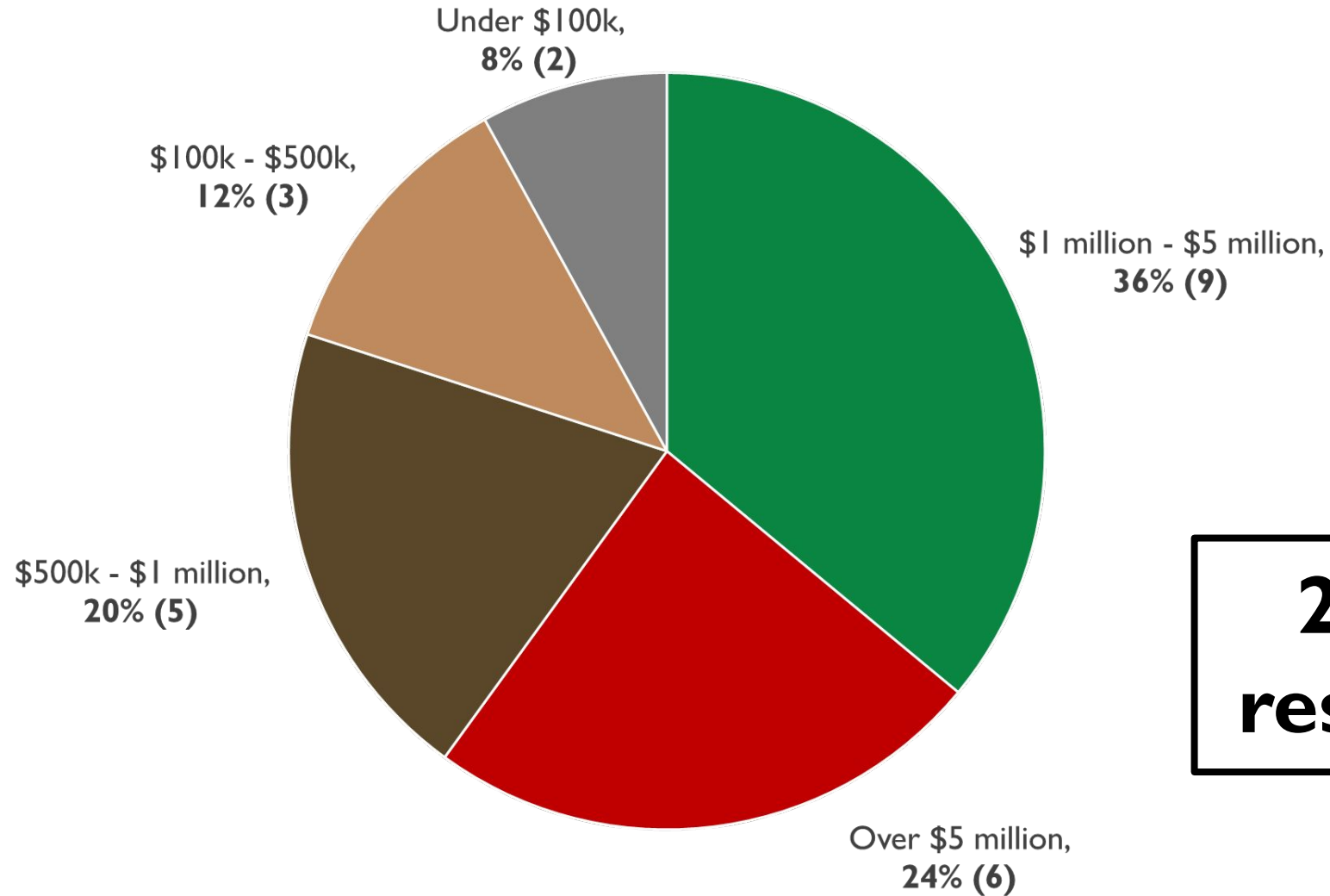
Trust-Based Philanthropy

Practices

1. Give multi-year, unrestricted funding
2. Do the homework in learning about your grantees
3. Simplify and streamline paperwork
4. Be transparent and responsive
5. Solicit and act on feedback
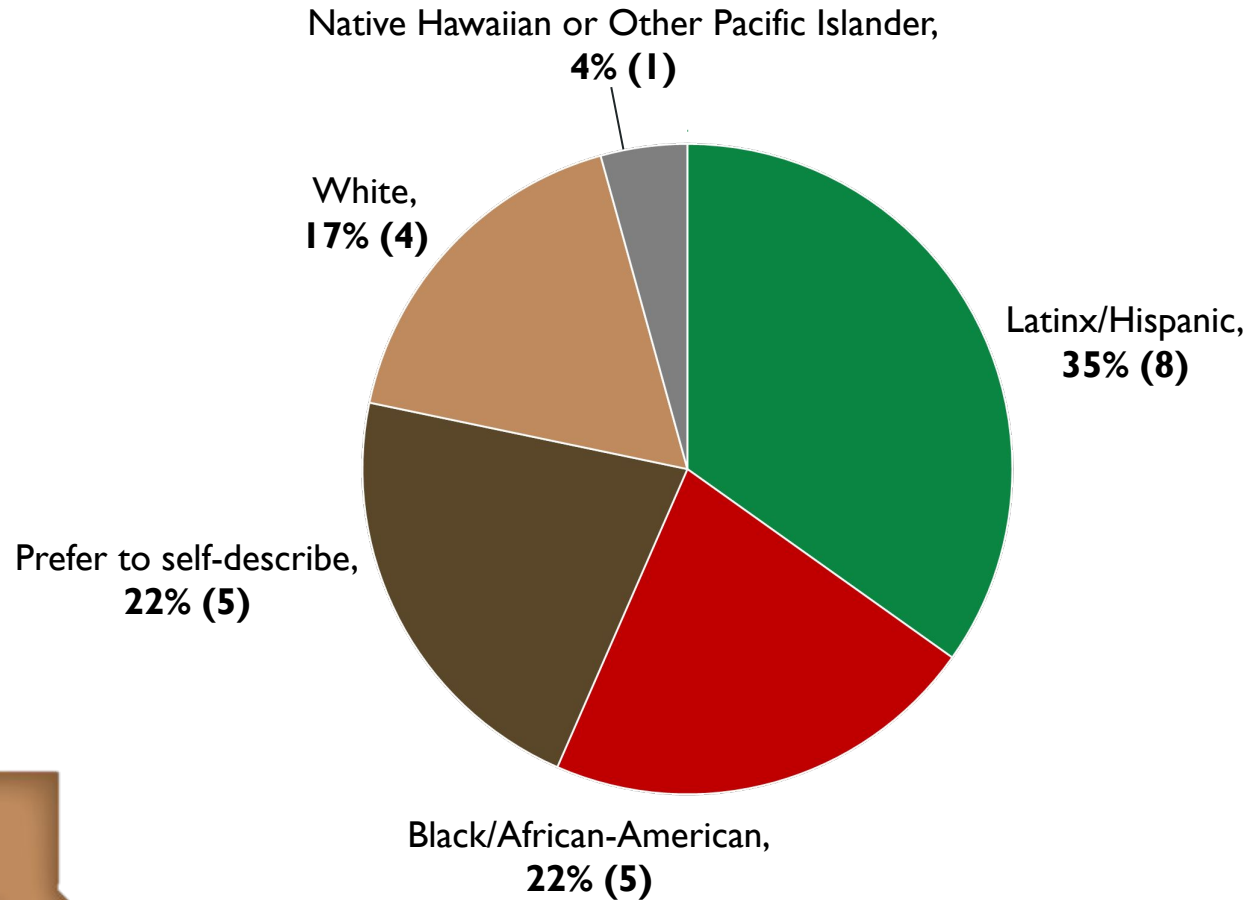6. Offer support beyond the check

Annual Budget

Under $100k,
8% (2)

$100k - $500k,
12% (3)

$1 million - $5 million,
36% (9)

$500k - $1 million,
20% (5)

Over $5 million,
24% (6)

27 total responses*

Race and Role

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander,
4% (1)

White,
17% (4)

Latinx/Hispanic,
35% (8)

Prefer to self-describe,
22% (5)

Black/African-American,
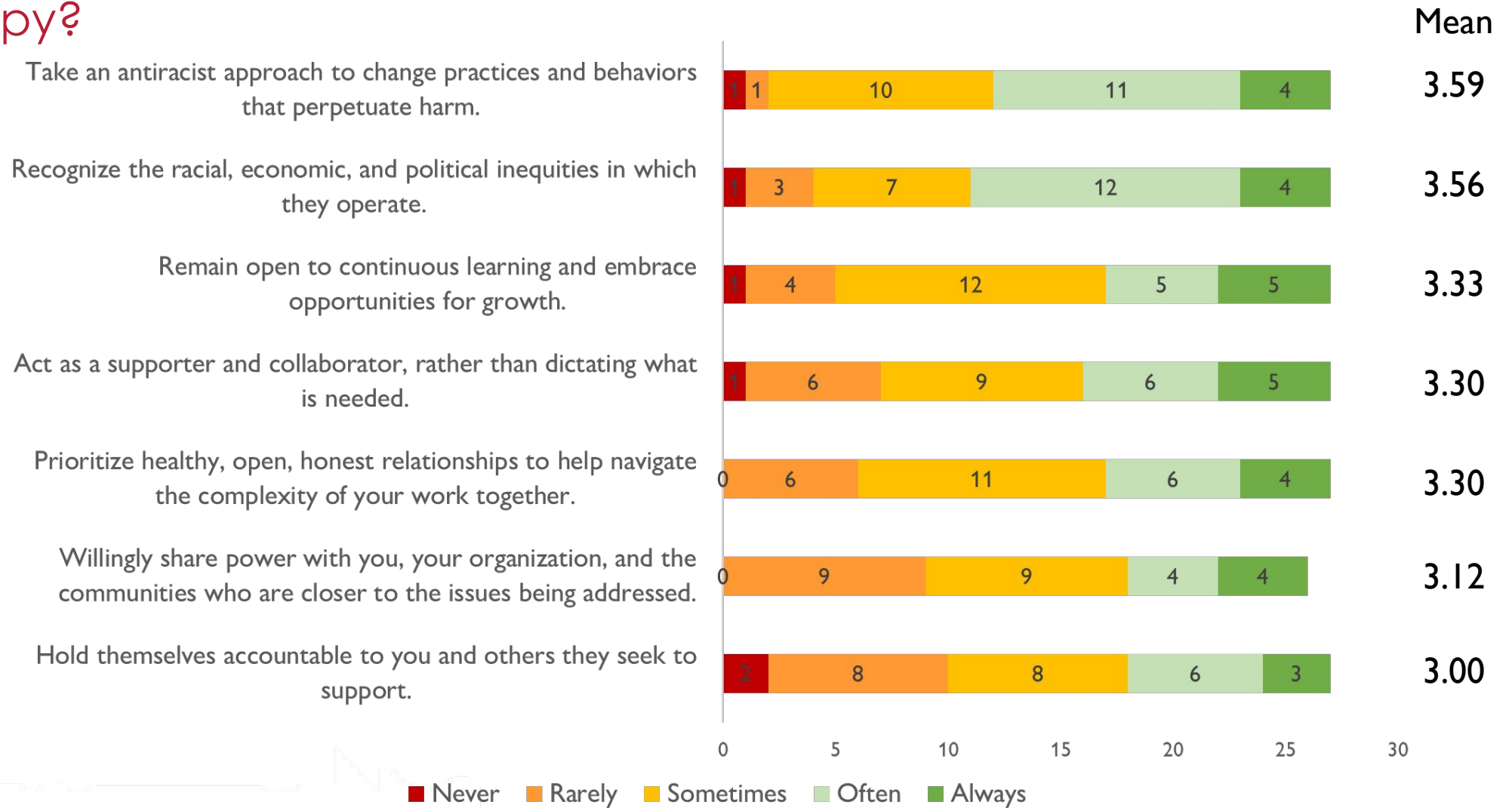**22% (5)**

CEO/Executive Director 19

Director 1

Development Staff 7

In your interactions with funders overall, to what extent have you experienced them demonstrating behaviors that enact the values of trust-based philanthropy?

Behavior	Mean
Take an antiracist approach to change practices and behaviors that perpetuate harm.	3.59
Recognize the racial, economic, and political inequities in which they operate.	3.56
Remain open to continuous learning and embrace opportunities for growth.	3.33
Act as a supporter and collaborator, rather than dictating what is needed.	3.30
Prioritize healthy, open, honest relationships to help navigate the complexity of your work together.	3.30
Willingly share power with you, your organization, and the communities who are closer to the issues being addressed.	3.12
Hold themselves accountable to you and others they seek to support.	3.00

■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ Always

How would you describe your experiences with funders and the degree of safety or trust you felt during those experiences?

What is a specific time when you felt a funder did something to erode the safety or trust you felt in the situation? What specifically did the funder do to contribute to this outcome?

1. Communication and engagement
   a. Limited accessibility/delayed response
   b. Lack of transparency
   c. Misleading information
2. Funding practices
   a. Overemphasis on policies & rigid structures
   b. Unexpected changes
   c. Favoritism (and exclusion) of nonprofits
   d. Insensitivity/lack of understanding

When have you felt safe and trusting in an experience with a funder? What contributed to you feeling this way?

1. Communication and engagement
   a. Open and transparent
   b. Demonstrated genuine interest

2. Collaborative partnership
   a. Trust in expertise and autonomy
   b. Respect and understanding

3. Funding practices
   a. Proactive offer of opportunities/creative solutions
   b. Simplified processes
   c. Nonfinancial support

4. Consistency and predictability

What can funders do to build a safe space for you to be honest about the things that you need and the challenges you face?

1. Engage in more **frequent, open, and meaningful communication**

2. Reduce the burden on organizations through **more streamlined processes and enhanced support**

3. Create **opportunities for relationship-building** between funders and nonprofits

4. Make decisions and engage with nonprofit from a position that sees them as **community experts and equal partners**

Reflection & Discussion

Individual Reflection

1. What stood out to you the most from the feedback shared by nonprofit partners?

2. What does this illuminate about your institution's practices — and about how you personally relate to your grantees?

Small Group Discussion

1. Share your reflections and thought processes from your individual reflection.

2. What ideas were spurred that might improve funding relationships?

3. Based on what you've learned from the nonprofit feedback and your peers, what actions can you implement or advocate for within your organizations?

Large Group Discussion

1. What challenges or obstacles do you foresee with trying to implement more trust-based practices within your organizations?

2. What are some strategies to overcome or avoid these challenges?

3. What action steps will you take to bring these learnings to your organizations?

4. What support do you need to continue trying to integrate trust-based practices within your individual practice and your organization?

5. What can the Funders Alliance do to empower you to make these changes? Are there any other actions you would like to see IEFA take in response to the feedback?

Resources

1. Trust-Based Philanthropy Project

2. Trust-Based Philanthropy Assessment

3. Building a Trust-Based Philanthropy to Shift Power Back to Communities