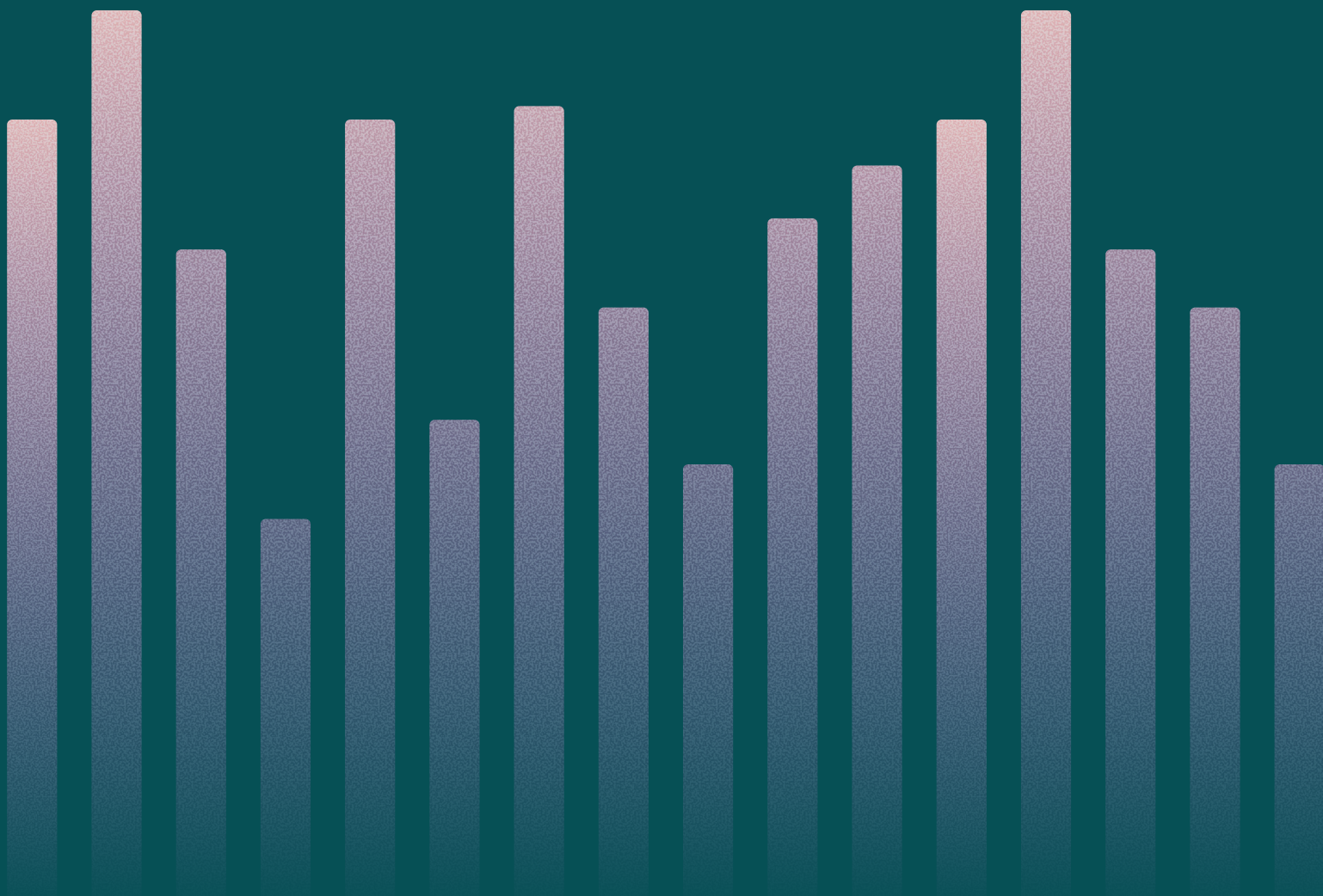


FUNDER SURVEY DATA

A Look Inside the Nonprofit Sector in 2025



FEDERAL FUNDING FREEZES, POLITICAL BACKLASH, AND A VOLATILE STOCK MARKET

are all converging to apply new pressure to the nonprofit sector that is having real and potentially long-lasting effects. In April 2025, we sent out a survey to our client base to better understand how they're adapting to the significant changes that occurred in Q1 2025.

In response, funders are showing considerable resilience. They're adapting their funding practices, pooling resources, and working to reduce grantee burden, all while juggling intense feelings of uncertainty and burnout.

In addition to the survey, we interviewed two industry experts, Tim Sarrantonio, director of corporate brand at [Neon One](#) and chair of the [Fundraising Effectiveness Project](#), and Eleanor Savage, president and CEO of the [Jerome Foundation](#). You can read their full articles here:

- How can foundations support nonprofits in 2025?
- How the Jerome Foundation is helping nonprofits weather the storm in 2025

This report distills insights from both the survey and these interviews. It provides a glimpse into the mindset of funders in 2025 and explores the actions they are taking to adapt to uncertainty while showing up for communities.

It provides a glimpse into the mindset of funders in 2025, exploring the actions they are taking to adapt to uncertainty, how they feel about the uncertainty, and what the long-term.

It provides a glimpse into the mindset of funders in 2025, exploring what's creating an environment of uncertainty, how foundations are adapting, and what the emotional realities of living through this time of change.

Executive summary

This report captures how U.S.-based nonprofit funders are responding to mounting pressures in 2025, from federal funding freezes and political backlash to market volatility. Based on 36 anonymous survey responses and two expert interviews, the findings reveal a sector adapting in real time by shifting funding strategies to be more collaborative, reducing grantee burden, and reaffirming values like DEI internally while talking about them differently externally. Despite widespread uncertainty, funders remain committed, collaborative, and clear-eyed about what it takes to serve their communities.

Methodology

This report is based on a survey sent to Submittable clients who are nonprofit organizations based in the United States. The survey was conducted via Google Forms and was open from April 7 through April 25, 2025. Customers were invited to respond throughout the period that the survey was open via email and in-app messages.

The survey was anonymous and included a mix of single-select, multi-select, and open-ended questions. Of the 36 total respondents, 9 requested not to be quoted directly; their responses were excluded from any published excerpts, though their data contributed to the aggregated findings.

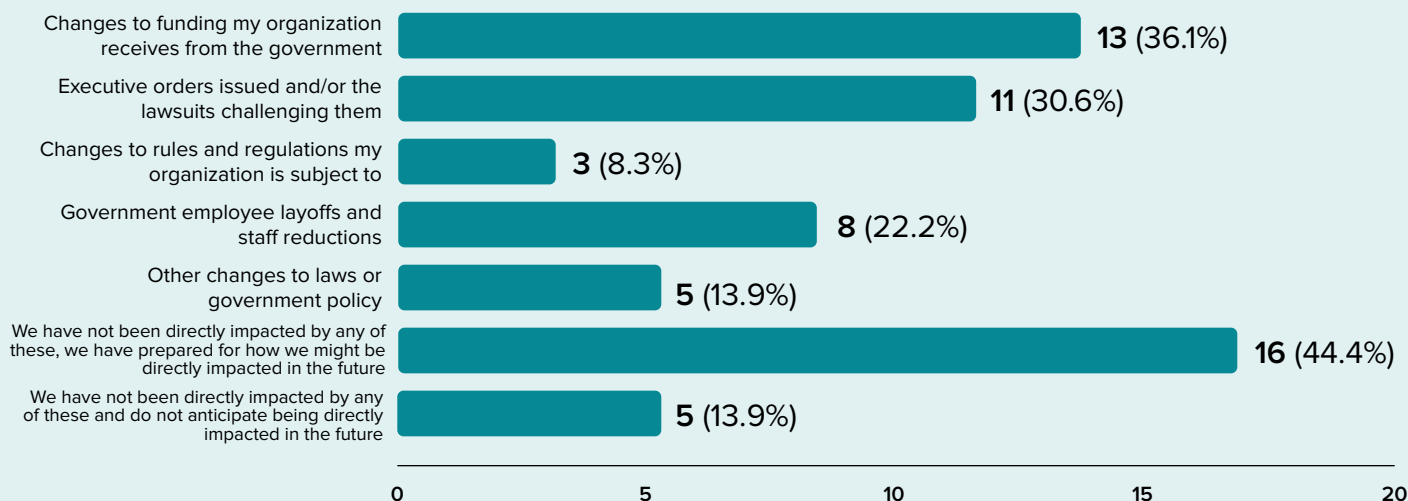
Additional qualitative insights were gathered through interviews with two industry experts: Tim Sarrantonio, Director of Corporate Brand at Neon One and Chair of the Fundraising Effectiveness Project, and Eleanor Savage, President and CEO of the Jerome Foundation.

Under pressure: The state of the nonprofit sector

In 2025, financial instability, political scrutiny, and uncertainty are converging to apply pressure on how nonprofits and foundations operate. According to our survey, only 13.9% of respondents say they “Have not been directly impacted and do not anticipate being directly impacted in the future.” This leaves 86.1% saying they have been directly impacted or expect to be impacted by economic and political changes.

36 RESPONSES

Which, if any, of the following have you been directly impacted by in 2025?

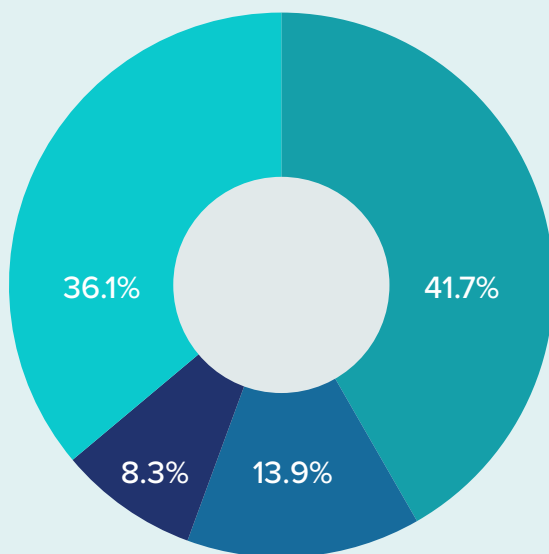


This pressure shows up in many forms, from shrinking budgets to nervous donors to threatened tax statuses. But the throughline is clear: pressure is mounting.



Funding freezes and stock market whiplash

Nonprofits and foundations now face a world with fewer dollars and more difficult decisions due to federal funding freezes and stock market volatility. In fact, 91.7% of survey respondents say their budgets and financial outlooks have changed or they are prepared for them to change.



36 RESPONSES

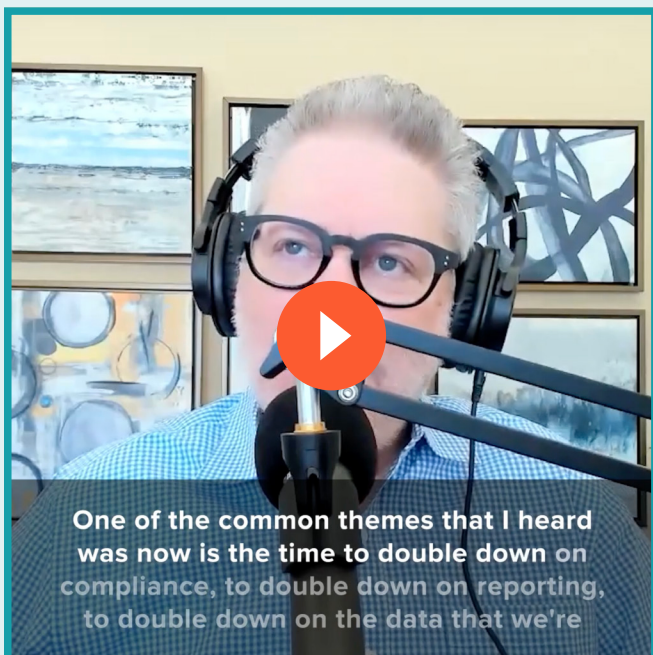
How has your budget or financial outlook changed?

- Our budget and financial outlook have not changed at all.
- Our budget and financial outlook have not changed yet, but we have prepared to make changes in the future.
- Our budget and financial outlook have changed some.
- Our budget and financial outlook have changed drastically.

Funding freezes and stock market whiplash

Federal funding disruptions are having clear consequences. Some survey respondents have lost access to money, while others have seen their grantees lose access to money. The result is increased reliance on the remaining funding streams and reduced impact on communities.

The impact of federal funding freezes goes deeper than what's encompassed in this report. Our recent Impact Audio podcast episode dives deeper into the impact of these changes for government grantmakers. Changes in federal funding typically hit government grantmakers first, then ripple on to private foundations. Here is a clip explaining the implications for compliance and impact reporting:



DIVE DEEPER

Dispatch from NGMA 2025: A seismic shift

Hear about Sam Caplan and Ian Witthoeft's experiences at the 2025 NGMA Conference with government grantmakers.

[LISTEN NOW](#)

Many grantors are directly, with one respondent explaining that they “cannot currently access legally obligated funds, and we have many partners’ positions in federal agencies that have resigned or been terminated.”

Another says, “We have experienced funding cuts for programs that we use to support smaller organizations in our community. The funds are for BIPOC-focused mental health and substance use disorder recovery.”

Grantors who are not directly affected still feel the shock through their grantees. A few describe their funding as an important stopgap for rescinded federal support. One says their beneficiaries “have informed us that the federal funds that are generally partially allocated to the programs we have funded/may fund have been rescinded. This makes the grants we give all the more important and impactful.”

These funding cuts have immediate consequences for beneficiaries. “[These cuts] will have an impact on our total number of clients helped because they are not receiving the government funding that they need to take care of their families,” says one grantor.

Another echoes that experience, saying that their beneficiaries are facing “significant budget cuts/funding loss and limitations in what activities they can engage in due to executive orders. This has resulted in a significant drop in participation in our programs.”

Foundations not reliant on government dollars are also under strain due to the stock market destabilization’s effect on their endowments.

Stock market volatility

Independent foundations have had to weather one of the most chaotic Aprils in financial history and still find ways to show up for their beneficiaries. One respondent explains that “The amount that we give every year depends on the investments we’ve made in the stock market.”

Another respondent echoes this reality, saying that they’re funded by private foundations, and when “the stock market performs poorly, endowments suffer. Funding from long-time sources has been reduced, and it’s become harder to attract new sources of funding.”

As both public and private sources of funding shrink, nonprofits and foundations are forced to make hard decisions about their budgets.

Resulting budget reductions

Altogether, these shifts are creating significant pressure on nonprofit and foundation budgets. One grantor estimates they’ve lost approximately 10% of their budget and are anticipating more losses this year. Another indicates they need to replace potentially 40% of their budget with new funding sources.

Less money means tough choices. One respondent put it plainly, “We may have to change our programming or staffing to weather the financial stress.”

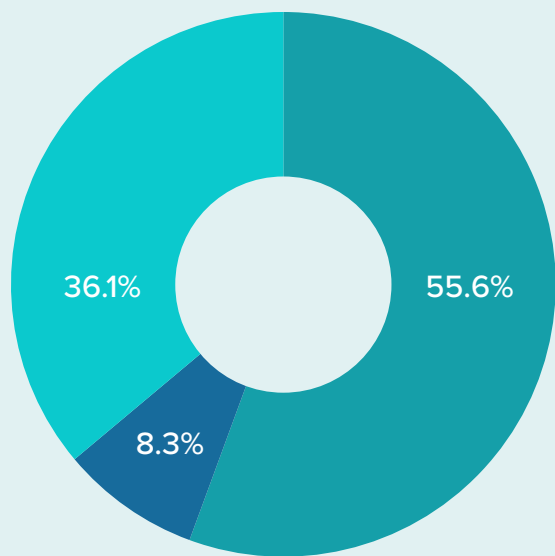
In summary, as federal dollars dry up, private funders are being asked to do more as their own financial footing is beginning to slip. The natural consequences are reduced capacity to serve and potential cuts to staffing and programming.

Increasing politicization

The politicization of nonprofit work concerns survey respondents and changes how they go about their work. One says that one of their main priorities right now is to do what they can to stay out of the spotlight, saying simply that they’re “Not ‘poking the bear.’”

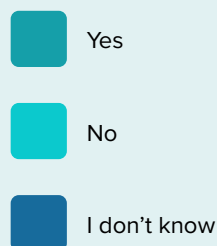
DEI backlash

DEI has become a flashpoint in what one respondent describes as the “culture war.” Our survey respondents are taking note, with 55.6% saying they have discussed the possibility of making or made any changes to their priorities, goals, strategy, or DEI work.



36 RESPONSES

Have you discussed the possibility of making or made any changes to your priorities, goals, strategy, or DEI work?



For some, this shift isn't a choice: "As a CDFI, we must comply with the updates in regards to DEI," one person explains. For others, it's a practical risk management decision, with a few respondents saying they made changes to their website copy and other public communications.

As we'll dig into later, these changes do not indicate these organizations' commitment to DEI principles is wavering. Quite the contrary, with one grantor in the higher education space saying, "With the attacks on DEI in academia, we are preparing for an eventual impact on our own work but will not compromise our values and will resist any pressure that conflicts with our mission."

One respondent expresses frustration with the ambiguity at the heart of the backlash: "[This situation] is further confused by the DEI label [by not having] a clear definition of 'DEI' being provided by the government. Most donors don't know how expansive that label is and that programs for women and girls, for example, are being included."

But the current political moment goes beyond DEI. It's beginning to shake the legal and financial foundations of the nonprofit sector itself through growing threats to 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.

Threats to 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status

As of Q2 2025, [Harvard has had its 501\(c\)\(3\) status threatened](#), Wall Street Journal op-eds are being written about revoking 501(c)(3) statuses of [nonprofits that engage in “illegal” DEI activities](#), and a bill has stalled in the Senate that could give the treasury secretary [near unilateral power to revoke 501\(c\)\(3\) tax exempt status](#).

This shift threatens to upend the nonprofit sector and would likely force many nonprofits to close. One respondent says, “We worry about threats to strip nonprofits of their 501(c)(3) status. If that were to happen, we would have to close our doors because we need that status in order to receive funding from private foundations.”

Overall, DEI backlash and the threatened revocation of 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status contribute to a larger sense of instability among the entire nonprofit sector, including donors to beneficiaries.

Unstable conditions undercut the work

These political pressures create anxiety among donors and beneficiaries. Some donors seem to be holding back their giving, and some beneficiaries seem to be withdrawing from programs they once relied on.

One immigration focused organization says that deportations have “scared the community whom my partners and my team aim to serve. Engagement is plummeting and we need to be more coordinated about our partner support than ever.”

Two other organizations that focus on supporting women explain how DEI backlash is affecting them. The first says that they had to reword their grant proposals to avoid mentions of “women,” and the second says that “We make grants that support women. If ‘non-discrimination’ policies are extended to nonprofits with the threat of revoking nonprofit status, we could be impacted.”

Donor anxiety is becoming clear as well, potentially impacting a vital funding stream. One respondent says that “Donors are VERY nervous,” while another says “donors are more cautious at this point about what they support and what they are interested in giving to.”

This matters because, as Tim Sarrantonio points out, most donors are individuals. And recent data from the [Fundraising Effectiveness Project Q4 2024 Report](#) shows that individual giving is declining: “Donor numbers have dropped by -4.5% year-over-year, with smaller donors (\$1-\$100) showing the sharpest decline at -8.8%.”

Taken together, these political pressures are forcing nonprofits and funders into difficult tradeoffs. The threats aren’t theoretical. They’re already reshaping how organizations communicate and who they serve. Between financial shocks and mounting political scrutiny, the level of uncertainty is intensifying.

Uncertainty is the biggest pain point

The feeling of uncertainty is the core throughline across all survey responses. In response to the open-ended question, “What has been most difficult for your organization and how are you working through that challenge?” respondents say:

- “Just the uncertainty.”
- “The lack of certainty and guidance from our government funder.”
- “What feels like almost daily changes to what is happening currently at the federal level has been the most difficult.”
- “Quite honestly, once we adjusted to a smaller budget, the uncertainty even after has been the most challenging.”

Even when frozen federal funds are restored (as happened to one respondent), uncertainty remains about future awards. Another respondent explains their situation: “The federal department that administers LIHEAP dollars had all positions eliminated. We have no indication of whether the remaining dollars to be released will be released, and whether funding will continue. It’s a ‘wait-and-see’ situation.”

Resilience in the face of change is one thing. What’s happening is a constant barrage of market forces, threats, and anxiety converging to create a prevailing sense of uncertainty for the nonprofit sector. But one thing we appreciate about this sector is that they do not let uncertainty derail the work.

The work of the moment: How funders are responding

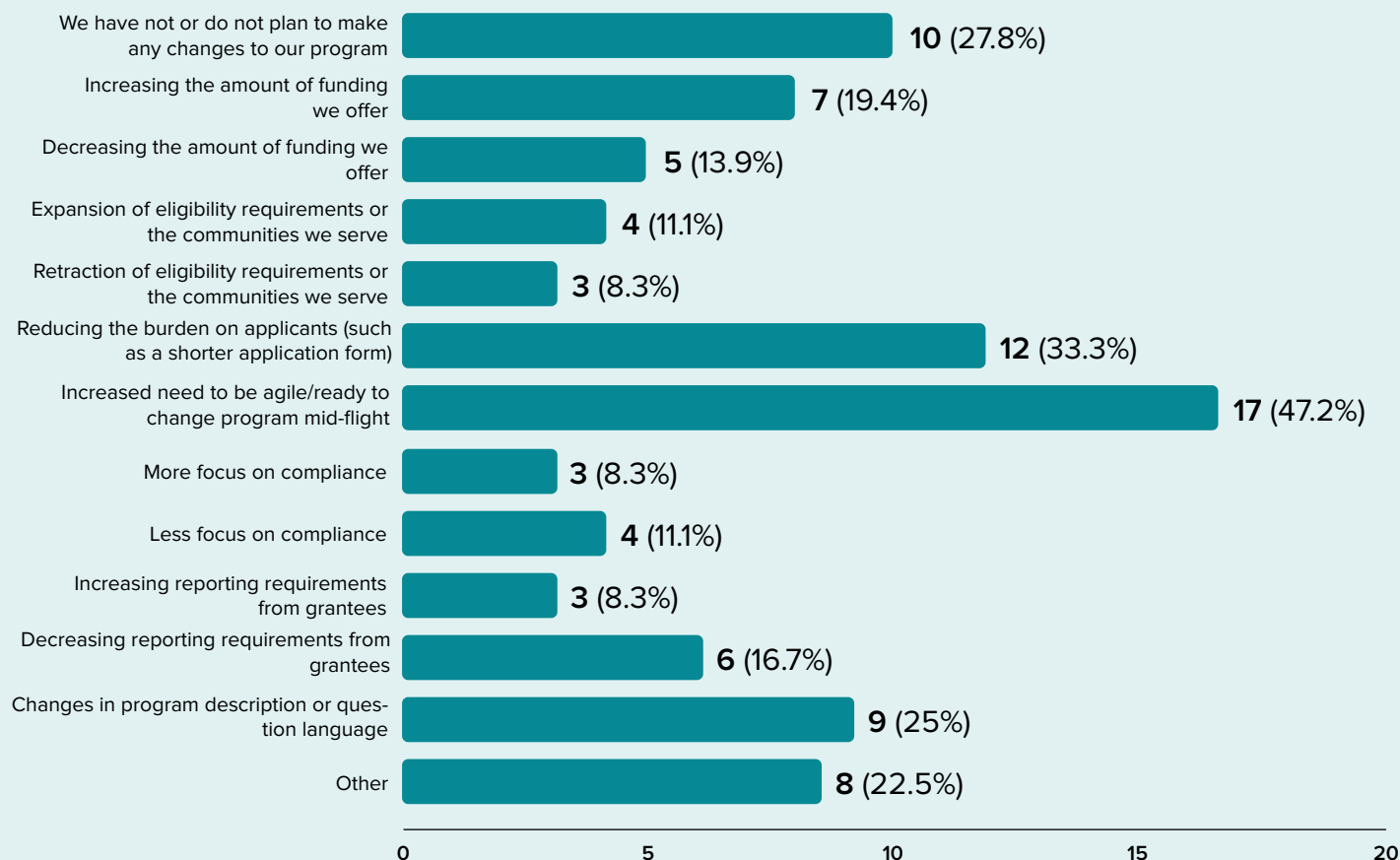
In response to uncertainty, survey respondents are getting creative, listening to grantees, and demonstrating strong resolve. Most indicate they are not compromising their commitment to their values and are exploring new ways to follow through on them.

Flexibility and creativity

A strategic shift towards agility came through loud and clear in survey responses. Nearly half (47.2%) of survey respondents say they feel an increased need to be agile, which they define as adjusting programming priorities and getting creative with how they support their grantees.

36 RESPONSES

Have you made or do you plan to make any of the following changes to how you run your grant (or similar) program?



Strategically pivot funding

Some funders are embracing a “triage” approach to funding, with one respondent describing their targeted shift: “We’re providing support more to organizations directly impacted by federal funding changes and less so on others not impacted as greatly.”

Other funders are taking an opportunity to embrace a more forward-looking, multi-year approach. One foundation describes their approach: “We limited the organizations supported and made large grants over 5 years (minimum \$2.8mm up to \$100mm+). We saw immediate impact – and impact that will be felt for generations.”

Fewer grantees receiving larger and longer-term commitments could provide stability that nonprofits desperately need to weather the current unpredictability. On the other hand, it can leave some nonprofits out in the cold. And without the money they need to continue operating, they may need to close their doors. Targeted funding pivots and multi-year grants could help nonprofits get a breather from “crisis management mode” and think longer term, but it’s one tough choice among many that funders face.

Coordinate with other funders

Working with other funders to support nonprofits in need was a common theme among survey respondents and in our interview with Eleanor Savage.

In response, one funder says they are bolstering programs meant to support BIPOC artists by “joining with other philanthropies.” Eleanor Savage echoes this sentiment, saying, “We’re working on pooled funding opportunities, especially around that emergency funding, also collective strategies with funders and artists and arts organizations, information and resource sharing.”

She says she’s seeing these funders pooling resources and choosing their roles. Some funders are focusing on legal support, others are focusing on data security, and others are working to do narrative change.

Think beyond the checkbook

Funding alone isn’t the only solution. In his interview, Tim Sarrantonio challenges funders to get creative by doing things like donating space for fundraisers and gatherings: “Funders should feel enthusiastic... They have resources that nonprofits don’t. How can we 10x impact by simply thinking: ‘OK I’m going to give you a gathering space.’”

One survey respondent agrees, recommending that funders “Be flexible wherever you can in the spirit of supporting our nonprofit ecosystem in traditional and nontraditional ways.”

This shift toward flexibility doesn’t just influence where the money goes. It’s also reshaping how funders show up in relationships, operations, and communication.

Advice from respondents

- “Be nimble and be prepared.”
- “Be flexible wherever you can in the spirit of supporting our nonprofit ecosystem in traditional and nontraditional ways.”
- “Diversify funding streams as much as possible.”
- “Be as nimble as the board and staff will allow you to be in order to support grantee partners.”
- “Talk to your trusted colleagues in the field and see how they are also approaching their challenges.”



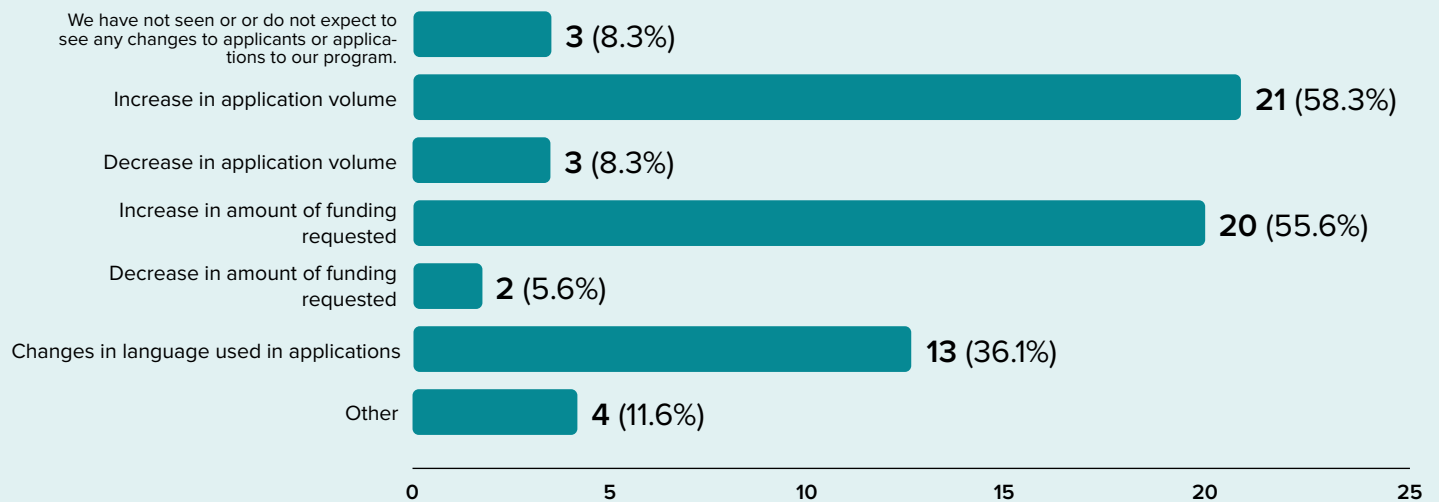
Reducing grantee burden

As the full weight of the current uncertainty hits the nonprofits, funders are anticipating their needs. Survey data shows just how much pressure may be on the way:

- 58.1% of respondents expect an increase in applications
- 55% of respondents expect an increase in the amount of funding requested
- Only 33.3% of respondents are prioritizing reducing grantee burden

36 RESPONSES

Have you seen, or do you anticipate seeing, any of the following changes in applicants or applications to your grant (or similar) program?



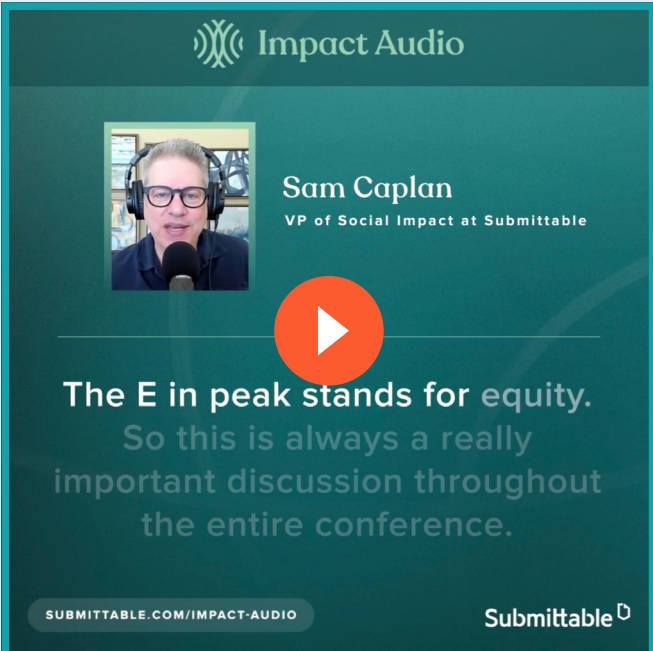
Lighten the load for grantees

For many funders, reducing grantee burden starts with rethinking paperwork and payment timelines.

Eleanor Savage of the Jerome Foundation reflects on the shift: “We’ve been through the pandemic, a lot of the things that we learned and responded to in that time, like simplifying the processes for getting a grant.” She adds, “We’re doing things like expediting payments to help deal with those losses of federal funding.”

One respondent puts it simply as advice for peers: “Please let people do the work and release the burden from your grantees.”

This is a meaningful continuation of conversations around equitable funding practices led by the [#FixTheForm campaign](#), the [Trust Based Philanthropy Project](#), [Edgar Villanueva](#), and others. The difference is – as Sam Caplan mentioned in our [recent podcast episode recapping PEAK 2025](#) – that now it's time for action, not theory.

The image shows a podcast player interface for 'Impact Audio'. At the top, the 'Impact Audio' logo is displayed. Below it, a small video thumbnail shows Sam Caplan wearing headphones. To the right of the thumbnail, his name 'Sam Caplan' and title 'VP of Social Impact at Submittable' are listed. A large orange play button is centered over the text. Below the play button, the text reads: 'The E in peak stands for equity. So this is always a really important discussion throughout the entire conference.' At the bottom left, the URL 'SUBMITTABLE.COM/IMPACT-AUDIO' is shown, and at the bottom right is the 'Submittable' logo.

Impact Audio

Sam Caplan
VP of Social Impact at Submittable

The E in peak stands for equity.
So this is always a really important discussion throughout the entire conference.

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Submittable

DIVE DEEPER

Dispatch from PEAK 2025: Leading with courage

Hear about Sam Caplan's experience at the 2025 PEAK Grantmaking Conference and how he sees philanthropy meeting the moment.

[LISTEN NOW](#)

Meet uncertainty with overcommunication

Several funders emphasize the value of reaching out with honest, proactive communication. One advises, "Be as responsive as possible to those you seek to serve."

Eleanor agrees, explaining, "We're letting our artists know, we're going to continue to fund you. We don't receive any federal funding. We are committed to funding you. Same with the organizations. We actually increased our funding to arts organizations to try to help chip away at some of the shortfalls."

This kind of outreach provides much-needed stability in the uncertainty. Funders can serve as a source of calm and continuity.

Ask nonprofits what they need

Funders are being called to think expansively about their role. That means offering more than money—it means showing up as true partners. One respondent recommends that you “Keep talking with grantee partners and offer support beyond the check as much as possible.”

This might look like opening space for honest conversations about capacity and burnout, or finding creative ways to use your networks, influence, or infrastructure to help grantees weather the storm.

“Open up/widen communication with beneficiary organizations, allowing them to share how they are struggling and where/how grantmakers can support beyond just funding,” says one respondent.

Tim Sarrantonio pushed further, challenging funders to reframe the core question they’re asking:

“At the end of the day, most of these folks don’t have any money. They don’t have any resources. How can we support them? We’re not asking that—we’re [saying], ‘We need to figure out how you’re relevant to us.’”

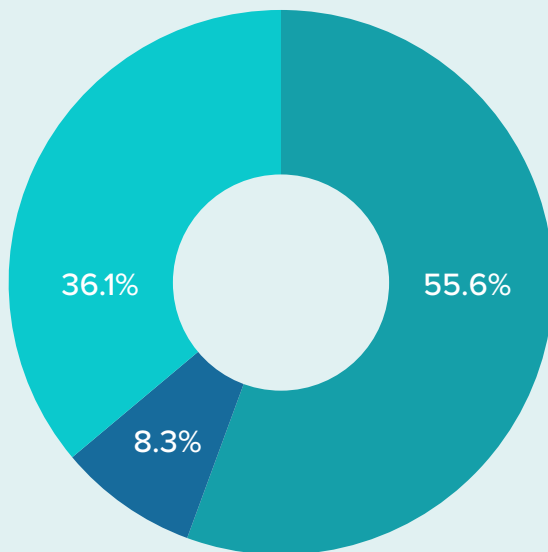
Support starts with listening. Survey respondents recommend listening to what nonprofits need right now.

Advice from respondents

- “Be as responsive as possible to those you seek to serve.”
- “Please let people do the work and release the burden from your grantees.”
- “Open up/widen communication with beneficiary organizations, allowing them to share how they are struggling and where/how grantmakers can support beyond just funding.”
- “Keep talking with grantee partners and offer support beyond the check as much as possible.”

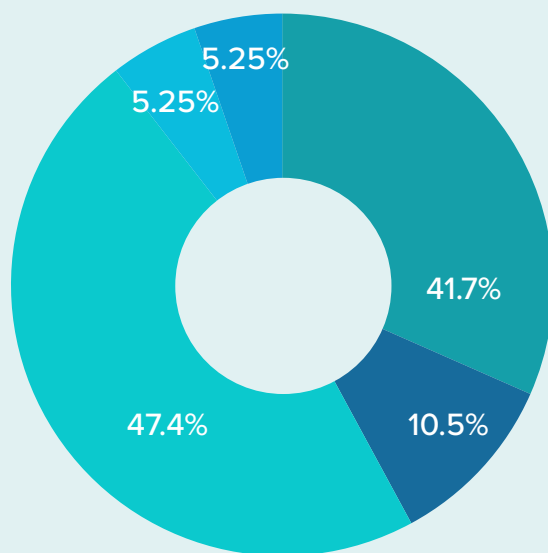
No backing down

In the face of uncertainty, funders are not backing down; they're banding together. When asked, 75% of respondents say they're sticking with their existing priorities. They're adapting their tactics, as we've covered above, but they're staying true to their strategies and values.



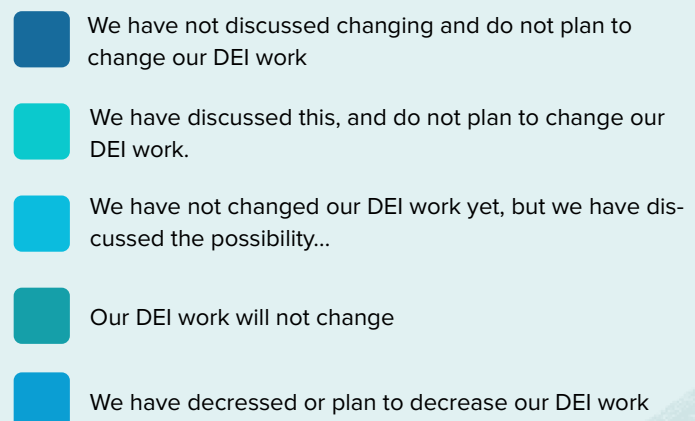
36 RESPONSES

Have you discussed the possibility of making or made any changes to your priorities, goals, strategy, or DEI work?



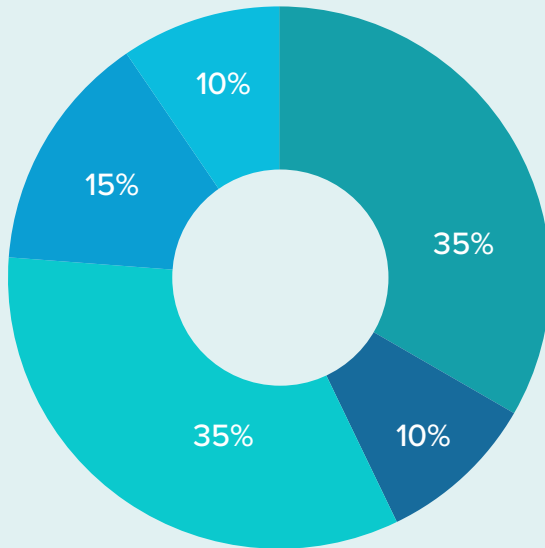
19 RESPONSES

How has your DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) or similar work changed?



20 RESPONSES

How have your priorities or goals changed?



-  Our priorities or goals will not change, but we will change how we talk about it
-  We have discussed this, and do not plan to change our priorities and goals
-  Our priorities or goals have not changed yet, but we have discussed the possibility
-  Our priorities or goals have changed some
-  Our priorities or goals have changed significantly

Internally, this resolve appeared most starkly in response to DEI. Yes, some are changing how they talk about these initiatives externally, but few indicate any compromise in their commitment to DEI core principles.

One respondent describes a situation where their organization is considering changing the title of an equity-focused community event so it “feels safer for people to attend and to invest in.” They then add that “Our DEI work is not changing, but our commitment to it has increased.”

Another describes how their commitment to DEI principles runs too deep to change, saying “DEI is built into our culture, though is not explicitly stated in such terms, so no changes need to be discussed or made.”

The strongest comment also serves as a rallying cry for funders to step up together: “Doubling down on everything [DEI]. This is the moment that social justice funders were made for.”

Externally, this resolve appears in a strong sense of solidarity and clear calls to work together. There was a keen recognition of the interconnectedness of the nonprofit sector, with one respondent saying that “We know the nonprofit ecosystem is extremely interconnected and vulnerable to the changes occurring.”

In response, two survey respondents didn't mince words:

"We must work collectively, to join together to protect our freedoms and the diversity of values and interests across the nonprofit sector, to resist government mandates that overstep our constitutional rights."

"The non-profit community should demand a transparent explanation of DEI be provided by the government to the entire community, so everyone understands what the impact is. Only then can informed decisions be made."

DEI is just one example of this resolve. The sentiment we see in survey responses is a clear-eyed appraisal of the actions funders need to take to reduce risk alongside a steadfast refusal to fold on their values.

The human element: Emotional realities in a time of change

It's difficult to discuss what our survey discusses without bumping into strong feelings. Survey respondents indicate feelings of burnout, fear, and, ultimately, solidarity in response to the changes and uncertainties of the moment.

Burnout is here

Exhaustion emerged as a subtle but unignorable theme in the survey. Uncertainty is exhausting to deal with on its own for nonprofit workers, but when you add to it layoffs, increased workload, and very real, immediate damage to causes they care about, burnout becomes pervasive.

Grief about the impact of funding reductions appears in a few comments. In response to a question about what has been the most difficult experience so far this year, respondents say:

- "Education, research, and health and human service programs are the most impacted to the point of irreparable damage. Research organizations indicate that the ripple effect will be enormous and potentially set back progress by at least a decade."
- "It is difficult to not fund very impactful organizations we would typically support so that we can focus our budget on those with reduced or limited funding from the government."
- "Seeing the direct impact of federal legislation on the communities we serve."

The impact of carrying this grief is real. One respondent puts it plainly, saying, "The current reality has created a significant burden and strain on our staff. They are in burnout."

One respondent advises funders, “Manage what you can while maintaining your own mental/ physical health.” But perhaps the most poignant response reflecting how funders are feeling right now came from one response to the question, “What advice would you share with your peers?”:

“I honestly don’t know at this point. I’m not even sure what advice I would like to receive from others at this time.”

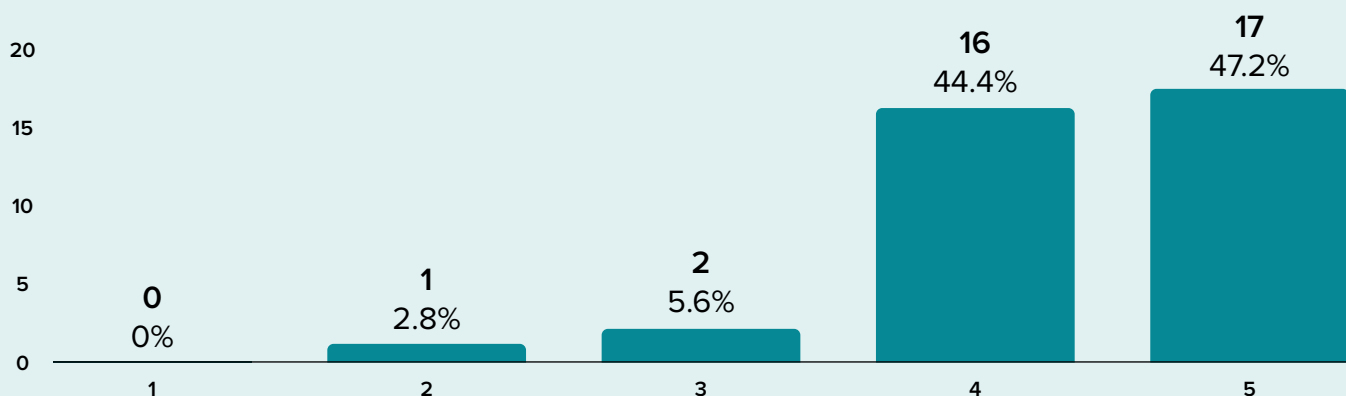
Honestly, now may not be the time for advice. And that’s OK.

This is deeply destabilizing in new ways

When asked to rate on a scale of one to five just how atypical the current situation is, all but three respondents rate it a four or five.

36 RESPONSES

Nonprofits have always had to adapt to changes outside of their organization. How typical or atypical does this moment feel to you?



Respondents frequently compare the current situation to the COVID-19 pandemic. One respondent says, “This feels much like COVID. Basic needs have increased, giving to organizations, such as those focused on the arts, may decrease.”

Another agrees, with an important caveat: “COVID was bad, this is worse because it feels self-inflicted.”

According to respondents, what makes the current situation different from a crisis like COVID is the feeling of being “under attack.” As one puts it, “Adapting to changes outside of the organization feels typical; feeling under attack as an entire workforce/sector is atypical and harmful in many ways.”

Another respondent adds further historical context, saying, “There have been culture wars in decades past in the 1990s and during the Cold War - but this feels more threatening. We must prepare - together and join with others to defend our freedoms.”

One respondent puts a fine point on it: “This isn’t a typical government funding cut. This is an overreach to change ideology that the current administration does not agree with. This is an act that will negatively affect each individual and community nationally and globally if allowed to persist unchecked.”

The term “unprecedented times” has been worn ragged with use in recent years. But one silver lining is that this sector has practice in banding together and finding strength in one another during hard times.

Resolve and trust in each other

In the face of uncertainty, exhaustion, and fear, survey respondents again show resilience. They’re clear-eyed about what’s happening and show intense resolve.

This resilience doesn’t come from internal reserves alone. It’s built together.

Eleanor Savage says there’s deep strength in working closely with beneficiaries: “My hope would be that people can know how important and powerful it is when grantmaking is shaped by the wisdom and experience of those most impacted.”

Tim Sarrantonio gets existential: “Humans want to be free. They want to talk over dinner. And they want to figure out big problems. ... And, in many ways, our sector is on the front of innovation because what we’re doing is figuring out how generosity can get us back to that humanity.”

In a moment when systems feel shaky, these attitudes provide conviction. And this conviction echoes across survey responses. One advises, “Talk to your trusted colleagues in the field and see how they are also approaching their challenges. It’s nice to feel like you are not alone, and can bounce ideas off one another to troubleshoot where needed.”

Another encourages, “Carry on and be true to your ideals. Do not yield to bullies.”

And, finally: “We’ll get through this - we always do.”



One glimpse into a complex, evolving situation

This survey was conducted in April 2025, and this report was written in early May 2025. As such, its findings are one small, time-bound glimpse into what's happening in the nonprofit sector and how funders are responding. What that glimpse reveals is resilience.

Responses were brutally honest, often vulnerable, and full of quiet strength and solidarity. If there's a way forward, my bet is that it's somewhere in that mix.

At Submittable, we're proud to have a small role to play in helping grantmakers reduce burden on grantees, stay agile, and stay compliant. If you're searching for a solution that can help you do that, [we'd love to talk to you](#). And if you're interested in following more conversations that we're having with people shaping this moment, we invite you to [subscribe to our podcast, Impact Audio](#).

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