
WHO FUNDS SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES?

A Review of Available Information

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Surfree/Integrative Strategies Forum

The objective of this paper is to review the situation facing organizations seeking grants for "sustainable community" projects. To do so, we created a hypothetical sustainable community initiative — the Chesapeake Bay/ Washington Regional Community Sustainability Project. Our fictitious project involves people from different grassroot organizations who came together to address the overlapping problems and needs of their communities and constituencies. These groups reflect a range of concerns: protecting the environmental quality of the local watershed and air, overcoming poverty, promoting and protecting civil rights and fighting racism, reducing sprawl, surmounting the high rates of crime and violence, and improving educational quality and opportunity.

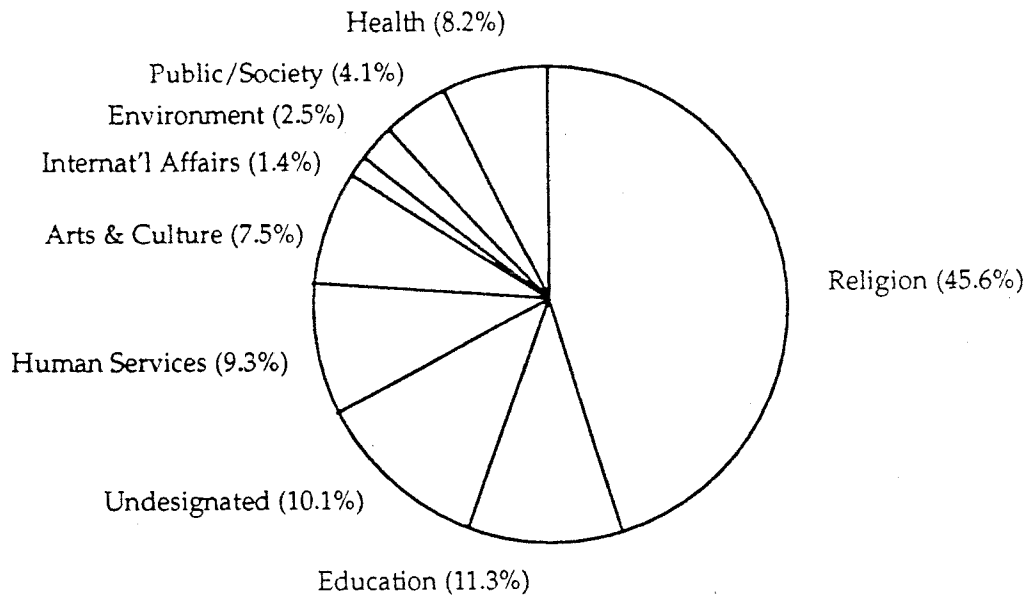
Imagining myself in the role of volunteer grantseeker, I paid a number of visits to Washington, DC's Foundation Center Library (one of only four across the country) to see what kinds of information resources are available. Note that most grantseekers would be hard pressed to find the information and assistance I received courtesy of the Foundation Center Library. Looking for a basic overview, I glanced through a number of publications, including the most recently published version of Giving USA: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 1992.

General Giving Patterns

According to Giving USA, over \$124 billion in charitable contributions were given away in 1992. The vast majority of these contributions came from individuals (82%). Less than seven percent came from foundations, amounting to \$8.33 billion. The remaining 11% was contributed by corporations and bequests.

Out of the nine basic subject areas to which these contributions were directed, almost half (46%) of total dollars went to "religious uses." Among the other categories (Figure 1), which would contain funding for sustainable community? Scanning these categories, I determined support for our work might be found somewhere among "environment" (less than 3% of total contributions), "public/society benefit" (about 4%), and "health" (slightly over 8%).

Figure 1
General Giving: Subject Areas
Percent of Total Giving (1992)

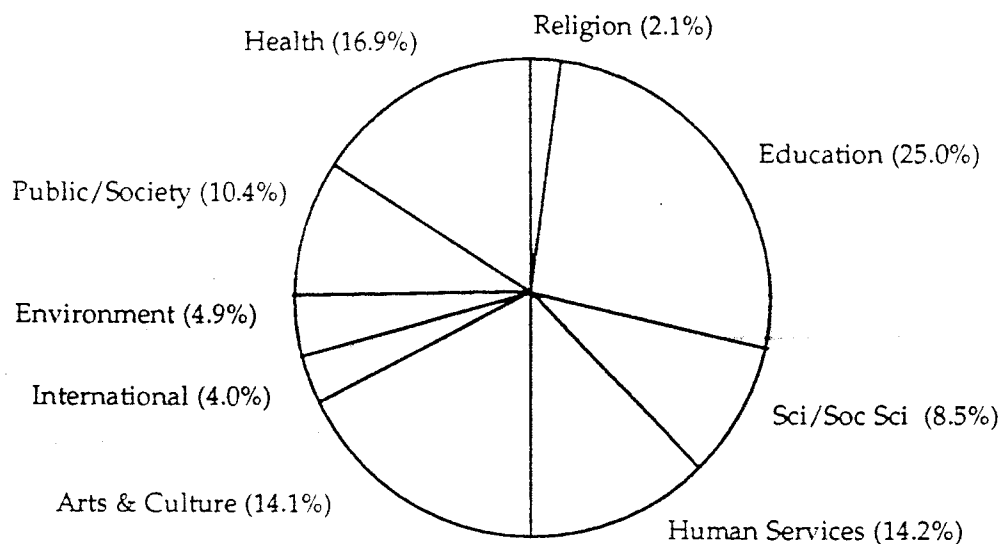


Foundation Giving Patterns

But I decided that seeking out contributions from individuals would be a difficult and time consuming place to start, so I turned next to foundations. Among the publications offering an overview of foundation funding patterns was the most recent edition of Foundation Giving.¹ This Foundation Center publication draws upon information provided by 8,971 foundations with assets of at least \$1 million or making grants totalling at least \$100,000 annually. While this information base represents only slightly more than a quarter of the 33,356 active grantmaking foundations identified by the Center, I felt that this was good enough for our purposes.

¹ Foundation Giving: Yearbook of Facts and Figures on Private, Corporate and Community Foundations (New York: The Foundation Center, 1993).

Figure 2
Foundation Giving: Subject Areas
Percent of Grant Dollars (1991)



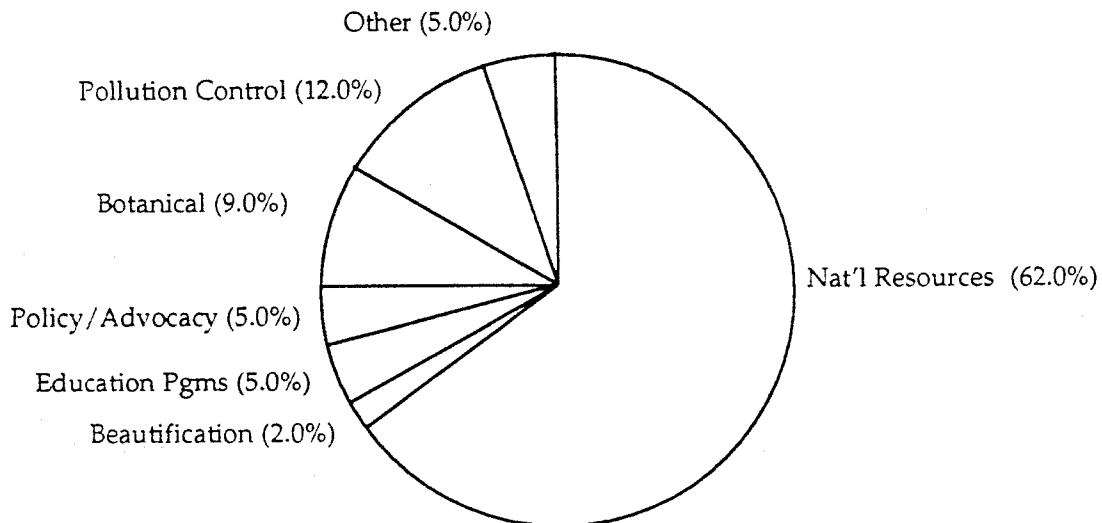
Foundation grants represented less than 7% of total giving in 1992, or \$8.3 billion.² The questions I was trying to answer were: how much of this money went to projects linked with building sustainable community, and who has been doing this funding? Among the ten basic categories of foundation funding, "education" stands out as the largest recipient (25%).³ My focus, however, was on that third of the pie (Figure 2) containing "environment/animals" (5% of total foundation funding), "public/society benefit" (10%), and "health" (17%).

² I had some questions here as to the actual amount, after comparing Giving USA's report on foundation giving in 1991 as \$7.7 billion, compared with Foundation Giving's 1991 figure as \$9.2 billion. While this inconsistency may very well be my own misunderstanding of the data, this situation reflects the difficulty faced by nonprofessional grants researchers in getting the numbers straight, as well as maintaining their credibility in the eyes of the committee to which they must report their findings.

³ This 1991 information is derived from The Foundation Grants Index (New York: Foundation Center, 1993).

Environment. According to a Foundation Center survey,⁴ environment and wildlife groups received a combined 4.9% of foundation grant dollars, about \$500 million, in 1991. Separated from "animals and wildlife," funding of "environment" amounted to 4% of total foundation funding. Looking at total grant dollars given to environmental programs (Figure 3), almost two-thirds go to "protection of natural resources (62%) and "pollution control" (12%). The remaining third is directed to "botanical and horticultural programs" (9%), "policy, advocacy and management" (5%), and "education programs" (5%), among others. While "sustainability" includes protection of resources and pollution control, the inverse is not necessarily true; it is unclear where to look for sustainable community amid standard environmental grantgiving.

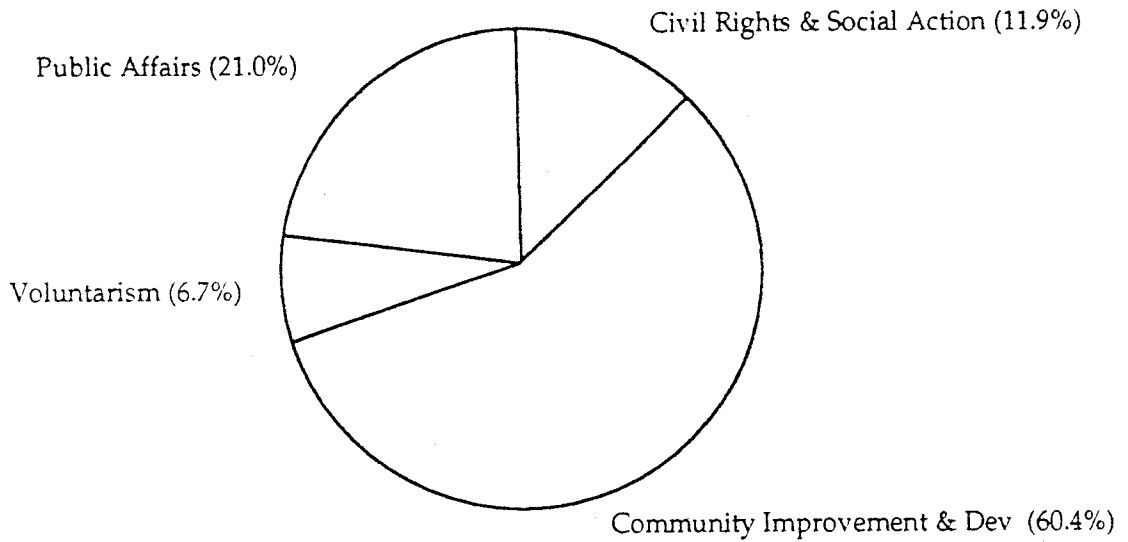
Figure 3
Foundation Giving to Environment
Percent of Grant Dollars (1991)



Community. In the Foundation Center's 1991 survey, 10.4% of all grant dollars, or about \$1 billion, support "public/society benefit" programs (see figure 4). Of this, 60% was directed to "community improvement and development" activities. Here we might hope to find some reference to sustainable community. However, the emphasis tends to be upon economic development, without any mention of "sustainable development" or of safeguards against exceeding the environmental carrying capacity within which this development takes place.

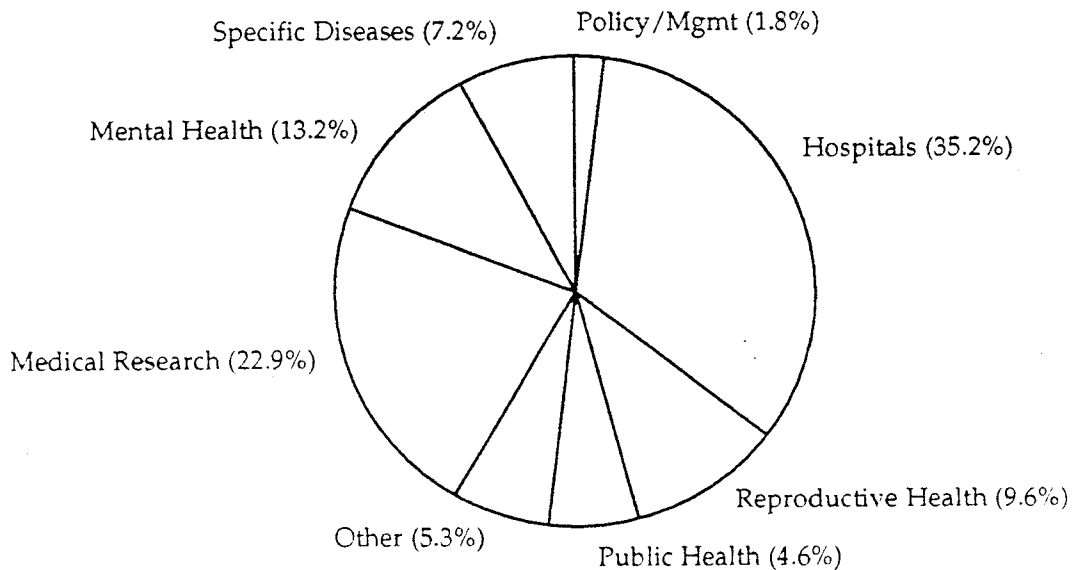
⁴ The survey is based on a sample of 846 independent, corporate, and community foundations, reported in Foundation Giving (New York: Foundation Center, 1993). This sample represented less than 2.6% of total, active grantmakers, yet account for 52% of total grant dollars given in 1991.

Figure 4
Foundation Giving: Public/Society Benefit
Percent of Grant Dollars (1991)



Health. The \$1.5 billion in grants to health represents almost 17% of all grant dollars, or more than three times the amount given to environment (see figure 5). But the emphasis is on hospitals and medical research; it is virtually impossible to determine if any "health" funding is directed toward environmentally-based health problems or the linkages between community development and health.

Figure 5
Foundation Giving: Health
Percent of Grant Dollars (1991)



SOURCES

General

Chronicle of Philanthropy, 1255 23rd Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037

Foundation Directory: A Guide to Grants Programs (New York: Foundation Center, 1993)

Foundation Giving: Yearbook of Facts and Figures on Private, Corporate and
Community Foundations (New York: Foundation Center, 1993)

Foundation Grants Index (New York: Foundation Center, 1993)

Giving USA: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 1992 (New York: American Association
of Fund-Raising Counsel Trust for Philanthropy, 1993)

Grants Classification System Indexing Manual (New York: Foundation Center, 1993)

Who Gets Grants/Who Gives Grants: Nonprofit Organizations and the Foundation Grants
They Received (New York: Foundation Center, 1994)

Environmental

Dialogue-database available at libraries

Environmental Grantmakers Directory (New York: Environmental Grantmakers Association, 1992)

Environmental Grantmaking Foundations (New York: Environmental Data Research Institute, 1993)

Foundation Directory: A Guide to Grants Programs (New York: Foundation Center, 1993)

Community Development

Grant Seekers Guide (District of Columbia: National Network of Grantmakers & Moyer Bell, 1989)

National Congress for Community Economic Development (old directory), 1875 Connecticut Ave. NW,
Washington DC, 20009, (202) 234-8009

National Directory of Corporate and Foundation Support for Community Economic Development (1988)

National Low Income Housing Coalition, 1012 14th St. NW, Washington DC, 20005, (202) 662-1530

Neighborhood Funders Group (directory with minimal information), 1001 S Marshall,
Suite 55, Winston-Salem, NC 27101

Urban Institute, 2100 M St. NW, Washington DC, 20036 (202) 833-7200

Health

Grantmakers in Health, 1350 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 1102, Washington, DC 20036