2000 Grants Program Survey

Introduction

This report presents findings from TCWF's second grants program survey, the first having been conducted in 1997. The purpose of these surveys is to increase TCWF's understanding of how funding applicants and current grantees perceive the Foundation, how they heard about it, how accessible and useful they find its materials and information, how staff treats them, and how TCWF could improve its philanthropic activities. In addition to reporting the 2000 grants program findings, this report will also compare these findings to those from 1997. Questionnaires for this second survey were mailed to all those who received and applied for funding in 1999.

Method

TCWF's Tom David, Magdalena Beltrán-del Olmo, Joan Hurley and (outside consultant) Julia Pennbridge revised the 1997 survey, resulting in a 33-question instrument that was distributed to 1,923 recipients (469 active/approved in 1999, 1184 declined in 1999, and 271 pending). The revisions, as they affect the ability to compare 1997 and 2000 data, are discussed in the "Results" section. They included adding new questions (Questions 1a, 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b and 29) and using the 1997 questions but altering the response options (Questions 3, 30, 31 and 32).

As with the 1997 survey, the 2000 survey included both closed and open-ended questions. The surveys were mailed with self-addressed envelopes to be returned to a P.O. box temporarily obtained for this purpose. Respondents were asked to return completed surveys within three weeks. The initial response rate was slow and TCWF sent a follow up letter to all survey recipients asking them to complete and return it. The cut-off date for accepting completed surveys was extended one week.

Completed surveys were coded and entered into a computerized database. Data were checked for accuracy using a 10% random sample and by reviewing intra-item relationships throughout the entire database. Quantitative data analyses included frequency and cross tabulation summaries using the standard SPSS 10.0 for Windows package. All responses to open-ended questions were separately analyzed for content and theme.

Results

Almost two thousand (1,923) questionnaires were mailed and 20.0% (384) were returned. Of these, five respondents claimed no one at their organization had worked with or knew about TCWF. These surveys were not included in the denominator. Thus, this report is based upon a 19.7% (n=379) response rate.

Raw data (numbers and percentages) for each quantitative question are provided in Appendix B. Summaries of the quantitative and qualitative data in eight different domains are presented below. Where comparable 1997 data are available, the comparison is presented first followed by the 2000 findings. The major points and highlights of the data are presented in the Executive Summary.

1. The respondents. (Questions 29 through 33) These data describe the jobs/roles of those completing the questionnaire, identify the current status of the organization *vis a vis* TCWF, and describe the types of organizations responding to the survey, their operating budgets, and locations.

Jobs/roles of those completing the questionnaire. (Question 29) This question was not asked in 1997, therefore comparisons cannot be made. The 2000 survey respondents held a variety of positions within their organizations. Almost two-fifths of them (38%) were executive directors, presidents, CEOs or, in two cases, board members. Another two-fifths were project/program directors/managers/ coordinators (22%) and development directors/grant managers (21%). The remaining one-fifth were senior managers (7%), researchers (3%) and others (3% including a filmmaker, consultants, secretaries, etc.) or were left blank (6%).

Current status of responding organization vis a vis TCWF. (Question 30) The question assessing the current status of responding organizations was totally revised for the 2000 survey. However, the same proportions of respondents had been declined funding in both years (56.3% in 1996 and 55.7% in 1999). Among the 2000 respondents, 37% are current and 17% former TCWF grantees, and among the 56% unfunded applicants, 26% were unfunded for an RFP and 30% for an LOI. Also, in the 2000 survey, 15% reported being "current applicants awaiting a Foundation decision." This category was not available to 1997 respondents.

In 2000, TCWF distributed 468 questionnaires to organizations with grants and to 1184 that had been declined grants. Although proportionately the 2000 response rate was only half that of 1997, the same pattern held with more grantees (30% in 2000 and 53% in 1997) than unfunded applicants (18% in 2000 and 20% in 1997) responding.

Types of responding organizations. (Question 31) In the 1997 survey, respondents were allowed to check as many categories as they wished to describe their organizations. This made it almost impossible to usefully summarize them (several checked every category). In the 2000 survey, respondents were asked to check the one category that best describes their organization.

Despite the restrictions imposed on the 2000 respondents, the pattern of responding organization types was similar to that from the 1997 survey. The top three responding organizational groups are community based organizations (34% compared with 26% in 1997), human services organizations (13% compared to 11%) and "other" (11% compared to 9%). The next group included community free clinics (7%), university/college/vocational schools (7%) and advocacy groups (6%). All other groups represented between 0.5% and 4% of the sample.

Responding organizations' operating budgets. (Question 32) Revisions to the response options for this question make comparisons between 1997 and 2000 data impossible in any detail. Overall it seems there were more organizations with smaller annual budgets in 2000 than in 1997. In 2000, respondent organizations' annual operating budgets were somewhat evenly distributed across a range from under $300,000 to $5 million plus as follows:

Operating budgets:	
<$300,000	24.5%
$300,000 TO $1 million	21.9%
$1 million to $5 million	29.3%
$5 million plus	22.4%

Responding organizations' locations. (Question 33) In 2000, the geographic distribution of responding organizations was similar to 1997, with only one having changed among the top four. As shown below, Los Angeles County continued to head the list while in 2000 Alameda County replaced Sacramento County in the top four.

Most frequently reported locations:		
	2000	**1997**
Los Angeles County	24%	34%
San Francisco County	10%	8%
San Diego County	6.9%	8%
Sacramento County	3.4%	6%
Alameda County	6.9%	unknown

Although similar patterns held in 2000 and 1997, the proportions were (with the exception of San Francisco) generally smaller. Also in 2000, fewer respondents were from outside California—2% compared to 8% in 1997.

A similar pattern was found among current grantees:

Current grantees locations		
	2000	**1997**
Los Angeles County	28%	35%
San Francisco County	13%	10%
San Diego County	6%	8%
Sacramento County	6%	8%
Alameda County	9%	8%

2. How TCWF compares with other foundations. (Questions 1 and 2) These questions were not asked in 1997. They focus on how respondents perceive TCWF and whether, and how, they think it differs from other foundations.

Perceptions of TCWF. (Question 1) Respondents were asked to provide the three words or phrases that best describe TCWF. This is a bold and unusual way to begin a questionnaire and provided some interesting information. Positive perceptions overwhelmingly outnumbered negative. Theme analysis identified seven positive response domains and one negative response domain. The positive domains center on TCWF's size and fields of interest, leadership, staff, commitment, community orientation, innovative approach, and professionalism. The negative response domain includes a variety of criticisms. These eight domains are discussed in more detail below.

It's big. Many of the first words or phrases that were provided centered on TCWF's asset base and its focus on health funding. TCWF is seen as a "rich" and "large" resource for grantmaking in California and its emphasis on health promotion, disease prevention and wellness is seen to clearly distinguish it from other funders. Only four respondents mentioned TCWF's public health perspective.

It's a leader. A few respondents seemed to link TCWF's size and wealth with being influential and commented on it having "good name recognition," "a good public image," being "prestigious," and playing an important leadership role dedicated to improving the health of Californians. One respondent likes "to see TCWF taking the lead in unpopular projects." As is always the case with public opinion, one or two respondents saw this leadership role as being "ambitious," and "politically motivated."

It has great staff. Overall, the most frequently reported words/phrases centered on TCWF staff and the way they interact with applicants and grantees. Their interactions clearly enhance respondents' views of TCWF. Staff are perceived to be "supportive," "responsive," "helpful," "courteous," "accessible," "friendly," "attentive," and "respectful." Other respondents used words with a heavier emotional load, e.g., "caring," "concerned," "generous," "compassionate," "gracious," and "dedicated."

It's committed to improving the health of diverse populations. Positive perceptions about TCWF's approach and emphasis ran a close second to perceptions about its staff. This group of words and phrases reported TCWF's "commitment to improving the

health of all Californians," and how it "advocates for better health outcomes." These comments included TCWF's commitment to meeting the needs of diverse populations, its sensitivity to cultural differences and needs and its diversity "in grantmaking and staffing."

It takes a community approach. These perceptions about TCWF's commitment to all Californians were linked to positive perceptions about its "holistic" approach in general and specifically to its emphasis on community. Most respondents see TCWF as promoting community solutions to problems and emphasizing services for the "underserved," "minorities," "needy," and the "disadvantaged." TCWF is perceived to do this by fostering and facilitating "collaboration," "cooperation," and "fostering new partnerships."

It's innovative. TCWF is perceived by these respondents to implement its dedication to improving health and its commitment to supporting communities in "innovative," "proactive," and "progressive" ways. Several respondents see it as "visionary," others see it as "risk-taking," "courageous," and being "provocative," and "gutzy (sic)." These respondents seem to agree that TCWF focuses "on the important issues facing society," takes an "activist" approach and is "open to new ideas."

It's professional. While TCWF is perceived to be unusual in its approach to defining problems and developing solutions, it is also seen by most respondents to be "professional," and "well organized." Its competence and efficiency seem linked to "clear communications" that delineate its goals and objectives and that are provided promptly and competently. It is seen to be "knowledgeable," "thoughtful," and "to have a good grasp of the issues."

Criticisms. A few respondents perceive TCWF more negatively. These perceptions are summarized in the word "bureaucratic." Other similar perceptions include "closed," "formal," "cold," "controlling," "insensitive," "arrogant," "disorganized," and "non-responsive." The subtlety of this issue is captured in the following statement "easy to approach, difficult to penetrate." More specific comments centered on being "unclear about funding priorities" and "shifting directions including on deadlines."

Differences between TCWF and other foundations. (Question 2) This question was not asked in the 1997 survey and responses to it were broad ranging and hence difficult to analyze. Almost two-thirds (65%) of the 2000 respondents reported that TCWF is different from other foundations. These differences could be positive or negative but from the written comments it is obvious they are predominantly positive (at a rate of about 4:1 positive to negative).

Positive differences. These comments primarily reflected the eight themes identified in the Question 1 responses. They include comments about TCWF being "larger than most" and "one of the few focused on health issues," and several respondents say TCWF is unusual because it will provide core-operating support for which they are extremely grateful. Other comments show TCWF taking a stronger leadership position—it "takes a stand on issues" and has been a leader in violence prevention—and having more accessible staff—"you can always talk to someone by phone about a project or need, not always the case with other foundations." Still other respondents think TCWF is different because it is more committed to solving societal problems—"more interested in long-term change"—and more oriented towards community level solutions—"provide real connections to other services to provide a more holistic response to problems." TCWF is also seen as more innovative and willing to "think outside the box" than other foundations—"more willing to take risks and be progressive in approach, more flexible, approachable and supportive." Finally, TCWF's staff and approach to grantmaking are generally seen as more professional than other organizations —"they seem better organized and more responsive than some other foundations I've worked with."

TCWF is also seen as different from other foundations in one other area—communications and the information it provides. Respondents feel that TCWF is "more concerned with communicating with us," and that it really reaches "out to us and make[s] programs known, assisting us in applying for funds, clear guidelines." As another respondent wrote, TCWF is different because of its "better communication in announcing new initiatives, providing workshops, [and] telling clients about funding." Other components of being a better communicator include TCWF having "a lot of pertinent information which is to the point and practical," being "more responsive…[providing]…continued information via newsletter, annual reports, etc.," and being "much more clear and focused about what they want."

Negative differences. Those who reported TCWF is different in a negative way essentially repeated the criticisms outlined in the responses to Question 1. They feel TCWF is more bureaucratic than other foundations, that its staff is less accessible and provides less feedback (particularly about denials), that its application process is too slow, and that TCWF is not open to new ideas. These applicants do not like, or cannot meet, the funding rules and regulations that TCWF has established.

There will always be applicants who cannot accept having been denied, days when staff is rushed and unable to give people the time they want, and some applicants will always want more time than they can reasonably have. However, from the comments reported here, there seems to be a much smaller group of disgruntled respondents in 2000 than in 1997.

3. How respondents heard about TCWF. (Question 3) The same response patterns to this question held in 2000 and 1997 with the three top referral channels being TCWF materials, other nonprofits and media announcements. However, in 2000 respondents were less dependent on TCWF materials and more dependent on its website. This pattern is best seen in a comparison of 2000 and 1997 data provided below.

Source of Information:		
	2000	**1997**
TCWF materials	46%	52%
Other nonprofits	28%	24%
Articles about TCWF or TCWF-sponsored advertisements	25%	22%
TCWF website	24%	<11%
TCWF staff presentations	20%	11-13%

Other grantmakers/corporate-giving programs	18%	<11%
TCWF staff suggestion	17%	11-13%
Applicant's board	16%	11-13%
Resource center	15%	11-13%
Other	8%	<11%

These data generally suggest that, as would be expected, TCWF is more integrated into the overall philanthropic environment in 2000 than in 1997. This is intimated in the written responses to 'other' where 18 out of 24 respondents essentially report that they "already knew" about TCWF.

4. Accessibility and understandability of TCWF materials and information. (Questions 4 through 10) Because there have been so many changes in TCWF's materials and communications strategies since 1997, questions relating to these issues in the 1997 survey were completely revised and only the most general comparisons can be made. These comparisons will be presented first in the section about receiving or accessing materials, then responses about the helpfulness of the materials will be described and finally specific information about TCWF's website, *Reflections* publications, the grants information brochure and *Portfolio* will be presented.

Overview of materials received or accessed. (Question 4) From the data shown below we can surmise that in 2000 more TCWF materials were more widely distributed and that the website is the second most used source of information. It is important to note that all the materials published by TCWF (except the grants information brochure) are placed on the website. Some of these materials are reformatted for the web and others appear on the web as they do in print.

Sources of information:		
	2000	**1997**
Annual report	73%	56%
TCWF website	61%	15%
RFP	57%	51%
TCWF brochure	52%	54%
Portfolio	39%	N/A
NOFA	38%	N/A
Initiative specific brochures	N/A	59%
Reflections	27%	N/A
Press release	17%	unknown
Foundation e-mail	11%	least used source

Helpfulness of materials received or accessed. (Question 5) Responses to this question identified three kinds of materials as most helpful: TCWF website (28%); Annual Report (25%) and RFPs (19%). The next most frequently cited materials were NOFA (9.0%), TCWF's brochure (9%), and *Portfolio* (2%). All others were less than 6%. Reasons for the helpfulness of the top three follow:

Website. Comments about why the website was helpful centered on how it had "all pertinent material in one place," how they "always know it's up to date," how "comprehensive and easy to use" it is, and how it's "easy to access." Three comments summarize these attitudes — "excellent, very thorough and comprehensive, all questions answered," "greatest, easily accessible [and] very complete," and "is extremely helpful, comprehensive and easy to navigate…the information is clear and concise." There was only one comment (out of 50 plus) that the website was difficult to navigate.

Annual Report. Comments about why the annual report is helpful centered on how it provided a "broad view," which includes information about "your philosophy," "examples of projects funded," and "TCWF's priorities and the amounts to apply for." These comments were well summarized by two respondents who reported that the annual report provides "a good snapshot of your work statewide… reports are clear and concise," and "helps inform me of other organizations we could work with, gets me thinking of other ways to strategize about issues." Similar comments were made about *Portfolio* and *Reflections*, although these were not so highly rated as helpful (8% and 6% respectively).

RFPs. Comments about why RFPs are most helpful centered on the usefulness of detailed information. Several respondents commented on how clear and focused RFPs are and how "helpful [it is] to know of funding availability and areas of interest," and how it "helps to plan and understand if [we] should apply for a grant." There is the sense that RFPs, along with the Foundation brochure and NOFAs (both of which were reported as most helpful by 9% of the respondents) are helpful because they give the most detailed information and because "getting funds for programs is what it's all about."

TCWF's website. (Question 6) Only 5 respondents (1.3%) reported that they do not have access to TCWF's website, although we cannot assume that all of the 60% reporting not having visited the website can easily access it. Over one-third (36%) reported having visited the redesigned website. They "like it" and think its "very well done."

Comments about the website were overwhelmingly positive with the most frequent statements being 'excellent,' 'very good,' and 'good.' More detailed compliments included "attractive," "easy to use," "comprehensive," "good design," and "informative." The website is extremely well-liked by those who use it. This is summed up in the following statement: "very detailed, updated information is available, instructions and navigation tools are clear."

The respondents were so positive about the website there were few suggestions about how to improve it. Those that were provided involved either refinements or additions. The most frequent request was to have email links to the staff from the website. The suggestions can be summarized as follows:

New applications:

- "E-mail links to staff"
- "E-mail addresses to grant winners"
- "A list of or "provide links to" funded programs under each category"
- "On-line applications/LOI capabilities"
- "LISTSERVE for updates"

Refinements to current website:

- "More information on RFPs"
- "Change font, shadow effects hard to read"
- "Grant searches by region or county rather than city"
- "More graphics and pictures" and "Keep more text based for accessibility"
- "Menu buttons change color and are hard to read"
- "More youth friendly information and wording is very adult"
- "Update more frequently"
- "Too dry, not interactive enough"

Only 8% of those accessing the revised website made less than enthusiastic comments about it. Their comments include "better but not great," "average," "OK," and "still clunky." Specific comments from these respondents include "OK visually attractive but loads slow," and "had some problem with color, some hard to read."

Reflections publications. (Question 7) One-third of the respondents (33%) reported receiving *Reflections* publications and the vast majority reported liking them a great deal. Again, in addition to primarily "excellent," "very good," and "good," comments include "interesting," "enjoyable," "informative," "positive," and "clear, well-written, good picture of work and mission of TCWF," "extremely well-done, shows understanding of in-depth issues, good analysis," and "liked honest discussion of lessons learned."

Negative responses (16%) included not remembering their reactions to these publications, "unnecessary," "interesting but not engaging," "OK." One respondent reported "informative but hard to read, reflect on wording and group trying to reach, too professional." Two respondents felt it is "slick" or "very slick, may be too slick."

Grants information brochure. (Questions 8 and 9) Over one-half (54%) had used TCWF's grants information brochure. Again, they were overwhelmingly positive in their reactions to it. Most comment centered on its clarity ("clear and easy to use") and how much information it provides ("very detailed and clear, easily understood"). Other comments emphasize how good the information is that it does provide ("good design, very readable") and how helpful and useful the information is ("helpful for learning about application process" and "useful to think through connections between our work and TCWF's interests").

Negative comments include "don't recall," "does not provide enough background information for each grant program," "large number of funding categories makes it confusing to know where to apply," and "too general, some appear to qualify for everything, confusing."

Of those who had used TCWF's brochure, 90% reported that it was easy to understand. Comments from those who did not find it easy to understand centered on it being "vague" and "confusing." Three comments seem pertinent: "hard to find difference between projects/initiatives, etc.," "still hard to understand concept of wellness in societal context," and "the brochure lists funding priorities and goals, however, information regarding current funding initiatives, current funding process and timelines are committed." This latter statement is taken to mean that the information in the brochure might not be current because funding decisions have already been made.

Quarterly Newsletter, Portfolio. (Question 10) Less than half (42%) of the respondents had received this newsletter. Of those who had, 88% reported that its information had helped them better understand TCWF's grantmaking priorities. Most respondents provided positive comments and three examples are provided: 1) "like 3-ring binder accommodation, articles, easy to find web contacts," 2) "like new layout-more articles about people TCWF services," and 3) "well designed, not too glitzy, good articles, staff profiles and grantee list."

Only three respondents made suggestions about how to improve *Portfolio*. One suggested adding "specifics about location and contact numbers for projects," the second suggested including "names of people who appear in pictures," and the third suggested s/he "would like more in depth articles on funded projects."

Only 7% made negative comments. These were primarily "don't recall." Others included "informative but feels like publication PR, would like to know more about challenges and critical thought about initiatives," "little too slick and shiny," "pretty much fluff," and "too dense/long; difficult to get information, not user friendly."

5. Contacting staff. (Questions 11 through 14) This section repeated the 1997 survey questions about contacting staff. They center on how many respondents called TCWF, which office they called, whom they spoke to and how they were treated.

Which offices were called. (Questions 11 and 12) Fewer respondents reported having telephoned TCWF in 2000 (73%) than in 1997 (80%). This overall reduction was distributed across the Woodland Hills office (53% in 2000 compared to 65% in 1997), the San Francisco office (11% compared to 18%), and in calls to both offices (8% compared to 9%).

Whom did respondents speak to? (Question 13) With the exception of telephone calls to Grants Administration that had remained almost constant, the proportions of calls to the receptionist and program assistants or secretaries had increased between 1997

and 2000, while the proportions to senior program officers and program officers decreased. The following table supports these statements.

	2000	1997
Receptionist	44%	42%
Program assistant or secretary	42%	34%
Senior program officer or program officer	38%	56.6%
Grants administration	12%	12%
Other	2%	6%

How were they treated? (Question 14) As in 1997 (94%), respondents overwhelmingly reported (96%) that they were treated courteously. However, the proportions reporting they were treated very courteously or courteously reversed between 1997 and 2000. In 2000, 34% reported they were treated courteously (compared to 58% in 1997) and 62% reported they were treated very courteously (compared to 36% in 1997).

In 1997, the ratio of positive to negative examples about how respondents had been treated was 2:1. In 2000, this ratio had increased to almost 4:1. The 2000 remarks emphasized staff helpfulness, responsiveness including prompt follow-up in answering questions and returning phone calls, professionalism and friendliness. Specific examples include: "All [staff are] extremely friendly and helpful; never sent to a black hole," and, "[e]veryone I've come in contact with has been wonderful, no exceptions."

There is also a sense that TCWF has good internal communication and has established and well-functioning customer service systems. Consequently respondents feel respected and valued, for example: "staff go out of their way to attain and impart excellent information; return calls and do what they say," and "our PO was out of the office for several days when scheduling a site visit. She informed me of her availability and put me in touch with her assistant who scheduled it. Staff professionalism and efficiency were wonderful."

Negative comments center on not getting phone calls returned, not getting to the right person, being given the wrong information and hence not feeling respected. An example of how staff can be courteous but applicants can still feel alienated is captured in the following. "[I was] treated courteously but with distance. Never got feedback about the denial, phone calls were not returned, felt like in [a] vacuum."

6. Grants processing. (Questions 15 through 22) The information provided through these responses can only be compared with 1997 data at the most general level because the 2000 questions were more specific than those asked in 1997. Questions focused on applicants getting timely responses, whether NOFA and RFP information is clear, whether respondents attended an initiative RFP meeting and obtained useful information, and finally, comments on the RFP process.

Timely response. (Questions 15 through 17) The timeliness of acknowledgements to letters of interest appears to have slightly improved between 1997 and 2000. However, it is unclear whether this is simply because respondents have better memories or whether TCWF's acknowledgement rates have actually improved because there is little difference between the proportions of applicants reporting they did not receive an acknowledgement within three weeks. In 2000, almost three-fourths (72%) reported submitting a Letter of Interest compared to 69% in 1997. Of those who did submit LOIs in 2000, 66% reported receiving acknowledgements within three weeks (compared to 53% in 1997). Also in 2000, 18% reported being unable to remember compared to 23% in 1997. Thus 16% in 2000 and 17% in 1997 reported they did not receive timely acknowledgements.

Responses to LOIs—denials or invitations to submit proposals—appear much improved in 2000. In this most recent survey, 80% reported receiving denial letters or invitations to submit proposals within three months. This compares very favorably with the 67% that similarly reported in 1997.

Again in 2000, 19% reported not having received a response within 3 months (15%) or not remembering (4%). This overall rate also shows a reduction from 1997 when the equivalent overall response was 24% (12% not having received a response within 3 months and 12% not remembering).

Notice of Funding Availability or RFP. (Question 18) Almost two-thirds (63%) reported having received a Notice of Funding Availability or RFP (6.1% Notice of Funding Availability alone, 25% RFP alone and 32% both). Respondents report that the information in these documents is not clear. Only 14% reported the information as being "very clear" (2%) or "clear" (12%). The majority (86%) reported it is "somewhat clear" (45%) or "unclear" (40%).

Initiative RFP meeting. (Questions 19 through 21) Slightly more than one in four (27%) of the respondents had attended an information meeting for one of TCWF's Initiative RFPs. Most reported attending Violence Prevention Initiative meetings (37%). Other meetings attended include Teen Pregnancy Prevention (19%), Community Health (6%), Work and Health (5%) and Health Improvement (<1%). Over four-fifths (86%) of the participants were unsatisfied with these meetings reporting the information was either "not helpful at all" (54%) or "somewhat helpful" (32%).

RFP process. (Question 22) There were as many negative as positive comments (i.e., 1:1) about the RFP process. The negative comments could be grouped into five themes: (a) insufficient information, (b) bad timing, (c) difficulty of completing proposal, (d) frustration with being denied and (e) unclear information. The positive comments (f) were considerably less diverse.

Insufficient information. Respondents complaining about insufficient information primarily want more help from staff at the beginning and end of the RFP process. At the beginning of the process they want help to better understand what TCWF is looking for and at the end they want more information about why one agency is chosen over another.

Bad-timing. Bad timing issues center on the fact that there is a "long time between submission and the award decision and a

short time between the award and start-up." Several commented that three months is too long to wait for a response.

Difficulty of completing proposal. Some respondents commented that the RFP process is "arduous" and that questions in the RFP are "repetitive," "too many for the space allowed, and that the "requirements are too rigid." Others commented on how the process and the RFP itself were "intimidating" and "too demanding for small organizations."

Frustration with being denied. There are always respondents whose prime frustrations are centered on the fact that they were denied funding. Reasons for this frustration included having been denied because TCWF "changed funding focus" and because they were "denied the opportunity to submit [but] couldn't talk to anyone." Two or three mentioned that they had submitted several LOIs, all of which had been denied, and that therefore they were not "trying any more."

Unclear information. Finally, several respondents commented that the information that is available is unclear or confusing. For example, one respondent reported getting incomplete information and therefore not knowing that "TCWF [is] not supporting anti-tobacco programs [because this] was not in the materials." Others reported that the deadlines, guidelines and meeting information were unclear or not received.

Positive comments. There was a narrower range of positive comments about the RFP process. Most respondents reported not having any comments and it seems that many of these were because the current process "functions well" and because there are "no difficulties with the current RFP [process, it's] simple and easy to understand." The positive comments that were made centered on staff helpfulness, clear and simple guidelines and a clearly articulated and understood process. These attitudes are captured in the following statements "process is better organized than other funding sources," and "foundation personnel very willing to help with suggestions, etc. Grant process is more open and accommodating than other grant experiences I've had."

7. Working with TCWF. (Questions 23 through 25) These three questions were for current grantees and asked about their relationships with program staff, whether their organizations have benefited as a result of their relationships with TCWF, and whether TCWF has hindered their organization's success.

Relationship with program staff. (Question 23) In 1997, slightly less than one-third of the respondents were current grantees and their comments about their relationships with TCWF staff were described as "overwhelmingly positive (4:1)." In 2000, over one-third (37%) of the respondents are current grantees and their comments are "even more" overwhelmingly positive at "8:1." As in 1997, many of the 2000 respondents described their relationships as "excellent," "very good," "good," and "great." Program staff is described as "helpful," "accessible and available," "responsive," (which includes providing prompt/timely attention and following through on what they say they will do), and "supportive." One respondent summed up his/her organization's relationship with TCWF staff as "better than with other foundations."

The few negative comments about relationships center on poor or no communication, wanting more personal attention ("I feel lost in the crowd"), and micro-management ("program staff very directive rather than flexible in allowing agency to run programs as desired"). Given that many other respondents commented on the flexibility of TCWF staff, it is hard to know whether this comment is from a grantee that needs to be held accountable or truthfully reflects program staff behavior. More than one comment was made about TCWF relying on communication "through the TA grantee" which was described as "not effective."

Grantee benefits from relationship with TCWF. (Question 24) Almost all grantees (94%) reported benefiting from their relationships with TCWF. Of those who answered this question (132), only one comment had a negative tone. It stated "[we've] benefited, however, not sure internal capacity has been strengthened, so many strings attached, exhausting."

Beyond the relationship (i.e., grant) that allows them to "continue our work," "serve more people," and "make a difference in people's lives," the most important benefit for respondents involves the increased visibility and credibility that being TCWF grantees brings them. Several mentioned that because TCWF had "taken a risk [with us]," "given us legitimacy," they had been able to get other funding. Also, becoming a TCWF grantee brings considerable prestige. TCWF grants are seen as difficult to get and therefore being able to add TCWF's name to its donor base validates an organization's capabilities.

Three other benefits were identified: 1) allowing the organization to stabilize, build infrastructure and grow, 2) getting feedback and information that improved their programs, and 3) providing access to new networks, collaborators and partners. Being a TCWF grantee is clearly seen as providing membership to an elite club, which in turn provides access to otherwise unavailable resources and influence.

Hindrances from TCWF relationship. (Question 25) Most (90%) of the respondents reported that their success had not been hindered by their relationship with TCWF. Many were quite adamant about this saying "absolutely not." Comments from the 12 (10%) who reported their success had been hindered fell into four issue groups: fiscal, staff relationship, communication, and dissatisfaction with the technical assistance being provided. There were only one or two comments in each of these groups and they are quoted, in total, below:

Fiscal issues:

- "All our funding comes from TCWF therefore we are facing sustainability difficulties."
- When "hearing of my grant was postponed for several months because the BOD docket was too full, we had a precarious few months as a result."

Staff issues:

- "There was inflexibility and lack of respect [when we were] restructuring grants."
- "They need to have things done a certain way that may not fit in."

Communication issues:

- The respondent was "unsure about what is wanted in the initiative because it had "unclear nuances," and reported feeling "inhibited about giving TCWF critical feedback…appear overly sensitive to constructive criticism especially at top level."

<u>Issues with technical assistance</u>:

- "Moving mark of TCWF has been difficult to accommodate, too much power to TA providers."
- "TA grantee told [us] TCWF's not committed to this type of community level change."

8. Reaching underserved communities? (Question 26) A similar question about whether TCWF funding is reaching traditionally underserved communities was asked in 1997. In 2000 more respondents (66%) believe such communities are being reached than did in 1997 (56%), although in their comments several (15%) reported that they "don't know," and some of those who responded "yes" qualified their answers by adding "based on what I read," or "from your Annual Report." Most comments were of one of two kinds. One group consisted of suggestions for why traditionally underserved communities are not being reached. These included the fact that underserved communities are served by small organizations that tend to be intimidated by TCWF's size and "rigorous demands" and that TCWF prefers to support "major firms and institutions."

The second group of comments consisted of examples of the geographic areas and target populations and issues not being reached by TCWF. Although it is presumed that these geographic areas, populations and issues primarily represent the areas, populations and issues addressed by those who were denied funding, some respondents clearly think about issues that transcend their organizational ties and the following information is provided for TCWF's critical review.

Geographic areas not being reached by TCWF:
All rural areas (this includes "Far Northern California — Susanville, Quincy, Portola, Sierraville, Marlieville)
Central Valley
Contra Costa County
Imperial County
Los Angeles 90006, 90007, 90015, 90057, 90017
North East Valley
Orange County
Riverside — needs recreation and outreach
South Santa Cruz County (Watsonville)
Ventura County (A few respondents commented that Los Angeles and Northern California "get too much".)

Target populations and issues not being addressed:
Alcohol and other drug prevention/education
Asian/Pacific Islanders
Battered women and children
Care-givers of the chronically ill need help with wellness
Domestic violence
Elderly
Environmental justice
Faith based programs/initiatives
Gay/lesbian/bi/transgender
HIV/AIDS population in San Diego
Mentally ill/mental health
Native Americans
People with disabilities
Prisoners

9. Other thoughts. (Questions 27 and 28) Question 27 asked for respondents' ideas about areas in which TCWF could improve, that is respondents were deliberately asked for their criticisms, and Question 28 provided space for any other comments.

Areas for TCWF improvement. (Question 27) This question was added to the 2000 survey and almost half of the respondents (49.1%) answered it. Of them, about one-third (37%) said they had no suggestions for improvement. The almost two-thirds (61%) that did respond overwhelmingly asked for improved communication and clarity of that communication. They also have ideas about the kinds of grants that TCWF should fund, a few negative comments about program officers, and suggestions for improving the survey.

Improve communication. These comments center on clarifying information, making staff more accessible, and providing more and quicker information. Information clarification issues include removing inconsistencies between what the guidelines say and the comments potential grantees get after their application has been reviewed, making budget forms easier to adjust, and providing more conferences (on research) and workshops (including one on how to develop partnerships). Respondents also want the opportunity to build relationships with program staff who are seen as over-worked and consequently not available. Most importantly, applicants want more information about why their requests are denied and several said they are concerned "about the lack of feedback after denial."

In order to improve communication, several respondents suggested specific kinds of outreach. One proposed holding "community forums in communities of color." Another proposed hiring staff specifically to work with "small but needy communities," and still another "setting up ways to educate the community about Board members [ideas] and TCWF's future interests." Others recommended "site visits for all staff (including clerical);" however, several wanted site visits before they were denied funding. Finally, there were requests to "continue communication with past grantees about upcoming opportunities and TCWF focus," and to "develop a routine for including grantees in TCWF events."

Types of grants to make. Several respondents requested that TCWF continue to support or increase program and general grant funds rather than focusing so much on initiatives. Others want TCWF to emphasis community level interventions rather than direct services. A few commented positively on TCWF's willingness to provide core operating support and others asked for longer grants that "help in planning and reducing administrative and fundraising costs," that are needed for "long-term community change," and "to determine [service] impact and to develop a standard of care."

Program officers. Given how many positive comments there have been throughout this survey about program staff, it was interesting to see five fairly negative comments about program officers. Two centered on hiring practices: one simply asked "how do you hire program officers?" and the other recommended that program officers with community experience be hired. The other three comments concerned applicants' working experiences. They include "some program officers are unapproachable, they should be partner[s] not benefactor[s]," "[they] are looking for reasons to reject instead of working with us on the proposal," and "[tell them to] lighten up, they come across as self important…are effective but overworked."

Survey comments. Several respondents commented on the survey. One pointed out an error in the skip pattern directions and the others had ideas about its effects ("thorough and thought provoking"), how to improve it ("ask about site visits") and what to do with the results ("post them on TCWF's website"). One appreciated its anonymity because without it he/she "wouldn't have been completely frank."

Additional comments. (Question 28) This question was also asked in 1997 and the responses then were predominantly negative (6 negative to 1 positive). In 2000, 44% of respondents provided additional comments that were overwhelmingly positive (only 5 were negative, i.e., 33 positive to 1 negative).

Many of these additional comments thanked TCWF for what it does, for focusing on the underserved and for asking for their ideas through this survey. After editing the "thank yous" and repeated comments about what has already been reported, the remaining comments could be grouped into Concerns, Directives and Compliments.

Concerns. These focused on funding availability and timing, what funds can be used for, and whether funding will be continued. One respondent wants to learn, as soon as possible, "if TCWF will continue funding for two years" because this affects his/her planning. Another asks "is there any criteria for continued funding of program based on success and impact after funding period ends?" Two other questions centered on why funding cannot "go towards grantwriting?" and "when is the next RFP or NOFA being released for VPI promising practices or can proposal be submitted any time?"

There were three negative additional comments regarding funding. Two centered on concerns that decision about funding recipients are made before proposals are reviewed and the third stated "accepting $5 million from CA Endowment was in really poor taste."*

Directives. These involved both "dos" and "don'ts" and cover a wide range of issues. It is most efficient to report the six "dos" and the two "don'ts" verbatim. They are not in prioritized order:

- "Work with other foundations on complimentary funding"
- "Like to encourage TCWF to look into program for advocacy and mediation service for health care consumers"
- "Some paperwork more effective if you identify community and work to be done very specifically" and "Specify money for definitive areas"
- "Fund DHS for systems update so they provide imperative data to other organizations"
- "Voice mail system is off at 4:30, please leave on longer"
- "Bring together grantees from the previous 2-3 years could prove useful for thinking through future directions and would help grantees understand the context for their work"
- "Don't appropriate funding to government collaboratives because community based get minimal funding"
- "Don't give up on initiative efforts to address social issues in CA [which are] greatly appreciated and essential to achieve

change and renew hope"

Compliments. Comments on the 2000 survey are qualitatively different from those on the 1997 survey because they are so complimentary to TCWF staff, mission, approach, and information—in fact about everything. It seems appropriate to end this section by quoting some of these compliments:

- "A pleasure to deal with because of information sharing and always respectful."
- "I appreciate TCWF's efficiency and respect in handling the grant process. After many state contracts and other foundation grants, TCWF is a joy, the Cal Endowment should take a lesson!"
- "It is, overall, a pleasure working with TCWF. It seems to be a thoughtful, objective, committed group of staff."
- "TCWF commitment to complex community approaches and evaluation distinguish it."
- "TCWF has done excellent job of involving key stakeholders in decision to improve TCWF work. Thank you."
- "Continue to be the model of a strong foundation you are!!"
- "You are doing a good job, help the CA Endowment."
- "Best foundation I've ever worked with."

Conclusions

Little can be added to the myriad compliments TCWF received from the respondents to its 2000 Grants Program Survey. Overall, they like and respect TCWF staff, approve of the way TCWF approaches and conducts its grantmaking, and view TCWF as a leader that takes innovative approaches to solving major social problems. This is obvious from the tone of many of the survey's written comments that is essentially "keep up the good work."

Only two problem areas are apparent, one obvious and the other more subtle. Clearly, TCWF must review its NOFA and RFP materials and the way its RFP meetings are structured. Although more than half the respondents identified RFPs as the third most helpful source of information (Question 5), others who reported receiving RFPs or NOFAs could not easily understand them (Questions 18 and 19). Also, the RFP process comments were the only comments where the number of positive statements was equal to and did not outweigh the number of negative statements and the RFP meetings were generally viewed as unhelpful. In addition to reviewing the content of these materials and the scheduling and location of the meetings, there is a sense that the material and meeting contents should be better integrated and their "roll out" better planned.

The subtler problem involves TCWF's strategy of providing technical assistance to grantees through other grantees. In some cases these grants are working well and respondents commented on how much they appreciate the initiative focused assistance they receive. In other cases, this strategy is not in TCWF's best interest. This occurs where the technical assistance grantees can assume too much power and thereby control all communications between the other grantees and TCWF. This arrangement leaves the other grantees feeling excluded, not valued and extremely frustrated. Program staff with technical assistance grantees should make sure that their primary relationships with other grantees are not usurped. Where this occurs, program staff may obtain only partial or biased information about initiative activities and progress. Without complete information, strategies to correct problems or expand the initiative will not have firm foundations.

These two problems are relatively minor and TCWF should be congratulated for the positive changes that have occurred in the last three years. These changes have been constructive and are appreciated by survey respondents. In 1997, TCWF received high ratings for its work, but the written comments were somewhat harsh and critical. Respondents to the 2000 survey gave TCWF even higher performance ratings and their written comments were predominantly complimentary. Thus, the problems areas that were identified are not of major concern. The results of this survey suggest that it is most important to focus on sustaining current efforts and supporting processes that are clearly working well.

*Editor's Note: TCWF did not accept funding from The California Endowment. Rather, The Endowment funded a TCWF grantee.