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# McCormick Foundation Civics Program:

# Voice of the Grantees

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Earlier this year, the McCormick Foundation Civics Program worked with an external evaluator to administer a confidential survey to organizations that applied for or received a grant from our program between 2010 and 2013.

The goal of the survey was to assess our performance in key grant-making areas and to solicit ideas on how we can enhance our relationship with grantees. The assessment questions focused on the clarity of our funding guidelines, deadlines and grant processes, our responsiveness to inquiries and requests for feedback, and our ongoing communication and contact with grantees. Further questions asked for input on the value of creating online application and reporting systems, on formulating a social media strategy, and on what we could be doing, in addition to funding, to support the organizations with which we work.

While the survey results revealed that we are doing well in some of these areas, we also received valuable feedback on where we can improve. Respondents appear satisfied with our grant application process and deadlines, the flexibility of our funding timelines, and the overall experience working with Civics Program staff. However, we also learned that our funding guidelines can be ambiguous, that our response to inquiries is not always timely and that grantees would appreciate more frequent and different types of communication over the course of a grant period.

In the next year, we will begin implementing changes based on these responses. In early 2015, we will administer a follow-up survey to look at our progress.

What follows is the full survey report, including the methodology and the underlined original questionnaire, as well as a "post-script" in which we identify priorities for the Civics Program in response to the information, insights and recommendations from respondents.

We welcome your comments or questions. Please don't hesitate to contact me at any time to continue the discussion.

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## INTRODUCTION

This project began with a broad goal: to understand participants' perceptions of, and experiences with, the Civics Program.  From an organizational standpoint, the survey was designed to provide the Civics Program staff with useful data that could be used to improve the program.  More specifically, the Foundation sought to assess participants' experiences with the different components of the Civics Program grantmaking process, beginning with hearing about the program, reviewing the website and submitting a proposal, as well as their experiences, either in being funded or declined.  The survey asked them to reflect on their satisfaction with the grantmaking process, the staff, and their own efforts navigating the program.

An essential objective was to **offer Civics Program applicants an opportunity to provide confidential feedback** about their experience working with McCormick staff.  Given the nature of the grantor/grantee relationship, it was especially important to guarantee that their responses would not be linked with any identifying information.

To meet these criteria, we developed, pre-tested, and administered a survey questionnaire to all applicants and grantees[1] that have pursued funding through the Civics Program in the past three years. The questionnaire was administered to 101 respondents, of whom 64 completed the survey, for a **final response rate of 63.4%**.

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[1] For the purposes of this study, '**applicants**' refers to organizations whose applications were declined; '**grantees**' refers to organizations whose applications were funded.  All respondents (i.e., both applicants and grantees) submitted a LOI or a full proposal.

# Response Rate by Grant Status
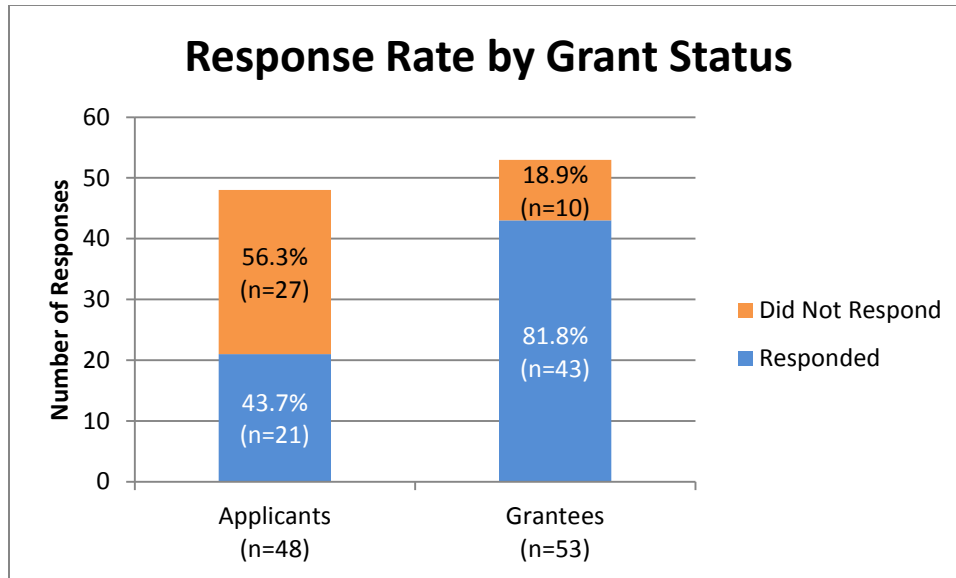


Almost two-thirds of the organizations represented in this survey have operating budgets over $1 million, with just over a quarter of the organizations having budgets over $5 million. However, smaller organizations were represented as well, with 17.2% having budgets of $350,000 or less.

**Table 1:  Total operating budget for organization's most recent fiscal year**

|  | Response Count | Response Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Less than $150,000 | 4 | 6.9% |
| Between $150,000 and $350,000 | 6 | 10.3% |
| More than $350,000 but less than $700,000 | 5 | 8.6% |
| Between $700,000 and $1 million | 5 | 8.6% |
| More than $1 million but less than  $5 million | 23 | 39.7% |
| $5 million or more | 15 | 25.9% |
| **Total** | 58 | 100.00% |

To offer respondents multiple outlets for feedback, the survey included both closed-ended and open-ended questions.  In each section, we provide numerical and textual data to offer both breadth and depth of information.  (See Appendix A for Methodological Summary.)

What follows is a summary of the responses to the survey.  It is our hope that the information that it provides will help the McCormick Foundation's Civics Program provide high quality support to all of its partners.

To fully understand the process that applicants undertake in applying for a Civics Program grant, we began by asking respondents how they became aware of the program.

**Table 2: How did your organization first learn about the funding opportunities available through the McCormick Civics Program? [Please choose one]**

|  | Response Count | Response Percent |
| --- | --- | --- |
| We have had a relationship with McCormick Foundation for a long time | 26 | 41.3% |
| Referral by a colleague or friend outside of our organization | 13 | 20.6% |
| Independent research | 10 | 15.9% |
| Suggestion from a member of our organization | 6 | 9.5% |
| Don't know/remember | 6 | 9.5% |
| Other (please specify) | 2 | 3.2% |
| Total | 63 | 100% |

Survey data shows that applicants come to McCormick through three primary routes. The majority of respondents (41%) reported having had a long-term relationship with the Foundation. The second most likely path was through a professional referral, either inside or outside of the organization (30%). And finally, 16% of applicants found the Civics Program by conducting general research (e.g., web searches, Donors Forum search.)

Turning next to perceptions of the Civics Program website (which provides the bulk of initial information to potential applicants), we see generally favorable opinions.

**Table 3:  Thinking about the McCormick Foundation's website, and the Civics Program pages in particular, please rate the following:**

|  | Excellent | Good | Fair | Poor | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| General Appearance (n=58) | 39.7% | 55.2% | 5.2% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Ease of Use/Navigation (n=58) | 31.0% | 53.4% | 13.8% | 1.7% | 100.0% |
| Relevance of Information (n=58) | 36.2% | 58.6% | 5.2% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Clarity of Information (n=57) | 35.1% | 50.9% | 12.3% | 1.8% | 100.0% |
| Overall Satisfaction (n=57) | 31.6% | 57.9% | 8.8% | 1.8% | 100.0% |

The strongest category, General Appearance, was regarded as "Excellent" or "Good" by over ninety percent of respondents.  The weakest two categories, with approximately one seventh of the respondents ranking them as "Fair" or "Poor", were Ease of Use/Navigation and Clarity of Information. Respondents offered both critiques and suggestions for improvement regarding their initial contact with the foundation.

> *"The website says to apply via one of a long list of funders [for Civics] – so it's not clear whether you can apply to several – or which one would be the best one to apply to.  The letter of denial we received said that we did not fit under guidelines, but our program offers service learning so this is not clear."*

> *"Our concerns with the Civics Program page are specific to the Program section. The information is not well laid out, particularly because there is confusion between the programming activities of the Civics Program and the funding opportunities provided by the Civics Program itself. The Democracy Schools information further blurs the distinction between the Civics Program as a funder and the specific program activities. This is particularly true with respect to the Illinois Democracy Schools. […] This Program dimension seems to be unique to Civics; I did not find listed a parallel arrangement under Communities, Education, Journalism, or Veterans.  **In effect, the Civics Program acts as both a funder of civic learning programs and organizations, and as a civic learning organization itself. It is sometimes hard to tell in which capacity it is acting at any one time.** I do not know whether there is a hard wall between the Civics Program's funding staff and the Civics Program's program staff. If there is, it is not apparent, and the separation should be publicized more clearly: our relations with both would be different and more useful. As things stand, the current blurry relationship is to the detriment of both."*

From these data, we can draw a few brief conclusions about how potential grantees make their way to the Civics Program.

- First, **the reputation of the McCormick Foundation has a clear and strong influence on the path taken by applicants**; over 70 percent of respondents report learning about the Civics Program through a long-term connection with the Foundation or through personal and professional networks, suggesting that McCormick's sustained high-quality relationships with peers and colleagues have led directly to applicants deciding to pursue funding.
- Second, even the lowest-ranked sections of the Civics Program's pages on the Foundation's website are still highly regarded.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

This section focuses on the phase after organizations have made the decision to pursue funding through the Civics Program *and* have been invited to submit a proposal.  We asked respondents about their perceptions of the application process, focusing in particular on two elements: clarity of guidelines and ease of applying.

Data show that **proposal guidelines and key program deadlines are well communicated** to applicants: 95% said that proposal guidelines were "Very Clear" (n=34) or "Somewhat Clear" (n=22), and just under 90% said that key dates and program deadlines are communicated "Very Well" (n=32) or "Somewhat Well" (n=19).  Those respondents who were critical of the Foundation in this area (i.e., those who said deadlines are communicated "Not Very Well" or "Not Well at All") offered some specific suggestions for changes.

> "[I would like to see] a place in the proposal process where the Foundation's commitment to civic education and the grantee's mission could speak to aligning the growth of both."

> "I think it would be good to have a **better idea of when decisions will be made**.  This seems to fluctuate a bit, so it would be nice to be informed instead of having to ask.  However, when we asked, we always received a quick response."

> "The **guidelines might be more specific** about allowable budget items and identify a policy on the recovery of overhead (indirect) costs."

The next set of questions focused on ease of applying.  The survey included questions about
- difficulty in applying and collecting supporting documents
- overall difficulty
- convenience of the submission due dates

Similar to the first set of questions, opinions about the ease of the process were quite favorable, with over 95% of respondents rating each element as positive.   Interestingly, when looking at the relationship between reported level of ease and whether or not they were funded, we see that **applicants who reported the process as being "Very Easy" were funded twice as often as those who rated it as being "Somewhat Easy" or "Somewhat Difficult"**.  Respondents made a number of suggestions to improve the application process.

*"Since we are long-time grantees, I would have been grateful for a **reminder** from the Civics Program **about the deadlines**."*

*"If the procedure changes, I would suggest contacting all past grantees with the new procedure."*

*"Communicating the results of an application. We have applied and do not know the outcome, and so assume that the decision was negative."*

In addition to perceptions of the application process, we asked how long it took them to complete the application, including communication with McCormick, writing the narrative and collecting the supporting documents. Responses to this question varied considerably, ranging from two to eighty hours, with an average of 15.5 hours. [2] Approximately one-fifth (21.1%) of applicants used a professional grant writer for this application. Interestingly, applicants who used a grant writer were slightly *less* likely to receive funding.

There are several interesting conclusions to be drawn from these survey questions.

- The first is that, despite the vetting efforts that the Civics Program engages in prior to inviting an organization to submit a proposal, **there is a wide variation in grantees' experiences writing an application**. Some people spend a few hours on their application, others upwards of a week; while most write the application themselves, others hire a professional grant writer.
- Second, while these data cannot demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship, they do suggest that organizations that perceive the application process as slightly more onerous, as well as those that hire grant writers, may indicate early signs of a weaker proposal.

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[2] This was an open-ended, rather than fixed-choice, question. The purpose was to allow respondents to estimate the time spent in any way that made sense (e.g., hours, days, weeks). While this does not allow for easy statistical comparison, some responses were recoded to estimate an average. Responses such as "1 day" or "2 days" were recoded into hours (8 and 16 hours, respectively). Responses that were listed as a range (e.g., "between 10 and 15 hours") were coded as the smaller number (e.g., 10 hours) for the purposes of consistency.

## DECLINES

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the portion of the application journey which received the most negative feedback was the process for declined applications. We asked organizations that had been declined funding by the Civics Program about their experience of being declined, including asking for and receiving feedback on their application. Approximately one-third (34%) of the survey respondents had not been funded in the previous three years.

When looking at how an applicant learned that their application had been declined, many (41%) either don't know or don't remember. Among those who do, nearly all applicants received word by e-mail or by mailed letter. Notably, a considerable **39% of applicants said that they did not receive their decline in a timely manner**. Responses to open-ended questions echoed this criticism.

>   *"Quicker communication of feedback and decision."*

>   *"Should **improve responsiveness**, both to informal requests for feedback, and to letters of inquiry."*

>   *"Become more involved in the denial process. Speak with agencies to let them know the truth of why they were denied."*

>   *"Provide more feedback and **suggestions along each part of the process**".*

When asked about their experience receiving feedback, slightly less than one-third of respondents reported receiving feedback, compared to 39% who requested it. Perhaps more importantly, however, **26% of declined applicants said that they requested, but did not receive, feedback on their application.**

While data indicate dissatisfaction with much of the decline process, among those who did receive feedback on their application, 100% rated the information as "Somewhat Useful" or "Very Useful". This presents a good and clear opportunity for internal improvement within the program. **Establishing a system for providing feedback to every organization declined funding is likely to be well-received by applicants.**

## GRANTEE EXPERIENCE

For those applicants who are awarded funding from the Foundation, we see high satisfaction in every area.  Grantees both welcome and appreciate the Civic Program's presence throughout the grantmaking process.

> *"We really like the personal contact opportunities; the current grant request process and the communication lines with the Foundation.  You have one of the finest systems in the non-profit world, which has generally moved to impersonal communication and standardized requests.  The McCormick system fosters the concept of strategic partnerships instead of an ATM machine mind-set."*

Grantees rated the McCormick Civics Program staff along five dimensions of professional behavior.  Most notably, a full **100% of grantees rated the knowledge of the Civics Program staff as "Good" or "Excellent"**.  Echoing feedback from declined applicants, the weakest category was 'Accessibility', with one third of grantees reporting Accessibility as "Good" or "Fair."

**Table 4:  How would you rate the Civics Program staff on the following dimensions?**

|  | Excellent | Good | Fair | Poor | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Courteous (n=38) | 76.3% | 18.4% | 0.0% | 5.3% | 100.0% |
| Responsive (n=31) | 67.7% | 29.0% | 3.2% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Knowledgeable (n=30) | 86.7% | 13.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Helpful (n=31) | 77.4% | 16.1% | 6.5% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Accessible (n=31) | 61.3% | 32.3% | 6.5% | 0.0% | 100.0% |

In response to the question, "How satisfied are you with the amount of contact between you/your organization and the Civics Program?" grantees were quite positive.

**Table 5: Level of Contact with the Civics Program Staff**

| | Very Satisfied | Somewhat Satisfied | Somewhat Unsatisfied | Very Unsatisfied | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How satisfied are you with the amount of contact between you/your organization and the Civics Program? (n=37) | 73.0% | 27.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| How satisfied are you with the frequency with which the Civics Program staff initiates contact? (n=38) | 44.7% | 50.0% | 5.3% | 0.0% | 100.0% |

Seventy-three percent of grantees reported being "Very Satisfied" with the amount of contact between their organization and the Civics Program, and 27% were "Somewhat Satisfied". However, we see slightly lower satisfaction with how often the Civics Program *initiates* contact, with just over half (55.3%) of respondents reported being "Somewhat Satisfied" Or "Somewhat Unsatisfied". The responses to these two questions suggests that while grantees find the Civics Program staff to be *responsive* to communication, they also find that staff take the initiative less often. As one grantee requested,

> *"Check in after [the grant is] made, a few months into the program."*

This again provides a relatively easy opportunity for improvement; to the extent that **program staff can make a practice of initiating conversations more frequently**, they can improve the overall impact of their efforts. Despite the slightly lower approval for contact initiation, the fact remains that grantees report exceptionally high satisfaction with every aspect of their experience.

> *"Our program applied for a three-year commitment and we are currently in the year three. Since receiving the award, we have had overall great communication with our contacts at the foundation. We don't have any substantive suggestions."*

Grantees were, overall, strongly supportive of the Civic Program's reporting process, both in form and function. These respondents largely agreed that the reporting form is easy to fill out, and the questions helped their organization to reflect on the program. The area that received the greatest criticism was the clarity of the reporting guidelines, with almost 10% of the respondents finding them problematic.

**Table 6: Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:**

|  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The reporting guidelines were clear. (n=21) | 42.9% | 47.6% | 9.5% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| The report form was easy to fill out. (n=20) | 35.0% | 65.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| The questions asked on the report form helped our organization to reflect on the program. (n=20) | 35.0% | 60.0% | 5.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |

One grantee, while quite supportive of the content of the Program's report form, recommended moving to an on-line version to improve its format.

> *"The Civics Program has a good report content-wise. The questions are appropriate, there are not too many of them, and the response requirement is not burdensome. The format, however, is pretty hard. We are comfortable with on-line reporting. The Brinson Foundation is a good example."*

## LOOKING AHEAD:  TECHNOLOGY AND NON-MONETARY SUPPORT

This project sought to go beyond a simple satisfaction survey, to ask what features respondents (both applicants and grantees) would like to see in the future.  Questions about potential future changes addressed two areas: technology and non-monetary support.

In terms of technology, the questionnaire gauged respondents' interest in both an online application process and social media efforts.  Interest in an online application was positive, through somewhat mixed; nearly one in five respondents said they were "Not Very Interested" or "Not At All Interested" in the option, while just over half reported being "Very Interested".

Support for social media reflected greater ambivalence:  a full third of applicants reported that they were "Not Very Interested" or "Not At All Interested" in social media efforts, roughly the same number who expressed that they were "Very Interested."[3]

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[3] As we had been thinking about whether to launch a Civics program Facebook page or Twitter handle, these comments were very informative and will help us be more thoughtful in planning a social media strategy for our program. We discovered that if we were to pursue social media efforts, the goal should not be to discuss our own work, but to highlight our grantees' initiatives or communicate current trends and best practices in the field. We could even potentially play a role in creating dialogue across organizations on issues related to civic learning and engagement.

## How interested would you be in the Civics Program participating in social media, such as Facebook or Twitter?
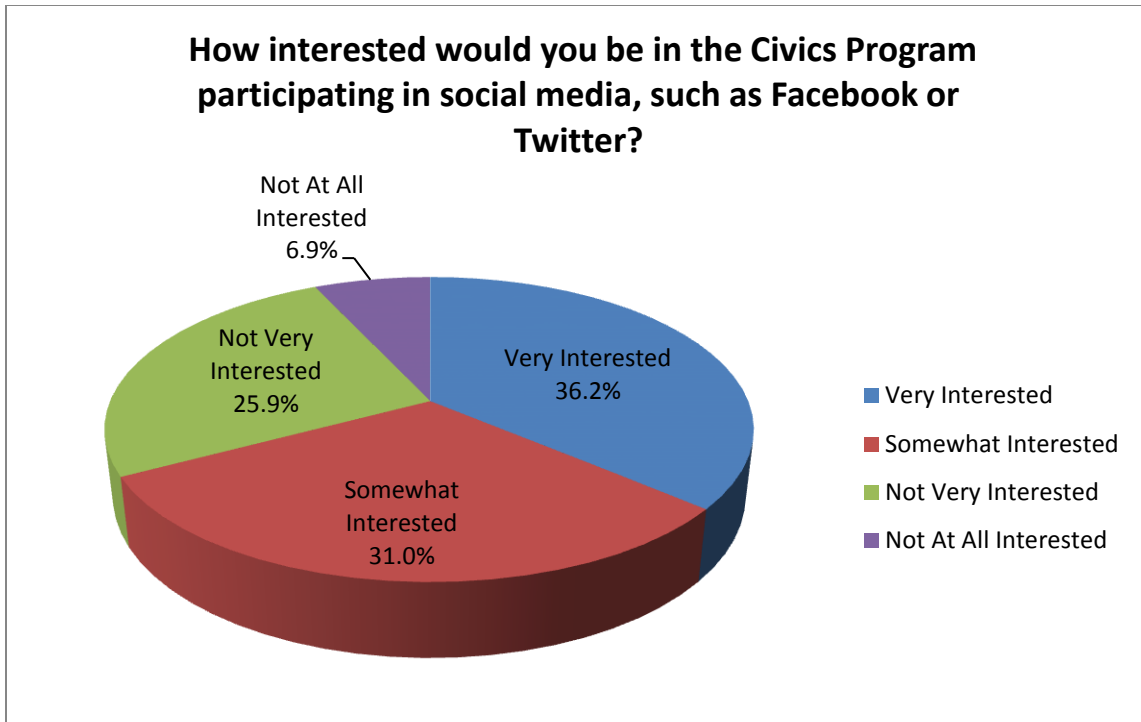


Those who expressed interest in social media were also eager to provide suggestions for its uses. A few illustrative ideas include:

> "**Social media activities that highlight the activities** of grantees could be helpful. Foundation media activities that raise the profile of grantees can help attract new volunteers, donors, or other supporters. I think that might be a great way for the McCormick Foundation to leverage its support of different organizations."

> "Sharing of resources, edgy new thinking, good practices in wide spectrum of arenas"

> "**A blog and/or webinars on best practices in civic education and engagement** - not just current research but include discussion from those implementing programs; communication from civic leaders in some format; a civics book club with the author as the facilitator."

In addition to technology, the survey asked respondents to consider ways in which the Civics Program might provide other forms of non-monetary support to its grantees. There was significant interest in Civics Program staff attendance at more of the grantees' program's events and as well as strong interest in the program hosting convenings.

**Table 7: Potential Initiatives**

| | Very Interested | Somewhat Interested | Not Very Interested | Not At All Interested | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would like the Civics Program staff to attend more of our program's events. (n=38) | 71.1% | 28.9% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| I would like the Civics Program staff to host convenings for current and recent grantees to discuss trends in the field, evaluation questions, or common goals. (n=38) | 65.8% | 28.9% | 2.6% | 2.6% | 100.0% |

When asked whether they would be interested in more site visits from foundation staff, almost one-third of grantees indicated that this would not be helpful. However, most grantees reported that Foundation staff members are good resources for advice.

**Table 8: Site Visits and Advice**

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would like the McCormick Civics Program staff to conduct more site visits of our program. (n=37) | 8.1% | 59.5% | 32.4% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| I consider the McCormick Civics Program staff a good resource for advice. (n=37) | 56.8% | 40.5% | 2.7% | 0.0% | 100.0% |

Finally, when given the opportunity to suggest other ideas for ways that the Foundation could provide support, quite a few respondents indicated an interest in **educational 'best practices' types of support**. Suggestions include:

> *"Would very much appreciate […] critical feedback on how we can improve our programs,* ***forecasting into future funding trends for McCormick,*** *and feedback on our proposal for how we could be more strongly positioned."*

*"Always helpful to have **technical help with evaluation** and for us it would be good to connect our local programs in Chicago with other resources at McCormick (other funded programs)."*

*"Board service and **pro bono training**."*

Other respondents indicated a strong interest in McCormick **supporting collegiality** among their fellow grantees:

*"Bringing grantees together is an excellent idea.  Overall, I have to say that the McCormick staff are wonderful; they truly get, believe in and support the Civics Program."*

*"**Discussion on how grantees may collaborate on their programs**, i.e., support in marketing or program delivery; facilitation by McCormick that impacts program student participants – for example, a civic youth summit on various community issues."*

*"Would very much appreciate a forum to engage with other non-profits."*

*"Connections to other organizations/learning experiences/best practices sharing."*

An important conclusion to draw is that grantees not only welcome contact with the Civics Program, but are eager to engage further with McCormick staff.  Moreover, they actively want to participate in building a community of peers, and a place for the Civics Program and its grantees to collaborate on developing programs for better civic engagement in the Chicago area.

One other area to note is that several recipients took the time in the survey to articulate their **gratitude for a multi-year commitment**.  A representative grantee wrote,

*"We deeply appreciated receiving a multi-year commitment from the McCormick Foundation and would love to see this longer-range planning continue in future years."*

## CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, the goal of this survey was to understand external partners' perceptions of, and experiences with, the Civics Program. The results show that, by and large, applicants and grantees welcome, support, and are grateful for the Civics Program's efforts at each step of the process. The most significant insights from the responses are as follows:

**Areas of excellence:**

- The reputation of the McCormick Civics Program as a professional and accessible funder has motivated potential grantees to seek out and apply for support.
- Respondents rate the Civics Program's pages of the Foundation website highly.
- The application process – including communication of key deadlines as well as the ease of the application – is rated highly.
- Grantees who received multi-year funding were explicit in writing about their gratitude and its importance to their programs' well-being.
- Grantees rated Civics Program staff as highly knowledgeable, helpful, courteous, responsive, and accessible.

**Areas for improvement:**

- Applicants (i.e., those who were declined) report that they did not receive their decline in a timely manner.
- Approximately one-quarter of declined applicants said that they requested, but did not receive, feedback on their application.
- It would be helpful if reporting guidelines were clearer.
- Civics Program grantees expressed strong interest in having staff attend more of their events.

**Recommendations:**

- Establish (or revamp) a system of providing rapid and thoughtful feedback to applicants.
- Clarify reporting guidelines.
- Maintain – and possibly expand – multi-year funding commitments to grantees.
- Focus future social media efforts on highlighting grantees' programs, activities and events.
- Provide opportunities for collegiality, collaboration, and shared learning among grantees.
- Encourage Civics Program staff to attend more of grantees' events.

## FOUNDATION POST-SCRIPT: OUR NEXT STEPS

We were extremely grateful for the time and thought respondents put into this survey. Based on the information, insights and recommendations from respondents, we have established an initial set of priorities for the upcoming year, which include the following:

- Clarify our letter of inquiry, proposal and grant reporting requirements and deadlines.
- Alleviate confusion about our program's funding guidelines by explaining our definitions of quality service learning, civic education and civic engagement on our website and grant application forms.
- Begin implementing an online grant application and reporting process.
- Improve response time when declining a request for funding.
- Initiate more contact with grantees during the grant period—either through face-to-face meetings, regular phone check-ins, site visits, or attending events.
- Spend more time visiting the communities in which our grantees work.
- Begin developing a social media strategy that positions us as a resource for organizations in the field.
- Facilitate convenings and conversations across organizations in the field.

In 2015, we will administer another survey to see if we have made progress in these areas and explore ways in which we can continue to improve our relationship with the organizations we support.

In the meantime, we welcome your thoughts and comments.

## APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

**Population/Sample:** The target population for this study was **all applicant and grantee organizations who had applied to the Civics Program for a grant in the past three years.** Using these criteria, the original sampling frame contained a total of 126 organizations. After removing ineligible organizations (i.e., no available contact information, had previous opted out of receiving anything from Survey Monkey, or had not yet been through a full application process), we arrived at a final sample of **101 respondents**. Sixty-four organizations completed the survey, giving a **final response rate of 62.3%,** including 21 (43.8%) of applicants and 43 (81.1%) of grantees.

**Survey Questionnaire:** Areas of inquiry for this project included: grant applications, organizations' experiences being awarded or denied funding; grantees' perceptions of their experience working with the Civics Program throughout their project; satisfaction with the foundation/grantee relationship; suggestions for future improvement; and background and demographics questions The questionnaire was pre-tested and refined based on respondents' input. The final questionnaire was comprised of a total of sixty items. However, given the nature of the questions and resulting skip patterns, no respondent was asked every question.

Each respondent could have received contact up to four times during the data collection period. An initial cover letter, on McCormick Foundation letterhead, was mailed approximately two weeks prior to the survey launch. The questionnaire was then administered via e-mail, using Survey Monkey. Non-responders received a reminder 14 days after the survey was first sent, yielding an additional 15 respondents. A final reminder was sent 21 days after the initial survey was sent to the remaining non-responders, yielding an additional nine responses.

**Question 1: Is there anything about the application process that the Civics Program could improve?**

| |
|---|
| A place in the proposal process where the Foundation's commitment to civic ed and the grantee's mission could speak to aligning the growth of both |
| Communicating the results of an application.  We have applied and do not know the outcome, and so assume that the decision was negative |
| Communication and returning messages |
| Coordination with other program area funding |
| Geographical boundaries need to be defined. |
| I would like to see periodic visits from McCormick to come out and learn about our program. We try to invite the program reps / civics leadership to ceremonial events but I would also like to access their thought leadership about other non-profits and best practices trends that they are seeing.  We do not seem to have a good success rate of getting McCormick out to visit. |
| If the procedure changes, I would suggest contacting all past grantees with the new procedure |
| It's very professional, clear and well-managed. |
| More explanation of denials |
| Our project officer was very helpful to us in our application. Our funding significantly impacts our program site deliverables and it would be  helpful for us to have  an opportunity to provide additional information on the funding request so that McCormick once it determined the amount of funding available, could work with us to create a  strategy for additional funding from others because of McCormick's branding in this space. |
| Quicker communication of feedback and decision |
| Should improve responsiveness, both to informal requests for feedback, and to letters of inquiry. |
| Since we are long-time grantees, I would have been grateful for a reminder from the Civics Program about the deadline. |
| The due dates do not always align with our program year - which is the school year. For example, our grant period may end in February, even though we have 3 more months of programming. However, the Civics Program has been very accommodating in allowing us to submit end-of-project reports at the close of our program years. |
| The guidelines might be more specific about allowable budget items and identify a policy on the recovery of overhead (indirect) costs. |
| The McCormick Foundation is a great collaborative partner. |
| We found the application process to be reasonable and the expectations were well-communicated throughout. |
| We would love to be funded by the Civics Program, so in our opinion it could improve by funding [our organization]!  Otherwise, it's a fabulous program. |

**Question 2: If there are any other ways in which the Civics Program could better support your organization, please describe them here**

Always helpful to have technical help with evaluation and for us it would be good to connect our local programs in Chicago with other resources at McCormick (other funded programs)

Board service and pro bono training

Bringing grantees together is an excellent idea.  Overall, I have to say that the McCormick staff are wonderful; they truly get, believe in and support the Civics Program.

Connections to other organizations/learning experiences/best practices sharing.

Convening a network of civics education programs

Discussion on how grantees may collaborate on their programs, i.e.. like support in marketing or program delivery;  facilitation by McCormick that impacts program student participants- for example a civic youth summit on various community issues.

Joint advocacy efforts to underscore that educating students for civic responsibility should be an expectation for every college graduate.  [...] Persuading other foundations to invest some funds and attention to educating for civic learning and democratic engagement.  Helping to publicize the good civic educational practices that our organization uncovers at colleges and universities.  Cooperating in strategic ways with the Department of Education and other federal sources where collaborations to strengthen our democracy can benefit from a more powerful public voice.

Linking to other resources, funding and possible partnerships.

Our hope is that the program will continue to value and support our work in the future.


[Our Organization] appreciates the fact that the McCormick Civics Program (MCP)  supports through grant awards both innovative and ongoing civic programs. With the disappearance of public funding, such support is increasingly rare in Chicago and across the nation and thus all the more welcome.    I have and will continue to share information when asked with MCP staff concerning civic learning efforts here and elsewhere. They care about promoting good civic learning, and I trust their  judgment and discretion. We invite them to observe our programs but do not feel neglected if they do not attend -- they know what we do. I don't generally turn to McCormick grant officers or staff for advice/information except concerning specific funding for our programs. The power dynamic feels awkward.    One important way that MCP might consider for extending support to [Our Organization] and other Chicago civic organizations is to provide general operating support for program activities instead of specific programs. Awards could be to support work with teachers or with students, work at specific grade levels, etc. This change would enable MCP to deepen its support for local civic learning organizations and allow them flexibility to both sustain and innovate in the designated program activity.

They are great!

We deeply appreciated receiving a multi-year operating commitment from the McCormick Foundation for 2013-2014 and would love to see this longer-range planning continue in future years.

Would very much appreciate a forum to engage with other non-profits, critical feedback on how we can improve our programs, forecasting into future funding trends for McCormick, and feedback on our proposal for how we could be more strongly positioned.

**Question 3:  Thinking about the entire grantmaking process (initial contact, application, program support, reporting, post-reporting communication), what could McCormick do better or differently to support our grantees?**

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| Actually they are delightful and very reasonable to work with. |
| After we invested in hosting Foundation members for a site visit we heard nothing back |
| As stated earlier, some conversation about growth strategies and impact |
| Be available to discuss planned proposals. |
| Be clearer about reporting guidelines |
| Become more involved with the denial process. Speak with agencies to let them know the truth of why they were denied |
| Better guidelines regarding expectations of the reporting process. |
| Can't think of anything at present |
| check in after grant made, a few months into program |
| I only sent in a proposal asking for financial assistance for a particular project. Your response was that your organization was unable to help at this time. |
| I think it would be good to have a better idea of when decisions will be made.  This seems to fluctuate a bit, so it would be nice to be informed instead of having to ask.  However, when we asked, we always received a quick response. |
| I was very pleased with the process. |
| improve clarity |
| It was a clean, crisp, respectful process. |
| It's an easy and clear process |
| MCP does a very good job and is a real lifeline for the civic community. (This is what we tell other people, too, not just McCormick.) They care about civic learning, and if you have a good idea, they will support it. The application process is concise. Documentation is not burdensome. The grant awards are significant. Reporting is thoughtful but not overmuch. I wish there were more foundations out there like McCormick. |
| More clarity on levels of program support |
| More discussion about what we are trying to build.2 |
| More precise information regarding funding interests and follow up by program officer |
| more site visits |
| Nothing significant comes to mind. It is nice to see representatives from foundations in person at events, and the McCormick Foundation is the most present of all of our large donors. |
| I appreciated the accessibility of program officers, web direction, application process |
| Our program applied for a 3 year commitment and we are currently in year 3.  Since receiving the award, we have had overall great communication with our contacts at the Foundation.  We don't have any substantive suggestions. |
| Overall we are happy with the process and the MF staff is wonderful. |
| Provide [our organization] with more information about the overall fit of our programs with McCormick. |
| Provide more feedback and suggestions along each part of the process. |
| Respond to requests for feedback; respond in a timely manner to letters of inquiry. |

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| Seems fine to me |
| The website says to apply via one of a long list of funders (for Civics) - so it's not clear whether you can apply to several - or which one would be the best one to apply to.  The letter of denial we received said that we did not fit under guidelines (but our program offers service learning so this is not clear). |
| Timely notification and suggestions for other partnerships, resources etc. |
| We are  very pleased with the support and direction provided by the Civics Program.  The staff is always very responsive to our questions, and make themselves available should any questions or difficulties arise. |
| We are very satisfied with the grantmaking process and the contact we have with foundation staff |
| We found the application process to be reasonable and the expectations were well-communicated throughout. |
| We really like the personal contact opportunities; the current grant request process and the communication lines with the Foundation.  You have one of the finest systems in the non-profit world, which has generally moved to impersonal communication and standardized requests.  The McCormick system fosters the concept of strategic partnerships instead of an ATM machine mind-set. |
| We would appreciate an in person meeting to take stock of the year prior and the upcoming year. |
| We're satisfied because it has gone well. |

**Question 4: What types of content or features would you like to see McCormick include in its use of social media (if any)?**

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| Blog and/or webinars on  best practices in civic education and engagement - not just current research but include discussion from those implementing programs;  communication from civic leaders in some format; a civics book club with the author as the facilitator; We drew on our Library of Congress primary source nexus which gets hits and blogs from around the country (primarysourcenexus.org) |
| Focus on highlights of currently-funded proposals. |
| How you measure the effectiveness of programs. and what kind of audiences you are trying to reach. |
| Links to activities of grantees. |
| Links to other resources and partnerships. |

Our concerns with the Civics Program page are specific to the Program section. The information is not well laid out, particularly because there is confusion between the programming activities of the MCP and the funding opportunities provided by MCP itself. The Democracy Schools information further blurs the distinction between MCP as a funder and the specific program activities led by Dr. Healy and his staff. This is particularly true with respect to the Illinois Democracy Schools. (The Illinois Civic Mission Coalition is more of a Resource than an Issue, but it is distinct from Democracy Schools.) This Program dimension seems to be unique to Civics; I did not find listed a parallel arrangement under Communities, Education, Journalism, or Veterans.     In effect, MCP acts as both a funder of civic learning programs and organizations, and as a civic learning organization itself. It is sometimes hard to tell in which capacity it is acting at any one time. I do not know whether there is a hard wall between MCP funding staff and the MCP program staff. If there is, it is not apparent, and the separation should be publicized more clearly: our relations with both would be different and more useful. As things stand, the current blurry relationship is to the detriment of both.

Partner engagement, promotion of organizational work, serving as a 'hub' of civic activity in the area.

Potential external engagement opportunities (example: re-tweeting our organization's recruitment deadlines and volunteer opportunities).

Relevant civics articles, highlights of grantees' work, advertising grantees' events

Sharing of resources, edgy new thinking, good practices in wide spectrum of arenas

Social media activities that highlight the activities of grantees could be helpful. Foundation media activities that raise the profile of grantees can help attract new volunteers, donors, or other supporters. I think that might be a great way for the McCormick Foundation to leverage its support of different organizations.

Topics of interest that are central to the Foundations interest, i.e. recent articles, op-eds, and information about recent grantees.

Updates on the programs funded by McCormick and upcoming initiatives of current grantees

We generate a lot of public media interest in our programs that could jointly benefit McCormick - we would love to be partnering to generate public support (and private philanthropic support) for the great work we do, and that McCormick funds.