

Changing Priorities in Foundation Grants to Children's Museums

September 16, 2019

Securing funding is important, and securing consistent funding over time is essential for children's museums. This work requires fundraising know-how, an understanding of the philanthropic foundations sector, and the ability to adapt as the landscape shifts. For many children's museums, these capacities add up to a tall order. To support these efforts, this Trends Report offers insight into how foundation grants to children's museums have changed from 2007 to 2015.

In ACM Trends Report #3.1, we explored how foundation funding varied across funding categories and museum size. Here again, funding activity includes grants and giving from family, community, private, nonprofit, and corporate foundations, for a representative sample of foundations' involvement with children's museums. In this report, we use a special data set from Candid's Foundation Directory Online (FDO) to show how the focus of foundation grants fluctuated from 2007 to 2015, and also how the size of children's museums related to changes in funding. These insights can help children's museums adjust their fundraising strategy to pursue avenues that are appropriate for their needs and institutional size.

ACM TRENDS

#3.2

ACM Trends #3.2

Figures 1, 2, and 3 show how different types of funding from foundations changed for Small, Medium, and Large children's museums over 9 years. The proportions of funding categories add up to 100% for each year within a museum size category. Each funding category bar chart shows how funding proportions evolve over time in a particular children's museum size category. Please see Trends #3.1 for explanations of each funding category.

If we look vertically down the funding categories in 2009, we see that for Large museums, roughly 40% of foundation grant dollars were categorized as Continuing Support. However, if we look horizontally across multiple years in the Continuing Support category for Large museums, we also see that Continuing Support grants steadily decreased over the next five years, until there were no grants reported as such in 2015.

We also see in Small museums that Capital & Infrastructure replaced Program Development as the leading funding category around 2011, and those categories had an inverse relationship over time. This pattern suggests Small museums pursued different types of funding—or foundations focused on different categories—during the recession and after the economy stabilized around 2011.

Using This Information

Institutions of all sizes can use these data to determine how their funding strategies compare to trends in philanthropy engagement in children's museums. Leaders

Small Museums

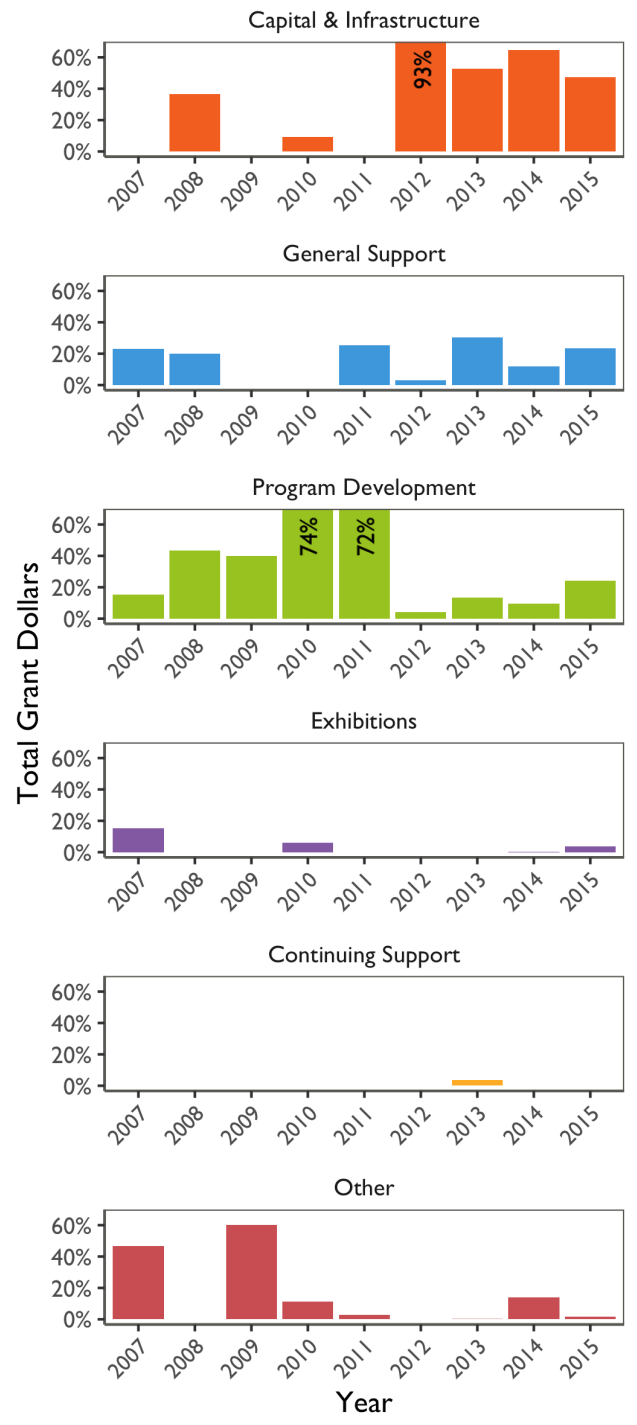


Figure 1. Foundation funding category trends for Small museums over time.

ACM Trends Reports

The Association of Children's Museums (ACM) is the world's foremost professional member service organization for the children's museum field. We leverage the collective knowledge of children's museums through convening, sharing, and dissemination. ACM has partnered with Knology to create the ACM Trends Reports. Knology is a nonprofit that produces practical social science for a better world.

ACM Trends Reports are commissioned on behalf of our membership to help advance the work of this community. They seek to draw attention to emerging issues and opportunities for elevating the field, and help our members use data to become more accountable to their mission and fiscal responsibilities. A product of collaborative efforts to collect data, the Trends Reports are an effort to support ongoing, accessible dialogue. Our objective is for this approach to be an equitable and inclusive way for museum professionals to contextualize our work and use data to produce effective outcomes.

Medium Museums

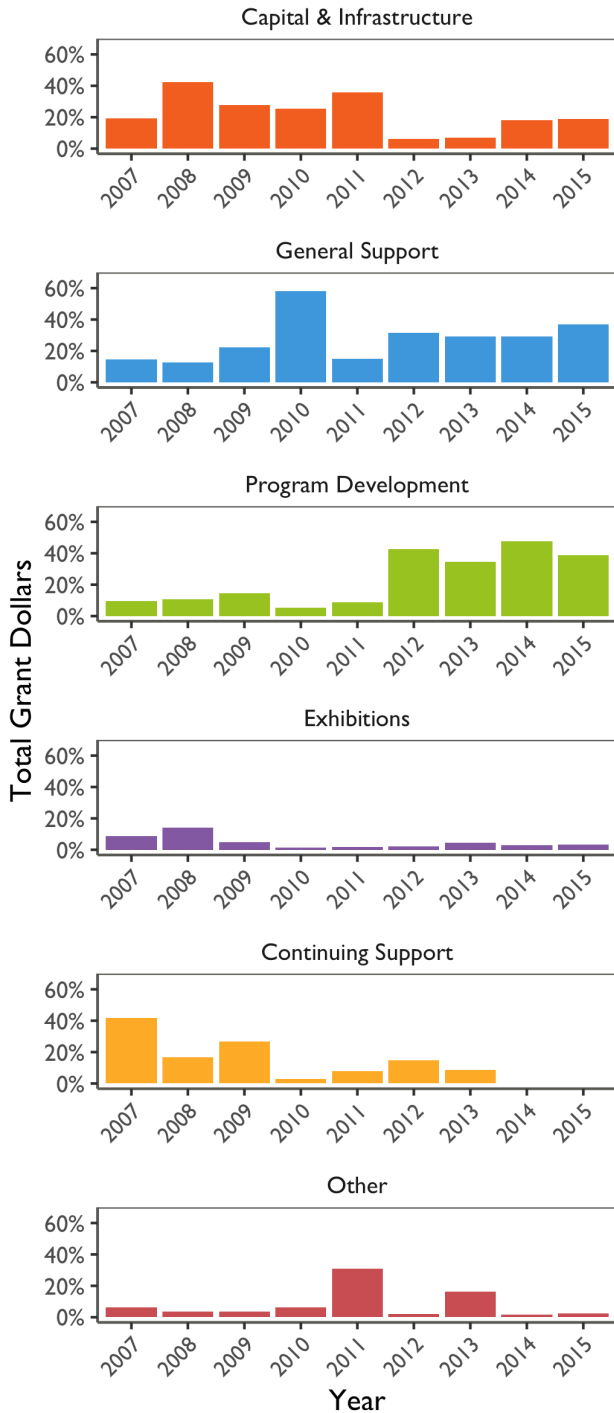


Figure 2. Foundation funding category trends for Medium museums over time.

Large Museums

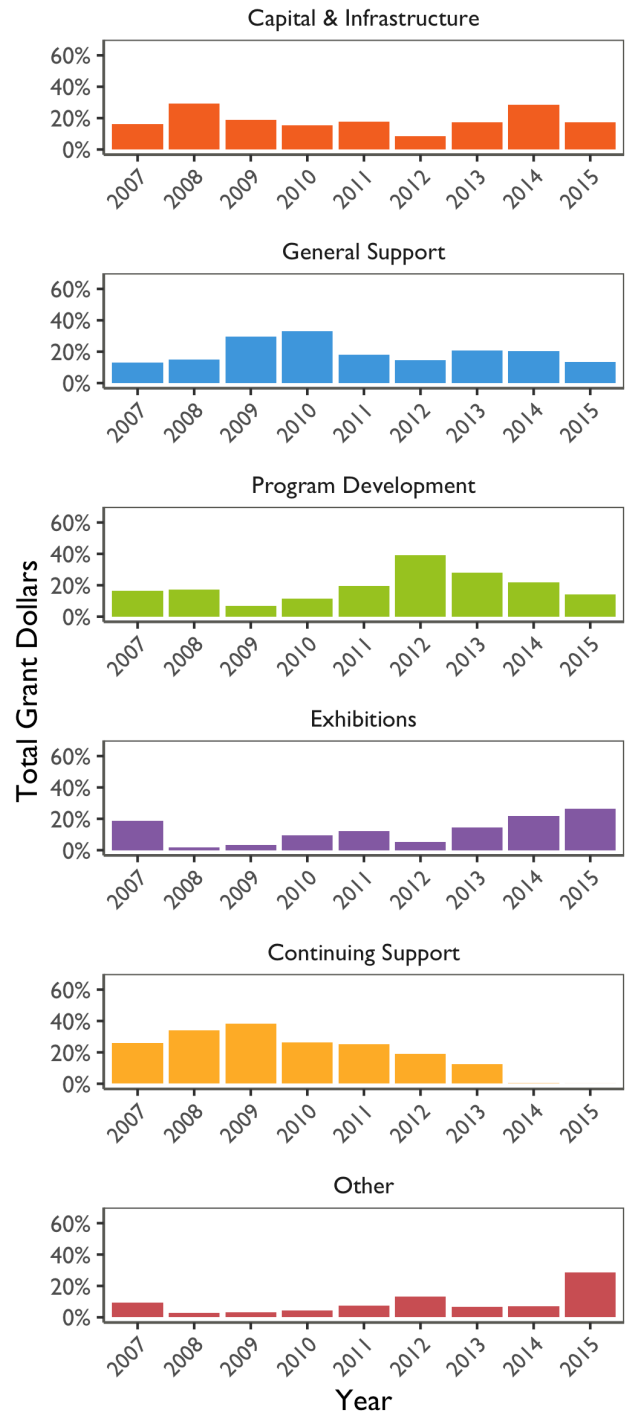


Figure 3. Foundation funding category trends for Large museums over time.

of children’s museums might ask themselves: Are we seeking funding in historically supported categories for museums like ours? How can these data inform the types of financial support we request from foundations?

About This Research

Here, we describe details that shaped the research for this Trends Report.

The Base Data Set – As a base for this research, we used data from a total of 599 children’s museums that are categorized by size (see Trends #1.1 and #1.7). This set includes 283 ACM member children’s museums represented in the 2016 Membership Survey and ACM’s Museum Member database. The data set includes an additional 316 children’s museums that are not ACM members. Data for both members and non-members were also pulled from forms submitted to the Internal Revenue Service and reported by Candid.

The Foundation & Giving Data Set – We compared the base data to data provided by Candid’s FDO on November 13, 2018. Candid—a new partnership of GuideStar and the Foundation Center—is a national non-profit focused on advancing knowledge about philanthropic giving around the country. The FDO database includes 990 data from family, community, and private, not-for-profit foundations, as well as corporate foundations that are organized separately from the for-profit company. It also captures additional self-reported information from children’s museums themselves. Because the FDO system consists of data from several sources, the categories used to describe funding areas may not match those used by other organizations.

This data does not include grants from federal government funders, nor does it capture gifts made

through Donor Advised Funds, corporate marketing sponsorships, individual giving, bequests, or in-kind gifts.

In Candid’s FDO, we found 8,917 grants that we could match to individual children’s museums in our data set. We were able to match 157 individual children’s museums to philanthropy grants in the FDO data. There are 65 different funding categories. From the most prevalent categories, our research team selected five overarching categories relevant for the US children’s museum field, in addition to a miscellaneous category called “Other.”

Within the FDO system, 8% of grants were labeled with multiple funding categories. For example, Program Development may show up on a grant as the only tag, or as one among many. Regardless, we counted that particular grant toward Program Development’s total number of grants and grant dollars, and included it in any other category labels. Each recorded grant in this data set consisted of at least \$1,000. The largest grant was a \$10 million-dollar grant in 2015.

FDO gathers data from publicly accessible sources, such as forms 990 and 990EZ submitted to the Internal Revenue Service. As a result, much of the data is subject to delays as well as updates. In this Trends Report, we include 2016 data because it is comparable with major trends, but we note that it is still considered preliminary data by FDO as of the publication of this report. As more children’s museums participate in future ACM member studies, we will be able to capture a clearer picture of philanthropy trends in this field.

Started in 1962, the Association of Children’s Museums (ACM) is the world’s foremost professional member service organization for the children’s museum field. With more than 460 members in 50 states and 19 countries, we leverage the collective knowledge of children’s museums through convening, sharing, and dissemination.

Knology is a nonprofit that produces practical social science for a better world. Since 2012, the collective of scientists, writers, and educators has been dedicated to studying and untangling complex social issues.

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