

ABSTRACT

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American Foundations and the Federal Government under Obama

An Assessment

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Abstract:

Relationships between foundations and the government in the United States have long been difficult with government attitudes ranging from hostile to at best indifferent in the past. In response, American foundations have long claimed innovation as a distinctive function to perform in society in order to preserve their legitimacy. One hundred years after the rise of the large-scale American philanthropic foundation, however, the relationships between foundations and government have come into flux. Between demands from fiscally-strapped local governments and a new openness of state and federal governments to develop collaborative relationships, a variety of public-philanthropic partnerships have emerged that question the traditional roles and distribution of labor between philanthropy and the state. Foundations are beginning to face an environment in which a greater emphasis is placed on substitution. Drawing on literature reviews and interviews with government and foundation representatives, this paper traces the historical development of the government/foundation relationship and discusses its changing nature using recession-induced ad hoc partnerships, the emergence of foundation liaison offices in federal agencies and cabinet departments, and the Obama Administration's Social Innovation Fund and Investing in Innovation (i3) program as examples.

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