



## Improving Grantmaking Through Relational Philanthropy

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In their article "In Reciprocity, We Trust: Improving Grant-making through Relational Philanthropy," Janis Petzinger and Tobias Jung present a compelling argument. They propose that embracing relational philanthropy, which emphasises trust-based relationships between grantors and grantees, can pave the way for more effective and empowering grant-making practices. This approach, they suggest, represents a promising departure from the current dominant model of philanthrocapitalism, which often relies on rationalist, market-based strategies and strict oversight of grant recipients.

Petzinger and Jung draw upon the theory of relational work to illustrate how relational philanthropy operates. They argue that this approach co-creates meaning and value between grantors and grantees, with knowledge and insights considered relative and context-dependent. The authors highlight the reciprocal nature of relational philanthropy, where grantors and grantees exchange resources and knowledge that can lead to more informed and relevant grant-making decisions.

[#RelationalPhilanthropy](#) [#TrustBasedGrantmaking](#) [#UnrestrictedFunding](#)  
[#ReciprocityInPhilanthropy](#) [#PowerDynamicsInGrantmaking](#)

### Background

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### Context



The research article outlines three critical ways in which relational philanthropy can empower communities:

- By trusting grantees and offering unrestricted funding, foundations empower them to engage more effectively with their communities and address local needs.
- By receiving grassroots knowledge from grantees about their lived experiences, foundations can develop more informed and relevant grant-making policies and practices.
- By fostering trust-based reciprocal exchanges to create social capital, strengthening relationships and solidarity across civil society.

Relational philanthropy holds a significant promise though it does not automatically solve power dynamics in grant-making and may even obscure them in less obvious ways. However, the authors argue that grantors and grantees can work together to address these issues by engaging in critical reflection and open dialogue.

# ERNOP Research Note

Academic articles on philanthropy through a practitioner lens

By adopting a relational approach that prioritises trust, reciprocity, and context-driven knowledge, foundations can move away from top-down, paternalistic models of philanthropy towards more collaborative and empowering partnerships with grantees.

## Takeaways & Learnings



- Trusting grantees and offering unrestricted funding can enable them to respond more effectively to their communities' unique needs.
- Open communication and knowledge-sharing with grantees can provide valuable insights to inform grantmaking policies and practices.
- Fostering reciprocal, trust-based relationships with grantees and other civil society actors can create social capital and strengthen the philanthropic ecosystem.
- Critically reflecting on power dynamics and engaging in honest dialogue with grantees is crucial for addressing potential issues and ensuring more equitable grantmaking practices.

Principles of relational philanthropy can work towards a more collaborative, responsive, and empowering approach to grantmaking prioritising the knowledge and agency of the communities philanthropic foundations aim to serve.



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