Voluntary Sector Review • vol XX • no XX • 1–14 • © Authors 2026
Print ISSN 2040-8056 • Online ISSN 2040-8064 • https://doi.org/10.1332/20408056Y2026D000000089
Accepted for publication 13 July 2026 • First published online 24 August 2026

policy and practice

Everyday organisational dilemmas and approaches when democratising philanthropy through trust-based philanthropy practices

Ane Grubb, agr@veluxfonden.dk
Velux Fonden, Denmark

Pamala Wiepking, pwiepki@iu.edu
Indiana University, USA and
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Sarah Rank, s.rank@uq.edu.au
The University of Queensland, Australia

Antonia Muhr, antonia.katharina.muhr@s.wu.ac.at
WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

Lena Höpken, lena.hoepken@uni-hamburg.de
University of Hamburg, Germany

This article examines trust-based philanthropy (TBP) practices as an alternative to short-term, project-based funding, which often perpetuates the non-profit starvation cycle. Drawing on academic literature and practice-based insights from Europe and the US, it explores incentives for adopting TBP and the dilemmas foundations face when selecting partners, cultivating trust, and exiting long-term relationships. The analysis highlights transparency, equity and accountability as critical factors for democratising grant making while addressing systemic challenges in philanthropic practice.

Keywords trust-based philanthropy • non-profit starvation cycle • democratising grant making • transparency

To cite this article: Grubb, A., Wiepking, P., Rank, S., Muhr, A. and Höpken, L. (2026) Everyday organisational dilemmas and approaches when democratising philanthropy through trust-based philanthropy practices, *Voluntary Sector Review*, Early View, DOI: 10.1332/20408056Y2026D000000089

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

Introduction[1]

The dominant approach in philanthropic grant making is short-term project-based funding (Wiepking and De Wit, 2024). For example, in the Netherlands, 93 per cent of funders provide project-based funding, while only 21 per cent of funders provide unrestricted funding – funding that grantees 'can spend any way they believe is appropriate to further their mission' (Shaker and Wiepking, 2021: para 1). In addition, only 4 per cent of total funding amounts distributed are unrestricted (Bekkers et al, 2024). These trends run counter to mounting evidence from academia and practice highlighting the negative consequences of short-term, project-based funding for non-profit organisations (Gregory and Howard, 2009; Wiepking and De Wit, 2024). In particular, such practices contribute to the phenomenon known as 'the non-profit starvation cycle' (Gregory and Howard, 2009). In this cycle, organisations understate the true costs of their work to remain competitive for funding in an increasingly precarious and resource-constrained environment, reinforcing funder misperceptions about the resources required to operate effectively (Altamimi and Liu, 2022). These dynamics create practical tensions for non-profit organisations seeking funding from foundations.

Additionally, scholars and practitioners talk about the excessive and exhausting demands placed on grantees to document and report on the impact of short-term projects through quantifiable performance measures (Hung and Berrett, 2025), easily interpretable for the 'distant, hurried audiences' (Eliasoph, 2011: 234) that populate the boards of (some) foundations. Finally, many foundations have strategic preferences to support project-based innovation rather than consolidating existing progress and building organisational capacity (Mills et al, 2023; Wiepking and De Wit, 2024). These challenges all gradually exhaust non-profit organisations.

Together, these dynamics highlight the structural power asymmetries embedded within philanthropic funding relationships, in which foundations retain significant influence over funding priorities, terms, and accountability mechanisms (Ostrander, 2007; Jung et al, 2013). In recent years, such concerns have prompted broader critiques of institutional philanthropy and have led to calls for more democratic approaches to grant making (Reich, 2016; Callahan, 2017; Giridharadas, 2018; Democratizing Philanthropy Research Initiative (DPRI), 2026). We use the term 'democratic approaches to grant making' to refer to a range of practices that exist to mitigate the power imbalance between funders and grantees, to come to more equitable, participatory and sustainable forms of grant making (DeBow et al, 2026; DPRI, 2026). Examples of more democratic grant-making approaches include: trust-based philanthropy (Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, 2025; #TrustCreatesImpact, 2026), participatory grant making (Gibson et al, 2025; Participatory Grantmakers, 2026), community philanthropy (Doan, 2019; GFCF, 2026), social justice philanthropy (Paarlberg et al, 2022), relational philanthropy (Petzinger and Jung, 2024) and mutual aid (Spade, 2020). Key tenants of these approaches are a commitment to move beyond highly technocratic, top-down grant making, instead embracing principles and practices that foster equality, trust and transparency in the interaction between funder and grantee. DPRI (2026) provides extensive definitions and examples related to these practices. In this article, we will specifically focus on trust-based philanthropy as one influential approach within this broader set of democratic grant-making practices.

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

Incentives for adopting more democratic philanthropy practices

Several broader societal trends are acting as levers for funders to shift towards more democratic practices. Within Western democracies, scholars observe how rising socio-economic disparities, material inequality, and political polarisation lead to declining levels of trust in key democratic institutions and societal elites, including foundations (Evers and von Essen, 2024). Accordingly, the privileged tax status and limited mechanisms for accountability of foundations have made them objects of political and public scepticism (Reich, 2016), and amplified questions about their legitimacy and societal relevance (Heydemann and Toepler, 2006; Saunders-Hastings, 2022; Dula et al, 2025). This scrutiny extends beyond formal governance to encompass how foundations shape public discourse, without democratic participation and accountability (Horvath and Powell, 2016; Anheier, 2018).

Against this backdrop, foundations are increasingly incentivised to proactively seek and earn the trust of stakeholders through practices that foster transparency, dialogue and the involvement of grantees and wider publics engaged in social change (Le, 2025; Trust-based Philanthropy Project, 2025). Moreover, several foundations brand themselves as committed to 'systemic change' or to tackling complex social problems. Yet such commitments seem difficult to realise with short-term grants and restrictive project funding (Salehi and Infante, 2024; Wiepking and De Wit, 2024). In contrast to governments and private companies, foundations are not obliged to provide universal welfare goods or meet certain performance measures to satisfy voters or shareholders. This situation makes foundations uniquely positioned to fund long-term, experimental or higher-risk projects with less guaranteed outcomes (Anheier and Toepler, 2019). Seizing this special role, according to Reich (2016), makes foundations legitimate actors in democracies, despite their lack of mandatory transparency and public accountability. Therefore, these dynamics point to potential incentives for foundations to engage in more democratic practices, grounded in both a sincere interest in enabling social change and a growing awareness of the importance of public legitimacy and trustworthiness. From the perspective of non-profit organisations, more democratised practices and longer-term funding hold the advantage of saving significant organisational resources put into constant fundraising and reporting on one-off grants from various foundations. Additionally, longer-term funding may stabilise organisational operations and strengthen their capacities to work more effectively towards their mission (Wiepking and De Wit, 2024). In addition, ongoing communication, mutual learning and relational accountability create space for clearer alignment among the funder, grantee and wider publics affected by and engaged in social change, to the benefit of all parties and society (Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, 2025; Participatory Grantmakers, 2026).

Trust-based philanthropic funding practices

One of the prominent approaches to democratising philanthropic grant making is a cluster of practices collectively described as 'trust-based philanthropy' (TBP). TBP is a funding philosophy that gained traction in the US from around 2014 and, over recent years, has proliferated through collaborative practice-based initiatives such as the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project and #TrustCreatesImpact (Whitman Institute, 2014; Trust-based Philanthropy Project, 2025; #TrustCreatesImpact, 2026).

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

Although no universal definition has been established, the primary aim of TBP is to 'make equitable grantmaking and community accountability the standard of practice for effective philanthropy' (Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, 2025). TBP is not a binary model but rather a spectrum of practices, with foundations implementing its elements to varying degrees.

Overall, TBP seeks to rebalance and dismantle traditional power dynamics in the philanthropic sector by emphasising collaboration, equity, shared goals and mutual accountability between funders and grantee organisations (Salehi and Infante, 2024; Maradeix et al, 2025). Rooted in responsiveness to societal needs, TBP encourages partners to address complex challenges together through mutual learning, reciprocity and transparency in application procedures and feedback mechanisms. A further central component of TBP is the provision of multi-year, unrestricted funding. Funders that embrace TBP also typically devote time to understanding the issues at hand with the aim of reducing the pressure of application and reporting processes, while fostering openness and transparency. Besides offering financial support, some funders also adopt a partnership-based approach, sharing resources and expertise to build the capacity of grantee organisations. These principles of TBP increasingly contribute to advancing democratic dimensions within philanthropy (Salehi, 2024). However, these practices also introduce new dilemmas for foundations in how they structure and implement their grant-making practices.

Concrete examples of trust-based approaches in grant making within Europe

In the UK, the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) has published several reports documenting foundations' lessons from TBP approaches, especially regarding unrestricted funding. Key lessons indicate that multi-year unrestricted funding strengthens non-profit organisations by providing stability, realistic timelines and the flexibility to adapt and learn, while also fostering trust and more open, efficient relationships with funders. Long-term support thus enhances organisational capacity and creates spaces for growth, reflection and continuous improvement (Mills et al, 2024).

However, the effective practice of trust requires calibration and contextual sensitivity, as excessive informality or insufficient clarity can obscure shared goals and accountability (Bridgespan Group, 2024). An interesting case of both the potentials and dilemmas related to TBP includes the Dutch Postcode Lotteries (DPL) in the Netherlands, which have been providing unrestricted, multi-year funding to non-profit organisations since 1989. Hunnik et al. (2021) reflect on the role of trust and power in DPL's relationships with grantees receiving unrestricted funding and argue that, while unrestricted grant making can foster openness and trust between funders and grantees, it does not automatically eliminate power imbalances. Even without formal spending restrictions, grantees may still feel pressure to meet implicit expectations and prove their worth. To create more equitable partnerships, funders should actively identify and address both explicit and unspoken expectations.

In Denmark, an increased interest across both foundations and non-profit organisations in concepts like core funding, long-term partnerships, transparency and other practices associated with TBP have recently spurred a series of initiatives aimed at enabling collective debates and the development of solutions to counter the multiple problems connected with the non-profit starvation cycle. Key takeaways from these

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

initiatives include that core funding requires a high degree of trust as well as clear and transparent communication of funding criteria, to avoid perceptions that access to core funding depends more on good personal ties to the foundation than on transparent, merit-based selection. Additionally, grantees noted that substantial funding coming from a single donor risks making them too dependent on the continued favour of that donor, causing a precarious situation of dependency and potentially undermining attempts to stabilise their operations (see also Wiepking and De Wit, 2024). Echoing the ambiguities related to unrestricted funding identified by Hunnik and colleges in the Netherlands, a recent Danish report on 'capacity building grants' to non-profit organisations, showed that all grantee organisations appreciated the opportunity to apply for a grant that was not project-based, but targeted broader organisational development. However, several grantees explained how the lack of specific demands, guidelines and conceptual clarity from the funder caused confusion and insecurity. In the absence of clearly defined expectations, some organisations incorporate typical 'project-based funding' elements in their applications such as quantitative performance measures (Sørensen and Hjære, 2025). These illustrative examples of the application of TBP principles by foundations within Europe highlight the complexity and need for conceptual clarity and transparent communication that come with this approach to grant making. On the one hand, we see that non-profit organisations generally experience significant benefits from trust-based and long-term funding, including greater stability, flexibility and the potential for more transparent relationships with funders. Yet, such practices also introduce new dilemmas in the forms of vulnerability, dependencies and uncertainties over agreed directions.

Key opportunities and dilemmas related to integrating TBP practices

This final section explores key dilemmas related to TBP practices and offers possible approaches to take forward its implementation. We do this by examining three stages in the lifecycle of philanthropic funding relationships: (1) selecting grantee partners; (2) cultivating trust and managing ongoing relationships; and (3) planning for the exit of funding relationships. At each stage, foundations exercise considerable discretion in shaping funding priorities, expectations and the conditions under which support is provided or withdrawn. Therefore, these stages represent critical sites where power asymmetries between funders and non-profit organisations are enacted (Frumkin, 2006; Ostrander, 2007). After presenting each dilemma, possible approaches based on research and practice are provided. These approaches are context-dependent and should be subject to reflection before implementation.

Approach

To represent the dilemmas and opportunities associated with integrating TBP practices, the article takes a multi-source approach, combining practice-based and academic insights. The dilemmas discussed below thus reflect experiences and observations of grant-making staff practising private philanthropy, while academic and grey literature provides further perspective, and reflections on these practice-based insights drawing from Europe and the US. The three main pillars of knowledge are mapped out in Table 1.

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

Table 1: Overview of sources used in the study

Source type	Purpose of the data in the study	Examples
Practice-based insights	Reflect the everyday organisational practices and dilemmas facing grant-making staff and other practitioners within the private philanthropy sector.	Meetings, debates, and workshops with grant-making staff, CEO's and other representatives from foundations and NGOs during 2024–5.[1] Specifically: • a seminar on core funding; • a meeting between representatives from Danish foundations and non-profit organisations, to debate the topic of fair budgeting models • two network meetings with decision makers from foundations and non-profit organisations exploring how to improve the collaboration between foundations and non-profit organisations.
Academic literature	Building on a growing body of academic knowledge on TBP.	Peer-reviewed journal articles (for example: Petzinger and Jung, 2024; Salehi and Infante, 2024; Wiepking and De Wit, 2024).
Grey literature and reports	Integrating recent, practice-oriented knowledge and insights on TBP.	Practitioner reports, conference papers, white papers (for example: Hunnik et al, 2021; Mills et al, 2024; Muhr and Neumayr, 2025; Sørensen and Hjære, 2025).

[1] Permission to represent observations and anonymous quotes were granted by the host organisers, provided that the authors observe Chatham House Rules. Accordingly, no specific organisation or person is mentioned.

Dilemmas

Selecting partners in a field characterised by inequality – who can you trust?

Situation

Foundations have limited funds, while the field of non-profit organisations is wide, varied and characterised by significant levels of inequality regarding size, resources, professionalisation and access to foundations (Hustinx et al, 2023). Moreover, non-profit organisations differ in the public appeal of the groups they serve and, in their capacity to invest in the relational work required to build trust and secure long-term funding relationships (Petzinger and Jung, 2024). According to a recent study of German and Austrian foundations, both foundations and grantees regard credibility and trust as important factors in funding decisions (Muhr and Neumayr, 2025). Yet, both credibility and trust take time and resources to build. Accordingly, newer, small and medium-sized non-profit organisations that could benefit substantially from unrestricted funding are frequently overlooked in favour of large, more established organisations (Hung et al, 2023; De Wit et al, 2026). These patterns of selection bias are exacerbated by racial inequalities, with evidence from the grey literature indicating that multi-year unrestricted funding disproportionally benefits white-led organisations in the US (Walton, 2021). As Hustinx et al (2023) argue, such selection biases warrant careful attention as, foundations – through their strategies, categories and funding decisions – play a significant role in shaping which forms of volunteering and organisational practices are supported and sustained.

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

Challenge

In this context, selecting partner(s) for long-term funding requires careful consideration by foundations, as those chosen will receive significant resources over an extended period, potentially at the expense of supporting a broader eco-system of organisations. The challenge, therefore, lies in identifying partner(s) who either possess, or can develop, sufficient competencies to manage larger, longer-term grants, without privileging more resourceful and well-known organisations. This situation raises several questions: What constitutes equitable, legitimate and reasonable criteria for selecting long-term partners? How can these criteria be clearly defined and communicated? How can foundations remain accessible to lesser-known, less-established non-profits? And how can they balance the need to fund non-profit organisations demonstrating good governance and accountability with a commitment to supporting newly established, smaller, grassroots partners?

Possible approaches

As a first step, foundations could conduct an eco-system scan to map the field and assess which non-profit organisations are best positioned to advance the foundation's mission. Key aspects to examine would include the organisation's governance structure, financial management, stage of development, mission and value alignment, proposed solutions, and the extent to which the organisations engage relevant publics in their work. Foundations can further enhance fairness by issuing open calls to remain accessible to new and lesser-known organisations. Application processes could be designed to accommodate applicants with varying levels of professionalisation by allowing flexible application formats and providing support throughout the process. Further, foundations might introduce initial smaller, short-term 'starter grants' for newer, less familiar organisations, enabling the mutual development of trust and credibility over an initial shorter testing period while assessing potential for longer-term funding partnerships.

Navigating the double axis of trust as an everyday organisational practice

Situation

Common in the everyday organizational life of a foundation, relational work is often performed by the grant-making staff without direct influence on the overall strategy and decision-making process, which is the purview of the management and board. Although grant-making staff may lead in relationship building (Petzinger and Jung, 2024), investing significant time in the often invisible work of establishing and maintaining trust with non-profit partners, these relationships can be undermined if management or boards reject the applications they advocate for. Simultaneously, grant-making staff depend on the continued mandate and confidence of foundation management, which can limit their willingness to challenge board decisions.

Challenge

The challenge for grant-making staff is to navigate this double axis of trust: maintaining trust with current and prospective grantees, while also sustaining trust with the foundation leadership.

Possible approaches

One possible solution is to formally involve a broader range of stakeholders in the grant decision process – not only management and the board, but also foundation

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

staff, external peer reviewers, non-profit partners and wider publics connected to their work. Participatory grant making is one such strategy that aims to include multiple perspectives in funding decisions and redistribute decision-making authority (Crins-Wubbels and Wiepking, 2025; Gibson et al, 2025).

Transferability of trust: cultivating trust in the context of instability and precarious employment

Situation

Non-profits that are more reliant on volunteers or low-salaried staff may experience challenges with staff retention due to fluctuating availability, shifting interests and changing life circumstances (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003). As a result, individuals who initiate relationships and build trust in the early stages of a partnership may leave shortly thereafter. While typically less precarious, grant-making staff at foundations also experience turnover, particularly in frontline roles.

Challenge

This parallel turnover creates an additional challenge for sustaining long-term funding relationships. Even if funder–grantee relations have been anchored at the inter-organisational level, rather than through inter-personal ties, this dual instability complicates the continuity of relational work (Petzinger and Jung, 2024).

Possible approaches

Foundations can respond by assessing non-profit organisational capacity and staffing stability when entering a partnership, and by supporting organisations where these capacities are limited. This may involve collaborative efforts aimed at strengthening core staffing and institutional stability. Moreover, adopting a 'pay what it takes' approach, can help ensure that funding covers the full costs required to sustain both programmes and the organisation, thereby reducing precarity over time.

Power imbalances and exit strategies: knowing if, when and how to leave

Situation

Despite intentions to the contrary, many foundations retain a privileged position in relationships with non-profit organisations, typically holding significant influence over partner selection, the terms of engagement and when to end the funding relationship. While attention to these power imbalances is important throughout the relationship, they become particularly pronounced when considering exit strategies (Bell et al, 2025).

Challenge

From the outset of a funding relationship, foundations often expect and encourage grantees to consider ways for sustaining activities after the grant ends. However, most small and mid-sized non-profit organisations lack both the time and resources for planning two to three years ahead, while delivering core activities (Sørensen and Hjære, 2025). Still, the pressure to appear professional and responsive to foundations may make grantees hesitant to speak openly about these constraints. Foundations often know that it demands significant amounts of time, relational work and advocacy to secure alternative funding, yet may be unable to extend support beyond the initial grant.

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

The challenge, therefore, lies in creating conditions where grantees can speak openly about the resources needed and the challenges related to consolidating activities after a grant, without the foundation mistaking this for lack of effort or professionalism.

Possible approaches

Given that sustainable financing models typically improve with early planning and strategising, the question of how to exit the funding relationship should be introduced by the foundation at the very beginning of the relationship, not as a demand, but as a shared challenge that both parties should reflect on how to solve. Bell et al (2025) provide several principles for 'responsible exits'. Building on their work, we suggest that foundations should consider offering additional 'consolidator grants' to support capacity building and consolidating activities (if they have proven relevant) to achieve financial sustainability. Additionally, a non-monetary way for foundations to assist the exit process could be to leverage their networks to connect grantees with similar organisations and more established actors in the field, in positions to dispense advice and mentorship regarding exit and consolidation. Finally, both foundations and non-profit organisations should remain cautious of single-donor dependency. While long-term funding from a single foundation may relief the organisation of administrative burdens, diverse funding can mitigate the risks associated with reliance on a single donor mentioned earlier.

As illustrated with these dilemmas, TBP does not remove accountability or power, it reconfigures how they are expressed across relationship stages. Table 2 translates these dynamics into stage-specific tensions, risks and mitigating practices for practitioners.

Table 2: Stage-specific tensions, risks and mitigating practices in TBP

Stage	Dominant tension	Key risks	Practices/possible approaches
Selecting partners	Trust vs fairness (power + transparency)	• Bias toward well-known organisations • Exclusion of smaller/ grassroots organisations • Hidden criteria → legitimacy issues	• Eco-system scans • Open calls • Flexible application formats • Support and dialogue across application process • Starter grants
Cultivating relationships	Trust vs accountability	• Over-reliance on informal trust • Staff caught between board and grantee ('double axis') • Loss of trust through turnover	• Participatory decision making • Clear but flexible expectations • Relational accountability mechanisms • Capacity support
Exits (or transitions)	Power vs trust (or equal collaboration) Top-down vs collaboration	• Abrupt withdrawal • Dependency and precarity • Mission drift before exit	• Early dialogue regarding exit strategies • Advance notice + transition planning • Offer financial or network support to secure alternative funding • Enable ongoing open communication • Framing exit as transition, not failure

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

Conclusion

Drawing on practice-based experiences and academic insights, this article presented the dilemmas related to three essential stages of a funding relationship following the principles of TBP: selecting, maintaining and exiting partnerships. We have shown how decisions and practices at each stage are shaped by structural characteristics of the non-profit field, including heterogeneity in size, target group and resources, and resulting inequalities. Moreover, the article highlights the persistent power asymmetries in funder–grantee relationships that warrant continued attention to transparency and accountability.

This article offers several important implications for funders and decision makers in the field of private philanthropy. By focusing on both the potential and practical dilemmas associated with more democratic approaches to grant making, the study acknowledges the challenges and pitfalls of implementing these approaches and aims to provide a realistic perspective. While these approaches hold promise, their application is neither straightforward nor uniform. The discussion of dilemmas and corresponding practices illustrates that there is no one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, practitioners must engage in context-sensitive judgement, considering the specific characteristics of their organisational, sectoral and national settings, as well as the needs and capacities of their partners. The practices outlined in Table 2 offer a set of actionable entry points that can be adapted and tested across different contexts.

Despite the context sensitivity of the approaches suggested here they can be summarised into four guiding principles that can serve as an orientation for funders and decision makers engaged in adopting more democratised forms of philanthropy:

(1) Participatory (for example involving a wide range of actors in grant-making decision processes)
(2) Adaptive (for example using flexible application formats and grant structures)
(3) Relational (for example fostering genuine, open, transparent and honest communication around needs and exit processes)
(4) Supportive (for example providing capacity building and networking support).

While this article adds a unique understanding of TBP grounded in practice-based insights, it is not without limitations. We applied an engaged scholarship-/practice-based approach, which builds on existing academic knowledge and includes insights from practice. Consequently, the empirical basis of the article does not adhere to the same academic rigour as classic academic papers (for example in terms of the approach to sampling and data collection), thereby introducing a selection bias and limiting the generalisability of the findings, especially beyond the Western European and US context, from which the examples are drawn. However, our approach prioritised the practical relevance and highlighted the value of practitioner–academic collaborations in exploring the intended and unintended consequences, tensions and paradoxes arising from efforts to democratise grant making.

Written by a team of scholars and practitioners, this article contributes to the emerging research agenda on TBP by foregrounding the everyday practices and dilemmas faced by grant-making staff as they seek to operationalise its principles.

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

Note

[1] This article was developed as part of the ERNOP Safe Spaces for Philanthropy 2025 initiative.

Funding

Pamala Wiepking's position as Stead Family Chair in International Philanthropy at the IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy is funded through a gift by the Stead Family. Pamala Wiepking's position as Professor of Societal Significance of Charitable Lotteries at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is funded by the Dutch Postcode Lottery.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the participants at the ERNOP Safe Spaces session on 24 September 2025, in Heidelberg, Germany, for their input and feedback to a draft version of this article. They also thank ERNOP's executive director Barry Hoolwerf for organising the Safe Spaces session around the topic of trust-based philanthropy.

Contributor statement

AG and PW: conceptualisation, writing initial draft and revisions. SR, AM and LH: revisions to initial draft.

Research ethics statement

The authors of this article have declared that research ethics approval was not required since the article does not present or draw directly on data/findings from empirical research.

AI statement

This research benefited from the use of generative AI (OpenAI ChatGPT, GPT-5.1 version) to support language editing, streamline revisions, assist with reference verification and literature retrieval. All conceptual, analytical and interpretive work were conducted by the authors.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

References

Altamimi, H. and Liu, Q. (2022) The nonprofit starvation cycle: does overhead spending really impact program outcomes?, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 51(6): 1324–48, doi: 10.1177/08997640211057404

Anheier, H. (2018) Philanthropic foundations in cross-national perspective: a comparative approach, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(12): 1591–602, doi: 10.1177/0002764218773453

Anheier, H.K. and Toepler, S. (2019) Philanthropy and social change in the United States: retrospective and future outlook, in *Philanthropy in Democratic Societies: History, Institutions, Values*, University of Chicago Press, pp 27–46.

Bekkers, R., Koolen-Maas, S. and Schuyt, T. (2024) *Geven in Nederland 2024: Maatschappelijke betrokkenheid in kaart gebracht* [Giving in the Netherlands], p 140, Amsterdam.

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

Bell, L., Teleki, S. and Vazquez, J. (2025) When shift happens: navigating toward a framework for responsible philanthropic exits, *Foundation Review*, 17(3): 105–15, doi: 10.9707/1944-5660.1772

Bridgespan Group (2024) The trust-based philanthropy conundrum: toward donor–doer relationships that drive impact, The Bridgespan Group, www.bridgespan.org/insights/trust-based-philanthropy/the-trust-based-philanthropy-conundrum.

Callahan, D. (2017) *The Givers: Wealth, Power, and Philanthropy in a New Gilded Age*, Vintage Books.

Crins-Wubbels, E. and Wiepking, P. (2025) *An Experiment with Participatory Grantmaking to Support People without Papers in the Netherlands*, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, www.grantmakingresearch.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/PGM-A-home-without-papers-Crins-Wiepking-Aug-2025.pdf.

DeBow, P., Yeh, M. and Daar Carvajal, M. (2026) Keeping score on sustainable grantmaking, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, doi: 10.48558/T335-N931

De Wit, A., Wiepking, P., Crins-Wubbels, E., Watson, W. and Maas, A. (2026) Measuring nonprofit capacities in the context of unrestricted funding: a case study on nonprofits supporting homeless people in the Netherlands, *Journal of Philanthropy*, 31(3): e70061, doi: 10.1002/nvsm.70061

Doan, D. (2019) *What is Community Philanthropy? A Guide to Understanding and Applying Community Philanthropy*, Global Fund for Community Foundations.

DPRI (2026) *Democratizing Philanthropy Research Initiative: A Research-Practice Network to Democratize Philanthropy – Position Paper*, Democratizing Philanthropy Research Initiative, https://democratizingphilanthropyinitiative.wordpress.com/.

Dula, L., Paarlberg, L.E. and Adeyeri, I. (2025) Philanthropic foundations and the exercise of power: an integrative literature review of the many faces of power, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 5(1): 5–30, doi: 10.1177/08997640251332893

Eliasoph, N. (2011) *Making Volunteers: Civic Life After Welfare's End*, Princeton University Press.

Evers, A. and von Essen, J. (2024) In search of intermediating capacities: the interplay of civic engagement and institutionalised politics, in *The Interplay of Civic Engagement and Institutionalised Politics*, Springer International Publishing, pp 1–28.

Frumkin, P. (2006) *Strategic Giving: The Art and Science of Philanthropy*, University of Chicago Press.

Gibson, C.M., Cardona, C., McGinnis Johnson, J. and Suárez, D. (2025) *Participatory Grantmaking in Philanthropy: How Democratizing Decision-Making Shifts Power to Communities. Georgetown Studies in Philanthropy, Nonprofits, and Nongovernmental Organizations*, Georgetown University Press.

Giridharadas, A. (2018) *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*, Vintage Books.

Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF) (2026) GFCF, https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/.

Gregory, A.G. and Howard, D. (2009) The nonprofit starvation cycle, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 7(4): 49–53, doi: 10.48558/6K3V-0Q70

Heydemann, S. and Toepler, S. (2006) Foundations and the challenge of legitimacy in comparative perspective, in K. Prewitt and Mattei Dogan Foundation (eds) *The Legitimacy of Philanthropic Foundations: United States and European Perspectives*, Russell Sage Foundation.

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

Horvath, A. and Powell, W.W. (2016) Contributory or disruptive: do new forms of philanthropy erode democracy? in R. Reich, C. Cordelli and L. Bernholz (eds) *Philanthropy in Democratic Societies: History, Institutions, Values*, University of Chicago Press, pp 87–112.

Hung, C. and Berrett, J.L. (2025) Exploring the dynamics: the relationship between unrestricted resources and nonprofit efficiency, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 55(2): 446–74, doi: 10.1177/08997640251341578

Hung, C.K., De Wit, A. and Wiepking, P. (2023) Restricted/unrestricted funds, in K.P. Kearns and W. Wang (eds) *Elgar Encyclopedia of Nonprofit Management, Leadership and Governance*, Edward Elgar Publishing, pp 495–8.

Hunnik, O., De Wit, A. and Wiepking, P. (2021) (In)equality through unrestricted grantmaking: examining trust and power in the collaboration between the Dutch charity lotteries and their grantees, *The Foundation Review*, 13(2): 38–51, doi: 10.9707/1944-5660.1563

Hustinx, L. and Lammertyn, F. (2003) Collective and reflexive styles of volunteering: a sociological modernization perspective, *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 14(2): 167–87, doi: 10.1023/a:1023948027200

Hustinx, L., Grubb, A., Rameder, P. and Shachar, I.Y. (2023) Inequality in volunteering: building a new research front, *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 33(1): 1–17, doi: 10.1007/s11266-022-00455-w

Jung, T., Harrow, J. and Phillips, S.D. (2013) Developing a better understanding of community foundations in the UK's localisms, *Policy and Politics*, 42(3): 409–27, doi: 10.1332/030557312x655594

Le, V. (2025) *Reimagining Nonprofits and Philanthropy: Unlocking the Full Potential of a Vital and Complex Sector*, John Wiley & Sons.

Maradeix, M.S., Gautier, A. and Pache, A. (2025) Trust-based philanthropy. New buzzword or paradigm shift, in G. Neri-Castracane and G. Ugazio (eds) *Philanthropy: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 1st edn, Routledge, pp 462–76.

Mills, C., Cairns, B. and Firth, L. (2023) *Evidence Review: Why Restrict Grants?* Institute for Voluntary Action Research, www.ivar.org.uk/publication/evidence-review-why-restrict-grants/.

Mills, C., Firth, L. and Cairns, B. (2024) *Time to End the Dominance of Short-Term Grants: The Evidence for Multi-Year Funding*, Institute for Voluntary Action Research, www.ivar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Time-to-end-the-dominance-of-short-term-grants-the-evidence-for-multi-year-funding-February-2024.pdf.

Muhr, A. and Neumayr, M. (2025, September) Foundations through the lens of self and others: aligning roles attributions with actual practices, paper presented at the 12th International Research Conference of the European Research Network On Philanthropy, Heidelberg, Germany.

Ostrander, S.A. (2007) The growth of donor control: revisiting the social relations of philanthropy, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 36(2): 356–72, doi: 10.1177/0899764007300386

Paarlberg, L., Walk, M. and Merritt, C.C. (2022) Six blind men and one elephant – proposing an integrative framework to advance research and practice in justice philanthropy, *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*, 8(3): 349–74, doi: 10.20899/jpna.8.3.349-374

Participatory Grantmakers (2026) Participatory grantmaking community, www.participatorygrantmaking.org/.

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC

Petzinger, J. and Jung, T. (2024) In reciprocity, we trust: improving grantmaking through relational philanthropy, *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing*, 29(2): e1840, doi: 10.1002/nvsm.1840

Reich, R. (2016) Repugnant to the whole idea of democracy? On the role of foundations in democracies, in R. Reich, C. Cordelli and L. Bernholz (eds) *Philanthropy in Democratic Societies: History, Institutions, Values*, University of Chicago Press, pp 72–86.

Salehi, S. (2024) The rise of trust-based philanthropy, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 22(2): 2–3, doi: 10.48558/RXPY-XX64

Salehi, S. and Infante, R. (2024) Forest for the trees: collective accountability and trust as groundwork for systems change, *Foundation Review*, 16(2): Article 6, doi: 10.9707/1944-5660.1721

Saunders-Hastings, E. (2022) *Private Virtues, Public Vices: Philanthropy and Democratic Equality*, University of Chicago Press.

Shaker, G.G. and Wiepking, P. (2021) What is unrestricted funding? Two philanthropy experts explain, *Conversation US*, 26 July, https://theconversation.com/what-is-unrestricted-funding-two-philanthropy-experts-explain-164589.

Sørensen, M.L. and Hjære, M. (2025) *Bevillinger i balance-En evaluering af Augustinus Fondens praksis for kapacitetsbevillinger på det sociale område [Grants in Balance]*, CFSA, https://augustinusfonden.dk/da/nyheder/ny-rapport-stoette-til-kapacitetsopbygning-styrker-civilsamfundets-sociale-organisationer.

Spade, D. (2026) *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*, Verso.

Trust-Based Philanthropy Project (2025) Trust-based philanthropy, www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org.

#TrustCreatesImpact (2026) FörderMonitor. Stiftungsförderung aus der Perspektive der Förderpartner. Eine Analyse für den deutschen Stiftungssektor, www.vertrauen-macht-wirkung.de/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/260326_VMW_Foerdermonitor_eReader.pdf.

Walton, J. (2021) *Are Multi-Year Unrestricted Grants Equitably Distributed? A Look at Racial Disparities in Funding*, Center for Effective Philanthropy, https://cep.org/centering-racial-equity-for-generational-impact/.

Whitman Institute (2014) Trust-based investment. Survey results, https://thewhitmaninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/Trust-Based-Philanthropy-2-pager-1.pdf.

Wiepking, P. and De Wit, A. (2024) Unrestricted funding and nonprofit capacities: developing a conceptual model, *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 34(4): 801–24, doi: 10.1002/nml.21592

Unauthenticated | Downloaded 11/03/26 02:07 PM UTC