



Center for Disaster Philanthropy

EVALUATION REPORT 2025

MIDWEST EARLY RECOVERY FUND

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Presented To:
**Center for Disaster
Philanthropy**



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Introduction and Methodology

The Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP) was founded in 2010 to pioneer the practice of strategic disaster philanthropy with a vision of a world where the impact of disasters is minimized by thoughtful, equitable and responsible recovery for all. Its mission is to mobilize philanthropy to strengthen the ability of communities to withstand disasters and recover equitably when they occur. CDP established the Midwest Early Recovery Fund (the Fund) in 2014 to support early recovery efforts following low-attention disasters in the Midwest. The Fund catalyzes recovery efforts two weeks to 18 months after disaster events within a 10-state region that includes Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota and the 77 sovereign tribal nations that share the land.

At the end of 2024, CDP partnered with Point b(e) Strategies to evaluate the Fund. The evaluation sought to understand the Fund's effectiveness in catalyzing local-led and equitable early recovery efforts and how its funding, education and technical assistance contribute to the outcomes for grantee partners. It is important to note that the Fund approached this evaluation through a *contribution* lens, rather than an *attribution* lens. The Fund staff embraces and acknowledges that the funding, assistance and support the Fund provides is only one piece of a very complex puzzle in the disaster recovery space in the Midwest. As such, the evaluation is designed to highlight how the Fund contributes to early disaster recovery efforts in its region.

Through the evaluation process, the following outcomes were identified:

- Grantee partners feel less isolated and recognize they are not alone.
- Grantee partners have increased knowledge about effective early recovery practices.
- Grantee partners have increased skill and confidence to take initial steps to recovery.
- Grantee partners have increased their capacity to translate next steps to recovery.
- Grantee partners have increased capacity to ensure they are implementing an inclusive, equitable recovery process.
- Grantee partners effectively support their communities during early recovery efforts.
- Grantee partners have increased connections to funders and resources that will further community recovery, sustainability and capacity.

The evaluation also included the following process-related outcomes:

- The Fund effectively supports local-led, equitable, holistic and robust early recovery efforts.
- The Fund appropriately and effectively elevates attention toward low-attention disasters.
- The Fund's model and programmatic elements are replicable within CDP and other spaces.

Point b(e) Strategies utilized a mixed-methods approach to collecting data and gathering information to understand progress toward the Fund’s outcomes. Point b(e) Strategies utilized the following methods:

- **Task Force Meeting**, which was comprised of four grantee partners and three CDP staff to support the evaluation. Point b(e) Strategies facilitated three Task Force meetings throughout the project.
- **Grantee Partner Survey**, which was completed by 28 grantee partners receiving funding from 2015–2024.
- **Grantee Partner Focus Groups**, in which 12 grantee partners participated across two focus groups.
- **CDP Staff Interviews**, which were completed via Zoom with five current or former staff at CDP.
- **Informational Interviews**, which were conducted via Zoom with six individuals in the disaster relief space.

Key Findings: About the Fund

The evaluation sought to understand various factors about the Fund’s model and process, such as its effectiveness in supporting local-led and equitable early recovery efforts and the strengths of the Fund’s model.

THE FUND’S UNIQUE VALUE

Staff and informational interviewees were asked to share the unique value that the Fund provides in contributing to disaster recovery in the region. Interviewees highlighted the following unique values:

- It funds low-attention disasters that are often ignored by disaster philanthropy.
- Through its grantmaking approach, the Fund utilizes a data-informed funding process, which removes barriers to ensure vulnerable populations receive support.
- The Fund’s staff have deep, trusted relationships with communities and are seen as connectors and partners.
- The Fund’s staff are seen as subject matter experts in disaster response and recovery in the region.
- The Fund works to address the needs of marginalized and vulnerable communities.
- The Fund has worked diligently to establish close relationships with tribal communities throughout the region.

THE FUND’S EFFECTIVENESS IN SUPPORTING GRANTEE PARTNERS

Overall, grantee survey respondents shared positive feedback on the Fund’s grantmaking, application, grant management and reporting process. More specifically:

- 93% of respondents agreed that CDP¹ supports their organization in applying for funding, and CDP provides clear communication during the pre-grantmaking phase.
- 89% of respondents agreed that the application process is easy to navigate.
- 93% of respondents agreed that the expectations for grant management are clear, and CDP's grant requirements are reasonable.
- 89% of respondents agreed that CDP staff demonstrate an understanding of the challenges and goals of their work, communicate clearly and effectively, and foster a sense of collaboration and partnership in their work.
- Several survey respondents also shared that CDP is responsive, supportive and easy to work with.

THE FUND'S ROLE IN ELEVATING ATTENTION TOWARD LOW-ATTENTION DISASTERS

Several informational interviewees shared positive feedback on the Fund's efforts to share information on low-attention disasters, such as through meetings and conferences at local and national levels, issue papers, at Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) meetings, webinars, email and their website. Grantee partners also shared feedback on the Fund's role and effectiveness of elevating their stories. Grantee partners shared the following:

- 75% of grantee survey respondents agreed that CDP provides opportunities for their organization to share their story, and 71% agreed that CDP effectively highlights the impact of their work to broader audiences.
- One grantee focus group shared that CDP does not bring awareness or that they weren't sure. Another grantee focus group reflected on the various ways CDP has raised awareness, such as by sharing articles or by being a consistent funder to fill gaps left by the federal government.

STRENGTHS OF THE FUND'S MODEL

CDP's staff and informational interviewees shared feedback on the key components, influence, and replicability of the Fund's model. Interviewees shared the following about the Fund's model:

- A key component is that it is more than a fund—it is a program offering capacity building support, technical assistance and connection to resources and expertise. This component has also influenced other funds at CDP and can be further replicated at CDP and in other spaces.
- The Fund is strategically focused on early recovery and fills gaps.
- The Fund's pre-positioned dollars and long-term, sustainable funding are a key component and an approach that can be replicated at CDP and in other spaces.

¹ The grantee survey and focus groups included only grantee partners funded by the Midwest Early Recovery Fund. To minimize confusion, the survey referred to the Fund as "CDP." Throughout the grantee partner findings, the Fund is referred to as CDP to maintain continuity with the wording in the grantee partner survey and focus group questions.

- The Fund has a dedicated geography and focus area that can also be replicated, along with its focus on hyperlocal communities.
- The Fund is committed to equity and has been strategic and thoughtful in how it has built relationships with tribal communities, providing key insights for CDP.
- The Fund's reliance on data to identify communities and assess needs, especially for vulnerable communities, is a key component, and other funds can reflect on how to utilize data in their grantmaking processes.
- The Fund convenes grantee partners and funders and has also influenced other funds at CDP.
- The Fund's dedicated, trusted staff are a key component to the Fund's success as they have developed strong relationships and connections within the region and are trusted by communities.

Key Findings: Grantee Outcomes

In addition to understanding the key components of the Fund and perceptions of its grantmaking process, the evaluation sought to understand how the Fund influences and impacts grantee partners. These findings illustrate grantee partner outcomes with a lens of how the Fund *contributes* to successful disaster recovery.

OUTCOME: GRANTEE PARTNERS FEEL LESS ISOLATED AND RECOGNIZE THEY ARE NOT ALONE.

The Fund has supported grantee partners in feeling less isolated and more connected to others.

- 89% of respondents agreed that CDP has helped them build networks with individuals and groups working on disaster recovery.
- 79% of respondents agreed that CDP's involvement has reduced the sense of isolation in their early recovery work.
- 82% of respondents agreed that CDP's support has helped their organization feel more connected to the disaster recovery community.

OUTCOME: GRANTEE PARTNERS HAVE INCREASED KNOWLEDGE ABOUT EFFECTIVE EARLY RECOVERY PRACTICES.

The Fund has helped increase the majority of grantee partners' knowledge about effective early recovery practices.

- 75% of grantee survey respondents indicated that their partnership with CDP has helped their organization learn how to identify resources needed for community recovery to a great extent or quite a bit, while 61% indicated that their partnership has helped them understand how to prioritize post-disaster needs to a great extent or quite a bit.

- Several grantee partner focus group participants shared that they were already established in disaster recovery and therefore did not learn a lot from CDP.

OUTCOME: GRANTEE PARTNERS HAVE INCREASED SKILL AND CONFIDENCE TO TAKE INITIAL STEPS TO RECOVERY.

The Fund has helped grantee partners develop increased skills and confidence to take initial steps to recovery. More specifically, 75% of respondents indicated that their partnership with CDP has helped their organization improve capacity to align recovery strategies with community needs, and 71% indicated that they have become more effective at collaborating with partners to implement recovery efforts to a great extent or quite a bit. Additionally, grantee survey respondents and focus group participants shared that their partnership has helped them:

- Receive additional funding and establish and grow resources.
- Engage their community and integrate different partners.
- Build resilience, think about mitigation and preparedness, and pivot to recovery.
- Understand their position and contribution in the community as a funder.

OUTCOME: GRANTEE PARTNERS HAVE INCREASED THEIR CAPACITY TO TRANSLATE NEXT STEPS TO RECOVERY.

The Fund has helped grantee partners increase their capacity to translate next steps to recovery. Because of the support, in part from CDP:

- 95% of grantee survey respondents agreed that their organization supported their community's recovery needs and increased their capacity to mobilize recovery efforts.
- 86% of grantee survey respondents agreed that their organization became more skilled at disaster recovery activities and improved their planning and implementation of disaster recovery activities.
- A few focus group participants shared that CDP helped change their organization's perspective on long-term recovery and disasters, while one participant shared that their capacity has not changed, as they are still trying to get their organization's leadership to understand the importance of disaster work.

OUTCOME: GRANTEE PARTNERS HAVE INCREASED CAPACITY TO ENSURE THEY ARE IMPLEMENTING AN INCLUSIVE, EQUITABLE RECOVERY PROCESS.

The Fund has helped grantee partners understand how to be inclusive and equitable and has increased their capacity to ensure they are inclusive and equitable in recovery efforts.

- 86% of grantee survey respondents agreed that the support, in part from CDP, has allowed their organization to strengthen their ability to design programs to meet the needs of historically marginalized populations, and 77% agreed that their

organization understands the challenges faced by historically marginalized groups in their community.

- 73% of survey respondents agreed that they have incorporated feedback from marginalized groups in their recovery processes and have prioritized equitable outcomes in their work.
- A few focus group participants also shared that CDP's grant process and guidance has helped them make sure they are cognizant of marginalized populations and of the importance of being connected to partners like state and national VOADs.
- One focus group participant shared that CDP is intentional about tribal engagements and has helped them make connections.

OUTCOME: GRANTEE PARTNERS EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT THEIR COMMUNITIES DURING EARLY RECOVERY EFFORTS.

The Fund has helped grantee partners support their communities, provide services, and connect members with resources.

- 86% of grantee survey respondents agreed that because of the support, in part from CDP, their organization has improved their ability to connect community members with critical resources, enhanced their capacity to provide necessary services to underserved populations, and increased availability of services for their community members.
- 91% of respondents agreed that because of the support, in part from CDP, their organization has strengthened networks to help further recover, and 86% have developed valuable partnerships with other organizations in the disaster recovery space.

OUTCOME: GRANTEE PARTNERS HAVE INCREASED CONNECTIONS TO FUNDERS AND RESOURCES THAT WILL FURTHER COMMUNITY RECOVERY, SUSTAINABILITY AND CAPACITY.

The Fund is somewhat increasing connections to funders and resources that will further community recovery, sustainability and capacity for some grantee partners.

- 46% of grantee survey respondents indicated that their partnership with CDP has helped them established meaningful relationships with additional funders to a great extent or quite a bit, while 25% indicated not at all or very little.
- 43% of grantee survey respondents indicated that their partnership with CDP has helped them identify connections with potential funders, and 39% indicated that they have secured additional funding for recovery efforts to a great extent or quite a bit.

Recommendations

The evaluation provided insight into several key recommendations:

1. **Continue to adequately staff the Fund.** The evaluation illuminated the important role of the Fund's staff in providing support to grantee partners, building trusted relationships within the region, and being a well-known source for connections and resources. As several interviewees noted, the Fund operates more as a program than as a traditional grantmaking fund. As such, it is critical that CDP continues to support high-quality, well-connected staff to manage and implement the Fund.
2. **Identify more ways to highlight the work of the Fund and the lessons learned.** The Fund has provided unique value to the region in the disaster recovery space for more than 10 years. During those 10 years, it has learned many lessons about how to support local-led, equitable disaster recovery efforts, particularly for low-attention disasters that do not receive a disaster declaration. The evaluation revealed there are opportunities to share those lessons within CDP, in the region, and throughout philanthropy as a whole.
3. **Explore opportunities to create more collaborative spaces for networking and connections.** The Fund's staff have developed close connections with individuals, nonprofit organizations, local governments, tribal nations, and philanthropic institutions within its 10-state region. Because it operates more like a program, it has found a way to break down many barriers that exist between philanthropies and grantees. As such, it has a unique opportunity to bring together the many entities that work in the disaster recovery space and provide opportunities for connection and collaboration. When applicable, the Fund should explore how to create collaborative spaces for all entities to network and connect. For example, because of its unique relationship with tribal communities, the Fund can explore how to help bridge the gap that often exists between philanthropy and tribal nations by facilitating more conversations and learnings between these groups.
4. **Identify the Fund's role in bringing more awareness to low-attention disasters and grantee partner stories.** The Fund provides critical disaster recovery support to the region, and it funds grantee partners that are making a difference in their communities. It is also connected to both the funding community and the recovery community. While the Fund has set an outcome that it appropriately and effectively elevates attention toward low-attention disasters, it should clarify expectations for what this means. For example, the Fund could determine if there are additional ways to bring awareness to low-attention disasters, ongoing capacity and recovery needs, and the work of grantee partners, whether through additional case studies, newsletters or webinars.
5. **Understand the Fund's unique value with organizations that have been in the disaster recovery space for a long time.** The Fund has indicated that it seeks to increase grantee partners' knowledge, skill and capacity to respond to disasters. The evaluation has illuminated that when grantee partners are new to the disaster recovery space, they experience an increase in their knowledge, skill and capacity to respond to disasters. However, the Fund also supports some organizations that have extensive experience and knowledge in disaster recovery work. For these grantee partners, the Fund should explicitly understand whether their unique value is simply to provide funding, or whether there is additional technical assistance or support that would benefit these entities.

Introduction

The Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP) was founded in 2010 to pioneer the practice of strategic disaster philanthropy with a vision of a world where the impact of disasters is minimized by thoughtful, equitable and responsible recovery for all. Its mission is to mobilize philanthropy to strengthen the ability of communities to withstand disasters and recover equitably when they occur. Since its inception, CDP has grown into an ambitious organization with a \$33 million budget and a team of more than 25 staff members working across the United States.

CDP established the Midwest Early Recovery Fund (the Fund) in 2014 to support early recovery efforts after low-attention disasters in the Midwest. The Fund catalyzes recovery efforts two weeks to 18 months after disaster events, including tornadoes, flooding, earthquakes, landslides and wildfires. It funds efforts in a 10-state region that includes Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota and the 77 sovereign tribal nations that share the land.

At the end of 2024, CDP partnered with Point b(e) Strategies to evaluate the Fund. The evaluation sought to understand the Fund's effectiveness in catalyzing local-led and equitable early recovery efforts and how its funding, education and technical assistance contribute to the outcomes for grantee partners. To create a roadmap for the evaluation, Point b(e) Strategies and the Fund staff developed a logic model and an evaluation plan. Based on the evaluation plan, the following outcomes were identified:

- Grantee partners feel less isolated and recognize they are not alone.
- Grantee partners have increased knowledge about effective early recovery practices.
- Grantee partners have increased skill and confidence to take initial steps to recovery.
- Grantee partners have increased their capacity to translate next steps to recovery.
- Grantee partners have increased capacity to ensure they are implementing an inclusive, equitable recovery process.
- Grantee partners effectively support their communities during early recovery efforts.
- Grantee partners have increased connections to funders and resources that will further community recovery, sustainability and capacity.

The evaluation plan also included the following process-related outcomes:

- The Fund effectively supports local-led, equitable, holistic and robust early recovery efforts.
- The Fund appropriately and effectively elevates attention toward low-attention disasters.
- The Fund's model and programmatic elements are replicable within CDP and other spaces.

Methodology

Point b(e) Strategies utilized a mixed-methods approach to collecting data and gathering information to understand progress toward the Fund's outcomes. This approach was strategically selected to employ tenets of equitable evaluation throughout the project.

Task Force Meetings. Point b(e) Strategies worked with the Fund's staff to create a Task Force to support the evaluation. The Task Force was comprised of four grantee partners and three CDP staff members. The Task Force played a pivotal role in providing feedback about the goals and outcomes of the evaluation, weighing in on what should be included in the data collection tools, bringing community-level perspectives and insights, and offering context to the final report. Point b(e) Strategies facilitated three Task Force meetings throughout the project.

Grantee Partner Survey. Point b(e) Strategies developed a survey for all grantee partners supported by the Fund. The survey was administered electronically via Survey Monkey to the primary contact at all grantee partners who were funded from 2015–2024. The survey was administered to 107 individuals, with 12 surveys bouncing back due to old or inaccurate email addresses. A total of 28 grantee partners completed the survey. Information about the responding organizations is in Appendix A.

Grantee Partner Focus Group. In order to gather in-depth feedback from grantee partners, Point b(e) Strategies facilitated two focus groups with 12 grantee partners. Point b(e) Strategies sent an email invitation to the primary contact at each grantee partner that was funded from 2015–2024. Grantee partners were invited to register for the focus group that best aligned with their schedule. Focus group participants represented large nonprofits (n=6), small to medium-sized nonprofits (n=3), community foundations (n=2), and a local chamber of commerce foundation (n=1). Large nonprofits include organizations with budgets of more than \$1 million, and small to medium-sized nonprofits include organizations with budgets of \$1 million or less.

CDP Staff Interviews. Point b(e) Strategies conducted interviews with five current or former staff members at CDP. These interviews were conducted via Zoom and were used to gather insights and information about the Fund and its role within CDP.

Informational Interviews. Point b(e) Strategies also conducted six interviews via Zoom with individuals in the disaster relief space in the region to gather additional perspectives about the role of the Fund in philanthropy and in the region. Interviewees included representatives from a community foundation, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies (MACP), social service and nonprofit organizations working in the region, a national organization with member organizations in the region, and Partnerships with Native Americans.

Sense-Making Session with the Fund staff and the Task Force. Upon completion of the data collection and analysis, Point b(e) Strategies facilitated sense-making sessions with the Task Force as well as CDP staff in order to discuss the key findings and recommendations and to ensure they are situated within the context and work at the local and regional levels.

ATTRIBUTION VS. CONTRIBUTION

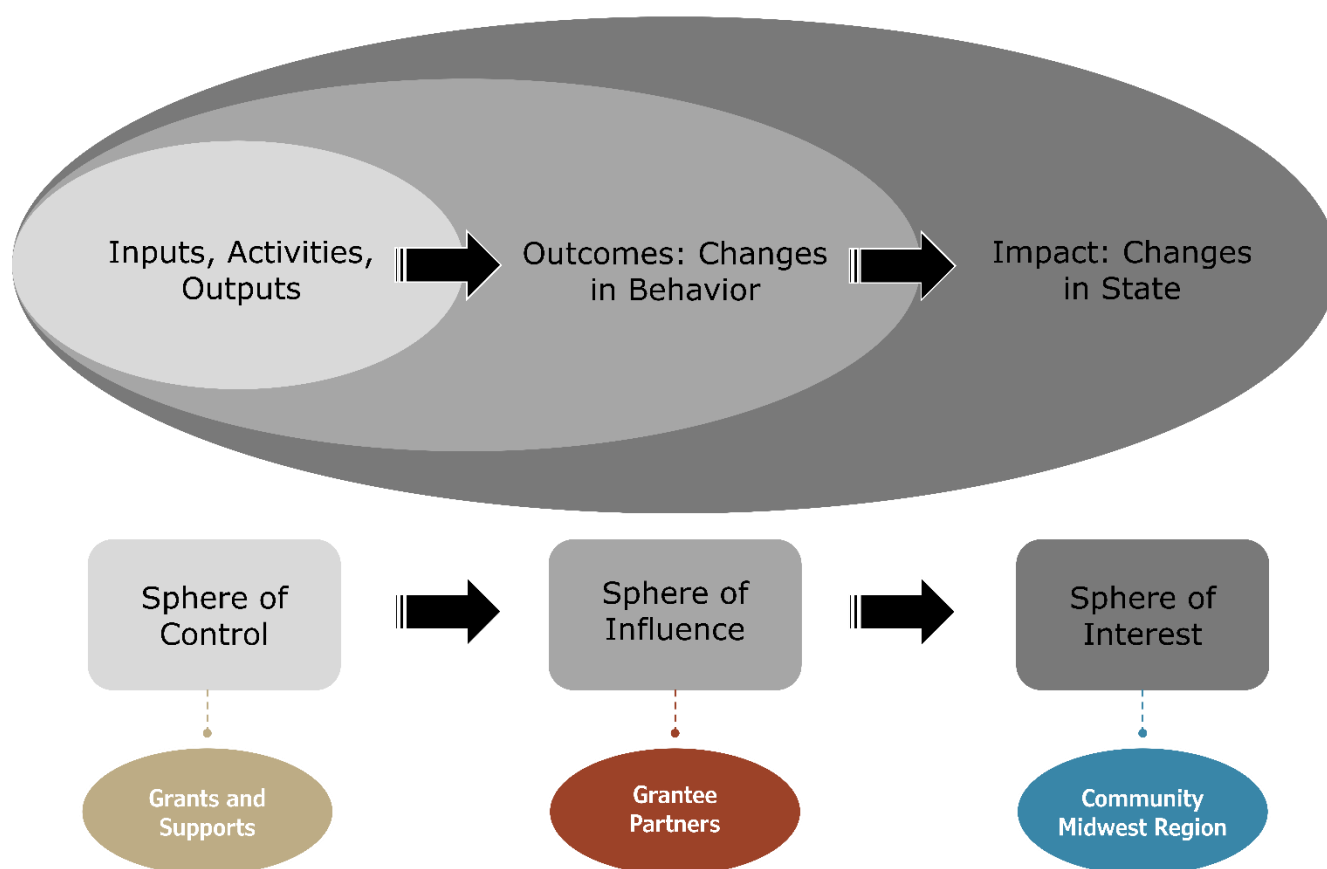
CDP and the Fund are committed to supporting organizations and communities recovering from disaster in the Midwest. It is important to note, however, that the Fund is not operating alone in this region. Organizations, communities, philanthropies and government entities are all actively supporting disaster recovery efforts. For this evaluation, there are two different approaches the Fund can take when assessing its impact. The first approach is “attribution,” which draws a clear, direct line from the intervention to impact. This approach takes a narrow lens and does not account for the multiple interventions and supports working collaboratively in the region. The second approach is “contribution.” Through this approach, the Fund recognizes that there are many other factors that are driving successful recovery. The contribution model asks the question, “To what extent does our intervention *contribute* to the change” compared with the attribution model, which asks, “To what extent does our intervention *cause* this change.” The Fund staff embraces and acknowledges that the funding, assistance and support the Fund provides is only one piece of a very complex puzzle. As such, the evaluation findings lean heavily into the contribution model by highlighting how the Fund contributes to early disaster recovery efforts in its region.

SPHERES OF IMPACT

As the Fund embraces the contribution model to situate its impact in its region, it is important for the Fund to understand how its work fits into the overall picture. By using outcome mapping, the Fund can look at the Spheres of Impact in assessing disaster recovery efforts. Through this approach, there are three Spheres of Impact that ultimately catalyze local-led and equitable early recovery efforts, as detailed in Image 1 below.

Sphere One is the Sphere of Control, which looks at the inputs, activities and outputs that an organization has direct control over. For the Fund, this would be its model—its grantmaking and capacity building process. The Fund has direct control over how its funding model is implemented. Sphere Two is the Sphere of Influence, which looks at the outcomes and change of behavior that organizations are seeking to achieve. For the Fund, this would be its grantee partners and how the Fund supports their work. Funds, technical assistance and capacity-building support can help strengthen the grantee partners; however, it is at the discretion of the grantee partners how the funds are spent and how recovery efforts are implemented. Finally, Sphere Three is the Sphere of Interest, which looks at larger-scale social impact. These changes occur at the social, economic or societal level and encompass the recovery efforts that are taking place in the region. However, it is important to note that these community-wide changes fall outside of the Fund’s Sphere of Control and Sphere of Influence.

Image 1. Spheres of Impact



Source: Outcome Mapping Learning Community. Webinar: Introduction to Outcome Mapping (2011)

By using this approach, it is important to note that the Fund’s Sphere of Control is the Fund’s model for how it engages with and supports grantee partners, and its Sphere of Influence is its impact on the grantee partners. Throughout the evaluation findings, the intent is to understand how the Fund contributes to the work of the grantee partners and supports recovery efforts for low-attention disasters in its 10-state region.

Key Findings: About the Fund

Since 2014, the Fund has been providing communities affected by low-attention weather and climate disasters with valuable recovery resources. The Fund’s vision is to support local-led, equitable, holistic and robust recovery efforts in order to relieve suffering through meeting disaster-caused needs and helping ensure that communities have developed capacities to mitigate, respond to and recover from future events. It catalyzes equitable recovery through three primary activities: providing individualized grantmaking, offering technical assistance and expertise, and supporting the community through connecting, bridging and educating.

According to the Fund, early recovery is not defined by a time period that is consistent across communities or disasters. Instead, it refers to the period of time when an organization or community is transitioning from response to recovery. This transitional time includes planning and working toward long-term recovery to rebound from the disaster event. Early recovery typically occurs in the two weeks to 18 months after a disaster event but may shift, especially in Native and tribal communities.

The Fund is made possible through a partnership with the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies (MACP), which has provided annual, pre-positioned funds—funding set aside in advance to help with emergencies—to support recovery efforts in the Midwest. Since its first grant in January 2015, the Fund has granted over \$10 million to over 150 grantees.

THE FUND'S EFFECTIVENESS IN SUPPORTING LOCAL-LED AND EQUITABLE EARLY RECOVERY EFFORTS

The Fund's Unique Value

The evaluation sought to understand the unique value the Fund plays in supporting the region and whether the Fund effectively supports grantee partners. Staff and informational interviewees were asked to share the unique value that the Fund provides in contributing to disaster recovery in the region. Interviewees shared numerous perspectives on the Fund's unique value. Interviewees highlighted that it **funds low-attention disasters** that are often ignored by disaster philanthropy, particularly in the flyover states of the Midwest. Additionally, through its grantmaking approach, the Fund utilizes a **data-informed funding process**, which removes barriers to ensure vulnerable populations receive support.

According to interviewees, the Fund's staff have **deep, trusted relationships** with communities and are seen as connectors and partners. Staff embrace the shoe-leather philanthropy approach to grantmaking and spend time in communities learning from the people who are most affected by the disasters. *"There's a huge relationship component that their team has built by the way they engage with, meet, and understand communities and disasters,"* stated an informational interviewee. Through these relationships, the Fund staff helps develop the local assets in the community and promote partnerships in order to support disaster recovery. As one interviewee stated, *"CDP staff have a lot of connections and existing healthy relationships in communities...they provide our name to partners and vice versa."* Finally, the Fund's participation in Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) meetings and activities helps contribute to shared learning and collaboration.

Interviewees also noted that the Fund's staff members are seen as **subject matter experts** in disaster response and recovery in the region. *"They are the go-to resources"* in the region and share their expertise with communities, foundations and organizations. The Fund's staff members share their valuable expertise through webinars, meetings and convenings at the local level or even at the national level. This expertise allows communities to be better prepared. It also informs funders about how to effectively invest in recovery efforts in the Midwest.

Interviewees commented that the Fund works to **address the needs of marginalized and vulnerable communities**. Through its decade of work, the Fund has continued to define what it means to be a "vulnerable population." The Fund's staff seek to understand the

needs of different uninvested communities and how those needs have shifted throughout the years. Relatedly, interviewees noted that the Fund's staff listen to and value the needs of local communities. One interviewee stated, *"They try to find out how to get a voice from those [marginalized] communities...valuing the less visible communities and know that it takes time and relationship building to get to that layer. I do see that as a strong value of theirs."* The Fund's staff are "consciousness keepers" in that they remind grantees and foundations to think about different groups and how different decisions will affect those groups. As a result, the Fund often funds programs and populations that would otherwise go unnoticed or unfunded by other philanthropic organizations.

Additionally, interviewees commented that the Fund has worked diligently to establish **close relationships with tribal communities** throughout the region. One interviewee affiliated with Partnership for Native Americans stated that the Fund staff is *"Always very mindful of the space they are in and making sure a tribal voice is there...nice that they are thinking about us and we are not an afterthought. They wanted me on the planning committee and we've been integrated from the very beginning at the table."* The Fund's relationship with tribal communities also provides an opportunity for reciprocal learning—elevating the tribal voice in funder settings.

Finally, the grantee focus groups also asked participants to share feedback on CDP's² unique value and the extent to which CDP has contributed to strengthening the region's overall capacity to respond to and recover from disasters, if at all. The following was shared.

- **CDP has strengthened the community through supporting case/disaster managers and staff.** Several participants shared that CDP has increased their capacity by funding a position that would not exist otherwise. Participants shared that they are able to support and maintain support for their communities through the funded staff member, helping them respond faster and with a trained and experienced disaster worker.
- **CDP has helped the community with visioning.** One participant shared positive feedback on CDP's facilitation of a visioning statement that has helped their community.
- **CDP coordinated efforts through VOAD.** One participant stated that because CDP is involved in VOAD, they are attentive to the needs and coordinate efforts rather than duplicating them.
- **CDP supported a new organization.** One participant shared that CDP has helped keep an organization operating and helped it maintain its capacity to serve while it transitioned as a new nonprofit.

The Fund's Effectiveness in Supporting Grantee Partners

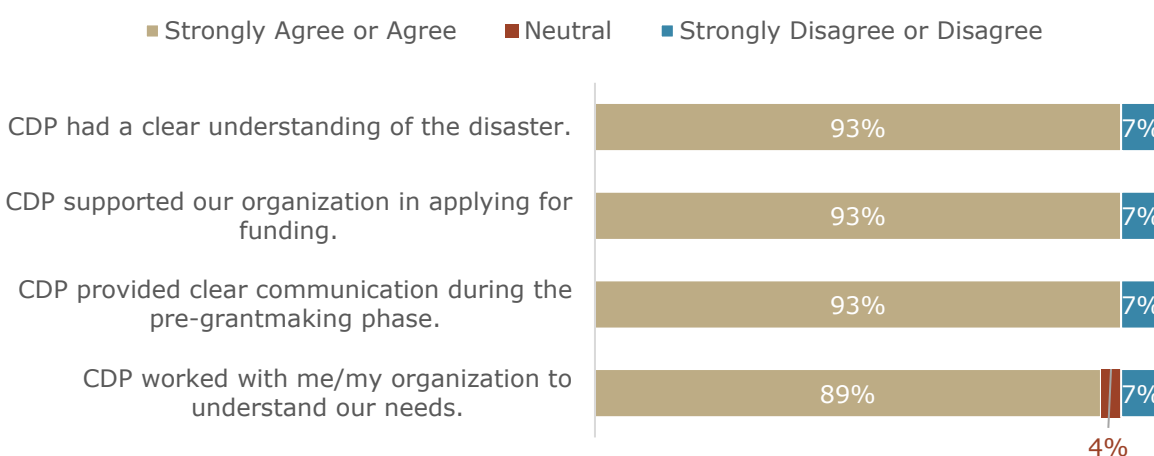
The grantee partner survey asked respondents to reflect on the different phases of the grantmaking process to understand the Fund's effectiveness in supporting grantee partners.

² The grantee survey and focus groups included only grantee partners funded by the Midwest Early Recovery Fund. To minimize confusion, the survey referred to the Fund as "CDP." Throughout the grantee partner findings, the Fund is referred to as CDP to maintain continuity with the wording in the grantee partner survey and focus group questions.

Respondents shared feedback on the pre-grantmaking, application, and grant management and reporting processes, as well as feedback on their experiences during the funding period.

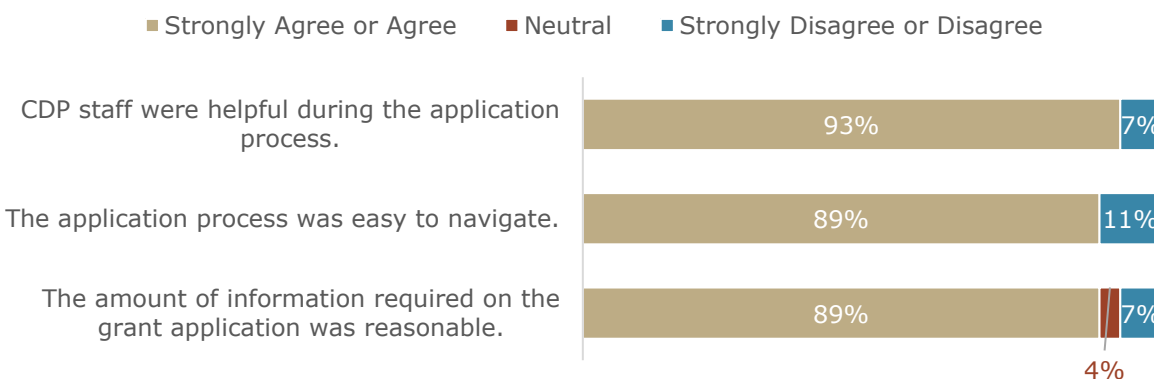
First, the survey asked respondents to reflect on the Fund's pre-grantmaking process, such as understanding of the disaster, support provided and communication. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, nearly all respondents agreed to statements related to CDP's pre-grantmaking process. More specifically, 93% of respondents agreed that CDP had a clear understanding of the disaster, and 89% of respondents agreed that CDP worked with them or their organization to understand their needs. Additionally, 93% agreed that CDP supported their organization in applying for the fund and that CDP provided clear communication.

Figure 1. Feedback on the Pre-Grantmaking Process (n=28)



Respondents also reflected on the Fund's application process. As presented in Figure 2 below, a high percentage of respondents agreed that CDP staff were helpful during the application process, that the application process was easy to navigate, and that the amount of information required on the grant application was reasonable.

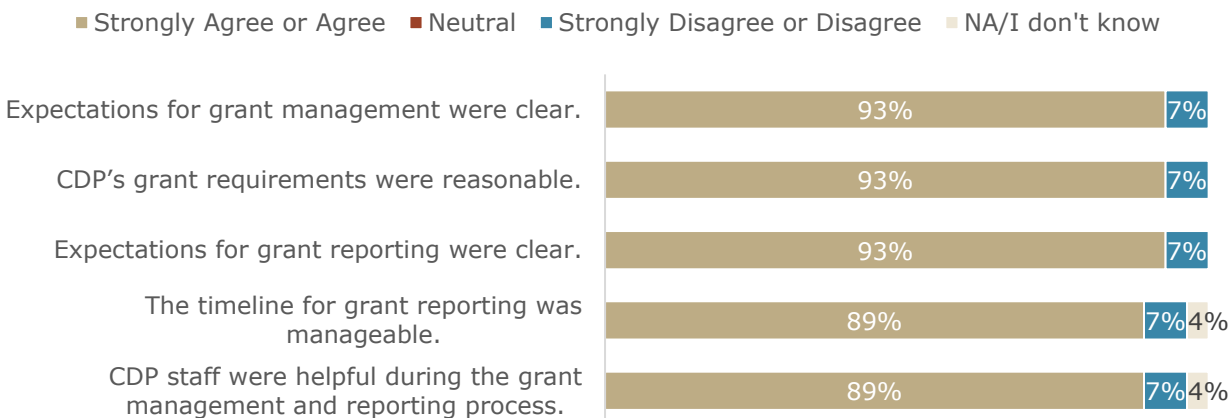
Figure 2. Feedback on the Application Process (n=28)



The survey also asked respondents to reflect on the Fund's grant management and reporting process. Similar to findings related to the pre-grantmaking and application process, a high percentage of respondents agreed to statements related to the grant

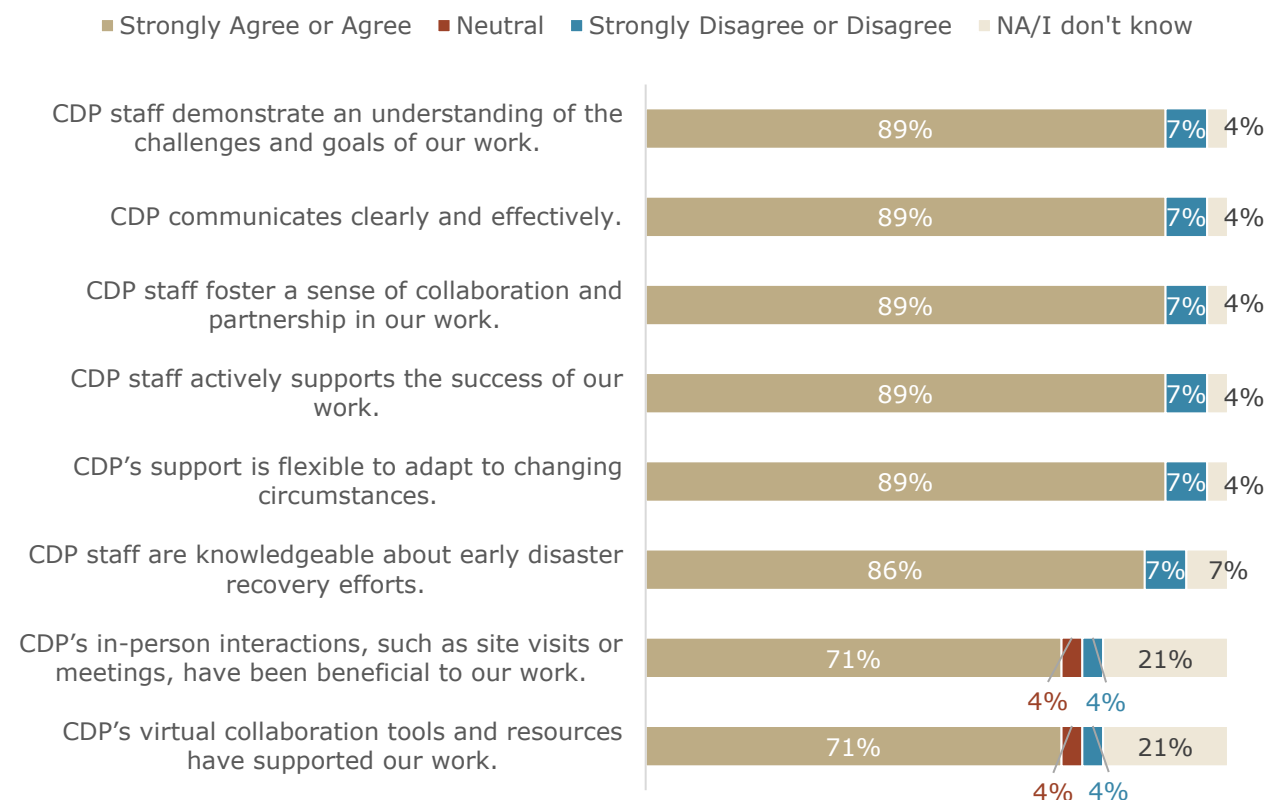
management and reporting process. More specifically and as illustrated in Figure 3, nearly all respondents (93%) agreed that the expectations for grant management were clear, the expectations for grant reporting were clear, and CDP's grant requirements were reasonable. Additionally, 89% of respondents agreed that the timeline for reporting was manageable, and CDP's staff were helpful during the grant management and reporting process.

Figure 3. Feedback on the Grant Management and Reporting Process (n=28)



Survey respondents were asked to share feedback on their experience with CDP and its staff during the funding period. As illustrated in Figure 4 below, a high percentage of respondents agreed to the majority of statements related to CDP's understanding, communication, sense of partnership and support. Notably, 21% of respondents selected not applicable or they didn't know for statements regarding CDP's in-person interactions having been beneficial to their work and CDP's virtual collaboration tools and resources having supported their work.

Figure 4. Feedback on CDP and Its Staff During Grantee Partners' Funding Period (n=28)



Survey respondents were also asked to share additional feedback on the grantmaking process and their experience working with CDP. Several respondents shared positive feedback while a few respondents offered suggestions.

- **CDP is responsive, supportive and easy to work with.** Several respondents shared positive feedback about their interactions, including that CDP staff are responsive to questions, supportive and provide guidance, easy to work with, transparent and flexible in addressing the needs and challenges faced by grantee partners.
- **Suggestions for the grantmaking process.** A few respondents shared suggestions for the process and for CDP, including having more face-to-face time, doing a pre-assessment to understand the phase where grantee partners are so as to not duplicate trainings or support, and offering additional reporting options like videos.

THE FUND'S ROLE IN ELEVATING ATTENTION TOWARD LOW-ATTENTION DISASTERS

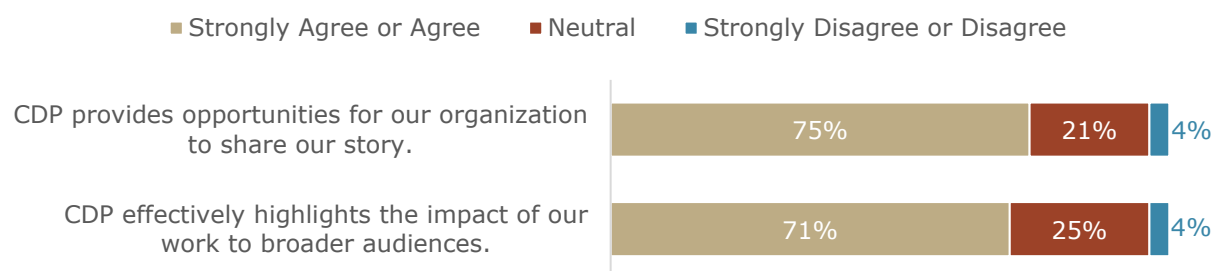
Through its work, the Fund seeks to elevate the needs and issues facing communities impacted by low-attention disasters. Informational interviewees were asked to discuss the role the Fund plays in raising awareness of these disasters. Several interviewees noted that the Fund's staff are good at sharing information through meetings and conferences at local

and national levels, through issue papers, at VOAD meetings, through webinars, and through emails and the website. One interviewee stated that the Fund has advocated for a much larger continuum of support around disasters and that their presence has elevated the conversation around low-attention disasters. Additionally, another interviewee noted, *"They are a model. My work focuses on the same population/disaster. I guess when they have national webinars they try to pull examples from some of those areas that aren't in the media as much. They pull in examples from low-attention, rural, less visible populations."*

One interviewee who does independent research on disasters noted that there is a need to draw more attention to some of the disasters and said they appreciate the work CDP is doing in that regard. This interviewee specifically highlighted that it can be hard to justify spending philanthropic funding in areas where there's no attention to the needs of the community. The Fund helps elevate that need and bring in important funding. This interviewee also noted, however, that some disasters take place in areas with sensitive conditions, specifically noting a community of primarily undocumented workers who were impacted by a low-attention disaster. In situations like this, there's concern that bringing attention to this disaster could raise the risk of an immigration raid.

Grantee partners were also asked to reflect on whether the Fund elevates low-attention disaster. The survey asked respondents to share feedback on CDP's effectiveness in sharing their work. As illustrated in Figure 5 below, 75% of respondents agreed that CDP provides opportunities for their organization to share their story, and 71% agreed that CDP effectively highlights the impact of their work to broader audiences.

Figure 5. Feedback on CDP's Effectiveness in Sharing Grantee Partners' Work (n=28)



Please provide feedback on the support that CDP has provided to you/your organization. Please rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

The grantee partner focus groups also asked participants what role they think CDP plays in raising awareness of disasters that do not typically attract widespread attention, and whether CDP has helped elevate their stories. The following are themes that emerged from the focus groups.

- **Not sure CDP has played a role.** One focus group shared that CDP does not bring awareness or that they do not know if CDP brings awareness to their disaster.
- **CDP has helped bring awareness in various ways.** Another focus group reflected on the different ways the CDP has raised awareness, including:
 - **CDP supports the overall return on investment.** One participant shared that while the federal government evaluates success based on the return on

investment, CDP supports the overall return on investment and fills the gaps, particularly by funding case management, which federal funds won't support. Through this, CDP brings awareness to low-attention disasters, building a history of success that helps organizations and communities get served.

- **Articles on CDP's website.** One participant reflected on the website and articles of the disasters that are available.
- **Cultivated donor base.** One participant shared that CDP has cultivated a donor base of those who want to help with Midwest disasters.
- **CDP makes communities feel like they are receiving attention.** Lastly, one participant shared that they sometimes feel left out following low visibility disasters, but CDP's funding makes them feel like they are receiving attention.

THE STRENGTH OF THE FUND'S MODEL

The evaluation gathered information from CDP's staff and informational interviewees about key components of the Fund's model, whether it has influenced CDP's overall strategy, and whether the model is replicable within CDP or in other areas.

Key Components of the Model

When CDP staff were asked to describe the key components of the Fund's model, the following factors were highlighted:

- **It is more than a fund—it is a program.** The Fund offers capacity building support, technical assistance, and connections to resources and expertise, and many staff described the Fund as a program. The Fund's staff are disaster experts and lend their expertise to communities and organizations.
- **Focuses on Early Recovery.** The Fund is strategically focused on early recovery, and it is filling the gap between immediate response and long-term recovery.
- **Utilizes pre-positioned dollars.** Through its relationship with MACP, the Fund has access to pre-positioned dollars that are ready and available when there is a disaster.
- **Maintains a geographic focus.** The Fund has a dedicated geography and focus area in the 10-state Midwestern region.
- **Commitment to equity.** The Fund is focused on supporting rural, low-attention disasters at the community level, with a focus on historically marginalized communities that are often left out of funding opportunities. It works to be nimble and flexible with its funding to ensure it is accessible and responsive to the needs of the community.
- **Provides smaller grants.** The grants from the Fund are often smaller than other domestic grants issued by CDP, allowing it to serve more organizations and communities.
- **Relies on data.** The Fund relies on its database to assemble data, identify communities and assess needs.

CDP staff and informational interviewees were also asked to discuss whether the Fund's model sets an example for other funding within CDP or for other funding organizations in

their disaster recovery programs. Interviewees noted that the Fund has set an example in the following ways:

- **Implementing clipboard grantmaking.** The Fund makes it easy and accessible to apply for funding. It meets potential grantee partners where they are and works with them to understand their needs and support their work.
- **Making decisions using data.** The Fund is very data driven and collects a lot of information about the needs of the population and the gaps in resources in order to better align services and funding.
- **Funding a specific region.** The Fund is focused on a specific region and has developed strong relationships that have built connections in communities with grantees and other disaster agencies and funders.
- **Being equity centered.** The Fund prioritizes the needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations.
- **Utilizing pre-positioned dollars.** The Fund has illustrated the power of pre-positioned dollars in responding quickly and effectively to the needs of communities after disasters.

Influence of the Model

The Fund is the longest standing fund at CDP and has been operating for 10 years. Staff interviewees were asked to discuss whether the Fund's model has contributed to or influenced CDP's overall strategy or approach to funding. Staff reported that the Fund has influenced CDP's strategy and approach in the following ways:

- **Highlighting low-attention disasters.** CDP has increased its focus on low-attention disasters and on bringing awareness to the important issues facing communities in these disasters.
- **Building relationships with tribal communities.** The Fund has been strategic and thoughtful in how it has engaged with and built relationships with tribal communities. These relationships and learnings have provided key insights for all of CDP.
- **Providing technical advice and assistance.** The work of the Fund in providing technical advice and assistance has been carried over into other funds at CDP, as the Fund has seen the power of providing more than just a check to an organization.
- **Convening partners.** The Fund has illustrated the value of convening grantee partners and funders to drive community change. This strategy is influencing other funds at CDP.
- **Incorporating lessons learned.** The Fund has provided lessons learned in everything from viewing recovery as a strategy to working with rural populations. These lessons and learnings from the Fund get pulled into webinars spanning across CDP.

Replicability of the Model

Staff interviewees were asked to reflect on which aspects of the Fund's model could be replicated at CDP or in other spaces with other philanthropies. According to interviewees, the following aspects of the Fund's model have the potential to be replicable:

- **Focus on a specific geography.** The Fund's focus on a specific geography, along with its focus on hyperlocal communities, provides a model for how to work with and support local communities. Interviewees reflected on whether CDP could replicate this model in other regions of the U.S.
- **Dedicate pre-positioned funds.** Through its pre-positioned funds, the Fund is ready to respond when disaster strikes a community. CDP could continue to explore relationships with other funders to replicate this model.
- **Consider flexible funding.** The Fund's staff members work with grantees to understand their needs and approach potential grantee partners with flexibility. This might include flexibility with grant applications, which programs are funded, or the size of grants. This flexibility can be considered across the agency or in other philanthropies.
- **Provide support and expertise.** The Fund provides support and resources in addition to funding to grantees, such as technical assistance, connections and expertise. This type of support can be replicable with other funds.
- **Utilize data to make decisions.** The Fund utilizes data about the region, disasters and communities to help inform its grantmaking decisions. This data is used to understand the needs of vulnerable communities and the gaps in resources and funding. Other funds or philanthropies can reflect on how to utilize data in their grantmaking processes.

Staff were also asked to discuss the resources or conditions that would be needed in order to successfully replicate the Fund's model in other spaces. The two conditions that all staff discussed are **dedicated, trusted staff** and **funding**. Interviewees could not overemphasize **the role the Fund's staff play in its success**. The staff have developed strong relationships and connections within the region and are trusted by communities. The work requires a long-term understanding of the unique needs and dynamics of the area, with in-person and on-the-ground connections. Finally, the staff are in regular communication with grantees and others working in the region and have built strong ties.

In addition to staff, the success of the Fund relies on **long-term, sustainable funding**. Through the long-term relationship with MACP, the Fund has pre-positioned dollars ready to be used to respond to disasters as they happen. In order to replicate the model, a fund or philanthropy would need to have access to long-term, pre-positioned dollars to support not only the grants, but also the staff to manage the program.

External Factors Influencing the Model

As previously mentioned, the Fund operates within a complex system and is only one factor of many working within this region. The staff and informational interviewees were asked to highlight the external factors that have the biggest influence on the Fund's model. The following external factors were identified:

- **Government funding and disaster declarations.** The biggest external factor influencing the Fund's model is whether a disaster has been declared by the government and what types of government funding is provided to that disaster. The

Fund is critical in filling gaps in funding and meeting the needs that haven't been met elsewhere.

- **Local leadership and infrastructure.** The Fund supports many grantee partners from small, rural communities where the local leaders wear many hats, such as mayor, volunteer coordinator, and local business person. Some communities lack the capacity or background to know how to access the resources that are available.
- **Presence of strong community foundations or organizations.** The Fund has developed relationships with numerous community foundations and organizations in the region. When there's a strong community foundation or organization such as United Way, the work of the Fund looks different.
- **Climate change.** As the climate changes, the prevalence of disasters will continue, and the work of the Fund will become increasingly more important and challenging.
- **Social justice issues.** Social justice issues such as food sovereignty impact the work with tribal communities during disasters. Similarly, policy issues around immigration will continue to impact marginalized communities supported by the Fund.

Unexpected Outcomes

Staff and informational interviewees were asked to reflect on whether there have been any unexpected outcomes or ripple effects, positive or negative, from implementing the Fund within CDP and the region. The majority of the unexpected outcomes described by interviewees were positive, with the following positive themes emerging:

- **Maintains relationships with tribal communities.** Several interviewees noted that the Fund's staff has worked hard to build relationships with tribal communities. These relationships have allowed not only the Fund, but also CDP as a whole, to better understand how to support tribal communities.
- **Increases awareness.** Interviewees discussed that the Fund has helped bring attention to the region, increase awareness about low-attention disasters, and highlight specific needs within communities such as childcare and housing.
- **Extends partnerships across states.** Many of the communities the Fund works with are facing similar issues and interviewees have seen a sense of community develop across state lines.
- **Provides a decade-long learning lab that legitimized disaster philanthropy.** The Fund has served as a learning lab for what it looks like when small to medium dollars are used to support a defined geography over 10 years. Through the Fund, CDP has helped legitimize disaster philanthropy with its commitment to distributing over \$10 million in this area.
- **Stitches together resources.** The Fund provides connections and supports to communities and helps introduce other potential funders and partners who can collaborate on recovery,

One interviewee noted an unexpected outcome and said that the outcome could be either positive or negative. They noted that one funder has stood by the work and has funded it for over 10 years, which is a testament to the strength of the Fund and its work. However, this could also have a negative outcome if this funder were to withdraw its support, in which case the sustainability of the Fund would be in question.

Similarly, the grantee partner focus group participants were also asked to identify any ripple effects—positive and negative—that CDP’s involvement has had on the region or broader disaster recovery ecosystem. The following ripple effects were shared by grantee partners:

- **Grantee partners are looked at as a resource and serve as mentors.** A few participants shared that by being disaster workers or coordinators in a disaster, they and their disaster staff serve as mentors, sharing and helping others through what they have learned and what to expect. However, one participant noted that being looked at as a resource also has some challenges for them.
- **Has helped the infrastructure.** One participant shared how they were able to build their infrastructure such as their technology and administrative positions.
- **Brings people into the workforce.** One participant shared that by funding disaster staff, they were able to hire and help someone return to the workforce.
- **Helps communities get ahead of new disasters.** One participant shared that remaining funding was used to maintain case management staff, allowing them to have the capacity to be ready to move into the next disaster experienced.

Key Findings: Grantee Outcomes

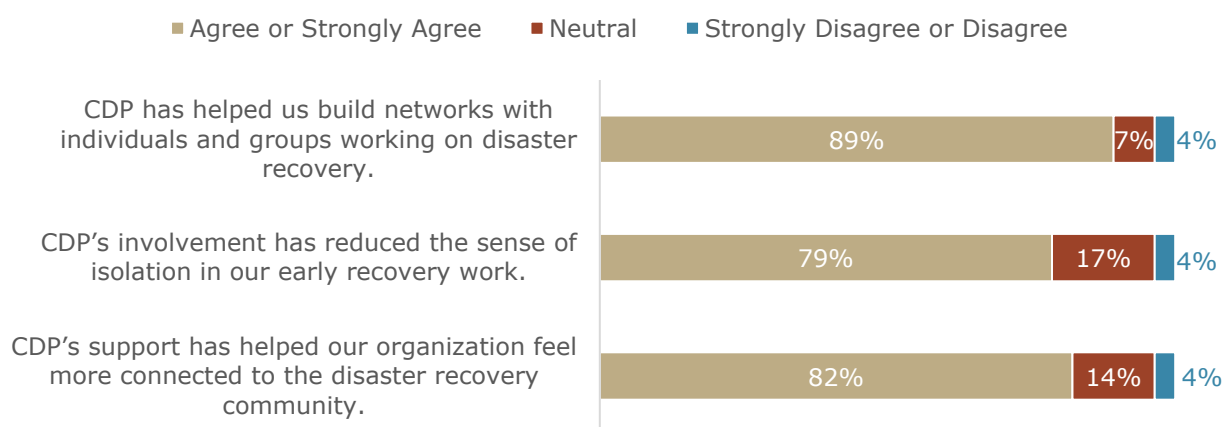
In addition to understanding the key components of the Fund and perceptions of its grantmaking process, the evaluation sought to understand how the Fund influences and impacts grantee partners. The following section illustrates the findings related to grantee partner outcomes, with a lens of how the fund *contributes* to successful disaster recovery. Additionally, the outcome evaluation divided the outcomes between short-term and medium-term. Like the timeline for early recovery, there is not a specified period of time associated with short-term outcomes; however, the timeline is viewed as the early stages of work immediately following grant funding. All grantee survey respondents were asked questions related to short-term outcomes. Grantee partners funded in 2023 and earlier were asked questions related to medium-term outcomes. Medium-term outcomes relate to the work that happens after the grantee partners have become more established.

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

Outcome #1: Grantee partners feel less isolated and recognize they are not alone.

The evaluation sought to understand how the Fund is impacting grantee partners' sense of isolation. In addition to providing grants, the Fund provides technical assistance, connections and hosts grantee gatherings, such as convenings, webinars and speaking engagements. The grantee partner survey asked respondents to reflect on their sense of isolation and connection. As illustrated in Figure 6 below, the majority (89%) of respondents agreed that CDP has helped them build networks with individuals and groups working on disaster recovery; 79% agreed that CDP's involvement has reduced the sense of isolation in their early recovery work; and 82% agreed that CDP's support has helped their organization feel more connected to the disaster recovery community.

Figure 6. Feedback on Sense of Isolation (n=28)



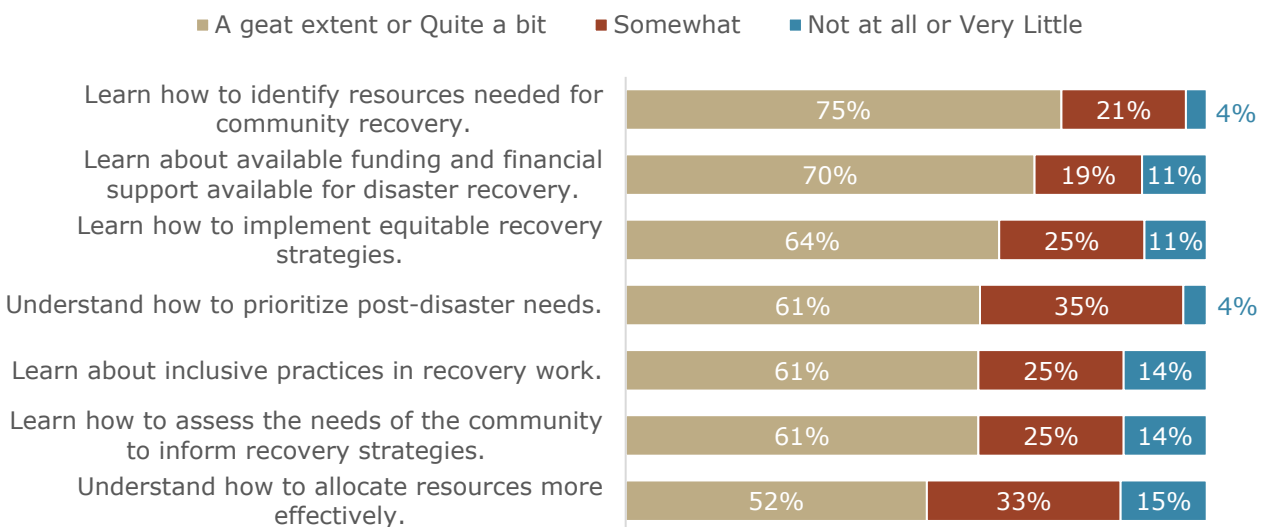
Please provide feedback on the support that CDP has provided to you/your organization. Please rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

Outcome #2: Grantee partners have increased knowledge about effective early recovery practices.

The Fund provides support to grantee partners related to effective early recovery practices through tools, trainings, education and technical assistance. Through these efforts, an outcome of the Fund is grantee partners increase knowledge about effective early recovery practices. The evaluation sought to understand the extent to which the Fund is increasing grantee partners' knowledge.

The grantee survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which their partnership with CDP has helped their organizations understand a series of concepts related to disaster recovery. As presented in Figure 7 below, 75% of respondents indicated their partnership with CDP has helped their organization learn how to identify resources needed for community recovery to a great extent or quite a bit, and 70% indicated their partnership has helped their organization learn about available funding and financial support available for disaster recovery to a great extent or quite a bit. More than 60% of respondents indicated that their partnership with CDP has helped their organization learn how to implement equitable recovery strategies, understand how to prioritize post-disaster, learn about inclusive practices in recovery work, and learn how to assess the needs of the community to inform strategies. Lastly, only 52% indicated that their partnership has helped their organization understand how to allocate resources more effectively to a great extent or quite a bit.

Figure 7. Feedback on Increased Knowledge of Effective Early Recovery Practices (n=28)



To what extent did your partnership with CDP help your organization with the following. Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Not at all and 5 = A great extent.

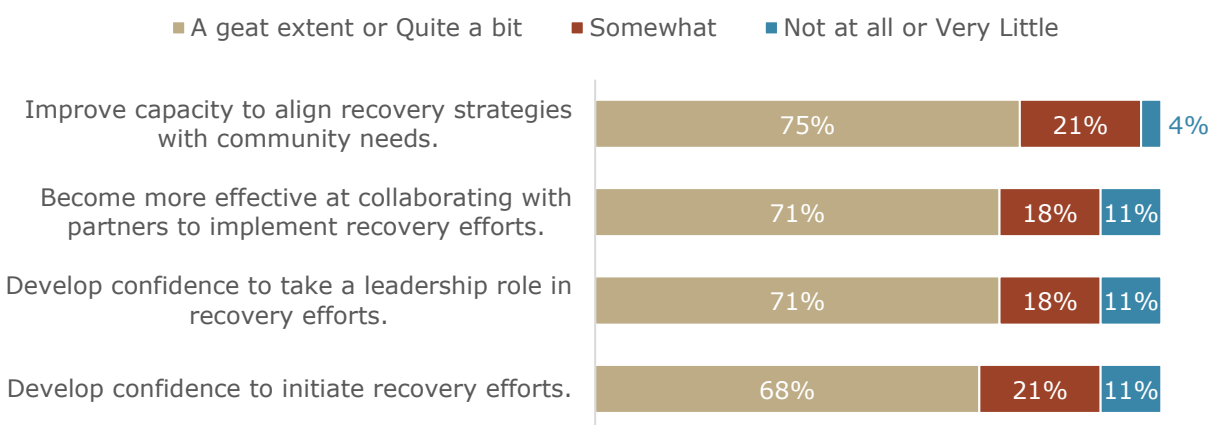
The grantee partner focus groups also asked participants to share their feedback on the impact of CDP's partnership on their knowledge of early recovery practices. The following themes emerged from the focus groups.

- **CDP did not impact the knowledge of those already established in disaster recovery.** Several participants shared that they were already established in disaster recovery, had legacy knowledge or were already further along in their recovery and therefore did not learn a lot from CDP. One participant stated that while CDP did not increase their knowledge on disaster recovery, it did increase their knowledge of how CDP can help.
- **CDP helped with funding connections and fundraising knowledge.** Several participants noted that CDP helped them seek and secure new funding through their connections and advice, as well as through funding trainings or staff to support fundraising and grantwriting.
- **CDP helped expand knowledge.** A couple of participants shared that CDP helped expand their knowledge, and one participant who represented a community foundation stated that CDP helped them understand recovery efforts and their role within disasters.

Outcome #3: Grantee partners have increased skill and confidence to take initial steps to recovery.

In addition to increasing grantee partners' knowledge, the Fund anticipates that grantee partners have increased skills and confidence to take initial steps to recovery. The survey asked respondents to reflect on the extent to which their partnership with CDP has helped their organization gain confidence and skills at initiating early recovery efforts. As illustrated in Figure 8 below, 75% of respondents improved their capacity to align recovery strategies with communities' needs to a great extent or quite a bit, and 71% of respondents became more effective at collaborating with partners to implement recovery efforts and developed confidence to take a leadership role in recovery efforts. Lastly, slightly fewer respondents (68%) developed confidence to initiate recovery efforts to a great extent or quite a bit.

Figure 8. Feedback on Skills and Confidence (n=28)



To what extent did your partnership with CDP help your organization with the following. Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Not at all and 5 = A great extent.

Survey respondents were also asked to share feedback on the impact of funding from CDP on their organization. Several respondents shared feedback related to their organization. The following feedback was shared:

- **Helped with additional funding.** A few respondents shared that the Fund has helped build capacity to continue fundraising and apply for grants.
- **Helped with community engagement.** A couple of respondents shared that the Fund has helped them engage and inform community members within their disaster recovery work and communications.
- **Helped build resilience.** One respondent shared that they have been able to develop a Community Resilience Building that provides emergency shelter and storage for supplies, and serves as a hub for VOADs and training.
- **Helped think about mitigation and preparedness.** One respondent shared that the Fund has helped them invest in research and data, improve coordination and engage in proactive planning.

Additionally, the grantee partner focus groups asked participants to reflect on the ways in which their partnership with CDP has helped them take initial steps to recovery, if at all. Participants shared various examples, such as:

- Allowed them to **pivot to recovery** after response and fill funding and volunteer gaps.
- Helped them pull in and integrate different partners.
- **Supported a staff member** to support their work and communities.
- **Gave hope, encouragement and confidence** to continue and go into the next phase.
- Helped with **understanding position and contribution** in community as a community foundation.
- Allowed them to establish and grow resources.

MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

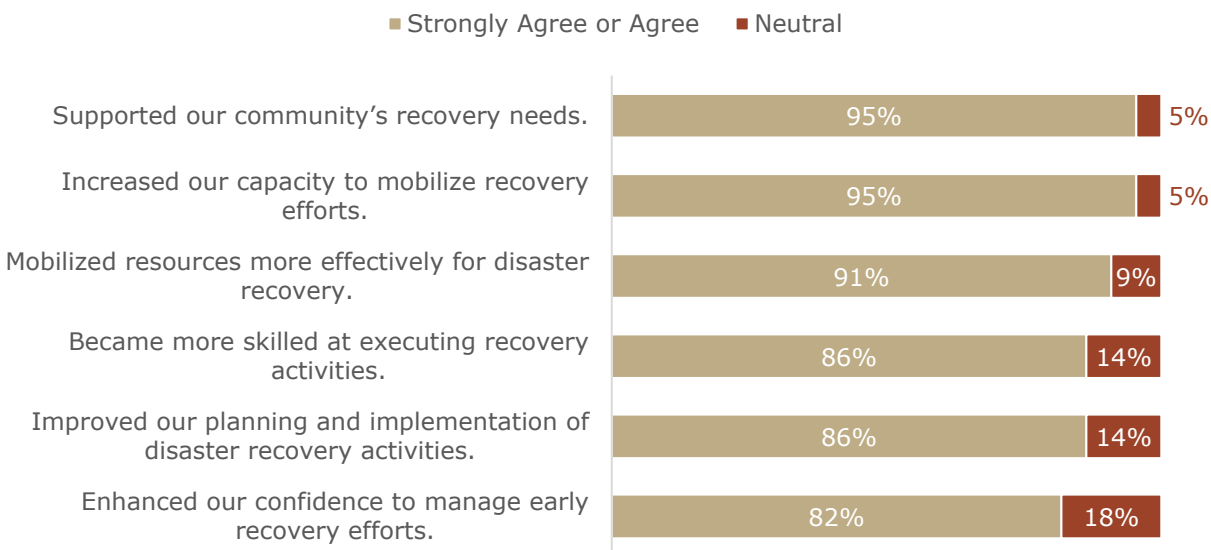
Outcome #4: Grantee partners have increased their capacity to translate next steps to recovery.

To further understand the impacts of the Fund on grantee partners' recovery efforts, the evaluation measured the extent to which grantee partners increased their capacity to translate next steps to recovery.

The survey asked respondents funded in 2023 or earlier to share feedback on several statements and concepts related to their capacity to translate next steps to recovery because of the support, in part from CDP. As illustrated in Figure 9 below, a high percentage of respondents agreed to all statements. More specifically, nearly all (95%) of respondents agreed that their organization supported their community's recovery needs and increased their capacity to mobilize recovery efforts. The majority of respondents also agreed that their organization became more skilled at executing recovery activities, their planning and

implementation of recovery activities was improved, and their confidence to manage efforts was enhanced, due in part from CDP.

Figure 9. Feedback on Capacity to Translate Next Steps to Recovery (n=22)



Please rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree. Because of the support, in part from CDP, in the early recovery phase of our work, our organization...

Focus group participants also reflected on how their capacity to mobilize recovery efforts has changed since they first received funding from CDP. The following was shared:

- **CDP helped change their organization's perspective on long-term recovery and disasters.** A few participants shared that CDP has helped changed their perspective and capacity to think about what is needed for long-term recovery and their role.
- **Their capacity has not changed.** One participant shared that they are still trying to get their organization's leadership to understand the importance of ongoing disaster work.
- **Other grantors have joined because of CDP.** Lastly, one participant shared how they now have secured other grantors that may not have joined were it not for CDP.

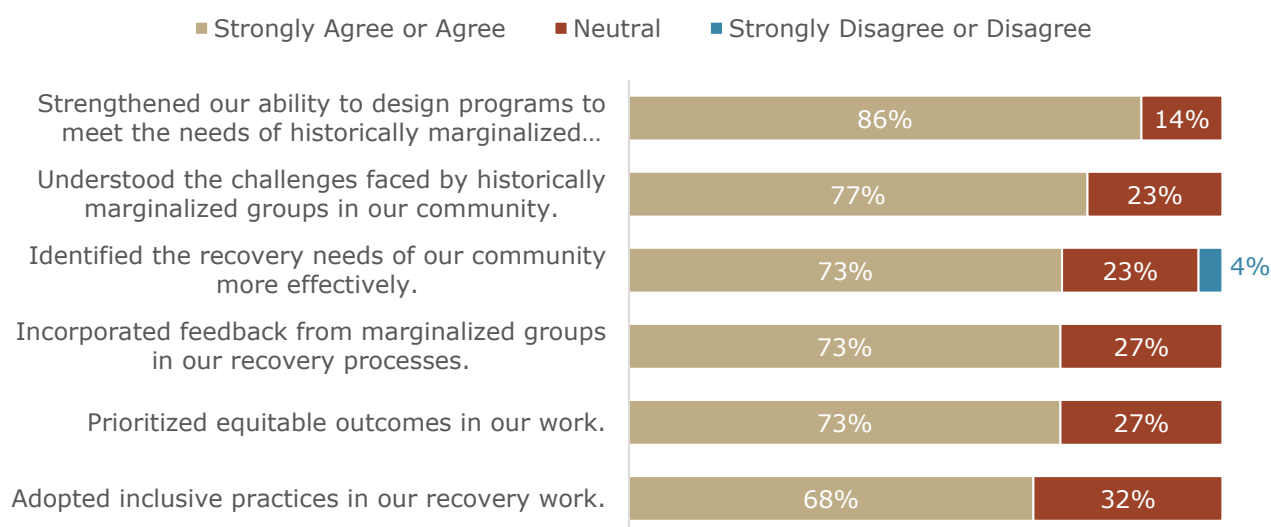
Outcome #5: Grantee partners have increased capacity to ensure they are implementing an inclusive, equitable recovery process.

The Fund focuses on and prioritizes local-led and equitable recovery efforts to ensure that those most impacted by disasters have the resources they need. Through this lens, an outcome of the Fund is that grantee partners have increased capacity to ensure they are implementing an inclusive, equitable recovery process.

The survey asked respondents funded in 2023 or earlier to share feedback on their organization's activities and ability to implement inclusive and equitable recovery efforts because of the support, in part from CDP. As illustrated in the figure below, a high

percentage (86%) of respondents agreed that for their organization, the ability to design programs to meet the needs of historically marginalized populations has strengthened. More than 70% of respondents also agreed that their organization better understands the challenges faced by historically marginalized groups in their community, is more effectively able to identify the recovery needs of their community, and has incorporated feedback from marginalized groups in their process.

Figure 10. Feedback on Equitable and Inclusive Recovery Processes (n=22)



Please rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree. Because of the support, in part from CDP, in the early recovery phase of our work, our organization...

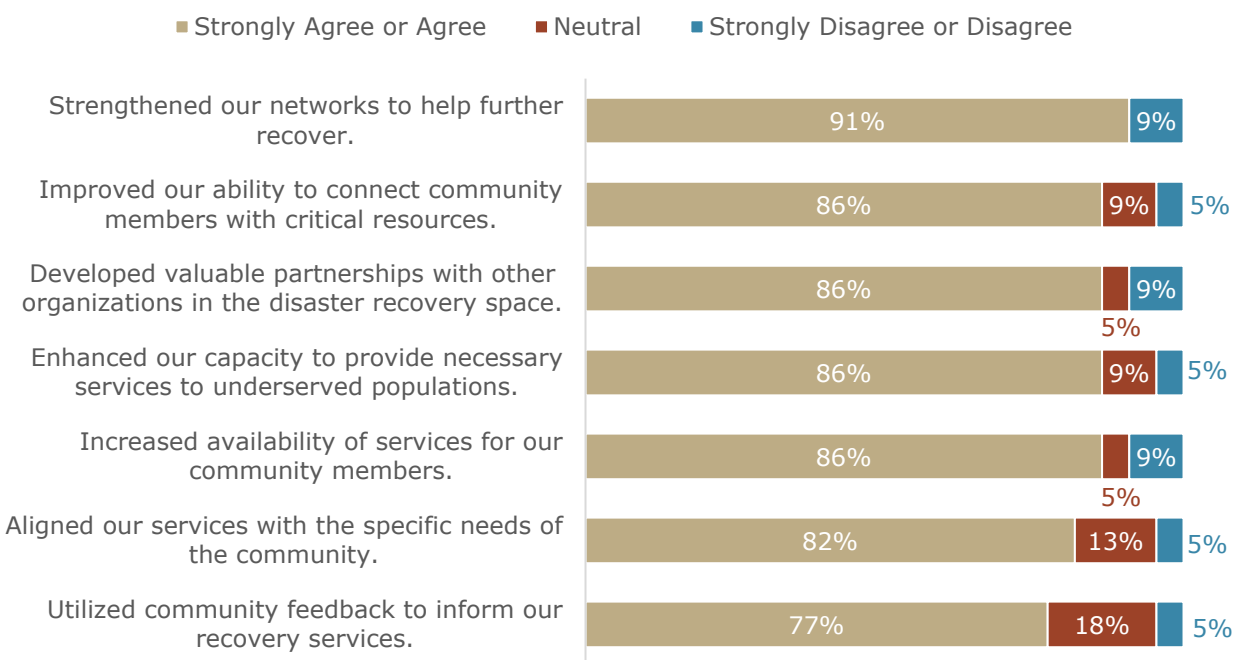
Lastly, the grantee partner focus groups asked participants to share feedback on how they are ensuring their recovery efforts are inclusive and equitable. Focus group participants shared both how they have ensured inclusion and equity in their efforts and how CDP has contributed to this. The following themes emerged:

- **The grant process helps make sure grantee partners are cognizant of marginalized populations.** A few participants shared that CDP's grant process and guidance help grantees think about various communities and how they are approaching them or supporting them. One participant also shared that the easy grant process makes it attainable for those who don't have a grantwriter.
- **Connections to partners helps with understanding marginalized populations.** A few participants noted that their partnerships with other organizations and with state and national VOADs have helped them understand and identify those most marginalized.
- **CDP is intentional about tribal engagement.** One participant reflected on CDP's relationships and intentionality with Native tribes and the tribal community, stating that CDP has helped make connections.
- **Extending flexibility as a funder.** One participant who represents a community foundation shared that they are able to extend the flexibility provided by CDP to their own partners.

Outcome #6: Grantee partners effectively support their communities during early recovery efforts.

The evaluation also sought to understand the extent grantee partners effectively support their communities during early recovery efforts. To first understand this, the survey collected feedback on grantee partners' effectiveness in supporting their communities by asking respondents that were funded in 2023 or earlier to reflect on a series of statements related to their recovery work and efforts. As illustrated in Figure 11 below, a high percentage of respondents agreed to statements related to strengthening their networks and partnerships, connecting with their community, and serving their communities due to the support, in part from CDP. More specifically, 91% of respondents agreed that their organization strengthened their networks to help further recovery, and 86% of respondents agreed that their organization improved its ability to connect community members with critical resources, agreed that their organization improved its ability to connect community members with critical resources, enhanced their capacity to provide necessary services to underserved populations, and aligned their services with specific needs of the community.

Figure 11. Feedback on Supporting Communities During Early Recovery Efforts (n=22)



Please rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree. Because of the support, in part from CDP, in the early recovery phase of our work, our organization...

Lastly, the survey asked respondents to share additional feedback on the impact of funding from CDP on their community's recovery efforts. A few respondents shared varying feedback on the impacts of funding on their community. The following feedback was shared.

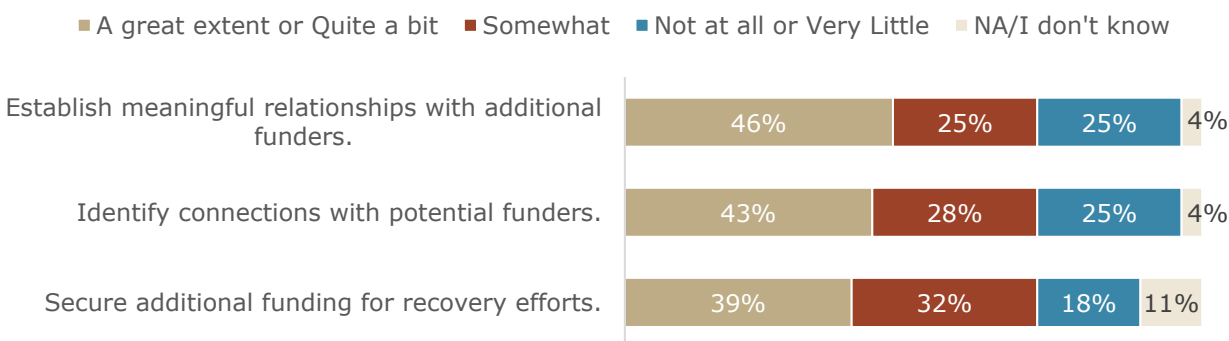
- It has provided hope.
- The community would not be where it is without funding.
- It has helped a specific population within the community.
- CDP has made us feel like we were not alone.

Outcome #7: Grantee partners have increased connections to funders and resources that will further community recovery, sustainability and capacity.

Finally, the Fund provides connections and information on additional funds and resources, as well as support to position grantee partners' work for additional funding. The evaluation sought to understand grantee partners' increased connections to funders and resources that will further community recovery, sustainability and capacity.

The survey asked respondents to reflect on the extent to which their partnership with CDP helped their relationships with funders. As illustrated in Figure 12, fewer than half of the respondents indicated that their partnership with CDP has helped their organization to a great extent or quite a bit to establish meaningful relationships with additional funders (46%) and identify connections with potential funders (43%). Additionally, approximately one-third (39%) of respondents indicated that their partnership with CDP has helped them secure additional funding to a great extent or quite a bit. Notably, 18–25% of respondents indicated not at all or very little to the three statements.

Figure 12. Feedback on Connections to Funders and Resources (n=28)



To what extent did your partnership with CDP help your organization with the following. Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = Not at all and 5 = A great extent.

Lastly, the grantee partner focus groups asked participants to share feedback on the extent to which CDP helped create or strengthen partnership among key players in their region. Focus group participants shared the following feedback:

- **Strengthens VOADs.** A few participants shared how CDP is active in national VOAD and local VOADs, strengthening them through funding and connections.
 - However, one participant noted that CDP can be more intentional about connecting with their local VOAD to help encourage and support long-term recovery groups.
- **CDP helps leverage funding partnerships.** A couple of participants shared that CDP is well-respected and that they bring up CDP when applying for other grant opportunities or to help obtain match funding. One participant also shared how CDP has connected them with community foundations for sustained funding.

- **Able to spread the workload to reach out to partners.** One participant shared that funding has helped them spread the workload that then enabled individuals to reach out to other agencies and connect next steps.
- **Provided a training that connected partners.** One participant shared that CDP provided a grantwriting training that has helped the community team up and continue partnering.
- **Already had established partners or still learning.** One participant shared that they already had partnerships, and another participant shared that they are a new grantee and still learning about partnerships available through CDP.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Through the evaluation, the Fund sought to understand its impact on grantee partners as well as the nuances and strengths of its model. Data collection methods revealed many positive aspects of the Fund and its work. The Fund staff also sought to understand how the Fund can continue to improve its work with grantee partners and its work in the region. The following section provides insights and recommendations for improvements.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The grantee partner survey and focus groups asked respondents to share feedback on opportunities for the Fund to improve. Respondents across the survey and focus groups shared the following opportunities:

- **The Fund is important, and more funding is needed**, especially pre-positioned dollars and funding to fill gaps between the immediate disaster response and early recovery phase. Additionally, respondents shared that:
 - CDP should consider rapid response, flexible funding or microgrants to help organizations responding within the first few months after a disaster.
 - CDP should take an active role in conversations about the gap between response and recovery.
 - CDP should fund and encourage funding for preparedness and resilience.
 - CDP should consider creating a dedicated tribal disaster recovery support fund to provide more support, assistance and tailored funding for Native-led recovery efforts.
- **Offer more tools, resources and technical assistance**, such as grantwriting support and resources for undeclared disasters.
- **Provide more collaborative spaces and opportunities for networking** where grantee partners can convene and share practices, lessons learned, and opportunities for collaboration. Additionally, one respondent shared opportunities for more networking between tribal and non-tribal organizations.
- **Continue to reach out to and get in front of communities**, especially historically disadvantaged communities and at the statewide level.

The staff and informational interviewees were also asked to reflect upon what opportunities exist for the Fund to improve. The following themes emerged from these interviews:

- **Diversify funding.** More than half of the interviewees discussed that the Fund needs to increase funding from other sources to ensure long-term sustainability and reach.
- **Ensure adequate staffing.** Because the Fund operates more like a program than like a fund, interviewees noted that it is important to continue to provide adequate staffing for the Fund. They noted that the current Fund staff are exceptional and that is a key to success.
- **Highlight the work.** A few CDP staff noted that the organization could be better about highlighting the work of the Fund, telling its story, and sharing lessons learned. The Fund has a unique opportunity to innovate with a community lens, and it can share the work and lessons with others.
- **Host more donor roundtables.** One interviewee noted that the Fund is well-positioned to bring donors together to discuss the importance of funding disaster recovery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the extensive feedback about the strengths and opportunities for the Fund, Point b(e) Strategies offers the following recommendations:



- 1. **Continue to adequately staff the Fund.** The evaluation illuminated the important role of the Fund's staff in providing support to grantee partners, building trusted relationships within the region, and being a well-known source for connections and resources. As several interviewees noted, the Fund operates more as a program than a traditional grantmaking fund. As such, it is critical that CDP continues to support high-quality, well-connected staff to manage and implement the Fund.
- 2. **Identify more ways to highlight the work of the Fund and the lessons learned.** The Fund has provided unique value to the region in the disaster recovery space for more than 10 years. During those 10 years, it has learned many lessons about how to support local-led, equitable disaster recovery efforts, particularly for low-attention disasters that do not receive a disaster declaration. The evaluation revealed there are opportunities to share those lessons within CDP, in the region, and throughout philanthropy as a whole.
- 3. **Explore opportunities to create more collaborative spaces for networking and connections.** The Fund's staff have developed close connections with individuals, nonprofit organizations, local governments, tribal nations, and philanthropic institutions within its 10-state region. Because it operates more like a program, it has found a way to break down many barriers that exist between philanthropies and grantees. As such, it has a unique opportunity to bring together the many entities that work in the disaster recovery space and provide opportunities for connection and collaboration. When applicable, the Fund should explore how to create collaborative spaces for all entities to network and connect. For example, because of its unique relationship with tribal communities, the Fund can explore how to help bridge the gap that often exists between philanthropy and tribal nations by facilitating more conversations and learnings between these groups.
- 4. **Identify the Fund's role in bringing more awareness to low-attention disasters and grantee partner stories.** The Fund provides critical disaster recovery support to the region, and it funds grantee partners that are making a difference in their communities. It is also connected to both the funding community and the recovery community. While the Fund has set an outcome that it appropriately and effectively elevates attention toward low-attention disasters, it should clarify expectations for what this means. For example, the Fund could determine if there are additional ways to bring awareness to low-attention disasters, ongoing capacity and recovery needs, and the work of grantee partners, whether through additional case studies, newsletters or webinars.
- 5. **Understand the Fund's unique value with organizations that have been in the disaster recovery space for a long time.** The Fund has indicated it seeks to increase grantee partners' knowledge, skill and capacity to respond to disasters. The evaluation has illuminated that when grantee partners are new to the disaster recovery space, they do experience an increase in their knowledge, skill and capacity to respond to disasters. However, the Fund also supports some organizations that have extensive experience and knowledge in disaster recovery work. For these grantee partners, the Fund should explicitly understand whether their unique value is simply to provide funding, or whether there is additional technical assistance or support that would benefit these entities.

Conclusion

This evaluation has provided a unique opportunity for the Fund to gather insights from grantee partners, CDP staff and other individuals working in the disaster recovery space. Through this process, not only did the Fund clearly identify the outcomes it seeks for its work with grantee partners, but it also took an inward look to understand the nuances and strengths of its model. The evaluation provided additional clarity about the Fund's model and what it would take to replicate it within CDP or beyond. It also illuminated the important work the Fund is doing with grantee partners and its unique role in providing funding, technical assistance, and connections to resources. The Fund fills a crucial gap in its 10-state region, and this evaluation highlights strengths and opportunities for the Fund as it enters its second decade of work.

Appendix A: Survey Respondent Demographics

Figure 1. Year Awarded a Grant by CDP's Midwest Early Recovery Fund*

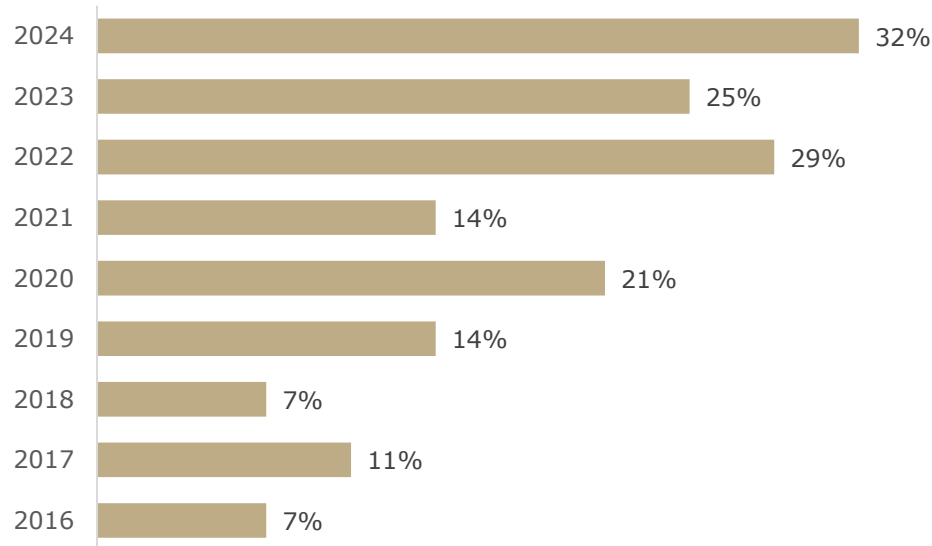
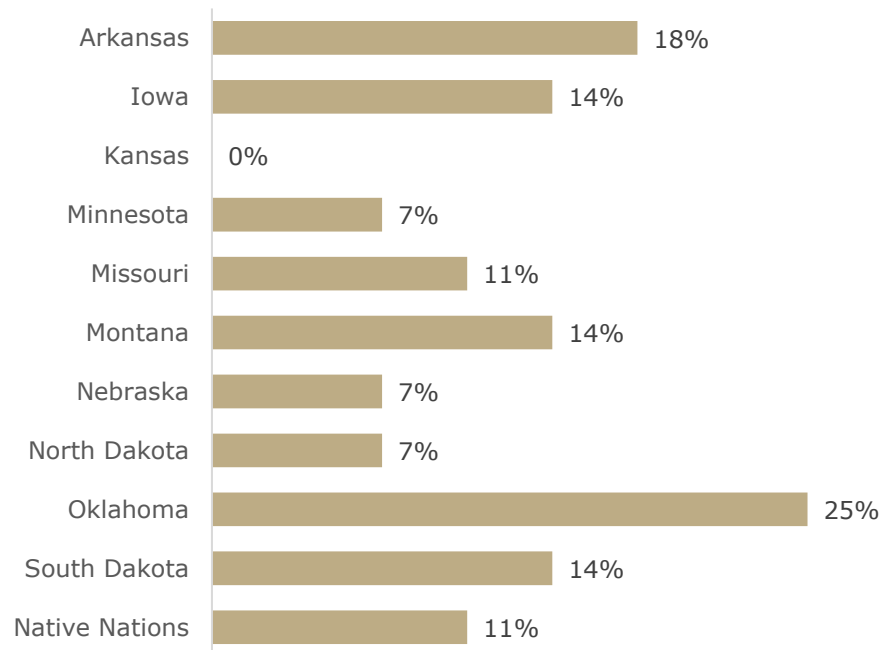
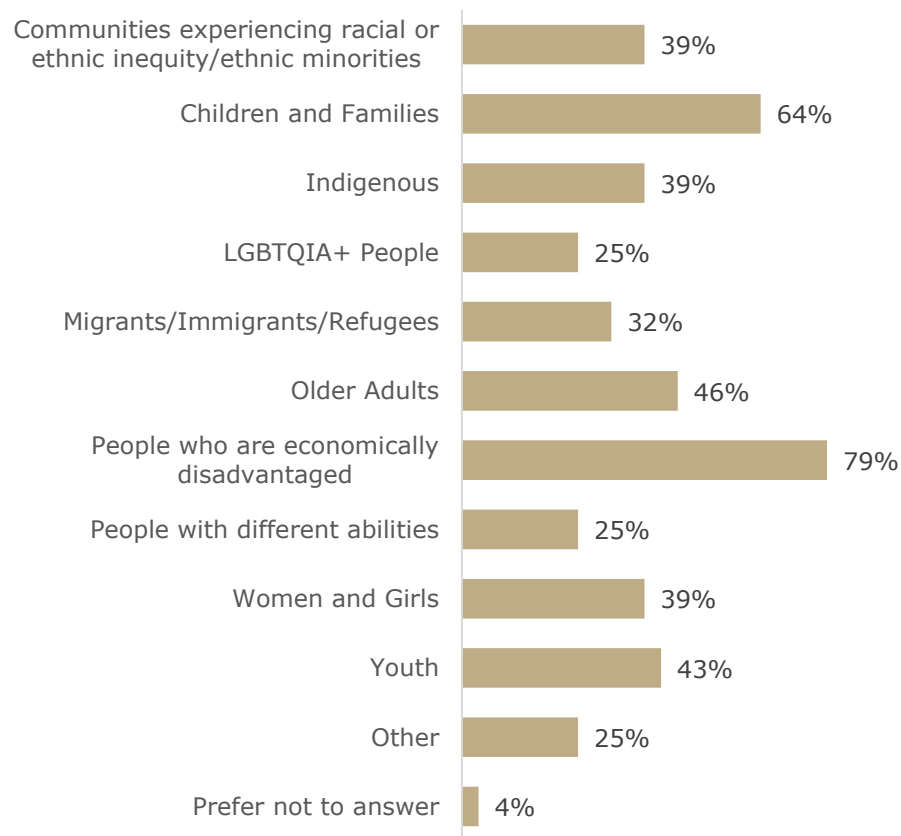


Figure 2. States in Which the Grant Funds From CDP Were Used*



*Totals equal more than 100% as respondents could select more than one option.

Figure 3. Specific Population Dedicated to Serving*



*Totals equal more than 100% as respondents could select more than one option.

Appendix B: Task Force Members

Catholic Charities of Eastern Oklahoma

Catholic Charities of St. Louis – Ben Perrin

Cheyenne River Long-Term Recovery Group – Arthur Rave

Crisis Care Ministries