

# Philanthropic Innovations: A Review of the Literature

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Organized philanthropy's capacity to innovate and have systemic impact has been invoked in recognition of philanthropy's limited resources as compared to the size of social problems (Ylvisaker, 1999). This disconnect has driven the search for impact and innovation in the past (Hammack & Anheier, 2013).

Two-thousand, sixty-four articles were identified in a systematic literature review focused on philanthropic innovations. After removing two hundred and twenty duplicates, the remaining abstracts were hand-screened for relevancy by two authors, leading to the exclusion of 1,759 articles because the article focused on funding innovation or individual philanthropy, or the search word was used in a completely different context (e.g., "giving" appears often in "giving birth" or "giving reason"; "charity" is frequently used as a synonym of nonprofit organizations; and "innovations" was often used in reference to methodology or approach). Most research on innovation and philanthropy is externally oriented. Studies typically analyze philanthropic foundations or philanthropy funding innovations. Studies on innovations in organized philanthropy focus on innovative practices (program area), innovation in administrative structures, and building a culture conducive to innovation.

Among academic articles, there is a high reliance on case studies, whereas the analysis of references in our initial corpus led to the inclusion of a noteworthy number of practice-oriented publications (grey literature). Thirty-nine out of the seventy-two total articles included in the systematic literature review were included during the citation and reference search. Grey literature "comprises an increasing proportion of information relevant to research synthesis" and has become more prevalent as technology has created new opportunities for its dis-

tribution (Rothstein & Hopewell, 2009, pp. 104).

Rothstein and Hopewell (2009, pp. 104) defines grey literature as "Just about everything not published in a peer-reviewed academic journal, whether or not it is produced by those for whom publishing is the primary activity." Although some researchers have expressed concern with including literature that hasn't been published in journal articles in research synthesis, Rothstein and Hopewell (2009) believe that peer review alone is not an indicator of its quality. Each piece of literature should be individually assessed for methodological quality when determining whether it should be included in research. Professionals who are not under pressure to publish in academic journals may produce reports of equal quality as those for whom publishing is incentivized. Scientific discovery and knowledge are not limited to traditional journal publications.

Grey literature is of great value for theorizing. Rothstein and Hopewell (2009) found that it may be more current than articles published in academic peer-reviewed journals. A comprehensive search of both peer-reviewed and grey literature also minimizes publication bias (Rothstein & Hopewell, 2009). Scholars must evaluate academic and practitioner literature when forming theories about philanthropic innovations.

Among the program opportunities for innovation in philanthropy, shared/blended value, donor-advised funds, prize philanthropy, impact investing, multi-year funding, collaboration/co-creation, venture philanthropy, and learning culture are all mentioned more than once. The use of multi-year funding, impact investing, venture philanthropy, and collaboration mentioned in Foundation News were all a response to shifts in government funding or tax law.

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Structural, financial, and administrative opportunities included program-related investments, the use of on-line platforms, and impact investing. Impact investing was included in this category if the author discussed investing from their endowment. The use of online platforms is a response to new technologies and is often used as a tool to connect funders with grant applicants.

This research highlights some potential avenues for innovations and the importance of grey literature in literature reviews. A more systematic way to include grey literature needs to be created.

### Statement of Research Advisor

The project aimed to identify innovations in the grant-making activities of philanthropic foundations. Reagan was in charge of all steps in the research project, from data collection to analysis and dissemination. She completed a systematic review of the peer-reviewed literature, thematically analyzing articles that discussed specific grantmaking innovations. This analysis led her to expand the project to incorporate grey literature serving the nonprofit sector with an applied and practitioner focus. By reviewing and analyzing more than 30 years of The Foundation News (the leading trade publication for foundation leaders), Reagan identified trends in foundation activities and paradigm shifts in grantmaking approaches from a historical perspective. She presented the different stages of this research at the 2022 Annual Conference of Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) in Raleigh (North Carolina) and at 2023 Annual Conference of Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) in Orlando (Florida). ARNOVA is the premier national conference for scholars interested in philanthropy and nonprofit organizations.

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### References

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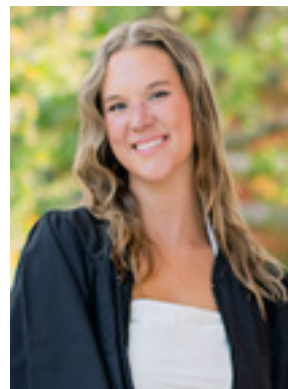
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### Authors Biography



Reagan graduated in December 2023 with a double major in Human Development and Family Science as well as Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies. She works for Our House, a nonprofit in Auburn, as the Volunteer and Program Coordinator.



Peter Weber is an associate professor of philanthropy and nonprofit studies and program coordinator of the Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies (PNPS) Program at Auburn University. He holds a doctorate in Philanthropic Studies from the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, as well as a master's in history and a Master in International Studies in Philanthropy and Social Entrepreneurship, both from the University of Bologna in Italy.