



NEWSLETTER | SEPTEMBER 2025

harp-weaver LLC Newsletter September 2025; 8th Edition

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CHALLENGE + SOLUTION

Grantmaking Transparency

*Sections of this article were originally published on
Philanthropy Network Greater Philadelphia's [blog](#).*

One of many topics permeating the philanthropic sector is “transparency.” Research and literature on the subject abound, including the Center for Effective Philanthropy’s report [“Sharing What Matters: Foundation Transparency,”](#) [“Nurturing Relationships with Transparency”](#) on the National Center for Family Philanthropy’s blog, and the blog post [“Why Transparency of Philanthropic Funding Matters”](#) by the Transparency and Accountability Initiative, which helps donor members improve grantmaking practices and boost collective impact through greater transparency.

For years, foundations had (and some continue to have) “closed doors” about their grants and grant cycles, their operations, their people, their processes, and their practices. If foundations have websites, they may not list direct contact information, relevant grant information, and/or news about partners or past grants. There are concrete boundaries between the funder, the nonprofits they give to, and the broader community.

At harp-weaver LLC, we believe that when foundations are more transparent, they can become more engaged with their partners, while also working to reduce the power imbalance between funder and nonprofit.

Listed are concrete examples of how funders can become more transparent:

- **Use external communications platforms.** Sharing grant information, news, and partner

spotlights on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or LinkedIn help amplify a funder's partners' efforts. Designing a website that has additional content such as a blog platform, 990PFs, resources, grant maps and data, and relevant news also makes a funder accessible to potential partners and the broader community.

- **Update reporting and application requirements.** Regularly update and streamline applications and reports in order to ease the burden on grantee partners and be more transparent about the funder's requirements. Only ask what is necessary for decision-making.
- **Convene your grantee partners around issues, topics, and trends of interest.** In recent times, organizations have had to rapidly adjust to changing circumstances. However, they haven't always had opportunities to speak with peers facing the same challenges. Offering virtual and in-person convenings offer opportunities for nonprofits to come together, learn, share ideas, and network. This boosts a funder's transparency by demonstrating their commitment to collaborative learning and shared problem-solving across their grantee network.
- **Present at conferences and events.** Sharing ideas and efforts with others illustrates how funders can be transparent within the philanthropic sector.
- **Use free sector resources such as Candid's eReporting.** Through the eReporting process, a funder can submit its grant data to Candid, which will be converted into an interactive grant map. This information informs Candid's own efforts, and it illustrates where and how much a funder gives.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Data-Informed Philanthropy & Research

Data-Informed Philanthropy & Research represents our firm's commitment to evidence-based grantmaking through comprehensive baseline research and ongoing impact measurement. This service begins with establishing a foundational dataset of neighborhood indicators that enables foundations to make more informed funding decisions and track meaningful change over time. Our approach involves systematically identifying and compiling publicly available social, economic, and educational data specific to target communities, including demographic and outcome information for key populations. By creating these comprehensive baseline studies, we provide our foundation clients with the analytical footing necessary to develop more strategic grantmaking approaches, measure program effectiveness, and demonstrate community impact through longitudinal data analysis rather than relying solely on anecdotal evidence or limited program metrics.

Celebrating 15 years of harp-weaver LLC
at Pastorius Park



Our staff celebrated 15 years of harp-weaver by sponsoring the Pastorius Park Summer Concert from the Chestnut Hill Community Association with Brother John on July 16! We look forward of supporting our clients and the efforts to make a difference for many years to come.

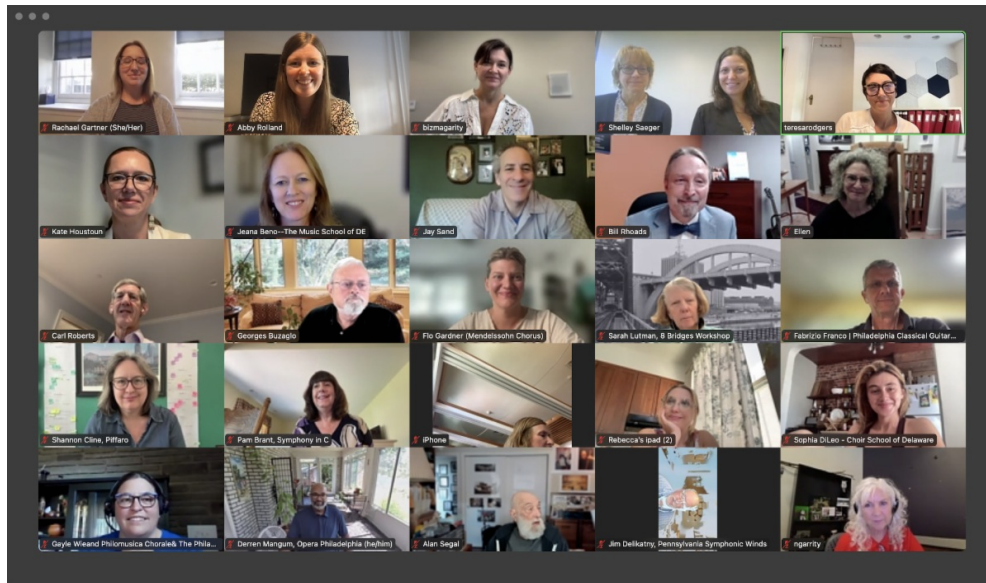
Widger Family Foundation Leadership Summit

On October 6, the Widger Family Foundation will host its first Leadership Summit in Philadelphia. The Foundation, which harp-weaver supports with tailored philanthropy advice, day-to-day administration, board management, financial management, grants management, strategic direction, and impact measurement, is particularly focused on strengthening leadership as a cornerstone of empowering the nonprofit sector. This focus reflects the Widger family's own journey and the belief that leadership development is critical to advancing innovative work.

The Leadership Summit demonstrates the Foundation's commitment to leadership development. Senior-level nonprofit leaders – both staff and board members – will gather together to share insights and learn practical ways to embed leadership principles into their own work and within their organizations. harp-weaver serves in an advisory capacity for the Summit, bringing expertise in leadership development to help ensure meaningful outcomes for participants. The insights and best practices that emerge from this convening will inform harp-weaver's ongoing work with clients and partners across the nonprofit sector.

FUNDERS' TOOLKIT

Strategic Agility



Strategic agility describes the ability to pivot without losing momentum, adapt without losing identity, and plan without perfect clarity. In August, [The Strategy Collective](#) and harp-weaver client The Presser Foundation co-hosted a virtual grantee convening focused on this topic at a time when nonprofits are facing a myriad of challenges related to decreasing or canceled federal grants, changes in institutional funder priorities, inflation, and staff burnout.

Funders can use strategic agility in their own work as they face uncertainty. The core principle of pausing to assess what a funder has power over – identifying circles of control, circles of influence, and circles outside of control – is an important step in determining how funders can meet the moment and support their grantees while also adhering to their mission and maintaining their identity.

At harp-weaver, we apply the principles of strategic agility to better understand our clients' efforts and determine how we can support them in reaching their goals. During uncertain times, we pause to evaluate each situation, make adjustments and brainstorm solutions as needed, and then review the progress made. Using strategy to guide decision-making helps us identify where and how to adapt to serve our clients effectively.

Mission-Aligned Investing Highlight: Subordinated Loan to First Step Staffing



Mission alignment, one of the services that harp-weaver provides, involves helping funders align some (or all) of their assets with their philanthropic mission. This means that while a funder may keep the majority of their investments in traditional markets, they can also direct a portion of their funds toward investments with lower financial returns but clear societal benefits.

There are several ways to structure mission-aligned investments, and harp-weaver provides guidance on all of them. One approach is through subordinated loans. A subordinated loan ranks below other, more senior loans when it comes to claims on assets or earnings. If the borrower defaults, holders of subordinated debt are only paid after senior lenders are paid in full. While this makes subordinated loans riskier for lenders, they can provide essential capital that borrowers might not otherwise access.

In 2017, a family foundation managed by harp-weaver approved a subordinated loan to First Step Staffing, an employment agency/nonprofit working to end homelessness and create pathways to economic stability. Operating in multiple cities nationwide, First Step Staffing not only connects underserved individuals with employment opportunities but also provides the wraparound supports people need as they enter or re-enter the workforce. The loan, facilitated by harp-weaver, provided crucial capital for First Step Staffing to acquire a regional staffing company.

Loans represent just one way for funders to provide vital capital to businesses and nonprofits creating positive social impact. Follow along to learn about other mission-aligned investing tools.

WHAT'S KEEPING US UP AT NIGHT?

Federal Budget Cuts

Since January, there have been calls across the country for foundations [to expand their giving](#) in the face of major government cuts to social services, the arts and humanities, health, and more.

This is not a new refrain, particularly in recent years. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic and following the racial unrest after the murder of George Floyd, calls for funders to give more escalated in order to alleviate the suffering of many who had lost jobs and/or faced longstanding inequities. [A number of funders did](#), with some agreeing to either a short-term boost in their payout percentage or a long-term commitment to giving more than the 5% legal requirement.

In the face of budget cuts and the dramatic impact on programs such as Medicaid and SNAP (food stamps), many anticipate that the demand for nonprofit services will increase at the same time that nonprofits face inflationary pressures, decreasing budgets (if they lose government grants or contracts themselves), and internal pressures such as staff fatigue and burnout. Thus, the call for foundations to give more continues and [many have responded](#).

However, it is not possible for foundation giving to “equal” government spending. [The Johnson Center for Philanthropy calculated](#) that in 2024, federal expenditures totaled \$6.75 trillion*. Meanwhile, the total assets held by all private and community foundations in the U.S. amounts to \$1.466 trillion. In other words, philanthropy would run out of all of its money in 79 days of one year of funding the federal budget.

While funders cannot replace government funding, they can increase their giving and/or find other ways to add value to the sector. As the [Stanford Social Innovation Review explains](#), “philanthropy’s emphasis should be less on avoiding a moral hazard, encouraging privatization than on helping the public understand the valuable services provided by nonprofit organizations and institutions that have lost government support.” The article points out that philanthropy should find ways to counter the toxicity, deep mistrust, and social disconnection that have become embedded in public life by emphasizing the role that its grantee partners play in enhancing civil society and community life.

Perhaps that can be done by supporting and/or working with community members who have stepped up and begun building movements in the face of social service cuts and social disconnection. [Generocity highlights some of these movements](#) in Philadelphia, illustrating that “communities are actively building new systems of care, accountability, and ownership, and want to ensure that the changes they make today become foundations for a better tomorrow.”

**The federal government spends money on a variety of goods, programs, and services to support the American public and pay interest incurred from borrowing.*

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

WillPower Foundation Walk + Talk

September 20, 2025

The WillPower Foundation focuses on educating, supporting, and healing emerging adults and families affected by the misunderstood and stigmatized pain of mental illness. It aims to help save lives and bring hope to those who are struggling, often silently.

harp-weaver is supporting the WillPower Walk + Talk on September 20. The funds raised from the walk will help expand programs, including educational courses, support networks, experiential workshops, and more to combat the stigma of mental illness.



[Learn More!](#)

Lisa's Army 5K Pumpkins in the Park

October 4, 2025



[Learn More!](#)

Lisa's Army is a nonprofit dedicated to providing comfort to individuals undergoing cancer treatments. It supplies personalized Comfort Care Packages filled with an Apple iPad or BEATs Headphones, an iTunes gift card, journals, and other items that are comforting, uplifting, and useful to those battling cancer.

The Pumpkins in the Park 5K is a run and walk to support Lisa's Army. The family event includes a 5K run, 1-mile walk, inflatable costume dash, pumpkin patch, costume contest, and food trucks! This year, the 5K will be held on October 4 at Rose Tree Park in Media, PA. Rachael Gartner, harp-weaver's Administrative and Grants Manager, has co-chaired the 5K since 2013.

Kelly Anne Dolan Memorial Fund

Rhythm & Brews

October 9, 2025

The Kelly Anne Dolan Memorial Fund provides financial assistance and direct support for needs not covered by insurance and a variety of respite programs for families who have children living with illnesses, disabilities, and injuries and receiving care in PA, NJ, and DE.

harp-weaver is supporting Rhythm & Brews on October 9. Rhythm & Brews features live music, catered food from Seedling and Sage, and a selection of local craft beers, all set against the Appleford Estate backdrop.



[Learn More!](#)

UPDATES

Team News

In 2024, harp-weaver began working with Samantha Matlin on strategy development, research, and data analysis. Samantha brings years of experience working in philanthropy, city government, academia, and nonprofit organizations. She focuses on partnering with organizations to strengthen effectiveness to ensure a greater impact on social, economic, health, and educational conditions in communities. She is faculty at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Samantha holds a doctoral degree in clinical and community psychology from The George Washington University and an undergraduate degree from The University of Pennsylvania.



The harp-weaver LLC team, with Samantha on the far right

PARTNER WITH HARP-WEAVER

Wealth Advisors & Investment Managers

harp-weaver provides consulting services to wealth management firms to incorporate philanthropic advising into their practices. Teresa has over 15 years of experience in financial services prior to the founding of harp-weaver in 2010. She understands the financial advice process and has developed a similar process when working with families on their philanthropy, which includes a discovery process to articulate a vision and developing a strategy, implementing that strategy, and assessing and changing to ensure impact. If you are interested in setting up a time to learn more about harp-weaver and how your firm can partner with us, please contact Teresa at teresa@harp-weaver.com.

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