

Summary of Survey Findings and Recommendations:

Early Childhood Advocacy among Grantmakers in Arizona, New Mexico, New York, and North Carolina



March 23, 2017
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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Alliance for Early Success is currently engaging foundations and other grantmakers across the country to increase support for effective advocacy and policy around early childhood issues. As part of the project, the Alliance for Early Success is partnering with Arizona Grantmakers Forum, New Mexico Early Childhood Funders Group, NY Funders Alliance, and North Carolina Network of Grantmakers. The partnership brings grantmakers together to share ideas and best practices related to early childhood issues, advocacy, and policy making. The goals of the partnership are to improve early childhood outcomes and the effectiveness of grantmaking in selected states. A first step in reaching these goals involved state-specific online surveys, conducted in 2016 and 2017 to: 1) learn about funders' priorities and strategies, 2) learn about their interests in early childhood issues, and 3) gauge their interest in joining a collaboration of grantmakers to support advocacy for early childhood issues. This report summarizes the findings of the surveys administered in Arizona, New Mexico, New York, and North Carolina.

THE SAMPLES

Some 425 grantmakers were invited to complete the four surveys. All potential respondents represented grantmaking organizations in each of the four states. Almost all were CEOs, executive directors, or senior program officers. In total, 218 grantmaking organizations chose to participate. Response rates in the states varied from 42% to 67%. In Arizona and North Carolina, all potential respondents were members of the grantmaker associations. In New Mexico, the New Mexico Early Childhood Funders Group identified 105 grantmaking organizations in New Mexico. Among these, members from the Funders Group and consultants from Frontera Strategy found functional emails for 41 leaders at these organizations. In New York, all potential respondents were on the NY Funders Alliance mailing list and received email correspondence from the NY Funders Alliance. Refer to **Figure 8** in the appendix for a detailed description of each sample.

FINDINGS

Funding Priorities for Early Childhood

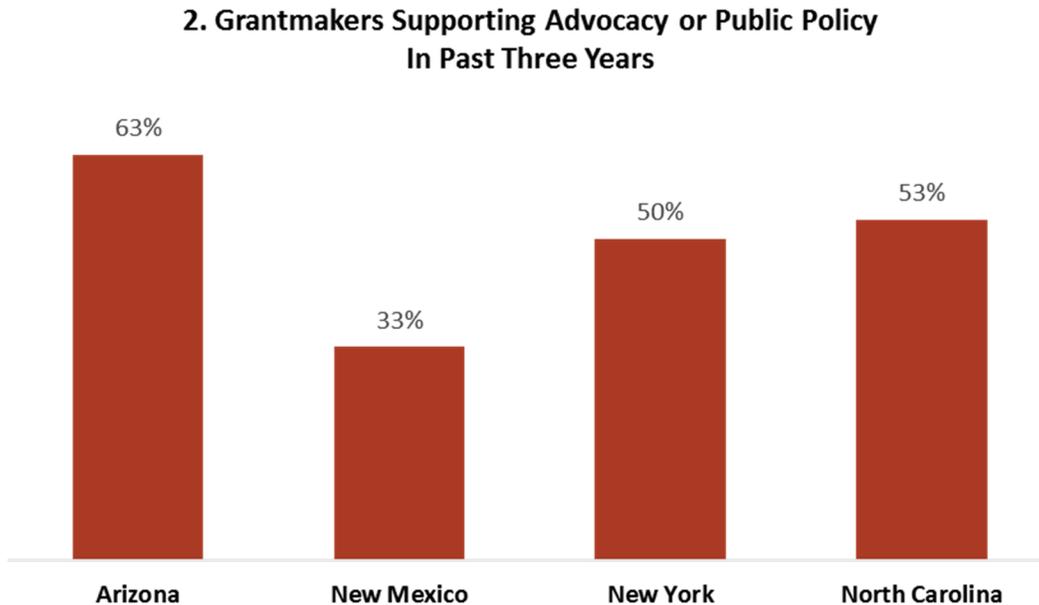
The survey asked respondents to prioritize issues related to early childhood that are important to their organizations' grantmaking. Across the four states, the following early childhood issues seem to be highly prioritized by the greatest percentages of grantmakers: 1) Early literacy, 2) Children's mental and behavioral health, and 3) Children's physical health. In New York, almost half of grantmakers surveyed highly prioritized "healthy environments for young children," and in North Carolina, almost half highly prioritized pre-k quality or access for four-year-olds (**Figure 1**). Figure 1 is sorted by the average of the percentages (highest to lowest).

1. Highest Funding Priorities for Early Childhood Reported among Grantmakers					
	Ariz.	N.M.	N.Y.	N.C.	Average
Early literacy	44%	56%	53%	47%	50%
Healthy environments	-	-	49%	-	49%
Children's mental and behavioral health	50%	56%	40%	46%	48%
Children's physical health	55%	53%	35%	46%	47%
Pre-K quality/access for 4-year-olds	-	-	-	46%	46%
Parent engagement/support/success	-	-	45%	43%	44%
State funding for early childhood	30%	55%	-	-	43%
Preschool quality/access	39%	-	44%	-	42%
Pre-K quality/access for 3-year-olds	-	-	-	41%	41%
Racial equity in early childhood outcomes	-	-	38%	42%	40%
Child care quality/access	29%	41%	48%	40%	40%
PreK quality/access	-	35%	44%	-	39%
Reducing/preventing child abuse and neglect	-	35%	37%	33%	35%
Developmental screening and follow-up	43%	29%	31%	25%	32%
Maternal and infant health	-	-	26%	33%	30%
Early childhood workforce development	-	29%	-	-	29%
Home visiting	19%	45%	33%	21%	29%
Research and evaluation	-	-	-	28%	28%
Family literacy	-	-	27%	-	27%
Training/education for early childcare workforce	-	-	24%	28%	26%
Full-day kindergarten	23%	-	15%	-	19%
Wages/benefits for early childcare workforce	-	-	13%	18%	15%
Children's dental health	-	-	11%	16%	13%

- Funding area was not included in survey.

Strategies Used among Grantmakers that Fund Advocacy

Figure 2 shows the percentage of grantmakers surveyed in each state that have supported advocacy or public policy during the past three years.



These grantmakers support a diverse array of advocacy efforts. Some foundations are comfortable funding advocacy, while others remain behind the scenes and support research efforts to inform public policy debates. In the four states, the most commonly used strategies seem to be: 1) Activities or campaigns designed to raise public awareness about a specific issue, 2) Coalition building or grassroots organizing, 3) Messaging and communication tools, and 4) Policy research and analysis. Relatively large percentages of grantmakers in Arizona and New York have funded activities designed to raise public awareness about a specific issue, coalition building or grassroots organizing, and messaging and communication tools (**Figure 3**). In each of the states surveyed, significant numbers of grantmakers applied several of the strategies. For example, in New York, 45% used four or more strategies in the past three years. In North Carolina, 62% applied four or more strategies. A lot of potential lies in coordinating these different strategies and approaches. The diversity of perspectives, strategies, and experiences is a strength, not a weakness, for grantmakers.

One grantmaker in New York described strategies not listed in the survey: “We do not provide grants for advocacy or lobbying, but we do provide professional development and training on these topics, publish a candidate survey, and serve as an advocacy organizer at the local, state, and federal level.”

Four grantmakers in North Carolina commented on how they go about their work:

- “When we do advocacy funding, our focus is on building capacity of grassroots groups to define their own advocacy agendas and build people-powered advocacy campaigns.”

- “In each case, we required more than two organizations to work together and not represent the interests of only one organization. In most cases, there were four or more.”
- “We do these things through other grants. We do not make stand-alone advocacy grants.”

3. Type of Strategies Used during Past Three Years among Grantmakers that Fund Advocacy

	Ariz.	N.M.	N.Y.	N.C.	Average
Activities or campaigns designed to raise public awareness about a specific issue	70%	21%	75%	41%	52%
Coalition building or grassroots organizing	70%	21%	75%	34%	50%
Messaging and communication tools	65%	8%	52%	43%	42%
Policy research and analysis	40%	13%	59%	30%	35%
Activities or campaigns designed to influence public opinion about a specific issue	45%	8%	36%	27%	29%
Education for policymakers about an issue	45%	13%	30%	26%	28%
Advocacy/lobbying by a grantee organization for an issue at the Legislature	25%	13%	18%	12%	17%
Education for grantees about advocacy and lobbying	10%	4%	14%	18%	11%
Support for campaigns to include a specific issue	-	-	-	7%	7%
Education for candidates about an issue	-	-	-	4%	4%
- Strategy was not included in survey.					

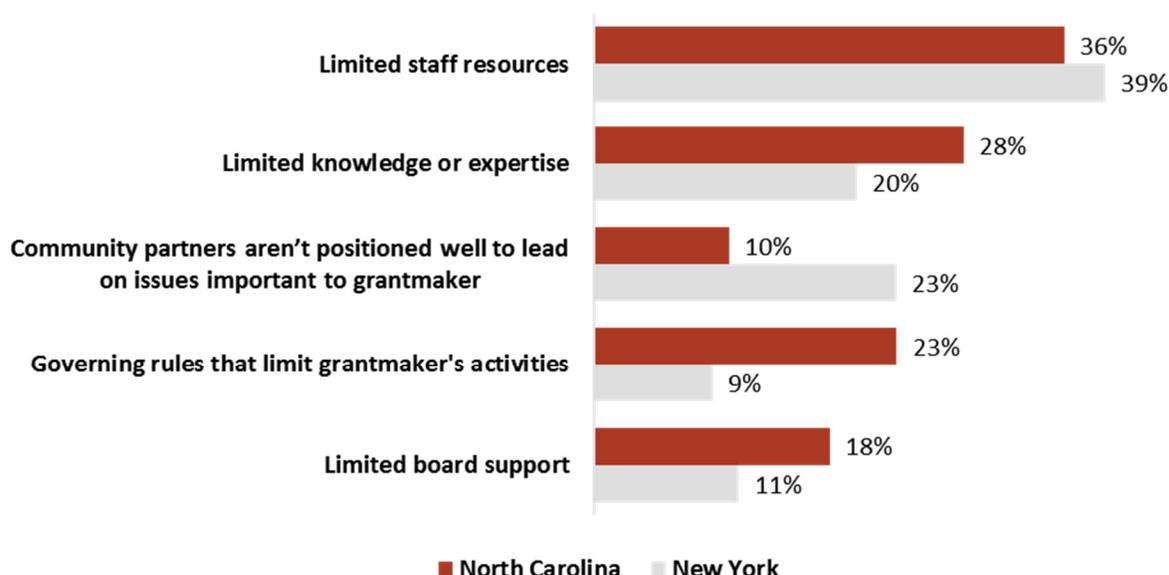
A grantmaker in North Carolina stressed the importance of advocating and collaborating at the local level, especially in rural areas:

As a place-based funder, we work at the state level only when we see a direct benefit, and it is in a program space where we have expert knowledge... We focus much more at the local level and are in contact with officials weekly, advocating progress and encouraging others to do the same... Rural settings with less capacity and resources require more integrated approaches... We see advocacy as something we do every day with local governments and organizations. But we only advocate if we are willing to invest. We are not trying to tell government what they should fund, we are trying to engage government in joint funding and action. We find state governments, Raleigh and Richmond, largely irrelevant or indifferent to our work. Maybe if we were a big funder in a big place, we would see state governments differently.

Challenges Faced by Grantmakers that Support Advocacy

The surveys in New York and North Carolina asked respondents from organizations that support advocacy what challenges they face related to that support. In both states, “limited staff resources” and “limited knowledge or expertise within their organizations” were cited by over 20% of grantmakers. In New York, 23% said “community partners that aren’t well-positioned to lead on issues important to the grantmaker” is a challenge. In North Carolina, 23% of respondents said they face challenges related to “governing rules that limit grantmaker’s activities” (Figure 4).

4. Challenges Faced by Grantmakers that Support Advocacy, N.C. and N.Y.



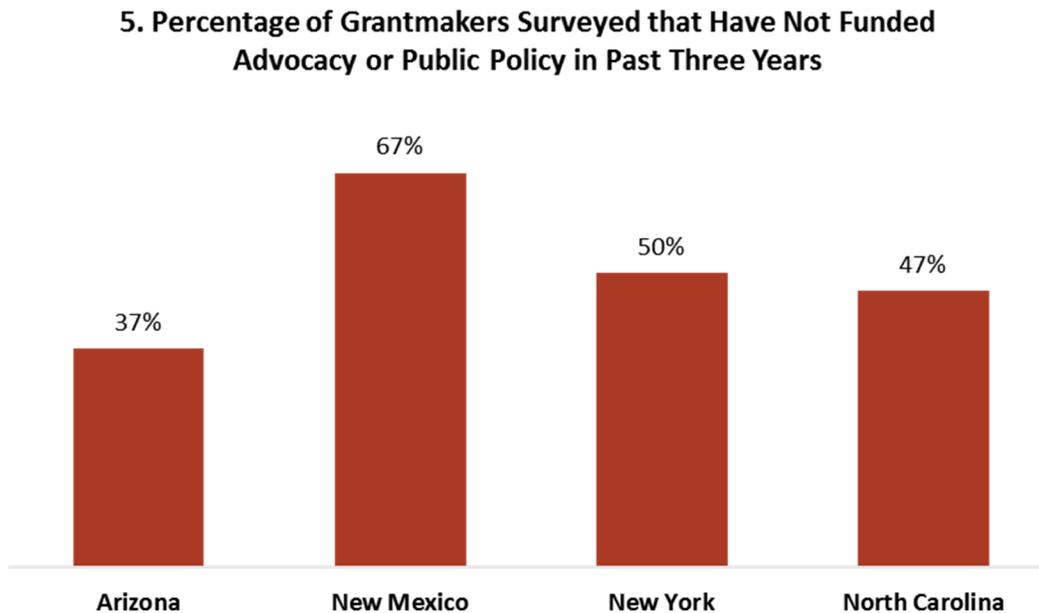
Some grantmakers said they had “limited funding resources.” One in North Carolina explained, “Our interest is in providing support that directly engages and impacts children and artists. Advocacy is important to address issues upstream, but as a small foundation with a limited grant budget, we have decided to focus on direct service and impact.”

Another grantmaker from North Carolina said, “Our biggest challenge in funding advocacy organizations is considering the best way to get our grantees to collaborate and align their work, while overcoming sector silos and differing missions and positions. Grantees tell us that sometimes groups undermine one another and don't understand how they can ‘drive in different lanes’ while still moving toward a common ultimate goal.”

A grantmaker active in advocacy and public policy in North Carolina said the perceptions of people who make decisions about spending public dollars and the perceptions of leaders of nonprofit service providers “have greater separation than I have ever seen.” He suggests that “bringing perceptions and expectations closer will have better results.”

Reasons for Not Supporting Advocacy or Public Policy

Among the four states, significant percentages said they have not supported advocacy or public policy-related activities at their legislatures in the past three years (Figure 5).



The survey asked representatives from grantmaking agencies to explain why their organizations do not currently fund advocacy. Many respondents said their organizations are considering funding advocacy or are in the process of developing strategies for how to support advocacy and public policy. Other reasons included:

Mission

Most reasons were related to the mission and purpose of the funding agency. For example, one foundation representative in New York said, “Not a strategic investment area for our foundation.” Another explained, “Advocacy has never been a part of our mission. Maybe it should be... We may be open to this idea, but so far, we have not gone in that direction.”

Different Perspectives on Meaning of Advocacy

Some said their organizations do not support advocacy or public policy, but their responses suggest that their organizations may define funding for advocacy and public policy in different ways:

- “Outside of our grant funding parameters. We hold information activities with elected officials but not grants to support advocacy.”
- “Advocacy programs are not funded out of our Corporate Contributions budget. We support those types of activities out of our Government Relations budget.”

- “We would generally not refer to it as *advocacy*. But, what others would describe as advocacy, we would characterize as raising public awareness and support for early childhood priorities. In that context, we do just about everything except campaigns.”

Shortage of Resources

Many reasons centered on a shortage of resources and capacity issues.

Perceived Impact of Funding Advocacy Efforts

Foundation representatives suggested that it is sometimes difficult for a small foundation to independently affect public policy:

- “Small size. The budget of our foundation leads us to believe we would have a difficult time making any impact.”
- The “board is interested in funding charitable projects that help people more directly and is not interested in getting involved in political advocacy.”
- “Our grants are designated to a specific county in the Southern Tier of New York. We are a small foundation with limited funds and prefer to have an immediate local impact.”
- “We leave that to the larger foundations.”

Few Requests Submitted by Grantees

Many foundations do not fund advocacy because they’ve never been asked to fund it. Five responses from New York concerned requests by grantees and local needs:

- “Our investments have been driven by grant requests and community needs. We are not opposed to funding advocacy.”
- “Not been asked”
- “Our community investments are driven by community need and capacity of applicants.”
- “I don't believe it is intentional, but our grants have not been awarded for advocacy. I would say out of deference to other issues.”
- “We have not identified a specific issue around which to conduct a concerted advocacy effort.”

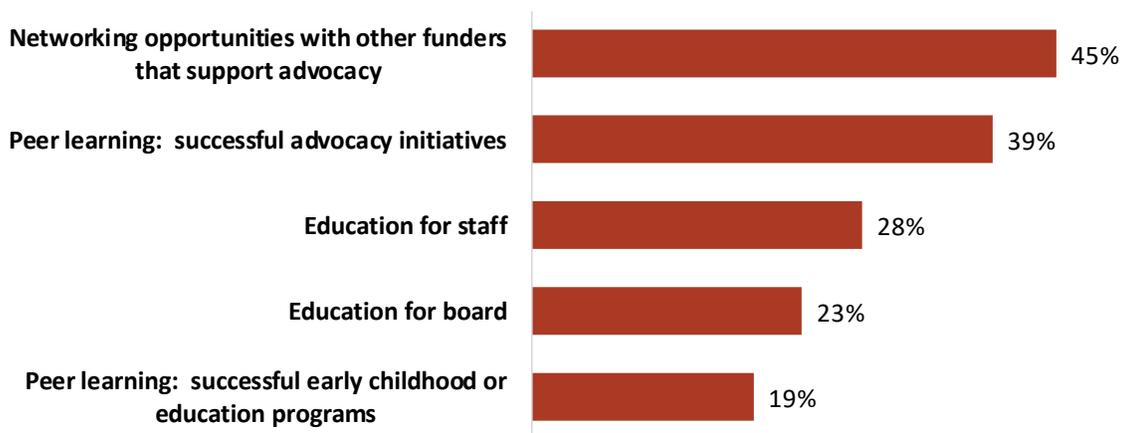
Lack of Knowledge about Advocacy and Lobby Laws

A respondent from Arizona said his board is uncomfortable in getting involved with politics: “The board feels these types of grants are too close to what we are restricted from funding, all political-type grants.” Respondents were concerned about “legal compliance” and “regulatory restrictions.” One emphasized her fear of the IRS: “Fear, worry and stress about incorrectly or illegally funding advocacy activities, so we just avoid it. We fund grants in several states, which makes it more complicated as well.”

Assistance Desired

The survey of the North Carolina Network of Grantmakers (NCNG) asked members “What kind of assistance would benefit your organization as it begins or continues to participate in effective advocacy?” Forty-five percent said “networking with other funders that support advocacy” would be helpful, and 39% said “peer learning: information on successful advocacy initiatives” would be helpful (**Figure 6**).

6. Types of Assistance That Would Benefit NCNG Members as They Participate in Effective Advocacy, 2017



Stronger Together

Many grantmakers in these four states want to work together to strengthen their impact through advocacy. Among those who completed the surveys, the largest percentages of those likely or extremely likely to join a funders’ collaborative in their state to support early childhood advocacy came from Arizona (59%) and New York (47%) (**Figure 7**). Among those likely or highly likely to join, significant numbers in each state have not supported advocacy or public policy in the past three years.

7. Likelihood of Joining Partnership to Support Early Childhood Advocacy

	Ariz.	N.M.	N.Y.	N.C.
Extremely likely	22%	6%	16%	14%
Likely	37%	18%	31%	21%
Unlikely	7%	41%	20%	24%
Extremely unlikely	11%	18%	11%	17%
Neutral or don't know	22%	18%	23%	24%

** Arizona's survey contained a neutral category. This table combines "neutral" and "don't know" for Arizona.*

Summary and Recommendations

The main purpose of the Alliance for Early Success' Philanthropy Engagement Project is to increase support for effective advocacy and policy around early childhood issues. Survey results suggest the trend toward philanthropy-driven advocacy is growing. Many foundations not previously involved in advocacy want to join state-wide collaboratives. Many also said they currently are "developing the strategy for how to support" advocacy and public policy. Within the context of improving early childhood outcomes, potential exists for more advocacy-related funding and greater coordination of existing efforts.

Frontera Strategy proposes the following recommendations based on survey findings. These recommendations may lead to a bigger movement, a wider tent of advocates, better focused projects, and more effective initiatives.

Continue to Define and Promote Advocacy and Public Policy in the Context of Philanthropy

Explain what advocacy and lobbying entail whenever possible. Some funders support advocacy efforts but do not consider their support related to advocacy or public policy so they are uninterested in joining a formal and focused collaborative.

Provide Training on What is Legal and Effective

The Alliance can educate grantmakers on advocacy- and lobby-related laws. Fear of the IRS and misunderstanding of the laws remain.

Build Capacity and Increase Diversity of Advocates

Foundations cannot fund advocacy if traditional and unexpected advocates do not write grant proposals requesting funding. Better proposals from advocates will make it easier for foundation staff and trustees to fund advocacy. The Alliance can:

- Build capacity of nonprofits engaged in advocacy and lobbying.
- Provide technical assistance and training to funders on how to build advocacy-related capacity among nonprofits.
- Provide assistance to foundations on how best to solicit proposals and write RFPs for advocacy and public policy.

Promote Models of Effective Advocacy and Accomplishments

The Alliance has learned that there is no "right" way to do advocacy, and survey results confirm the unique interests, perspectives, and resources among foundations. Results also suggest that many foundations underestimate the key role that advocacy and public policy can have in furthering their missions and improving people's lives. The Alliance can:

- Emphasize the strengths and successes of small funding collaboratives, like the New Mexico Early Childhood Funders Group, and support these grassroots initiatives.
- Engage and mobilize regional associations of grantmakers in a way that respects the interests of local grantmakers. Ensure that new initiatives are coordinated with existing grantmaker-led advocacy efforts.

- Promote the work of smaller family or community foundations, such as the RGK Foundation, the Wright Family Foundation, the Community Foundation of North Texas, and the Timo Foundation. These foundations have moved or are moving the dial forward on specific issues by themselves or as part of a small informal group. Their successes and lessons learned can be applied to early childhood issues.
- Help foundations understand that advocacy and lobbying are two strategies that can further almost any mission.
- Emphasize the return on investment (ROI) of supporting advocacy and public policy.
- Invest in rigorous evaluations of advocacy and public policy projects that show impact and ROI. Promote these research findings.

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

Survey Design

For all four surveys, Frontera Strategy, the Alliance for Early Success, and each grantmaking association (Arizona Grantmakers Forum, New Mexico Early Childhood Funders Group, NY Funders Alliance, and North Carolina Network of Grantmakers) collaboratively designed the online survey instrument. Though the surveys shared questions, each instrument was uniquely designed to reflect the association's needs and state-specific policy realities and goals. In each state, representatives of early childhood advocacy organizations reviewed and contributed to designing the instrument. For each survey, the multiple choice and open-ended questions covered: type of organization, involvement in advocacy-related activities, funding priorities, and interest in joining a collaborative for grantmaker-led advocacy. All surveys and reports resulting from the research are confidential. At the end of the survey, respondents could give their names for follow-up, or they could remain anonymous. We structured the 4- to 6-minute surveys so that respondents could skip items they did not want to complete. Please contact Dr. Lisa Kerber (Kerber@FronteraStrategy.com) for more information about the survey instrument.

Sample and Data Collection

Each of the grantmaking associations invited grantmakers to complete the survey. Staff created contact lists with one representative per funding agency. All potential respondents represented grantmakers. In Arizona and North Carolina, all potential respondents were members of the grantmaker associations. In New Mexico, the New Mexico Early Childhood Funders Group identified 105 grantmaking organizations in New Mexico. Among these, members from the Funders Group and consultants from Frontera Strategy found functional emails for 41 leaders at these organizations. In New York, all potential respondents were on the NY Funders Alliance mailing list and received email correspondence from the NY Funders Alliance. **Figure 8** describes the response rates, samples, and dates of survey in each state. Almost all respondents were CEOs, executive directors, or senior program officers.

In each state, the associations or funding group emailed an invitation with a link to complete the survey, and two to three weeks later, the survey closed. The three associations, the Funders Group in New Mexico, and Frontera staff sent reminder emails and made reminder calls while the surveys were open. Frontera Strategy administered the online survey using SurveyMonkey.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

A Frontera Strategy consultant analyzed the data using SPSS. The consultant used descriptive and comparative data analysis techniques including frequencies and cross-tabs. Survey findings are not representative in the statistical sense. Each response represents an important view that a number of grantmakers in these four states may share. The percentages shown in the tables can act as a guide to interpreting the salience of the responses. When reviewing the findings,

readers will want to keep in mind some biases and limitations. For example, it is likely that the people who chose to complete the survey differed in significant ways from people who did not complete the survey. For example, foundation representatives who are more interested in advocacy or issues related to early childhood may have been more likely to complete the survey. Exercise caution when comparing percentages across states. Surveys were not identical and were not designed for comparison across states. In each state, different groups were sampled. For example, potential respondents in Arizona and North Carolina included only members of the state-wide grantmaking associations. Potential respondents in New Mexico and New York included members and non-members of the NY Funders Alliance and the New Mexico Early Childhood Funders Group.

8. Description of Samples

	Ariz.		N.M.		N.Y.		N.C.	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Type of Organization								
Private or family foundation	14	44%	15	63%	44	50%	37	50%
Community foundation	5	16%	4	17%	18	20%	16	22%
Corporate foundation or giving program	7	22%	1	4%	7	8%	8	11%
Local United Way	0	-	2	8%	9	10%	0	-
Public foundation	3	9%	1	4%	1	1%	5	7%
Other	3	9%	1	4%	9	10%	7	9%
Missing	0	-	0	-	0	-	1	1%
Response Rates	32/61	52%	24/41	59%	88/212	42%	74/111	67%
Dates of Survey	April 2016		April-May 2016		August 2016		January 2017	

- Less than .05%