

PROGRAM OFFICER ROLE

Reimagining the job with a Trust-Based Lens

trust-based
philanthropy
project

Trust-based philanthropy is a holistic approach that goes beyond how you do your grantmaking. Part of this includes reexamining grantmaking *structures* to better reflect values of power-consciousness and equity in all aspects of philanthropy. One concrete example of this is job descriptions, which set standards for staff responsibilities, eligibility, and performance.

The program officer role is a critical one in advancing a foundation's commitment to trust-based philanthropy. Often serving as the main point of contact for grantee relationships, program officers can make or break a nonprofit's perception of an entire grantmaking organization.

This guide invites us to reimagine the program officer role in a radically different way – away from conventional norms of compliance and oversight, and towards trust-based norms of

PARTNERSHIP, COLLABORATION, & SERVICE

By applying a trust-based lens to program officer job descriptions, grantmaking organizations will be able to:



Attract values-aligned candidates with relational and trust-based skill sets



Reinforce a sense of accountability to grantee partners and communities



Set goals and assess performance based on relational strengths, learning acumen, and commitment to partners

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:



SUPERVISORS & HR PROFESSIONALS can use this as a tool to develop or revise job descriptions, and to guide hiring policies and decisions



PROGRAM OFFICERS can use this to deepen their approach to grantee relationships and to start conversations with supervisors about how their roles can be sharpened to better reflect their organization's values



RECRUITMENT TIP FOR HR STAFF

Look beyond conventional philanthropy networks for potential candidates. Consider hiring people with TBP-relevant skills and experience, such as:

- ORGANIZERS
- COMMUNITY LEADERS
- NONPROFIT STAFF
- SOCIAL WORKERS
- EDUCATORS



WHAT IS A TRUST-BASED PROGRAM OFFICER?

Ultimately, a trust-based program officer strives to be a thought partner and collaborator with grantee partners, who aligns on organizational mission above all else, with a goal of supporting the success of grantee partners and in the process, cultivating learnings that can inform a foundation’s overall grantmaking strategies.



NOTE: This provides a snapshot of TBP-aligned roles and skills, but it is not a job description template. For sample job descriptions, visit: www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org/resources-articles/collection-job-descriptions.

JOB FUNCTIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Main role** is to leverage the foundation’s power and resources to support nonprofit and community self-determination
- **Focused on** understanding grantees’ work within a broader social change ecosystem and supporting grantees to advance their work within it
- **Actively listens** for and offers grantees support beyond the check, including introductions to funders, connections to grantee partners, and other non-monetary supports
- **Grantee interactions** are relational & reciprocal, with opportunities for transparent dialogue and exchange
- **Takes a learning stance** in grantee relationships, and shares the responsibility of learning & evaluation with other foundation colleagues.
- **Works actively** to earn and maintain trust with nonprofit partners
- **Collaborates** with other funders in the same issue area/region in order to inform bigger picture strategies

SKILLS & COMPETENCIES

- **Values** advancing equity, redistributing power, centering relationships, & cultivating mutual learning
- **Committed** to advancing the programmatic goals of the foundation and grantee partners
- **Demonstrates** curiosity, humility, flexibility, and responsiveness
- **Lived experience** in the issue area or past experience in relevant community or nonprofit work
- **Brings** a strong customer-service orientation
- **Understands** the interconnectedness of various social issues, especially across a foundation’s program areas
- **Defines** success based on ability to cultivate trust, dialogue, and learning with grantee partners, and ability to respond to community needs
- **Able to identify** themes & trends among grantee partners’ efforts, to see and bridge gaps, and to connect dots
- **Recognizes** the importance of organizational values to inform decision-making



JOB TITLE ALTERNATIVES

Some foundations are opting for alternate titles since “officer” can connote enforcement. Examples include:

COMMUNITY PARTNER • PROGRAM PARTNER • COMMUNITY ORGANIZER
RESOURCE MOBILIZER • PROGRAM LEAD

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