

Challenges with philanthropy research?

For foundations:

- **Resistance to and disengagement with research** – by donor/founder/trustee
- **Scepticism** – about the value of academic research
- **Mismatched agendas and timeframes** – of different parties and stakeholders
- **Accessibility of research** – ‘please don’t write anything too academic’
- **Format of research** – often seems too prescriptive or descriptive
- **Perceptions of research** – frequently seen as a tool for further social action rather than understanding and assisting philanthropy itself
- **Philanthropic egos** – individual, organisational and collective, and ‘disbelief’ that ‘someone (else) out there might know something’
- **Fear** – that research might challenge identities
- **Power** – need to feel/be in charge of the dynamics
- **Organisational Culture** – no strong history of internal learning and knowledge-exchange, with a resistance to learning from others
- **Working environment and pace of change** – not allowing for important reflection time

For academics:

- **Private domain of philanthropy** – difficulties of access, engagement and building trusted, long-term, relationships
- **Perceptions of minimal opportunities** – especially around experimentation
- **Career trajectories** – working with the sector(s) and engaged scholarship have traditionally not been rewarded
- **Potential danger of ‘absolution research’** – aimed at confirming validity and/or appropriateness of philanthropic (funding) choices
- **Bi-polarity** – academic research has tended to take on an either overly friendly or hypercritical approach instead of acting as philanthropy’s ‘reflective/critical friend’

Opportunities for philanthropy research?

For foundations:

- **Find out ‘what *does* work’** – identify ways to answer ‘the how to?’ questions
- **Understand the ‘ecology of funding’** – explore better and more appropriate approaches for giving money away, and understand donors’, founders’ and trustees’ motivations
- **Join the dots and get a more global perspective** – learn from other foundations and from different areas of activity/contexts/countries
- **Enable learning from the past to encourage current practices** – ‘if we treated our money in the way we treat the knowledge we hold, it would be a scandal’
- **Reputation, competition and status within the sector and amongst peers** – ‘we need to look good’
- **Strengthen credibility** – ‘research is like armour, it protects us’
- **Become more self-reflective and examine practices and approaches** – ‘what helps us *do* our job better and what helps us *see* our job better’
- **Moving beyond rhetoric** – providing a means of looking at the spectrum and limits of what foundations are actually doing and can do
- **Provide pointers and space(s) to think** – ‘indicate the directions of stuff we don’t know’

For academics:

- **An important, highly relevant, underexplored and emerging area of research** – promises new insights, understandings, and learning
- **Offers opportunities to make a difference** – to academia, policy and practice
- **Scope for interdisciplinary and comparative learning** – that identifies and examines lessons for/from different research fields and builds integrated knowledge – ‘what, if anything, is unique about the world of philanthropy?’
- **Engaged scholarship and research co-production** – develop scholarship that is supportive but reflects on philanthropy’s roles and actions, offering opportunity for critical friendships between academia and philanthropy
- **Education possibilities** – ‘where do you go to become a board member or trustee?’

Areas for development?

- **Establishing and providing safe spaces** for discussion, reflective exchanges and peer learning
- **Building dialogues** that both challenge and support philanthropy
- **Developing ‘curated space’** for philanthropy research that offers accessible digests and ‘nuggets’, clearly points out ‘what is this research for?’, and addresses the danger of research getting ‘lost in translation’
- **Undertaking meta-analyses** (e.g. of foundations’ project/programme evaluations) to bring together disparate sources of knowledge

- **Communicating, acknowledging and capitalising** on the notion that ‘someone, somewhere else [in a variety of different contexts and settings], *does* in fact know something’
- **Examining what, where and which insights can be gleaned** from different disciplines and how such knowledge relates to philanthropy practice, policy and theory
- **Reviewing appropriate funding** for varieties of philanthropy research
- **Opening and strengthening mutual understanding** of philanthropy’s and academia’s respective expectations and needs, opportunities and challenges