



The Advancing Human Rights Research: What have we learned?

“Quantitative data is critical to philanthropy... [it] begins to ground conversations in the reality of what’s really happening, and provide a benchmark to measure change over time to see how the field is evolving.”
— *interviewee*

“In the human rights movement we’ve historically relied heavily on peoples’ stories and anecdotal evidence, so having quantitative analysis that can corroborate that data and further enhance our decision-making would be especially useful for funders.” — *interviewee*

What is the research?

The *Advancing Human Rights* (AHR) research tracks the evolving state of global human rights funding. It is a collaboration between [Human Rights Funders Network](#) and [Foundation Center](#), in partnership with [Ariadne](#) and [Prospera](#), and uses grants data to map the issues addressed, funding strategies used, and populations and regions served.

Our aim is to strengthen funders’ decision-making, promote collaborations, and improve the effectiveness of human rights philanthropy. We have produced multiple tools to make the research findings accessible, including a [public website](#), a series of [annual analyses](#), and a [funders-only map](#) with a grants database. Eight years into the initiative, we have tracked more than 111,000 human rights grants totaling over \$12.1 billion.

How did we evaluate the research?

We gathered feedback about the accessibility and usefulness of the research and tools through website analytics, a survey of 98 network members, interviews with 20 grantmakers and other stakeholders, and a series of additional conversations. We also reviewed input provided by our members since 2010.

What did we learn?

Our findings suggest the research has had some impact in all 4 areas we evaluated, especially in increasing knowledge:

Increased Knowledge	I am more knowledgeable about...	Agree
	the human rights funding landscape	91%
	trends in human rights funding	89%
	emerging or underfunded human rights issues	72%
Strengthened Grantmaking Practice	I have used the research to...	
	inform the strategic direction of my project, program, or organization	50%
	identify funding gaps and increase funding to those areas	42%
	identify new partners or grantees in the field	41%
Greater Funding	I have used the research to...	
	advocate internally for more funding for an issue, region, strategy, or population	39%
	raise money for my organization	25%
Deeper Connections	I have used the research to...	
	identify other funders working on my issue, region, strategy, or population	66%
	build new or stronger relationships with other funders	38%
	establish a new collaboration with other funders	19%

Table 1: evaluating the impact of the research based on the experiences of 64 survey respondents who have used the AHR tools



What did funders say?

Funders described diverse ways they are using the AHR research to inform their work:

"I read with great interest and dismay your first report mapping funding of international human rights organizations across the globe. I was shocked to see so few funders in the Caribbean and particularly in Haiti... I can't exit or retrench because I now know that there is a dearth of human rights funders in Haiti."

— *HRFN member*

"As a small foundation, having the data to back up my assertions of where to fund and partner helps immensely. Also, finding like-minded donors in niche areas has been extremely helpful." — *survey respondent*

"When I shared the data at a convening of our grantees, it gave them a baseline and some associated righteous anger to push for more inclusion in funding to other groups and issues. It encouraged them to think outside the disability box and to consider ways in which their organizations could apply for women's rights funding, environmental rights funding, etc." — *HRFN member*

"It helped us form a new relationship with another foundation that we might have previously identified as unlikely potential allies - their grants got included in the AHR research because those grants have a human rights focus, even though the foundation does not publicly describe itself as a 'human rights funder.'" — *survey respondent*

What comes next?

We appreciate the rich feedback people have shared about how we can strengthen the AHR research to better serve the human rights community. Some recommendations that stood out to us include:

- Provide more commentary, analysis, and conclusions to accompany the data to help people make sense of the research and use it as an advocacy tool.
- Publicize the ways funders are using the research and what it has allowed them to do.
- Add more narrative context to the public website to orient visitors to what they are seeing and its relevance, and include case studies, curated tools, and resource experts for the topics highlighted.
- Review the titles and definitions for the issues and strategies we track to ensure they are clear, mutually exclusive, and easily accessible, and develop sub-categories for some strategies and regions.
- Include a subset of research focused on giving from funders who explicitly use a rights-based approach in their grantmaking.
- Develop more detailed guidance about our methodology, and what the research can do and its limitations, so the data are not misinterpreted.
- Facilitate data sharing by establishing more automated systems, coordination among mapping projects, and guidance on security.

Our detailed report is available at www.hrfn.org and will serve as a critical foundation as we work with partners to develop the next phase of the research.



Human Rights
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Knowledge to build on.

ARIADNE 
European Funders for Social Change and Human Rights



Prospera
INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF WOMEN'S FUNDS