



30th Anniversary Listening Tour Report

October 2023

Introduction

As part of celebrating our 30th anniversary of the Fund for Women (FFW), a giving circle at the Delaware Community Foundation (DCF), we asked our community of volunteers, supporters, and grantees to reflect on our work and provide feedback on areas for improvement. We formally invited more than 70 people to participate and extended the invitation to our general audience through our social media channels. The final 30 participants included a diverse population of Founders, Young Founders, and First Founders (from 1993); current and former Board of Trustee (BOT) members; grantees; committee members; and DCF staff.

We conducted more than 13 hours of interviews from June through September 2023. Interviews included no more than three participants, and in most cases, included two interviewers.

The following is a summary of our findings:

True to our Mission

One key takeaway was that our constituents believe we stay true to our mission of *“empowering women and girls in Delaware to achieve their potential”* through our grants process. The FFW engages volunteers and donors in a culture of enthusiasm around supporting women and girls. The participants believe what we are doing really matters; the FFW is making a difference.

We are 30 years strong, past the start-up stage, so we must keep going and be sure not to duplicate what others are doing. We can encourage our grantees to keep going. Our role is on the money side; giving money to organizations that are making change happen in our community.

Positive feedback included how the FFW was responsive during COVID. Engaging dozens of volunteers each year to serve on our communities and the board is a real positive. The diversification of our board and committees is evident. We have made great progress and still have much work to do.

One participant mentioned that we are good stewards of the funds raised, which is important to her. We are supporting our mission and putting our money where it will make the biggest difference. This is a differentiator for the organization in our community.

In addition to embodying our mission, participants believe the FFW has created a good grants process. Many participants spoke from their experience of serving on the Grants Committee. The process is streamlined, and the portal makes it easy for volunteers to participate and to know what is going on throughout the process. (** Interested parties can go to <https://fundforwomende.com/grants/> to opt in for the 2024 grants committee.)

Additionally, participants believe we do a great job of bringing people together for fun social events, an area that everyone suggested we expand upon. There was an overwhelming request for more opportunities to get together with other Founders including small house parties, cocktail parties, and other events throughout the state.

Lastly, some participants believe we have done a good job in diversifying our Founders by age (in 2013 we added the Young Founder option of \$500 commitment for those 35 years old and younger) and that our diversity around race has improved. A few participants believe we need to increase our diversity efforts especially in Sussex County, around both age and race. Additionally, a few participants asked about diversifying on socio-economic status. Many of our grantees have valuable input into our process and may not have the personal funding to become a Founder. Working to involve women from all economic levels into our fold would benefit everyone.

(Our DEI efforts continue at the Board of Trustee, volunteer, and grant level. Currently, our Board is made up of 26% women of color. In November, that percentage will increase to 32.)

Issues of Importance

The FFW is made up a diverse group of people throughout the state. Each person has passions around different causes. We asked participants which issues for women and girls are most important to them. Answers included:

- Early education**
- Support to escape domestic violence**
- Mental health support**
- Abortion funding/access to reproductive healthcare**
- Basic human services – homelessness, hunger, sanitary supplies for girls/women**
- Stop human trafficking**
- Healthcare**
- Maternal/child healthcare, especially in the African American community**
- Anti-addiction services
- Food insecurity/nutrition/exercise
- Literacy programs
- Financial freedom (and education)
- Community equity
- Voting rights & democracy issues
- Access to college education
- Reducing gun violence

** Denote answers that were received multiple times.

When discussing the priorities of needs, suggestions in helping to determine these were: 1. Involve the Delaware Community Foundation (DCF) in the discussion since it has a lot of data about the state and 2. conduct additional research about where the greatest needs are. We can then re-focus our priorities on the most urgent and pressing issues.

Opportunities for Improvement

Our request for improving the FFW was met with numerous and enthusiastic suggestions mainly within three areas of the organization: grants, communications, and donors.

Grants

With respect to grants, the majority of participants agreed that our process is good, aligns with our mission, and meets some of our community's needs. Many interviewees believe we should begin to discuss larger grants. (The current limit for grants is \$15,000 per organization per year for no more than three years in a row.) To some organizations, our grants process can be laborious, especially for smaller nonprofits. And we request a significant amount of information for what some consider a rather small grant.

A side note about grants included the suggestion of ensuring we are aligned with our strategic initiatives and that we should look at the possibility of collaborating with other organizations to enhance the impact of our grants. One grantee suggested that FFW could assist grantees in garnering more volunteers. Another participant appreciated that FFW showcases the various organization around the state that actually support women and girls.

One interview group suggested splitting the grant funding into two buckets: one for large, established, national organizations and one for smaller, start-up, less established ones. This would minimize the competition that smaller organizations face and ensure more equity with respect to distributing funds.

It was also suggested that FFW consider focusing on one or two areas, in a given year, instead of granting to 15 organizations in 15 different areas of need each year. The question we were asked was "What if FFW decided to take 1/3 or even \$100,000 of available funds in a year and grant it to an organization focused on one area, like early childhood education? What kind of impact could FFW have?" This scenario could create significant change in a short period of time.

When discussing the growth of grants from \$2,500 in 1993 to \$250,000 this past year (2023), all participants agreed that there is still work to be done to support women and girls to achieve their potential and we must grow our funding base to provide more grant money each year. One participant agreed that having more resources is good as long as we are clear of how you are going to use it. We were advised to ensure we don't replicate what others are doing.

Lastly, questions about how we can support our non-binary community members and suggestions about us continuing to review how we look the organizations that also support boys and families were raised.

Communications

Suggestions on communications included expanding our reach by using broadcast mediums for our video and invitations to events, including buying ad space, requesting interviews with major publications and TV stations, and creating give away items like magnets and bumper stickers, etc. When asked about the best way to communicate with each individual, the answers varied from receiving postcards and mailers; email information and invites; reading the quarterly e-newsletter; finding posts on Facebook and Instagram; and/or hearing from friends about upcoming events and news. One Young Founder claimed she does all her nonprofit giving online yet stated that "getting a letter in the mail reminds me to send money to FFW." Our conclusion is that we must continue to increase our communications to our Founders and to use all mediums to tell our story, inform our community, and ask for donations.

It was suggested that we could use our Founder community to take a broader stand on women's issues. We are sensitive to our diverse population with diverse beliefs but if we say we support women and girls, we might want to be a little louder in our support.

Most participants felt that we could cultivate our Founders to be more involved. Suggestions included having a volunteer team who reaches out to Founders to include them, especially during the first few years upon becoming a Founder. It is believed that more communications will help us grow our donor base, both through new Founders joining and through existing Founders donating more.

Lastly, it was suggested that improvements in communication between the counties could be made as well as giving more autonomy to the various committees. One challenge of a state-wide organization is that often we have to travel 100 miles to attend an event.

Growing the Infrastructure and Motivating Donors

While discussing the growth of FFW, we asked participants how they felt about the possibility of FFW hiring a paid professional with the primary responsibility of cultivating relationships with donors and raising new donations. The overwhelming response was that given our history, our impact, and the need in our community that “this step is overdue, and a good next step”. Our participants realize that fundraising is personal and relationships must be fostered. Building on what FFW has already accomplished is the goal. Some participants expressed concern about the effectiveness one person would have and the responsibilities this person would have. One participant said she liked that we are an all-volunteer organization. (**The FFW does pay an individual for marketing services.)

Most donor involvement begins by becoming a Founder which includes committing \$1,000 (or \$500 for Young Founders, those 35 and under) to the endowment at DCF. Some donors give additional funds during our year end appeal as well as through sponsorships or donations in memory or honor of someone.

Many participants thought the best way to increase new Founders and additional donations is by telling the story how their money will improve the lives of women and girls in Delaware. We need to describe what more money will do for our communities and how lives be positively impacted. We must use data on the results of our grants and use our post-grants process to review, record, and communicate our effectiveness. Several suggestions were made about interviewing grantees and telling individual stories of how the FFW grant created change for good.

A few participants suggested being more transparent in how the funds are being used. In other words, if year-end donations go towards operating funds instead of into the endowment, be very clear about how this works. One interviewee wants money to go towards grants, not towards operating funding in any way.

Ideas around donor giving were numerous. Suggestions included asking donors to give for milestone events, like our 30th anniversary; educating Founders how to make a legacy gift through an estate; host a campaign engaging Founders' significant others to become Founders; finding the cause each Founder wants to support; ask people to be “part of the change”. Other ideas were to do more state-wide mailings, hand-out bumper stickers and other items with our branding including business cards for all volunteers and board members. Several participants suggested that the FFW nurture and cultivate one on one relationships with donors to determine what each donor is passionate about. People give to causes they care about. One person suggested allowing Founders to ‘vote’ for the cause their money would be allocated to. Lastly, it was suggested that the FFW discuss estate planning with donors to create future legacy gifts. A suggestion around this was to split your estate into one more slice so you

can make a bequest to an organization like FFW. For example, if you have two children and want to leave your money to them, divide your estate into three parts and leave 1/3 to FFW.

(For more information on creating a legacy with the FFW, please contact Kathy Kiernan, Advancement Chair, at kmkiernan1@gmail.com)

Summary

Overall, the feedback we received was very positive, highlighting all the good the FFW has accomplished during the past 30 years. It is evident that our Founders support our efforts and want to see the organization continue to grow and thrive. Being more engaged, having more social opportunities, and making positive change happen in Delaware for women and girls is on everyone's list of priorities.

A final note to share was learning that many of our Founders and volunteers still have questions about how the endowment works, what our advocacy committee is focused on, and how they can actually help us continue to grow. The FFW leadership is committed to educating our Founders on how the FFW distributes grants, being transparent with information and data on the impact throughout the state, and providing opportunities for all of us to make a difference.

The participants were appreciative that we asked for their opinion and took the time to listen. Special thanks to our BOT members that participated in the interview process. And thank you to everyone at FFW for your time, money, and commitment to helping women and girls in Delaware achieve their potential.