



Top Line Madison Initiative Grantee Survey Insights

August 2015

The Center for Evaluation Innovation conducted a confidential survey of all Madison Initiative grantees in July 2015 to understand **grantee perspectives** on the strength of their part of the democracy reform field, the Initiative’s design, and ideas for moving closer to the Madison Initiative’s ultimate goal of improving the ability of Congress and its members to deliberate, negotiate, and compromise in ways that work for more Americans. Forty-nine of 61 grantees (80%) responded.

To ensure the survey captured insights at a level most relevant to grantee experiences, grantees were grouped into categories representing the “cluster” or sub-field in which they are working, as determined by the Madison Initiative team (see box at right; the appendix offers a list of all grantees by cluster). Recognizing that many grantees work in more than one cluster area, for the survey, grantees were grouped into the cluster that most closely represented the work the Hewlett Foundation is supporting them to do.¹

Grantee Clusters (with number of respondents)
1. Building bipartisan relationships (n= 7 of 9)
2. Improving the rules, norms, procedures, and / or capacity of Congress (n= 10 of 12)
3. Developing and sharing information to support reform efforts (n= 7 of 11)
4. Illuminating and / or reforming existing patterns of campaign finance (n= 11 of 11)
5. Modernizing systems for voter registration and election administration (n= 2 of 2)
6. Reforming election rules (e.g., ranked choice voting, primaries, or districting) (n= 1 of 2)
7. Improving the information that voters have at their disposal (n= 3 of 3)
8. Increasing voter turnout in primary elections (n= 2 of 2)
9. Fostering patterns of civic engagement that alleviate polarization (n= 5 of 7)
10. Understanding and improving media coverage of Congress (n= 1 of 3)

It is important to remember the survey is just one of several data sources being tapped for the evaluation. However, the findings capture a key stakeholder perspective—grantees on the ground doing the day-to-day work of democracy reform. Survey findings across all ten clusters both validate existing Initiative directions and raise questions for the team to consider.

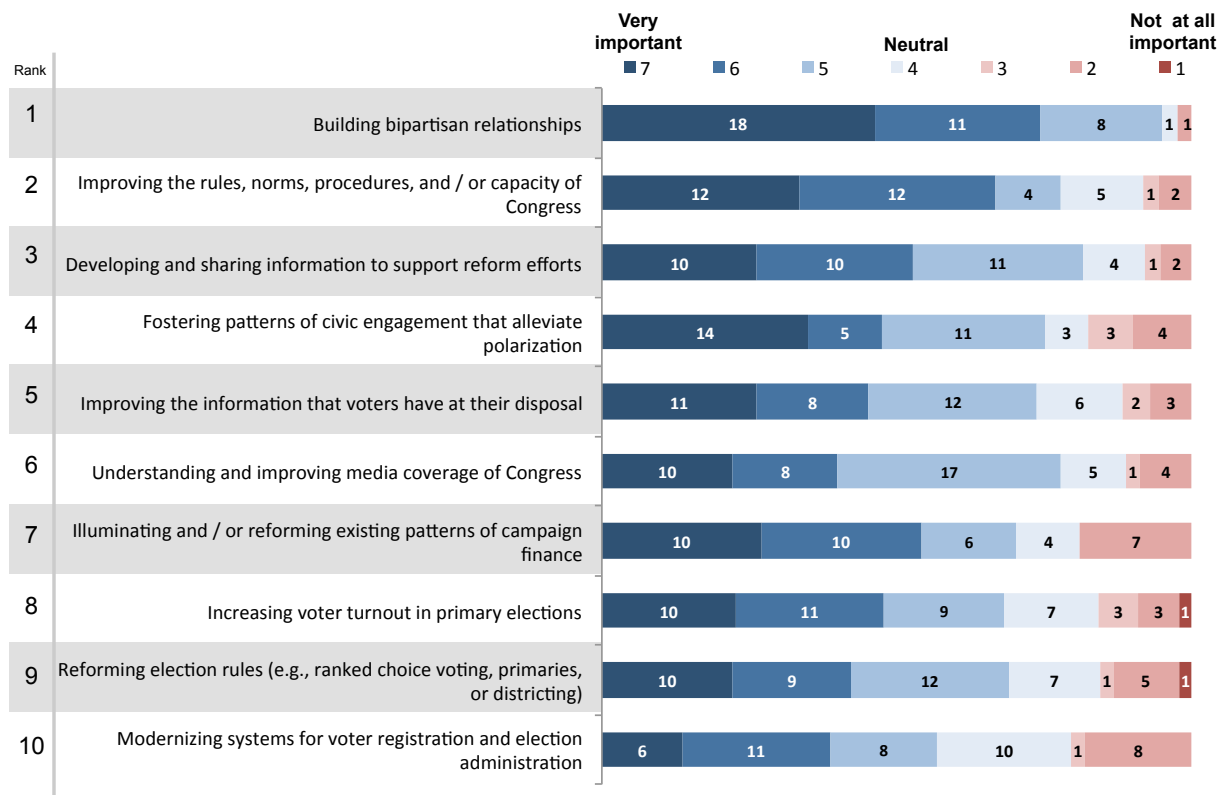
¹ The tradeoff of clustering grantees was that some clusters had very low numbers.

1. Although most grantees believe that all of the clusters in which the Madison Initiative is investing are important to achieving the ultimate goal, they ranked those with the most direct “line of sight” to Congress as most important.

Grantees were asked to rate how important each cluster is to the goal of improving the ability of Congress to deliberate, negotiate, and compromise. In the following analysis, we removed each respondent’s ranking of the cluster in which they are working in order to get an overall picture of how Hewlett grantees see the relative importance of sub-fields *other than the one in which they are most directly engaged*. Ranking the clusters according to their average rating of importance in this fashion revealed that Initiative investments focused most directly on *Congress* (bipartisan relationship building and improving the rules, norms, procedures, and/or capacity of Congress) were viewed as most critical, even by those whose work focuses on other parts of the democratic system.

Clusters related to *civic engagement* ranked in the middle (fostering patterns of civic engagement that alleviate polarization; improving the information that voters have at their disposal; and understanding and improving media coverage of Congress), and investments in structural *campaign and election* reforms ranked lowest (keeping in mind that these are relative rankings, sorted according to average overall score; all areas received an “important” rating by at least half of the respondents).

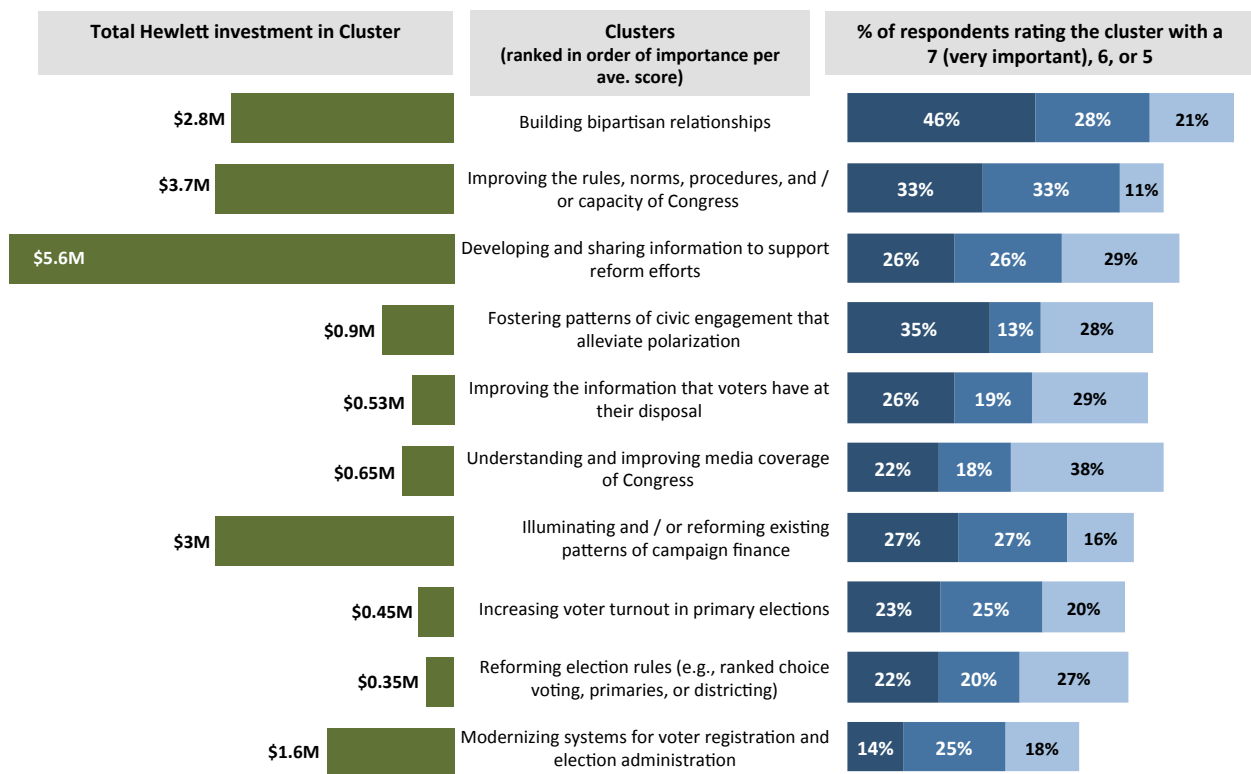
Ratings of the Importance of Broad Investment Strategies to Achieving the Goal



2. Madison Initiative investments partially align with the strategies grantees ranked as most important for achieving the Initiative’s ultimate goal.

As illustrated below, grantee rankings of cluster importance somewhat match the pattern of Hewlett investments in these areas to date, with some notable differences. Investments in campaign finance reform and in modernizing voter registration and election administration, which were ranked lower by grantees, are on par with investments in the top-ranked clusters. Conversely, investments in civic engagement and voter information—in the mid-range of grantee rankings—are relatively low.

Comparison of Hewlett Investments to Cluster Rankings



The juxtaposition of Madison Initiative investments and grantee importance ratings for each cluster offer one perspective on the extent to which Madison investments are aligned. From this vantage point, all other things being equal, clusters perceived as most important relative to the goal should likely receive more funding, whereas clusters perceived as less important should likely receive less.

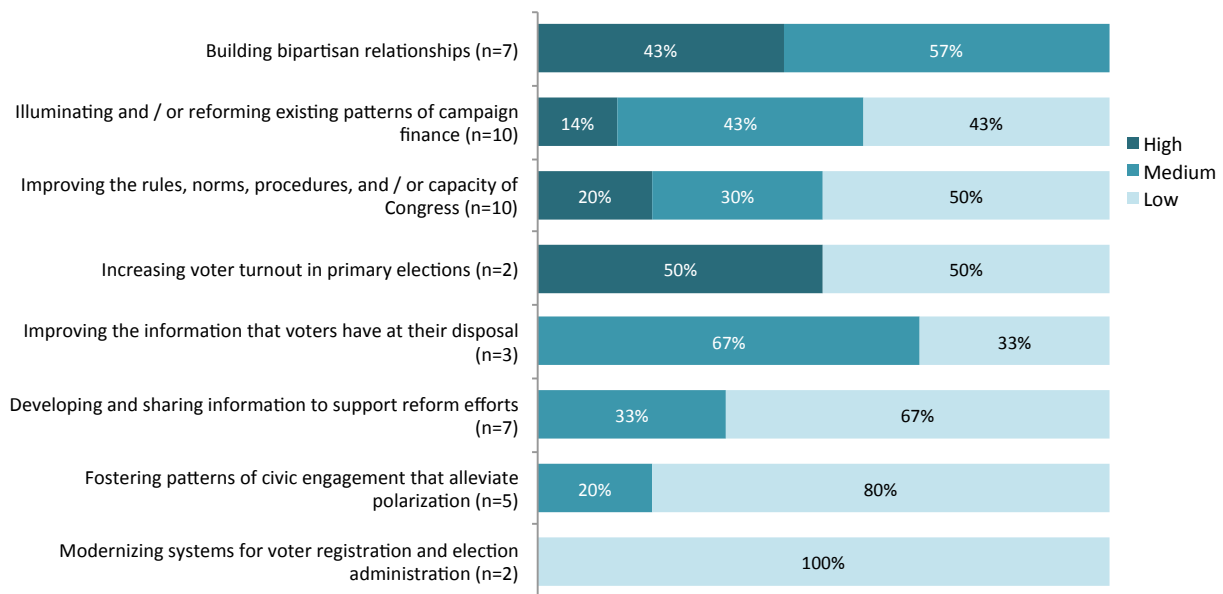
3. Although the “field capacity” of most clusters was rated as low-to-medium by grantees working in those areas, most believe capacity has increased in recent years.

Progress on such a complex and systemic problem as the inability of Congress to deliberate, negotiate and compromise in ways that work for more Americans cannot be made by a single organization, or

even by several organizations. Instead, the Madison Initiative presumes that progress will be made as clusters or sub-fields of organizations and funders increasingly are equipped to work on levers of change from a variety of perspectives over the long-term. The hope is that those efforts also will become increasingly aligned and complementary. This requires that each sub-field have the size, reach, skill, stability, and mix of organizations to make sustained progress toward a shared goal (e.g., increased voter turnout in primary elections, improved media coverage of Congress, etc.).

Madison Initiative grantees were asked to rate the capacity of their own clusters or sub-fields as high, medium, or low (noting that some clusters had only two respondents, and two clusters do not appear because there was only one respondent). With the exception of bipartisan relationship building, most clusters were rated as having medium to low capacity.

Grantee Ratings of Cluster Capacity



Grantees also were asked to assess the extent to which capacity has increased or decreased in their cluster in the last two years. Over 70 percent believed that it had increased. Reasons for increases included renewed interest from funders such as the Democracy Fund and Hewlett Foundation, growing salience of these issues amidst public frustration about Congressional performance, and an influx of fresh thinking and new organizations.

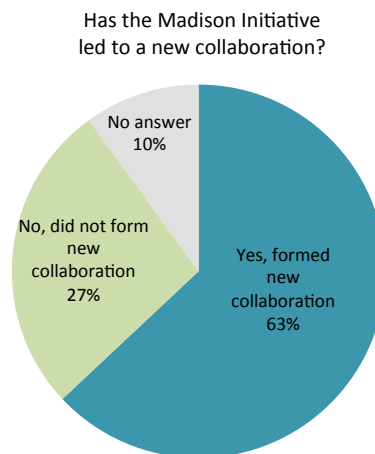
Capacity ratings introduce another variable to consider when determining whether Initiative investments are aligned. For example, clusters that rank higher in importance but have lower field capacity may merit more funding. There are several clusters where further consideration and investigation of the interplay between perceived cluster importance, field capacity, and level of investment may be warranted. This is the case for fostering patterns of civic engagement that alleviate polarization, for example. Perceived importance for that cluster is fairly high, but field capacity is low, as

are Madison Initiative investments.²

4. Fostering collaboration is time well spent in strengthening the capacity of grantee clusters.

The Madison Initiative has led to numerous new collaborations among grantees and others in the field. Almost two-thirds of grantees could identify at least one new collaboration resulting directly from their involvement. About half of new collaborations were between Madison grantees, and half were with other organizations (including funders).

Grantees cited specific events (such as the Colaboratory meeting in Baltimore or small in-person meetings between organizations working the same issue) as particular catalysts for the development of new partnerships. Many also highlighted Hewlett’s direct role in connecting them to other grantees, organizations, scholars, and funders.



Grantees expressed a strong desire for even more collaboration. When asked what would most improve the ability of their fields to contribute to the Madison Initiative’s goal, improved collaboration was a among the most frequent suggestions. Though the specific purpose for improved collaboration varied from cluster to cluster, grantees tended to emphasize the reduced “time to impact” that could result from improved alignment, coordination, complementarity (including maintaining a diversity of approaches to a shared problem), or cross-organizational learning—both between nonprofit organizations and between democracy funders.

This finding has implications for how the Madison Initiative team spends its time moving forward. During the Initiative’s initial stages, the team spent a great deal of time getting to know the field, getting to know grantees, and identifying promising “spread bets.” Moving forward, more time fostering within-cluster collaboration through small convenings or one-on-one connections is likely to be seen as valuable.

5. Moving from a diffuse spread bet approach to a more consolidated and flexible grantmaking approach will require consideration of what different cluster areas need to boost their ability to help achieve the goal.

The Madison Initiative’s spread bet strategy has resulted in a diverse portfolio of grantees that include both established players and newer entrants to the field. As the Madison Initiative approaches the

² In addition to examining investments against perceived cluster importance and grantee capacity, it also is important to examine them alongside the relative cost of achieving progress in each cluster based on the scale and nature of the problem. For example, the cost of meaningfully impacting civic engagement may be much more than the cost of supporting impactful bipartisan relationship building programs.

completion of its initial spread bet phase, the team is planning to consolidate its grantmaking so that it moves away from supporting numerous grantees engaged in shorter-term *projects*, and moves toward making longer-term *unrestricted grants* for organizations that are central to the Initiative's strategy and tightly aligned with its goal.

This move will not eliminate future spread betting and experimentation. Rather, it presumes that greater flexibility and sustainability on the grantee level will encourage grantees to experiment and innovate based on their own expertise and ideas, rather than centralizing these decisions within the Foundation.

Grantee survey findings are useful in helping the Foundation to consider both where and how to make longer-term and flexible grants in different cluster areas. Grantees provided valuable insights on how they felt capacity could best be built in their areas of work, which organizations they found most effective among their peers, and which they found to be useful collaborators and partners.

These findings support emerging Foundation thinking that future Madison Initiative grantmaking should focus on leaders and organizations that demonstrate:

- Alignment between the grantee's role and the Madison Initiative's goal. There should be a clear line of sight between an organization's work and the Initiative's goal of supporting deliberation, negotiation, and compromise in Congress. Alignment also will provide sufficient confidence that flexible resources will be deployed in useful ways that support the Initiative's long-term aims.
- Insight to identify opportunities and respond to them in strategic and inspired ways. Grantees clearly conveyed that while some solutions in their fields already have proven promising and are in need of either ongoing support or scaling, the generation of new ideas and continued experimentation also are critical.
- Leadership and credibility to rally others to new or promising causes. Across most clusters, grantees consistently said that increasing capacity in their fields requires more collaboration among democracy reformers. Organizations that have the inclination and ability play a convening or a connecting role are considered particularly valuable to the work.
- Organizational ability to move or re-prioritize resources without upsetting stability. This does not mean that the biggest organizations with the most resources are always the best choices. It means identifying organizations with infrastructure that allows them to adapt the deployment of their resources and expertise to the highest and best uses as circumstances evolve.

6. Grantees support continued inclusion of conservative and libertarian voices.

Achieving the Madison Initiative's goal clearly requires engaging with grantees across the political spectrum. To date, the Madison Initiative has been reaching out to people aligned with both parties by

supporting:

- Bipartisan relationship building that deliberately brings both sides together.
- Organizations that have credibility with both sides of the spectrum, or with one side specifically.

As democracy reform traditionally has been a space for organizations and funders that are more left-leaning than right, many grantees see Hewlett's role in engaging conservative and libertarian voices—and supporting grantees who offer such perspectives on policy and reform options—as unique and important. Grantees believe this is key to strengthening the capacity of specific clusters to be effective, particularly the ability of think tanks to make the case for deliberation, negotiation, and compromise, and to generate policy and reform ideas that resonate across the political spectrum.

This finding has implications for Hewlett's selection of grantees in different clusters; how these organizations are perceived among both the left and right will affect their ability to serve different functions (such as fostering collaboration, generating new ideas, reaching particular constituencies, building consensus in the field, etc.). It also suggests the Madison Initiative team should continue its valued role of looking for new opportunities to bring in or further support voices on the right side of the spectrum that previously have not been engaged in democracy reform efforts.

APPENDIX
Madison Initiative Grantees by Cluster

Cluster	Organization
Building bipartisan relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspen Institute (Rodel Fellowship) • Aspen Institute (Congressional Program) • Center for a New American Security • Faith and Politics Institute • Millennial Action Project • Montpelier Foundation • National Conference of State Legislatures • No Labels Foundation • National Institute for Civil Discourse
Improving the rules, norms, procedures, and / or capacity of Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research • Brookings Institution • Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget • Federalist Society • George Mason University • George Washington University • Indiana University • Congressional Research Service • Partnership for a Secure America • Partnership for Public Service • Project on Government Oversight • R Street Institute
Developing and sharing information to support reform efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research • Bipartisan Policy Center • Brookings Institution • Center for American Progress • Foundation Center • Michigan State University • National Affairs Inc. • New America Foundation • Social Science Research Council • Stanford University • Washington Monthly
Illuminating and / or reforming existing patterns of campaign finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brigham Young University • Campaign Finance Institute • Campaign Legal Center Inc • Center for Responsive Politics • GuideStar • Issue One • National Institute on Money in State Politics • New Hampshire Rebellion • Represent.Us Education Fund • Take Back Our Republic • University of Massachusetts

Cluster	Organization
Modernizing systems for voter registration and election administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massachusetts Institute of Technology • Pew Charitable Trusts
Reforming election rules (e.g., ranked choice voting, primaries, or districting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FairVote • Voters First
Fostering patterns of civic engagement that alleviate polarization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen University • Ethics and Public Policy Center • Franklin Project • Living Room Conversations • Roosevelt Institute • University of Texas at Austin • Voice of the People
Understanding and improving media coverage of Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Press Institute • Pew Charitable Trusts • Texas Tribune
Improving the information that voters have at their disposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maplight • John S. and James L. Knight Foundation • Seattle City Club
Increasing voter turnout in primary elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of California at San Diego • Yale University