MacArthur Foundation
X-Grants Evaluation

Summary of Findings
May 2018

Overview

1. Evaluation Overview

2. X-Grants Overview

3. Findings

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Evaluation Overview: Timeline

Phase I:
Evaluation Design

Phase II:
Evaluation Implementation

Phase III:
Evaluation Report

Activities

- Document Review
- Internal Interviews
- Outline Evaluation Plan
- Develop data collection tools

- Schedule Interviews
- Conduct interviews
- Manage interview and survey processes
- Review grant processes and workflow
- Analyze administrative cost/benefit
- Aggregate data from all sources

- Synthesize findings
- Draft initial findings report
- Refine and finalize report

Timeline

December 2016 to January 2017

January 2017 through March 2018

March to April 2018

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Evaluation Overview: Administrative Analysis (2017)
Key Findings (For Reference)

Overall X-Grants is an incredibly helpful program to Program Officers. This is demonstrated by its growth and the fact that it has been institutionalized beyond the pilot.

Many of the findings from the Administrative Analysis were consistent with the Phase I Benefit/Cost analysis.

- IIE[1] will be able to execute grants in a more timely manner than MacArthur

- Program staff support IIE's involvement in the process, as it allows them to fund timely projects and reduces their administrative workload

- If the program were to be brought in-house, practices and procedures need to be reviewed in order to maintain the integrity of the program (providing smaller timely grants)

- Grants Management remains central to this conversation, and if X-Grants are brought in-house careful planning would be required for a smooth transition

Source: X-Grants Administrative Analysis (April 2017)
[1]IIE is contracted by MacArthur Foundation to serve as the administrator of the X-Grants process

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Evaluation Overview: Research Questions

1. How can the learnings from the evaluation inform future X-Grants planning?

    a. How was the X-Grants incorporated into the 2017 budget? How were the budget amounts determined?

    b. Why were Program staff interested in making X-Grants? Did this differ from 2015?

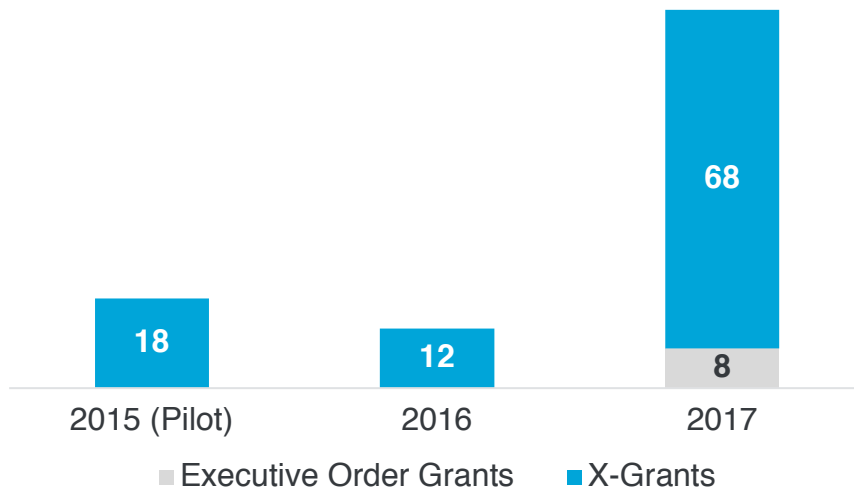   c. What are the key learnings from the planning process for X-Grants 2017 that can inform X-Grants 2018?

2. How did the Foundation staff use the X-Grants as a tool for advancing their work?

    a. How were the X-Grants used in 2016 and if applicable in 2017? How does this compare/contrast to past years of the program (2015, 2016)?

    b. What is the grantee's perspective on how the X-Grant helped them achieve their objectives?

    c. How were X-Grants used to support a design/build approach?

    d. How were X-Grants used to support Big Bets and Enduring Commitments?

    e. What are the key learnings from a programmatic perspective that can inform the X-Grants program in the future?
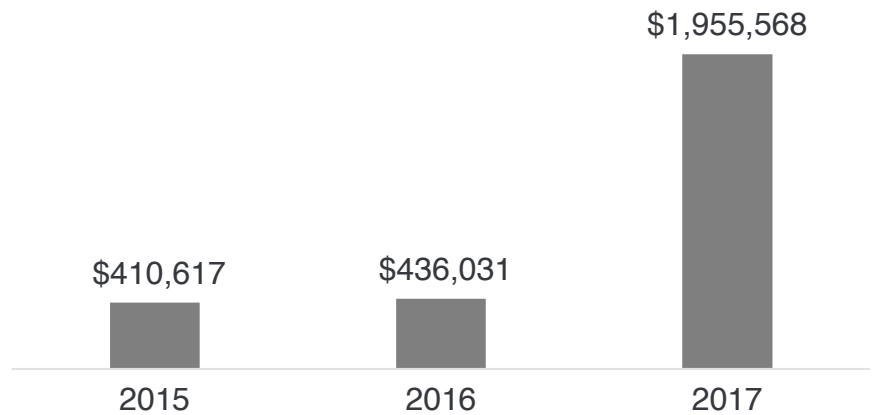
X-Grants Overview

X-Grants Overview

Since inception, 106 X-Grants have been made. Grants were made in 13 of MacArthur Foundation's program areas and supported projects in all of the four available categories: attending a meeting, convening a meeting, research and knowledge building.
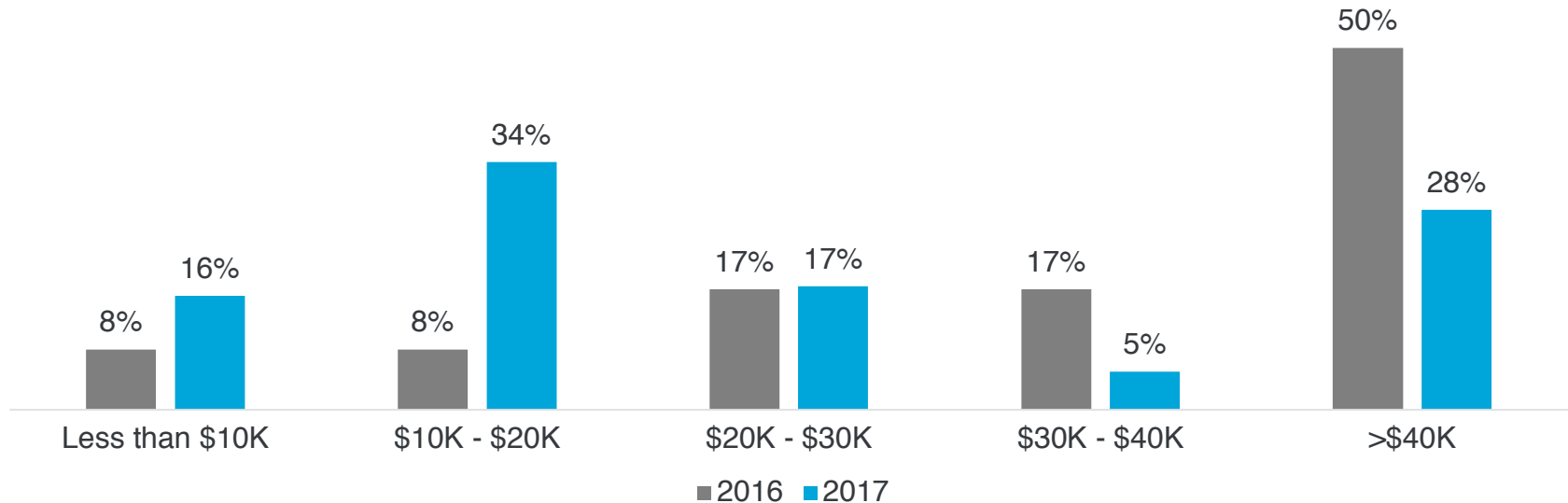
Total Number of Grants

Year	Executive Order Grants	X-Grants
2015 (Pilot)		18
2016		12
2017	8	68

■ Executive Order Grants   ■ X-Grants

Total Amount Granted

Year	Amount
2015	$410,617
2016	$436,031
2017	$1,955,568

Source: X-Grants Tracking Data (2015, 2016, 2017)

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X-Grants Overview

Grants in 2016 and 2017 were made at different levels depending on the purpose and the organization. This graph represents the distribution of grants by size.
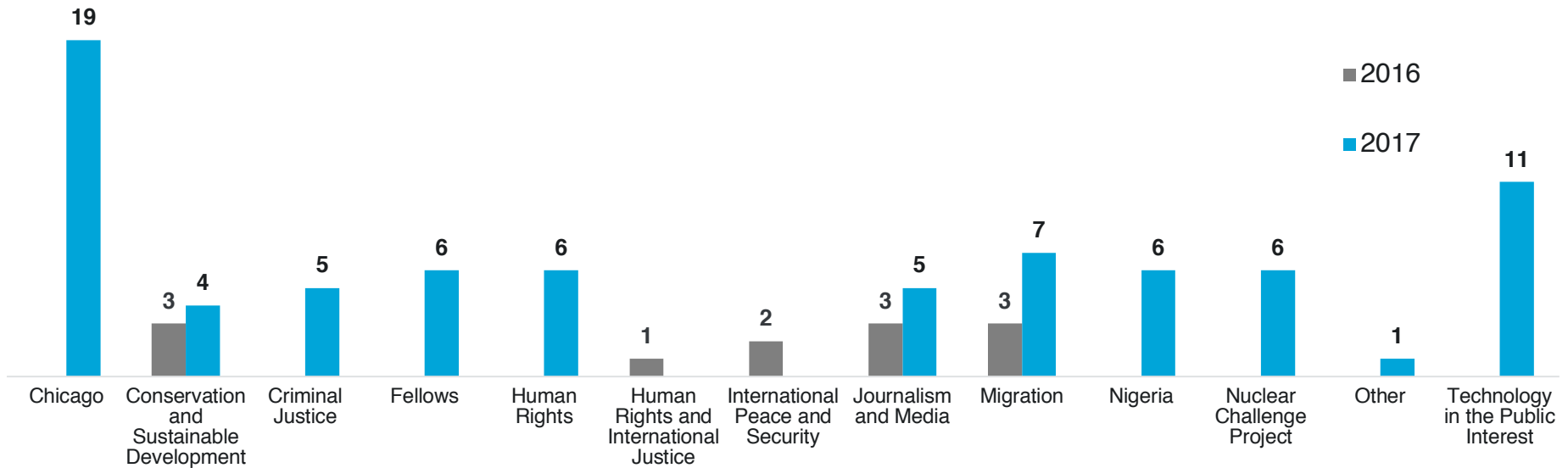
Grants by Size

Legend: ■ 2016 ■ 2017

Categories: Less than $10K, $10K - $20K, $20K - $30K, $30K - $40K, >$40K

Less than $10K: 2016 8%, 2017 16%
$10K - $20K: 2016 8%, 2017 34%
$20K - $30K: 2016 17%, 2017 17%
$30K - $40K: 2016 17%, 2017 5%
>$40K: 2016 50%, 2017 28%

Source: X-Grants Tracking Data (2016, 2017)

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X-Grants Overview

Number of Grants by Program Area

Legend: ■ 2016 ■ 2017

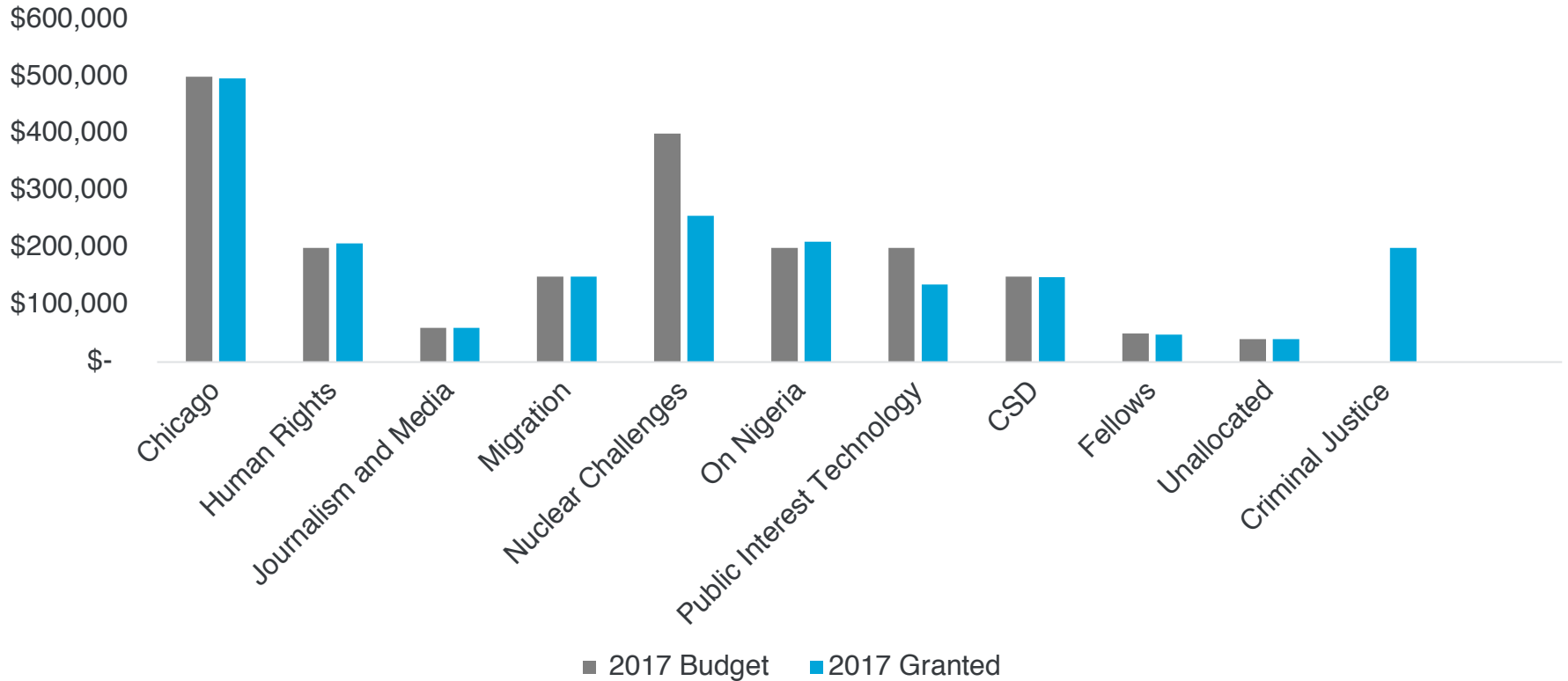| Program Area	2016	2017
Chicago		19
Conservation and Sustainable Development	3	4
Criminal Justice		5
Fellows		6
Human Rights		6
Human Rights and International Justice		1
International Peace and Security	2	
Journalism and Media	3	5
Migration	3	7
Nigeria		6
Nuclear Challenge Project		6
Other		1
Technology in the Public Interest		11

Source: X-Grants Tracking Data (2016, 2017)

Note: During the X-Grants Pilot in 2015, Grants were made by the following program teams: HRIJ, Migration, CSD, Criminal Justice, IPS, GSE, Discovery and Cities

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X-Grants Overview

2017 Budgeted vs. Granted

NOTE: Budget data was unavailable for Criminal Justice

Source: X-Grants Tracking Data (2016, 2017)

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Findings

Findings

1a. How was X-Grants incorporated into the 2017 budget? How were the budget amounts determined?

- Program teams noted that there was "not a lot of strategy" and that is was "more of art than science" as they incorporated X-Grants into their budget.

- The amount allocated to X-Grants was largely reported to be "based on last year" and a "best guess" of what the teams would need. In some cases, Program teams increased the allocation.

- Some Program teams noted that once their budget was drafted, they were presented with an opportunity to allocate more dollars to X-Grants and they took advantage of this opportunity.

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Findings

1a. How was X-Grants incorporated into the 2017 budget? How were the budget amounts determined?

- There are some Program teams that have not allocated dollars to X-Grants
  - **Team Example 1:** Noted that they make large grants that already have a fair amount of administrative support and flexibility built into the grant agreements and have not seen a need for X-Grants or a clear way to tie back to strategy.
  - **Team Example 2:** Originally this team did not see a role or purpose for X-Grants within their strategy. However, through their participation in a focus group as part of this evaluation, the team noted several areas that may be beneficial, including conferences and meetings.

- Program officers liked having more control and knowledge about the total amount of grant dollars available. They also preferred having funds allocated to their own program budgets instead of "competing" with other departments.

- Program teams reported a sense of "use it or lose it" with the dollars that were allocated for X-Grants.

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Findings

1a. How was the X-Grants incorporated into the 2017 budget? How were the budget amounts determined?

- Some teams noted that as opportunities came forward they would determine if they wanted to use their administrative budget or X-Grants.
  - **Admin Budget:** Was described as faster. Less likely to get approval for anything over $25K
  - **X-Grants:** For conference or events, teams noted that if they wanted to have "more control" they would fund through admin and if they wanted to have less control and be more hands off, they would use X-Grants

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Findings

1a. How was the X-Grants incorporated into the 2017 budget? How were the budget amounts determined?

"This was a test year to see what comes up. This is a bit of an experiment for us"

"When it moved to our budget, we were conservative. We did not put a lot of money aside as we did not want it to go unused. We will use all of these resources in 2017 ($60K) and will put more aside in 2018 ($400K)"

"We allocated $200K for 2017. We determined our budget by looking at historical information and potential projects coming our way. We allocated the same amount for 2018"

"The use it or lose it effect is crummy; the whole point is flexibility"

"We had a discussions in June for this year's budget. We came up with a number that assumes $50K per grant and added a little more. $50K is the right amount for convenings"

"We looked at all of our grants and considered which ones we plan to renew and new opportunities and that helped us get to our 2018 budget. We then brought this to a nice round number and the gap between the initial number and round number was the amount we allocated for X-Grants. Past patterns brought us to $200K"

"I'd like to say that we had a rigorous and thoughtful process, but we did not. We knew we wanted more than last year"

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Findings

1a. How was the X-Grants incorporated into the 2017 budget? How were the budget amounts determined?

Allocated X-Grant Budget by Program
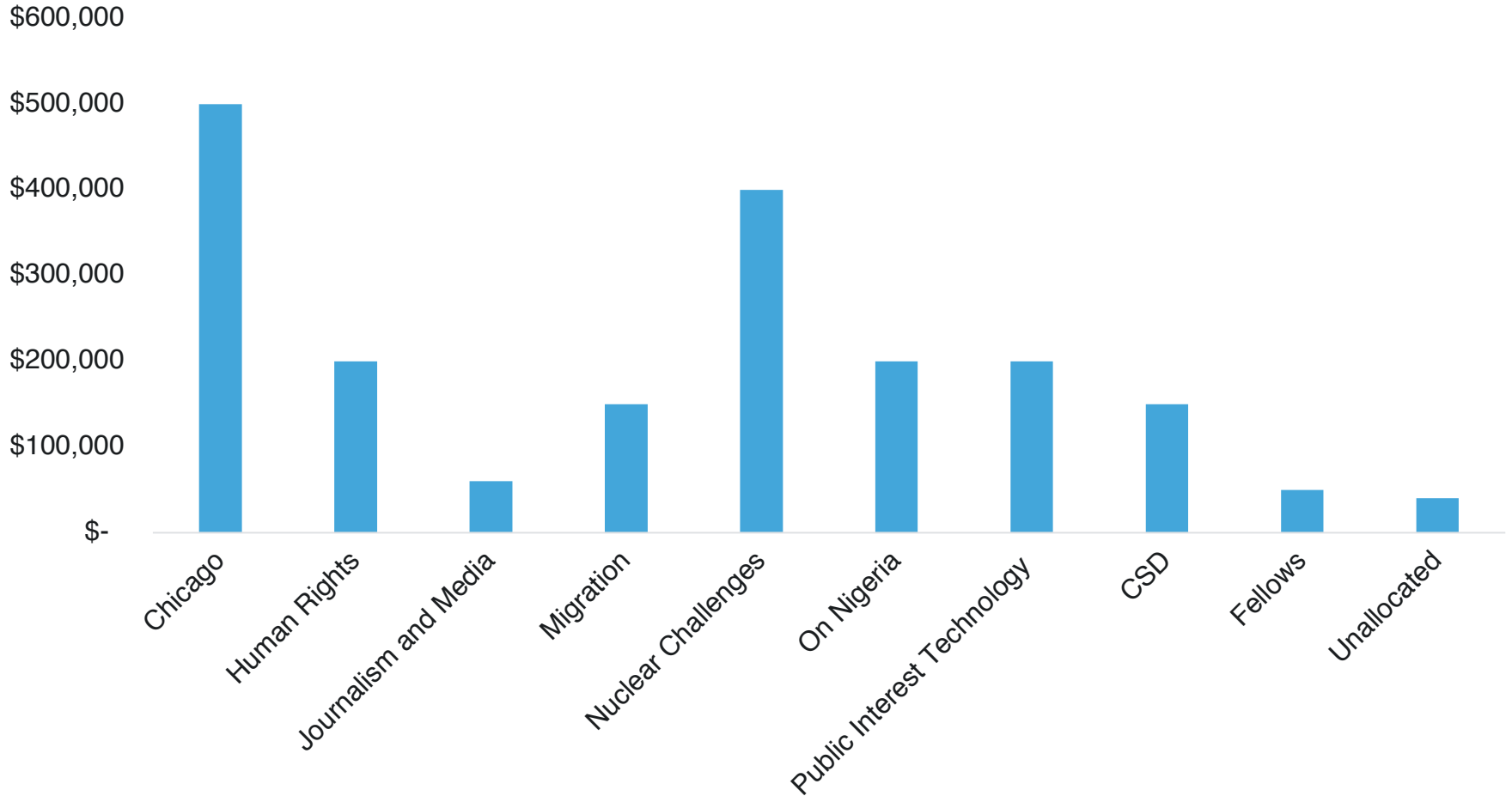
Source: X-Grants Tracking Data (2017)

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Findings

1b. Why were Program staff interested in making X-Grants? Did this differ from 2015?

- X-Grants continue to offer a flexible and nimble mechanism to support existing grantees or explore relationships with new grantees.

- The process is easy and the approvals that are required are minimal.

- At the beginning of the year, Program teams often know 95% of the grants that they are going to make. X-Grants provides some flexibility to test new ideas and/or provide additional support on a project.

- Program teams reported that they are "getting smarter" about how they are using X-Grants.

- At this point in X-Grants history, the grantmaking tool has become institutionalized and allows Program teams to be both responsive and opportunistic.

Source: MacArthur Foundation Staff Interviews and Focus Groups

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Findings

1b. Why were Program staff interested in making X-Grants? Did this differ from 2015?

"Expedited grants that require a one page justification for why we would want to support something. Our normal process for making a grant is much more onerous"

"Real value is to make things easier. We get approached regularly for conference sponsorships and meetings. We were writing full briefs for this type of grant in the past. It is easier on the grant managers, as well. The burden is lifted on all sides"

"Quick access to funds where you might make a regular grant."

"I will personally be making more of these grants now that we have our strategy. I am so excited to have this tool"

"We are able to respond quickly to opportunities and support our grantees. We have not been able to do this at MacArthur Foundation before"

"We have adopted a learning approach to our grantmaking. Premised on the idea that through the work of our grantees, we learn things that inform our strategy. This is the role X-Grants can play, it can help us learn faster."

Staff interest in making X-Grants was consistent from the pilot through present day. The main difference was the number of staff engaged in making X-Grants expanded significantly.

Source: MacArthur Foundation Staff Interviews and Focus Groups

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Findings

1c. What are the key learnings from the planning process for X-Grants 2017 that can inform X-Grants 2018?

- The process feels institutionalized at this point and Program teams value and will be interested in continuing to use this grantmaking mechanism.

- The number of program officers and different initiatives using X-Grants has increased substantially.

- Program officers have an interest to see if the X-Grants efficiency can be brought back to the Foundation grant making processes

- Different from 2016, some of the X-Grants made in 2017 were made in response to the new Administration's policies.*
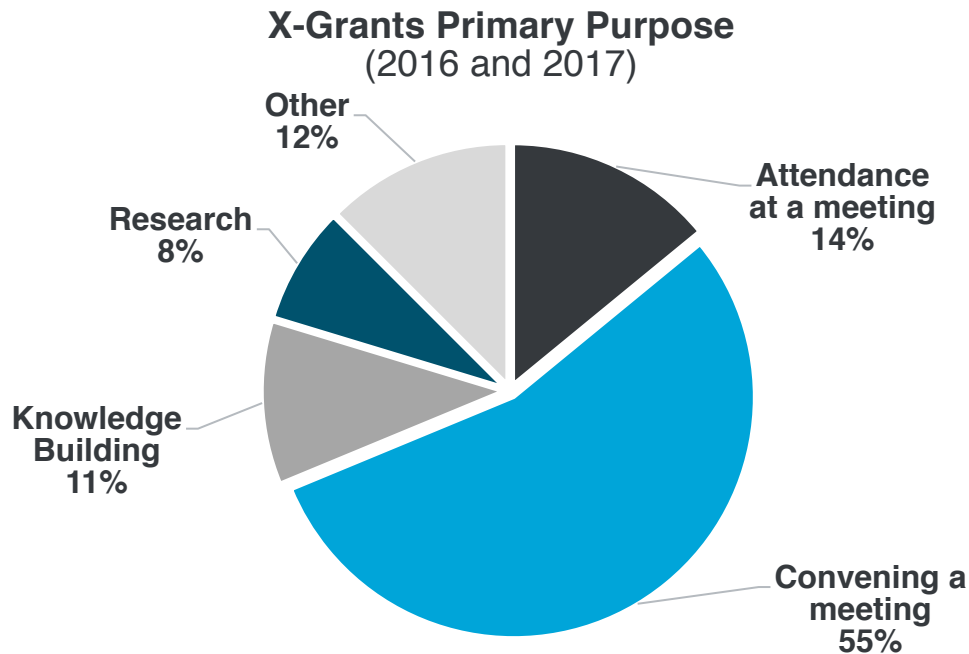
*A separate evaluation of the grants made in response to President Trumps' Executive Orders is included under separate cover.

Source: MacArthur Foundation Staff Interviews and Focus Groups

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Findings

2a. How were the X-Grants used in 2016 and if applicable in 2017? How does this compare/contrast to past years of the program?

In 2016 and 2017, X-Grants were used for projects, activities and initiatives in all four of the defined categories and also activities in an "other" category. In 2015, the majority of X-Grants (68%) were used to convene a meeting, followed by 21% for research and 11% for knowledge building activities.

X-Grants Primary Purpose
(2016 and 2017)

Other
12%

Research
8%

Attendance
at a meeting
14%

Knowledge
Building
11%

Convening a
meeting
55%

Note: The following "other" purposes noted by grantees: Awareness building event, building new alliances, Women of Color Leadership Program, movement building, cross category activities, and one grantee noted that they convened experts to update a document that outlines the legal standards of care for certain groups.

Source: X-Grants Grantee Survey (64 responses)

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Findings

2b. What is the grantee's perspective on how the X-Grant helped them achieve their objectives?

X-Grants continue to be valuable to and useful for grantees. 96% of grantees agreed that the X-Grant enabled their organization to meet a need in a timely manner

The funding secured through this grant enabled our organization to meet a need in a timely manner

Disagree
2%

Strongly
Disagree
2%

Agree
15%

Strongly
Agree
81%
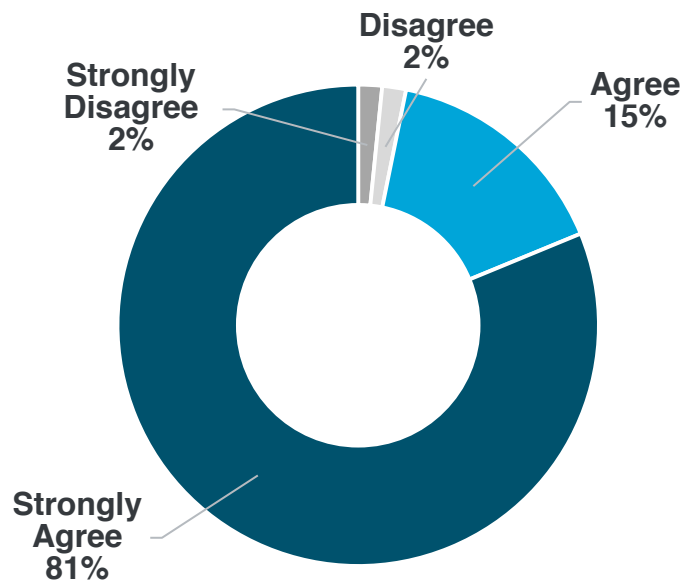
"This was the first time we designed, prepped and convened a meeting like this, which meant that our costs were very slightly higher than the grant amount. The grant allowed us to complete a very important activity that would not have been possible without the quick turnaround." – Grantee

"The funding from this grant was a godsend - it let us push out a key research paper by a December 21 deadline. It came through quickly, and with very little paperwork - a very rare thing in this space." – Grantee
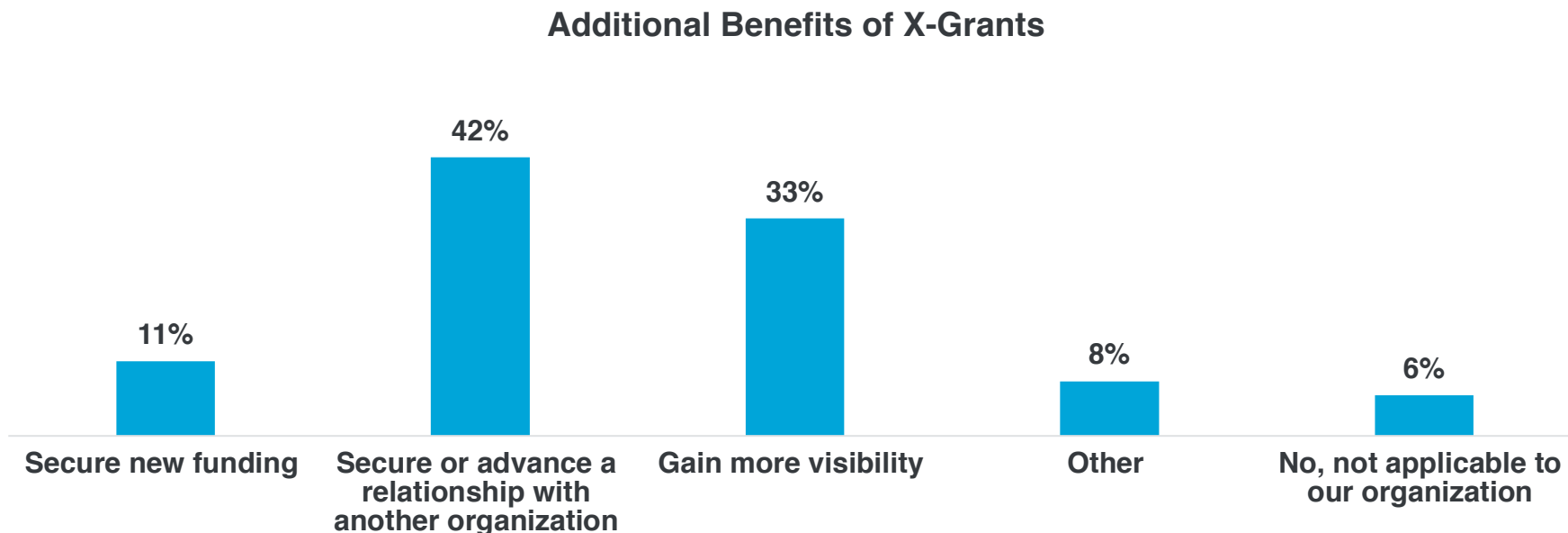
"Due to the timing of the funding, it did not cover the full cost of the activity, we had to return over $5,000 that we intended to use for the second portion of our activity." – Grantee

Source: X-Grants Grantee Survey (64 responses)

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Findings

2b. What is the grantee's perspective on how the X-Grant helped them achieve their objectives?

Grantees noted a range of additional benefits associated with X-Grants.

Additional Benefits of X-Grants

11%	Secure new funding
42%	Secure or advance a relationship with another organization
33%	Gain more visibility
8%	Other
6%	No, not applicable to our organization

Note: The following "other" benefits included: provided for additional deliberation on an important topic, launched an outreach and engagement campaign, lent credibility to a new concept, met a commitment to transparency by our organization, organized a convening that led the grantee to shut down their organization and relaunch with a new mission and vision, supplemented support received from another organization, and included MacArthur Foundation perspective in our planning and conversations with other donors.

Source: X-Grants Grantee Survey (64 responses)

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Findings

2c. How were X-Grants used to support a design/build approach?

Program staff reported a variety of ways that X-Grants were used to support a design/build approach

- Explored new complementary issues

- Engaged with new organizations and/or start new relationships

- Tested assumptions and new concepts or pilots and provided quick feedback

- Supported convenings and conferences which contributed to the field, educated the field, leveraged relationships and garnered additional funding

- Supported strategic initiatives that were responsive to needs in the field

- Advanced the learning approach to grantmaking

Source: X-Grants Grantee Survey (64 responses)

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Findings

2c. How were X-Grants used to support a design/build approach?

"I think of it as an opportunity for exploratory grantmaking mainly for convenings. We can decide pretty quickly and be more responsive"

"It is great news for grantees especially when you are dealing with something urgent"

"We know almost 95% of the grants we are going to make in the year. This provides some flexibility if we meet a new grantee going into the year"

"It furthers our strategic goals and it is a faster turnaround"

"Allows us to be more responsive to what is happening in the field and to provide some flexibility that wouldn't necessarily fit within the strict boundaries of the strategy"

"Beginning to establish an identity for the Foundation as one that is nimble and easy to respond. We are looking for ways to complement our existing work"

Source: X-Grants Grantee Survey (64 responses)

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Findings
2d. How were X-Grants used to support Big Bets and Enduring Commitments?

- Used inside of existing strategies

- Positioned Foundation to build particular capacity of an organization

- Positioned Foundation to build relationships to advance Big Bets and Enduring Commitments

- Offered an opportunity to make grants to organizations that are not current grantees and to build out a network

Source: X-Grants Grantee Survey (64 responses)

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