The Columbus Foundation Survey of Community Foundations

What is the Columbus Survey?

The Columbus Survey is the **annual "census" of the community foundation field**. Begun in 1988 by the Columbus Foundation, it represents a **comprehensive longitudinal view** of community foundation activity in the United States.

Transitioned to CF Insights in 2008, the Columbus Survey is now stored in CF Insights' **centralized online database**. The Survey collects basic **operating metrics** including assets, gifts, grants, and expenses to identify and track trends on operating models.

Broad participation in this endeavor enables trends to be understood at a field-wide level, and allows community foundations to perform peer benchmarking using our on-demand reports.

Why should my foundation participate in the Columbus Survey?

Field-wide benchmarks are only as strong as the community foundation representation in the survey. CF Insights, a resource to the field on peer benchmarking and knowledge sharing, conducts the survey for the benefit of the field to understand large scale trends and insights.

In thanks for your participation in the survey, you'll receive access to the following reporting tools and research:

- **Field-wide trend report –** an annual report on trends in the field, with companion resources featuring lists of the top 100 community foundations for a selection of metrics

- **Online benchmarking reports –** on-demand reports that highlight your community foundation's performance compared to a peer aggregate and the field

- *For CF Insights members*, peer identified online benchmarking reports – customizable peer benchmarking reports for CF Insights members that illustrate their community foundation's performance relative to a selected peer set

How long will it take to complete the Columbus Survey?

Past participation indicates it takes between **fifteen minutes to an hour** to complete the survey, depending on the complexity of your organization (number of supporting organizations, corporate/trust, etc).

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How can my foundation participate in the Columbus Survey?

It's easy! The Survey is online and accessible at any time.

1 **Log in** at www.cfinsights.org

If you have any questions regarding your access to the CF Insights database, contact David Rosado (dar@foundationcenter.org) for help or to acquire a username and password.

2 **Enter your financial information**

Either audited or unaudited figures are welcome. Most of the data you'll enter will reflect common metrics such as total assets, gifts, grants and expenses. There are also some geographic profiling questions.

3 **Access field-wide benchmarking reports**

Log-in required to access reports

The survey is always open, allowing you to update information at any time.

How do you standardize definitions for data collection?

Most community foundations have questions about the standardized definitions we use for data collection. Here are some tips:

· **For any definition,** hover over the blue ? icon next to any data field to see its definition

· **For asset, gift and grant numbers,** answer these fields as if you were preparing your 990; assets per audit is also collected to eliminate inter-entity transactions

· **Supporting organizations**, if they file a separate 990 from the community foundation, are entered in separate lines to allow for easier updating

· **Core operating expenses** include all administrative expenses for your foundation, as you have indicated on your budget; this number does not include any grant dollars. It represents total personnel + non-personnel expenses

· **Special initiative expenses** should be separated out for more detailed benchmarking; does not include any grant dollars

· **Population of area served** is the aggregate population your community foundation serves – whether it be a single or multiple counties, a region, or an entire state

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