



Helping Good Ideas Go Further

By Larry Kramer September 18, 2014

At bottom, philanthropy is about finding good ideas and providing the resources to see them tested, improved, implemented, and, if all goes well, brought to scale. Good ideas are essential but not by themselves enough. Even the best idea fades away without proper support, without a plan for making sure the right people hear about it, without effective advocates to press for its adoption. We do our best to use the resources at our disposal to help spread good ideas. And while it may sound peculiar to hear this from an organization with an endowment in excess of \$8 billion, the fact is that there is only so much we can do by ourselves, and often it's not enough. We need to find other ways to get the good ideas we support the widest possible hearing.

The changes we've made in our practices related to [openness and transparency](#) are in service of this goal—sharing what we learn with others so they can build on our successes (and avoid our failures). Now it's time to take that one step further.

The Hewlett Foundation has for many years supported open licensing—a simple way to displace traditional copyright that facilitates and encourages sharing intellectual property. Grants to organizations like Creative Commons, which established and maintains a set of these open licenses, and to the many nonprofits that have received funds as part of our Open Educational Resources strategy, have helped to create the legal, cultural, and intellectual infrastructure for more open sharing of ideas. And we have long made information about our grant making available under one of Creative Commons' licenses (as you can see by clicking [the link](#) at the bottom of this, and every, page of our website).

The benefits of open licenses are clear, and they are substantial. Reducing the burdens and removing the risks associated with ordinary copyright—making it easier for others to use, share, and build on work—magnifies the impact of new research and good ideas. Everybody wins.

For that reason, beginning this year we will ask grantees to license materials created with our grant dollars. More specifically, the Hewlett Foundation now requires that grantees receiving project-based grants—those made for a specific purpose—openly license the final materials created with those grants (reports, videos, white papers, and the like) under the most

recent [Creative Commons Attribution license](#). We also will require that the materials be made easily accessible to the public, such as by posting them to the grantee's website. These requirements do not apply to grants made for general operating support of an organization or a program or center within an organization, because they are incompatible with the nature of general support. We do very much hope, however, that the positive experience of openly licensing materials created with project-based grants will lead grantees to do so for all their work.

That last paragraph comes from a new document in the "Values and Policies" section of our website, [Commitment to Open Licensing](#). It explains why we are making this change, what the new policy covers, and how we intend to implement it.

We recognize that any time we place new requirements on grantees, we're asking them to change practices, and we want to be sure that the benefit from the change outweighs the cost of making it. To that end, we're rolling this new requirement out to our programs slowly—we'll continue to refine our internal practices, learn from how grantees respond, and make adjustments as needed. If the open license we suggest isn't appropriate for a particular grant, we'll work with the grantee to find one that is.

As with all of our efforts aimed at increasing transparency and openness, we're making this change because we believe that this kind of broad, open, and free sharing of ideas benefits not just the Hewlett Foundation, but also our grantees, and most important, the people their work is intended to help.

Solving the kinds of challenges the Hewlett Foundation chooses to address requires good ideas, but ideas are not enough. Asking grantees to make sure their ideas are shared, so others can learn from and build on them, will help those ideas go further, be challenged and strengthened, and, in the end, do more good.