FRACKING SURVEY 2012

Report on NGO and Philanthropic Efforts to Address Impacts of Hydraulic Fracturing

February 2013

In October 2012 the Health & Environmental Funders Network (HEFN) surveyed non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and philanthropic foundations addressing public health, environmental, and community impacts of oil and gas extraction through hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) across the United States. The objective was to compile an initial snapshot of activities and needs emerging in response to the spread of this industrial activity. A total of 81 NGOs and 33 foundations took part in the survey, including many of the organizations most active on this issue. This report summarizes survey results and findings.

Rapid Engagement, Philanthropic Dependence

Engagement of NGOs and foundations on this issue is growing rapidly. The NGOs surveyed reported spending a total of $17.4 million in 2012; they hope to expand that investment of effort to more than double that figure in 2013.

The foundations surveyed reported investing a combined total of $18.3 million in fracking-related grants in 2012. Foundation respondents also projected an increase in their grantmaking on fracking in 2013, but by only a small amount. Significant additional increases in philanthropic support or other revenue would be required to meet field aspirations and sustain its growth.

Survey results found that philanthropic support has been critical for NGOs working on fracking. Some 65% of nonprofit expenditures on fracking in 2012 were supported by foundation grants, as compared to just 14.3% of 2011 expenditures for the whole U.S. environmental non-profit sector.¹ Survey comments underscored this reliance on grant revenue and flagged concerns about its sustainability:

“Funders have a tendency to stampede from fad to fad, resulting in a ‘boom and bust’ cycle of funding that prevents success. As with any issue, success will come based on long-term commitment of resources. Jumping in with big piles of cash and demanding deliverable results on a one- or two-year timeframe is both unrealistic and an obstacle to success.” – NGO respondent

The 81 NGO respondents reported a total of 254 full-time equivalent staff working on fracking issues. The median number of dedicated issue staff per organization, however, was just 1.5, and the median expenditure on fracking-related work was just $75,000. These findings suggest a diverse nonprofit landscape with many small and local-level groups involved.

Most Activity at State or Local Level

Both NGO and funder respondents reported a primary focus on state or local activity, with 68.6% of NGO expenditure directed to this community-focused work, along with 83% of foundation grants.

The survey found some level of NGO activity in 43 out of the 50 U.S. states. In states with the most NGO activity, upwards of 25 different groups reported engagement. The survey also found that the majority of 2012 NGO and foundation expenditures on fracking-related work were focused on the Marcellus Shale formation. By contrast, in other states there was NGO activity reported without any corresponding foundation investment.

“The strength of the fracking movement is its grassroots power…” –NGO respondent

**Strong Alignment of Motivations and Goals**

When asked about their motivations for engaging on this issue, there was striking alignment among funders and advocates. Both cited top concerns about water quality, public health, and environmental conservation.

“At the national level, both political parties focus on domestic energy production, with little regard to costs.” –NGO respondent

“While the public wants clean air, clean water and to protect our wild places, the gas drilling industry spends money hand-over-fist to sway decision makers.” –NGO respondent
The survey also found strong alignment between NGO and foundation respondents about the outcomes being sought. Both sectors pointed to promoting better public understanding of the impacts of fracking as a top priority (receiving 43.9% of NGO votes and 44.7% of those from foundations).

Varying Emphases on Tactics

The survey found more divergence among nonprofits and foundations regarding the tactics they are prioritizing. The NGO respondents gave highest priority to communications work and raising public awareness, whereas foundations reported looking more towards policy and regulatory reform in order to secure change. Responses about forthcoming priorities also suggested potential convergence around tactics, as many foundation respondents identified a need for increased investment in communications work.

“Much of the advocacy on this issue occurs via communications (events, social media, news publications), and NGOs need to bolster their skills in this area.” – NGO respondent

More Field Capacity and Connections Sought

The survey asked several questions relating to funding needs in the field. As illustrated in Figure 5, respondents identified various needs for additional resources, with information, research, organizing, and communications capacity all seen as priorities. Most respondents reported a sense that NGOs are doing strong grassroots work, and that even more capacity of this kind is needed in order to expand public outreach and constituency engagement.

While the survey found mixed views on the need for a new national campaign, there was broad enthusiasm for the idea of national meetings to facilitate networking, learning and strategizing among NGOs in the field, as well as for better field access to resources like speakers’ bureaus, technical expertise, and litigation capacity.
Our organizing efforts would certainly benefit from more scientific data around methane leakage during the process, more examples of how the industry’s economic promises were not realized in actual fracked communities and more energy outlook analysis showing how we can meet our energy needs with efficiency and renewables as opposed to major new investments in natural gas, which is driving the demand for fracked gas.” –NGO respondent

“This issue has so many angles, no one organization is likely to have the ability to be effective working alone. New forms of partnerships, collaboration and coordination need to be developed to leverage each group’s abilities.” –Funder respondent

Conclusions

Concerns about impacts of fracking have escalated quite rapidly within the non-profit and foundation sectors, as this industrial activity spreads across U.S. communities, ecosystems, and public lands. The HEFN 2012 national survey was intended to take an initial snapshot of activity, in order to better understand the landscape and inform decisions about future work. The 2012 survey found a vibrant and expanding field of non-profit organizations addressing the issue, supported by a growing number of philanthropic foundations.

The survey also highlighted considerable alignment across respondents around priority concerns about water and health impacts as well as around the importance of expanding public awareness and engagement. It is worth noting that such apparent alignment is arising from a dispersed field, largely ahead of the development of extensive national coordination infrastructure. These aggregated responses suggest a strong base of civic concern which is likely to inform both the philanthropic and non-profit communities in the months ahead.

This report was authored by Jon Cracknell as a consultant to the HEFN survey project. The survey project was undertaken with support from the 11th Hour Project of the Schmidt Family Foundation; organizational contacts information from NetCentric; guidance by an advisory committee including Lauren Davis, 11th Hour Project; Philip Johnson, Heinz Endowments; and Heeten Kalan, New World Foundation; and with HEFN staff support from Ramtin Arablouei, Andrea Levinson, and Kathy Sessions. For more information about the survey project or the HEFN working group for funders concerned about public health, environmental, and community impacts of fracking, contact info@hefn.org.

For more information, please visit www.HEFN.org.