Title: Philanthropic investments and higher education: Is funding moving away from the university?

By Nabih Haddad

Michigan State University

Abstract

Researchers have taken note of the policy involvement among philanthropic foundations in the higher education. In particular, philanthropists have increasingly relied on intermediary organizations (IOs)—boundary spanning entities that operate between systems—to participate in policy implementation. To what extent have philanthropic investments shifted away from colleges and universities and toward these intermediating entities? Through statistical analysis, semi-structured interviews, and network analysis, this mixed-method study empirically assesses the grant-making trends among six of the most active postsecondary funders. Using an original data set of over $1 billion in higher education filtered grants, the findings demonstrated that philanthropic funding approaches has changed from 2006 to 2012. Specifically, funders are more willing to invest resources to IOs than they've have done so in the past, especially for college completion and student success efforts.

Keywords: Higher education policy; college completion; philanthropy; mixed-methods; regression analysis; social network analysis

Introduction

Many scholars have taken note of policy involvement among major philanthropic organizations in higher education (Barnhardt, 2017; Bernstein, 2014; Clotfelter, 2007; Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Hall & Thomas, 2012; Kelly & James, 2015). As Drezner (2017) has posited, "…[f]oundations, individuals, and corporations are involved in the funding of and wielding of influence on education worldwide" (p. vii). While philanthropists have always worked to promote an array of agendas and reforms in higher education (Barnhardt, 2017; Bernstein, 2014; Slaughter & Silva, 1980; Thelin & Trollinger, 2014), their approach has drastically changed since newer philanthropists like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Gates) and the Lumina Foundation (Lumina) have entered the scene (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Hall & Thomas, 2012). Not only have these two newer funders introduced "advocacy philanthropy" to the field, which is a close cousin of venture philanthropy (Bernstein, 2014; Hall & Thomas, 2012; Kelly & James, 2015), there has also been an increase in purposeful convergence in higher education grant making (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018).

One way in which educational philanthropists have engaged in the policy arena has been through the use of intermediary organizations (IOs) (Gandara, Rippner & Ness, 2017; Hall & Thomas, 2012; Kelly & James, 2015; Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Reckhow, 2010, 2013). Specifically, IOs are entities that operate between funding agencies and the systems they are seeking to influence or improve (Gandara, Rippner & Ness, 2017; Honig, 2004). These "middle managers" have been important policy actors in promoting educational reforms in higher education—such as Complete College America, an advocacy entity that has worked with lawmakers and institutional leaders to promote college completion and student success reforms across the country (Gandara, et al., 2017; e.g., Honig, 2004). Furthermore, IOs

have taken on many approaches; they can broker relationships, provide technical assistance, or support capacity building efforts (Honig, 2004; Ness, & Tandberg, & McLendon, 2015; Lubienski, Scott, & DeBray, 2011; Scott & Jabbar, 2014).

Scholars have posited that the newer, more advocacy-oriented philanthropists have been more willing to fund IOs over traditional higher education institutions, like colleges and universities (Gandara, et al., 2017; Hall & Thomas, 2012; Kelly & James, 2015). As Hall and Thomas (2012) have argued, "It appears that contemporary foundations … are increasingly making higher education grants to intermediary entities" (p.18). This trend has been associated with the college completion agenda, a reform movement comprised of a coalition of organizations which seeks to increase the proportion of young adults with a credential beyond high school (Bernstein, 2014; Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Hall & Thomas, 2012; Kelly & James, 2015). To what extent has higher education investments among major funders shifted away from colleges and universities and toward these intermediating entities? This is the motivation behind this study.

Outsourcing Policy Engagement

More recently, this strategy of supporting IOs in higher education policy has been reported in a number of media outlets. For example, on March 15th 2017, *Inside Higher Ed* described a new higher education organization, Higher Learning Advocates, established by the Lumina Foundation—one of the most active funders in postsecondary education—was created with the mission of advancing federal policies designed to promote student success and degree attainment (Fain, 2017). Based in Washington D.C., Higher Learning Advocates aims to shift "federal policy from higher education to higher learning" through research production and advocacy (Fain, 2017, para 3). Higher Learning Advocates not only received its startup

investments from Lumina but has also drew on the foundation's networks to establish its board. According to *Inside Higher Ed*, "[t]he group's attempt to reach both sides of the aisle in Washington is reflected in its initial governing board … which includes some big names in higher education" (Fain, 2017, para 4). Some of its most well-known Republican members are Margaret Spellings, the current president of the University of North Carolina system and the former Bush administration's Secretary of Education; and the former three-time Governor of Michigan, John Engler, who led the National Association of Manufacturers and the Business Roundtable (Higher Learning Advocates, n.d.). On the other side of the aisle is former representative George Miller (a Democrat), who once chaired the Education and Workforce Committee in the House of Representatives (Higher Learning Advocates, n.d.). Miller also had experience working alongside President Barack Obama on issues relating to federal loan policy and workforce development issues (Higher Learning Advocates, n.d.).

Few higher education studies have investigated this trend of mobilizing resources away from universities and colleges and toward IOs in a systematic way. Reckhow's (2013) and Reckhow and Snyder's (2014) scholarship has demonstrated that K-12 investments have shifted away from universities and colleges and toward jurisdictional challengers, entities which act as contenders to the public sector. Furthermore, current literature in K-12 education has suggested that philanthropically-sponsored IOs are not only a growing sector, but a powerful one (Henig, 2013; Hess & Henig, 2015; Scott & Jabber, 2014). As Scott and Jabber (2014) have argued, "[f[oundations have been critical for providing the essential funding for other IOs and their advocacy efforts, without which such organizations would not exist at their current scale and level of policy influence" (p.238). This growing sector of policy actors has challenged some of

the more traditional blocks in K-12 education (Henig, 2013; Hess & Henig, 2015; Scott & Jabber, 2014).

While IOs have been shown to be a burgeoning sector in K-12 education, this has been underexamined in higher education. In a recent paper, Gandaraa, Rippner and Ness (2017) have noted that "…. previous studies have largely overlooked the role of intermediary organizations…in the higher education literature broadly" (p.702). To that end, this study will extend the current empirical literature around higher education philanthropy and IOs by addressing the following questions: (1) To what extent have philanthropic investments among major funders in higher education shifted away from colleges and universities and toward intermediating entities? and (2) What are some of the motivations behind funding IOs? In particular, I will examine six of the largest funders in higher education philanthropy, who set the agenda in the field.

Theoretical framework

The conceptual framework which grounds this study is organizational theory with an emphasis on collective action and resource mobilization (DiMaggio, 1991; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; Weber & King, 2014). Researchers have posited that philanthropic organizations operate within an organizational field of higher education (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018), mobilizing resources for specific outcomes or agendas (Barnhardt, 2017; Cress & Snow, 1996; DiMaggio, 1991; Jenkins, 1998; Jenkins & Eckert, 1986). According to Zald and Useem (1987), this form of mobilizations among actors occurs "to achieve change in the social structure and the allocation of value" (p. 249). One strategy philanthropists have employed is allocating money toward IOs engaged in policy to effectuate field-level changes (Ylvisaker, 1987). As Callahan (2017) has noted, "Gifts to policy groups often go hand in hand with other kinds of giving that aims to have

influence" (p. 76). Mobilization, then, is based on the promotion of a strategic vision as well as influencing normative expectations in fields through policy engagement.

In addition, researchers in K-12 education have demonstrated that IOs have become important policy actors, who tend to be networked with the broader policy landscape (Cooper & Schwchuck, 2015; Honig, 2004; Reckhow, 2013; Scott, Jabbar, Goel, DeBray, & Lubienski, 2015). In particular, Scott and Jabber (2014) noted that foundations play an intermediating role themselves. Specifically, philanthropic organizations can work to broker ideas (Reckhow, Galey, & Ferrare, 2016), or alter the ecology of policy actors (Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). Therefore, resource mobilization may be more than just allocating funds (philanthropic investments), but also emphasizes the role of access to key policy entrepreneurs (social capital) and their networks. According to Clemens (2005), "Mobilization may—and frequently does—run along lines of personal relationships and friendship, but the imagery of social movement theory implies conscious and strategic coordination of action that does not rely on— indeed, typically opposes—coordination that is based on legitimate authority" (p. 357). Thus, this emphasis on field-level mobilization is a fitting theoretical frame for the empirical analysis below.

Methods and Data Sources

Multi-method approach. A mix-method approach is used to examine the research questions noted above (Yin, 2009). Many researchers have drawn on an array of data to assess philanthropic strategies in K-12 education and political science (Greene, 2005; Greene, 2015; Ferrare & Setari, 2018; Hess & Henig, 2015; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Snyder, 2015; Scott & Jabber, 2014; Tompkins-Stange, 2016). Similarly, to systematically investigate the likelihood of foundations funding IOs over colleges and universities, this analysis draws on descriptive and univariate data (Kelly & James, 2015), inferential statistics (Klopott, 2015; Reckhow, 2013),

semi-structured interviews (Cantwell & Haddad, 2017; Thomkins-Stange, 2016), and social network analysis (Ferrare & Setari, 2018; Ferrare & Reynolds, 2016; Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014).

Foundations were selected based on the top funders classified by the Foundation Center (Foundation Center, 2018). The philanthropic organizations sampled are the Carnegie Corporation of New York (Carnegie), the Ford Foundation (Ford), Gates, The Kresge Foundation (Kresge), Lumina, and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (Kellogg) (Table 1). Studies have noted that these philanthropists are some of the most active higher education grant makers (Hall & Thomas, 2012; Kelly & James, 2015; Haddad & Reckhow, 2018), who subsequently set the normative basis in higher education philanthropy.

Table 1.

Foundation Name	Location	Endowment	Grants 2006	Grants 2012
Gates Foundation*	Seattle, WA	$44.3b	N=70	N=347
Carnegie Foundation	New York, NY	$3b	N=80	N=78
Ford Foundation	New York, NY	$12.4b	N=219	N=143
Lumina Foundation*	Indianapolis, IN	$1.4B	N=132	N=167
Kresge Foundation	Troy, MI	$3.6b	N=35	N=94
Kellogg Foundation	Battle Creek, MU	$7.3b	N=83	N=281

Note: Grants extracted and analyzing using the Foundation Center Directory Online. Grants represented have been filtered for "higher education." *Denotes newer/advocacy philanthropists (Hall & Thomas, 2012).

Quantifying Philanthropic Agendas. In order to quantify philanthropic agendas (Reckhow, 2013; Reckhow, 2016), I have created an original data set of over 1,700 filtered grants (representing over $1 billion), filtered for postsecondary education (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018). These 990 tax forms were downloaded from the Foundation Center Online Directory database (Kelly & James, 2015), allowing me to investigate philanthropic agendas empirically.

Each funder's PF-990 tax forms were coded using categorical purposes developed by Kelly and James (2015). This coding outline included purposes around advocacy, policy, research, college completion, general operating support, capital projects, and other thematic areas in higher education (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018).

Similarly, grant recipients were also coded based on institutional types (Ferrare & Reynolds, 2016), which included for-profit firms, government agencies, higher education institutions, media, membership organizations, educational non-profits, and think-tanks (Kelly & James, 2015) (Table 2). For this analysis, two points of time were considered – 2006 and 2012. These dates were important because they represent a policy shift in higher education, in which the completion agenda displaced the goals of advancing postsecondary access (Bernstein, 2014; Kelly & Schneider, 2012). As Kelly and Schneider (2012) have pointed out, "These goals represent more than political talking points or an incremental shift in emphasis: they constitute a fundamental rethinking of priorities in higher education policy" (p.1). Thus, this provides an interesting point of time for higher education funders and policy IOs.

Table 2

Organizational Types Examined	Totals (N=1,635)
For-Profit Firm	N=6
Government Agency	N=69
Higher Education Institution	N=915
Media Outlet	N=18
Membership Organization	N=100
Non-Profit Organization	N=404
Think-Tank/Research Firm	N=123

Source: Data collected and analyzed by author using foundations' PF-990 tax filings extracted from the Foundation Center Online. Represents higher education filtered from 2006 and 2012.

Regression Analysis. To test my hypotheses, I will use a logistic regression analysis, similar to Klopott's (2015) study on K-12 philanthropy, mainly because the dependent variable is

binary. Specifically, the dependent variable is a binary indicator – whether a grant is directed to a non-institutional entity (IO) or not. The independent variables are foundation types (0=new, 1=old), the year grants were authorized (0=2006 or 1=2012), and the interaction term, with the reference groups being 2006 and new funders. IOs were coded as the binary variable "1" and higher education institutions (HEI) were coded as 0. For this analysis, IOs are organizations that do not represent higher education institutions, such as think-tanks/research firms, non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations, governmental agencies, and certain types of membership organizations. For example, traditional membership organizations like the American Council on Education (ACE) was included in the HEI variable because ACE is comprised of higher education presidents, who represents the sector (Bernstein, 2014). These types of membership organizations tend to be different than entities like Achieving the Dream, which are reform-oriented entities.

In addition, the differences between advocacy and older/non-advocacy foundations have been a theme in higher education philanthropy (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Hall & Thomas, 2012; Kelly & James, 2015). Following this line of thinking, I included this distinction as a binary variable in the mixed model. The newer, more advocacy-oriented funders were coded as 1, and the older, more traditional funders were coded as 0. Years authorized were also coded as a binary variable (2006=0; 2012=1). The lme4 packaged for R statistical software was used to run the regression (Bates, Machler, Bolker & Walker, 2015; R Core Team, 2016).

$$IOi = \beta_o + \beta_1 \text{Traditional} + \beta_2 Year\ Authorized + \beta_3 Traditional * Year\ Authorized + e_i$$

Qualitative interviews. Twenty-four semi-structured interviews were conducted with both, foundation officials and representatives of IOs (Table 3). Seventeen informants were interviewed from the philanthropic sector, which included officials from all levels—executive teams, directors of programs, senior program officers, and communications staff members. Interview questions focused on higher education policy engagement and advocacy efforts, with an emphasis on college completion and student success. The rest of the informants came from the nonprofit/policy sectors and were selected to discuss the influence of philanthropists in promoting student success.

Many of these informants had experience at the institutional, regional, and national levels and have received funding from foundations for completion work. Nearly all of the IO informants were referred to me by the foundation officials themselves, who viewed these participants as "knowledgeable insiders" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). NVivo (2015) was used to collect and systemically analyze the 24 interview transcripts (Thomkins-Stange, 2016). An inductive approach was used when gathering and analyzing interview data and themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Thomkins-Stange, 2016).

Table 3

Positions	**N**
Foundation Officials	17
IO/Policy Officials	7
Total	**N=24**

Social network analysis. Lastly, social network analysis was used to examine relationships between philanthropic foundations and the institutional types they supported (Ferrare & Reynolds, 2016; Reckhow et al., 2016; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The existing research on policy networks have demonstrated the importance of organizations brokering and promoting ideas (Lubienski, Scott, & Debray, 2014; Reckhow et al.,

2016). As Kezar (2014) has noted, "[n]ot only do organizations unintentionally shape networks, but organizations can also attempt to influence network creation and direction" (p.106). Therefore, affiliation graphs of higher education funders were created to visualize institutional types that received grants from foundations over time (Ferrare & Reynolds, 2016). These recipient types included institutions of higher education (colleges and universities), non-profit organizations (includes educational non-profits and advocacy organizations), research firms (think tanks), membership organizations, media outlets, and for-profit firms, which is represented in Table 2 above (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Kelly & James, 2015). Lastly, since postsecondary funders have utilized networks to promote reforms (Kezar, 2014), I conducted a network analysis for 2012 to assess which IOs these six funders mobilized support for, similar to Haddad and Reckhow (2018). UCINET was used to conduct these analysis (Borgatti, Everett and Freeman, 2002).

Results

Question 1: To what extent have philanthropic investments among major funders in higher education shifted away from colleges and universities and toward intermediating entities?

Philanthropic Resource Mobilization

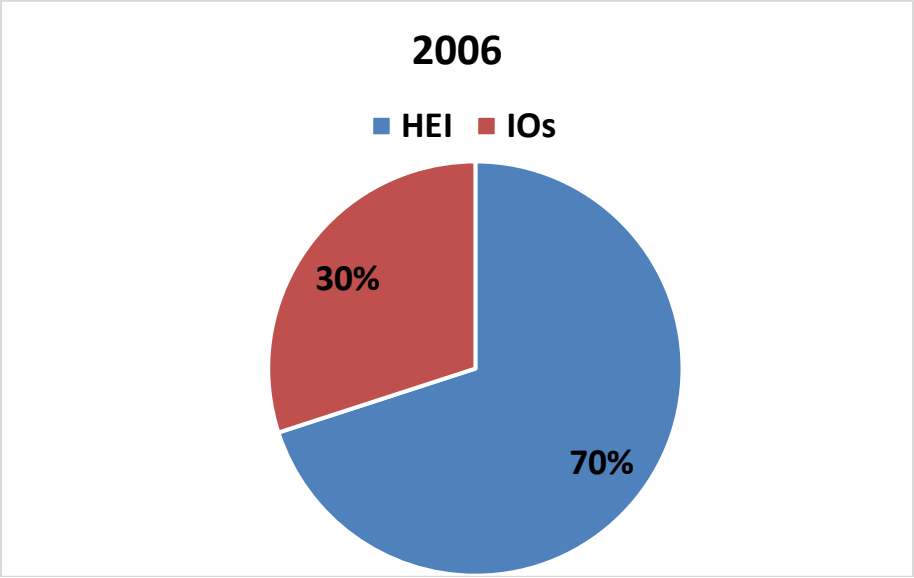
A theme linked to the newer funders in higher education has been their reliance on IOs (Hall & Thomas, 2012; Kelly & James, 2015). Rather than building up the capacity of the postsecondary sector, as traditional philanthropy has done, the advocacy philanthropists have emphasized programmatic and reform efforts (Bernstein, 2014; Haddad & Reckhow, 2018). Interview findings have demonstrated that those in higher education have observed a similar

trend. As one informant who has had experience in both, philanthropy and higher education, described,

> …we no longer see foundations investing routinely in building up the capacity of Higher Ed Institutions. Occasionally gifts are made, a new school of public health here at [redacted] was financed in large part with a big gift from Kellogg. But the goal there was to enhance public health and to make stronger connections between the school of public health and the communities it served, not to build up the University of [redacted]."

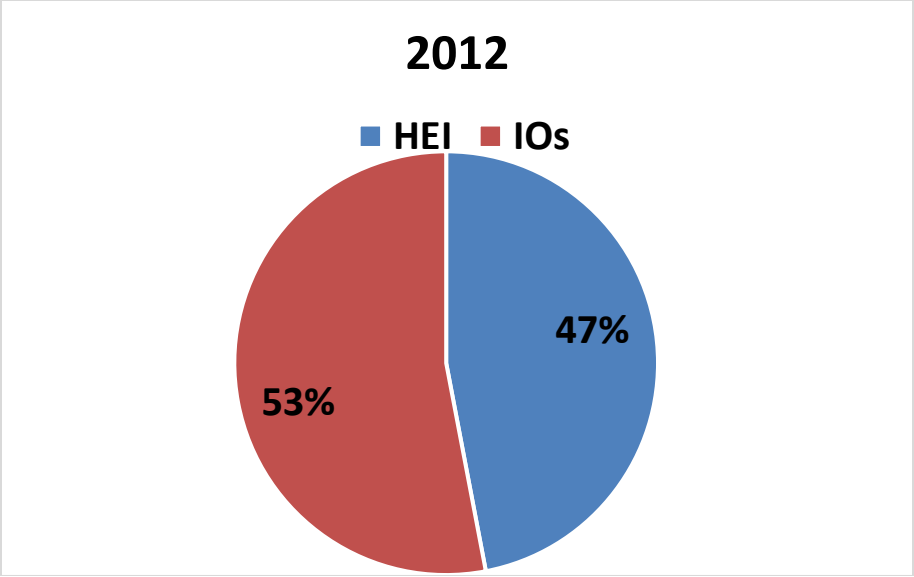
Indeed, informants have emphasized that funders are no longer interested in traditional forms of institutional building efforts, but rather, on programmatic initiatives related to systemic reform. "There was a period in which foundations were involved in institution building in one form or another, because that's how capacity was going to be created. I would say there is a dramatic change in that regard," as the same informant lamented. This trend has been confirmed in my empirical analysis as well. For instance, according to my grant data, in 2006, over 70 percent of higher education grants were directed toward colleges and universities (Figure 1). However, by 2012, this represented less than half of higher education directed grants (47%) (Figure 2). When comparing funding trends between the two years, the sheer amount of IO investments has also increased.

Figure 1



Note: Represents the frequency of grants. Data collected and analyzed by author using foundations' PF-990 tax filings.

Figure 2



Note: Represents the frequency of grants. Data collected and analyzed by author using foundations' PF-990 tax filings.

According to the 990 forms, it was not uncommon to see grants for institutional building efforts "To provide support for new building to house faculty and students for public health research and education" ($250,000) like this 2006 Kellogg grant to the University in Washington. Many older funders, like Kresge, "…used to fund capital projects, bricks and

mortar projects in nonprofits and in of a lot of colleges and universities," as this informant noted, or what can be described as low-leverage forms of higher education philanthropy (Greene, 2005; Greene, 2015; Kelly & James, 2015). Yet, with the influx of IO grants, we start to see more investments intended to broker relationships between philanthropy and higher education, conduct policy research, launch innovations, and engaged in advocacy efforts. For instance, in 2012, the Lumina Foundation provided a $200k grant to the Center for Law and Social Policy "To serve as intermediary for a three-year initiative to test operational and financing models for integrating benefits access services in community colleges." We see a similar trend in dollar amounts as well. Specifically, in 2006, $97.8m went toward IOs, but by 2012, we start to see a significant uptick, with $251m awarded to non-institutional entities (Table 4).

Table 4.

	Philanthropic Investments to Non-Institutional Entities
2006	$97.8m
2012	$251m

Note: Data collected and analyzed by author using foundations' PF-990 tax filings.

Expanding Partnerships in Higher Education

As the data set demonstrates above, funding patterns in higher education philanthropy has changed over time, with regards to the number of grants directed to colleges and universities (Figure 1 and Figure 2). Yet, this only tells one part of the story. In order to examine some of the funding approaches and strategies between these six funders and how they have engaged with IOs, I have created a model without an interaction term (funder types) to examine the main effects of the years grants were authorized and the age of the foundation. Model 1 shows that both, year authorized and funder types (older/traditional) are significant predictors (Table 5). For example, in 2012, foundations were more likely to fund intermediating entities (IOs) than they were in 2006,

controlling for philanthropy type (newer/advocacy funders) (OR=3.073, P<0.001) (Table 5). Overall, Figure 3 demonstrated that funders were more likely to fund IOs in 2012 than they were in 2006. (In both years, foundations were more likely to fund IOs).

Model 1. Main Effects Only

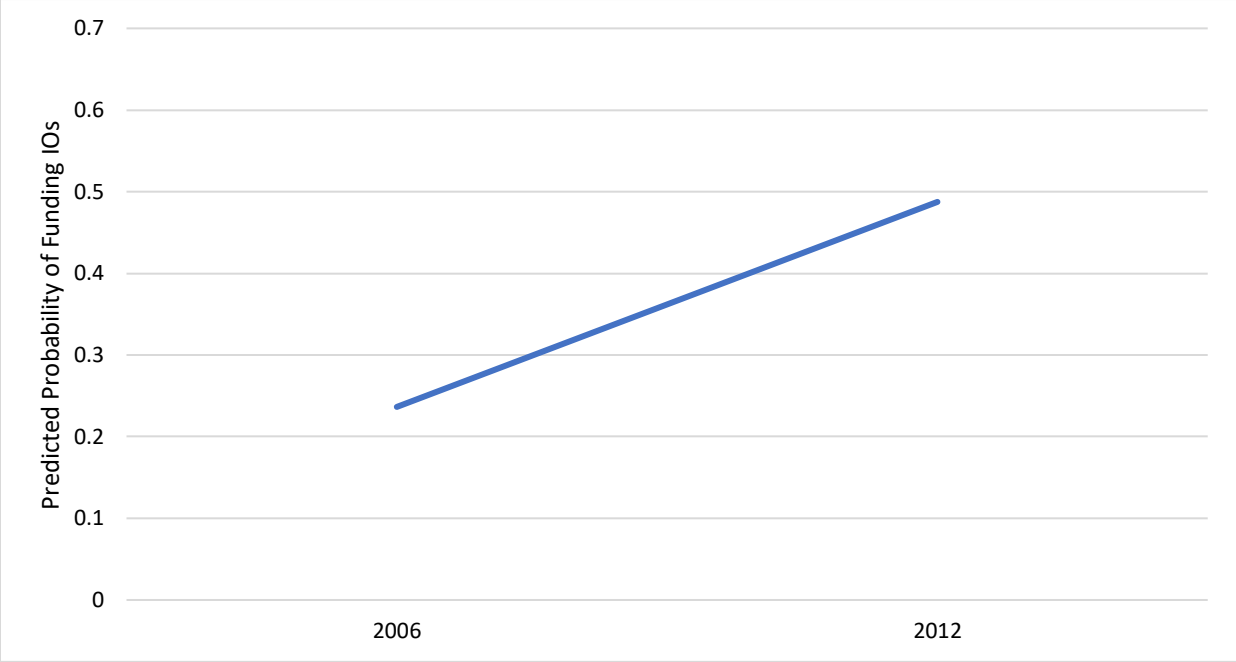
$$IOi = \beta_o + \beta_1 \text{Traditional} + \beta_2 Year\ Authorized + e_i$$

Table 5.

	Log Odds	OR	Standard Error	Z	P-Value
(Intercept)	-1.309	0.270	0.119	-10.998	P<0.001
2012	1.122	3.071	0.113	9.936	P<0.001
Traditional	0.234	1.264	0.104	2.244	0.025

Note: Reference groups are 2006; reference groups for funders were Lumina and Gates, coded as the newer/advocacy foundations.

Figure 3. Predicted Probability of IO Investments



Note: Data collected and analyzed by author using foundations' PF-990 tax filings.

Time predictor was important for this analysis, since many interview participants noted a historical shift in philanthropic strategies. Indeed, as the outputs in Table 5 have demonstrated, funding patters have been changing, and by 2012, funding strategies have shifted towards IOs,

especially when compared to 2006 (Figure 3). Traditional funders in the sample were more likely to give a grant to intermediating entities than the newer foundations were, controlling for years authorized (Table 5). These findings, along with the current empirical higher education philanthropy literature (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Hall & Thomas, 2012), led me to explore the differences between 2006 and 2012 and how they varied between the newer (advocacy) and older (traditional) philanthropists in my sample. In particular, research have demonstrated that there are strategic differences among older and newer funders (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018). Due to the suspicion that there may be variations in strategies, I decided to create a model which allows for differences in slope for traditional and newer funders, represented in Model 2 below.

Model 2. Interaction Model

$$IOi = \beta_o + \beta_1 \text{Traditional} + \beta_2 Year\ Authorized + \beta_3 Traditional * Year\ Authorized + e_i$$

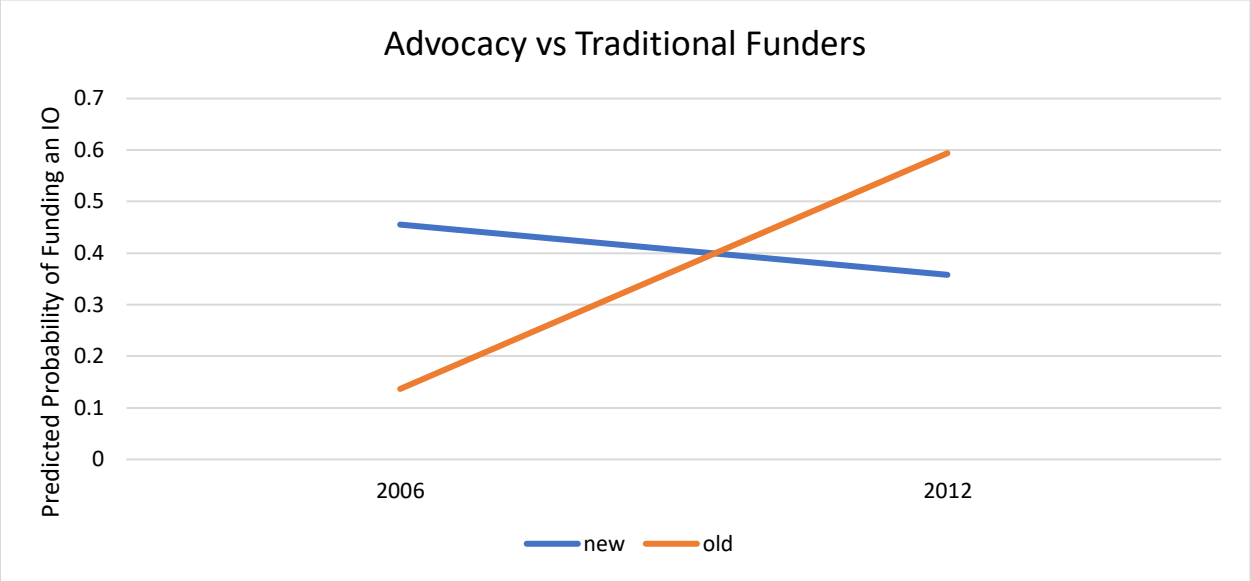
According to Table 6, in 2006, traditionally funders were less likely to fund IOs than the newer funders were (OR=0.189, P<0.001). In 2012, however, newer foundations were less likely to fund IOs than in 2006 (OR=0.667, P=0.016). For older foundations, the probability of funding IOs increase from 2006 to 2012, whereas for newer foundations, the probability slightly decreases from 2006 to 2012 (Figure 4). The added interaction term was large and statistically significant (OR=13.858, P<0.001) and has been visualized in Figure 4 below.

Table 6.

	Log Odds	OR	Standard Error	Z	P-Value
(Intercept)	-0.179	0.836	0.141	-1.265	0.206
2012	-0.405	0.667	0.169	-2.405	0.016
Traditional	-1.664	0.189	0.201	-8.293	P<0.001
2012*Traditional	2.629	13.858	0.236	11.138	P<0.001

Note: Reference groups are 2006; reference groups for funders were Lumina and Gates.

Figure 4. Predicted Probity of IO Investments



Note: Data collected and analyzed by author using foundations' PF-990 tax filings.

Funding trends in 2006 to 2012 is different for traditional funders when compared to the newer philanthropists. For newer funders, we see a more constant probability of funding of IOs (a slight decrease), whereas for older funders, there is a fairly large increase of IOs directed grants (Figure 4). To visualize this relationship, predicted probability was again calculated and visualize in Figure 4. This suggests that the field has bended, where both groups of funders have borrowed strategies from one another. However, the advocacy philanthropists have had the greatest impact on the field, as other research has shown (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018).

Organizational Affiliations in Higher Ed Philanthropy

Together, funders have been more likely to fund IOs in 2012 than they were in the past. As the descriptive data illustrated, there is still a sizable portion of funding directed to IOs. Indeed, the newer philanthropists have had a long history of funding advocacy organizations, think-tanks, governmental agencies and media organizations than some of the traditional funders. This is representative of a new form of philanthropy. As one Lumina leader described it,

> So the way that I think, you know, there's sort of this traditional way of philanthropy which is that, you know, you get these proposals and you look at what the proposals are and then you fund it…that isn't really our model …the way that we work is we say 'what's the problem we're trying to solve' and 'who are the array of stakeholders that we need to bring together to think about how we need to solve that problem.'

As this informant noted, working with a diverse group of actors is a central strategy. A theme which emerged in the interviews data is the notion that investing in IOs are just one of the many ways to achieve an organization's goals. As this high-level Lumina official noted, "That array of stakeholders can be other foundations, it can be other grantees. It can be policymakers, and so then we think about based on what we have learned and based on this group, who could enact in actuality deliver on and do a body of work …" A grant recipient who received funding from both, Lumina and Gates, confirmed this strategy,

> I mean, they fund a wide range of things, I mean, they, you know, they fund progressive organizations, they fund more conservative organizations, they fund schools, they fund nonprofits, I don't know how much they fund for-profit entities, I don't think they do as much if they're not like consultants or things like that but, and obviously they have limitations in terms of what they can do with the actual government but, you know, within the broad categories of things that foundations fund it's a wide range of stuff, I mean, you know, it's not, like, only, like this type of organization need to apply or something like that.

To provide an in-depth assessment of some of the funding patterns around recipient and funder relationships, I drew on my grant data to systematically investigate who the most central recipient

types were (Table 7). This displays a similar trend as we have seen in the regression, where funding is moving away from traditional actors and toward IOs.

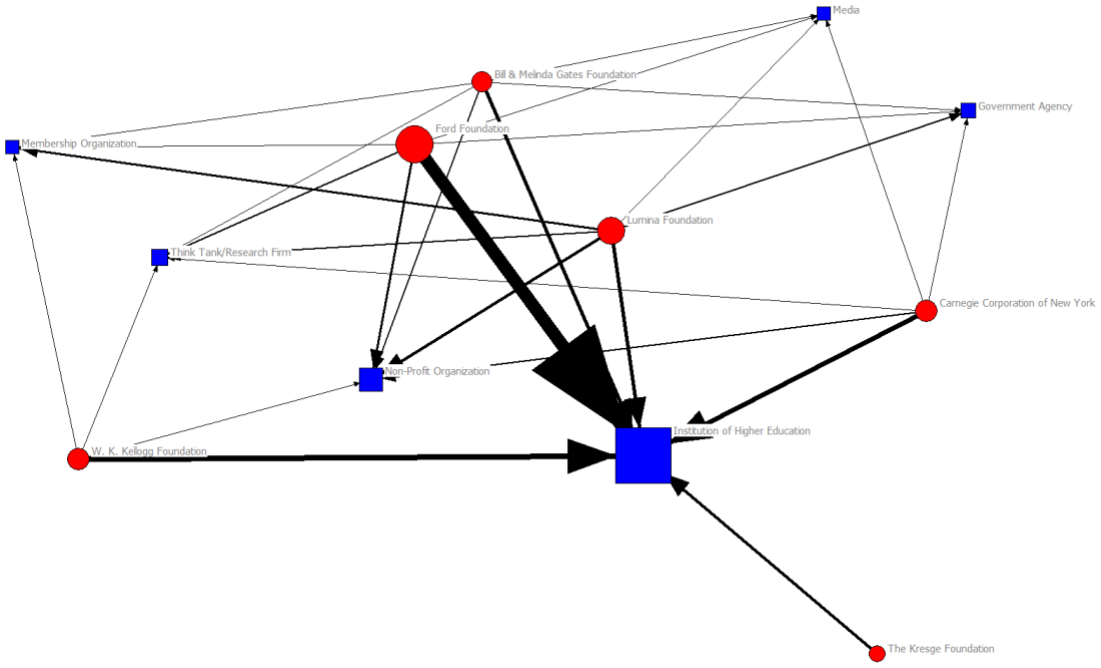
Table 7

	2006 Grant Network	2012 Grant Network
For-Profit Firm	**0**	**6**
Government Agency	**16**	**53**
Higher Ed	**384**	**531**
Media	**4**	**14**
Membership Organization	**9**	**91**
Non-Profit Organization	**87**	**317**
Think-Thank/Research Firm	**28**	**95**
Total	**528**	**1107**

Note: Data collected and analyzed by author using foundations' PF-990 tax filings. Represents frequency of grants per year by all funders.

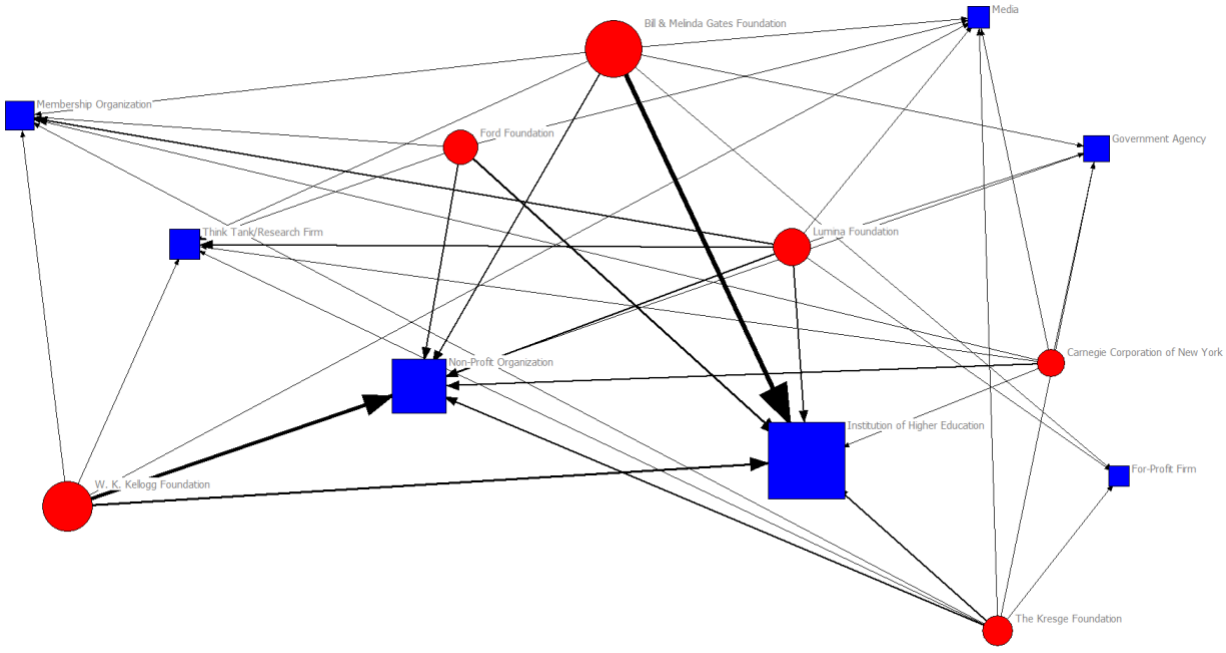
This has also been visualized in Figure 5 and Figure 6 – the first directional funding graph represents the 2006 grant network, and the second figure represents the 2012 network. Thicker ties denote larger quantity of grants, not larger grant amounts. The size of the nodes represents the number of investments. Red circles are foundations, and the size represents the number of grants distributed each year. Square size represents the number of grants an organizational type received that funding year.

Figure 5: Directed Funding Graph



Note: Data collected and analyzed by author using foundations' PF-990 tax filings. Red circles represent foundations and blue squares represent institutional types.

Figure 6: Directed Funding Graph



Note: Data collected and analyzed by author using foundations' PF-990 tax filings. Red circles represent foundations and blue squares represent institutional types.

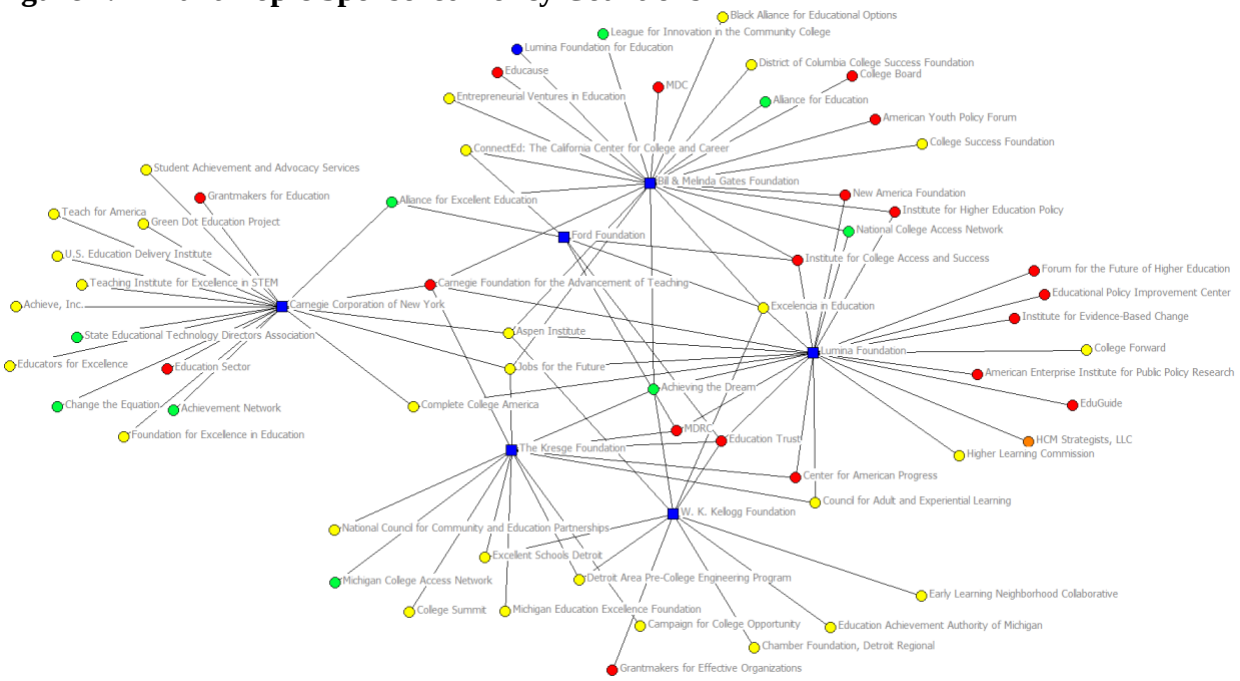
Between 2006 and 2012, we start to see a significant change in traffic patterns (Figure 5 and Figure 6). Specifically, we see less grants flowing toward colleges and universities, and more granting activity between philanthropists and non-institutional entities. In particular, in 2006, many funders were focused on investing in traditional higher education institutions (Figure 5). Kresge, for example, only funded colleges and universities in 2006 (Figure 5). All funders listed in the networks below show that the strongest ties they had were to traditional higher education institutions, but in 2012, it became more diverse, with an increase amount of grants directed to educational non-profits, membership organizations, media outlets, and think-thanks.

Policy Networks

In a review of the state of higher education social network literature, Kezar (2014) posited, "[r]ecently, policy makers and foundations have begun to capitalize on the potential of networks to create education reforms" (p. 92). Sponsoring policy networks have been an important strategy for philanthropic foundations. As one policy entrepreneur who has been active in the completion movement contended, "completion success network supported by philanthropy help institutions learn from each other, learn from best practice nationally what they can do and, and they can go about doing it and so… encouraging our university to organize our own facility group of universities to learn about best practices around the institutional degree completion…" To provide a deeper analysis into which IOs have been supported through philanthropic sponsored coalitions, the sociogram below provides an overview of organizations funded by all six funders, excluding higher education institutions, IOs that do not focus on higher education issues (i.e., do not have a higher education focus, office, or longstanding initiative), or government agencies. (Figure 7). This was done to emphasize the relationships between advocacy, research, and reform-oriented membership organizations and philanthropic

organizations. Yellow circles represent educational non-profits, red circles represent think-tanks, green represents membership organizations, and blue represents foundations.

Figure 7. Philanthropic Sponsored Policy Coalitions



Note: Data collected and analyzed by author using foundations' PF-990 tax filings. Blue squares and circles represent foundations, red circles represent think-tanks, yellow circles represent educational non-profits, and green circles represent membership organizations.

We do see an interesting trend with these six funders. Carnegie, Kresge, and Kellogg, for instance, tend to support more educational non-profits and membership organizations when compared to the other funders. In contrast, Gates has a very diverse portfolio, funding non-profits, membership organizations, research firms, and even other foundations (Figure 7). Similarly, Ford also invests in an array of actors, but its portfolio is not as large as Gates. With Lumina, we tend to see it fund a lot more research firms/think-tanks then some of the other funders in the sample, even supporting a for-profit firm, HCM Strategist, LLC.

One aspects which is reoccurring in the interview data is the importance of network entrepreneurs (individuals and organizations), who are able to broker relationships and ideas in complex policy environments. As this high-level informant from one of the newer foundations

noted, “The other thing that we do is support nonprofits. We support nonprofit and ask to see the network or they have alliances or they are part of a group that really is going to dig deep …”. The entities that received funding from multiple funders also tended to be some of the most influential actors in the college completion agenda, which have been featured in Table 8. For instance, Achieving the Dream, Complete College America, Education Trust, MDRC, and the Institute for Higher Education Policy have all been active in the college completion agenda—involved in advocacy and policy efforts, as well as research production (Table 8).

Table 8.

Advocacy/Research Firms	Funders	Amounts and Purposes
Achieving the Dream	Gates Kellogg Kresge Lumina	$4,185,917 College Completion
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching	Carnegie Gates Kresge Lumina	$8,800,000 College Completion Tech and Innovation
Complete College America	Carnegie Lumina	$1,500,000 Advocacy/Engagement College Completion Policy
Education Trust	Ford Lumina Kresge Kellogg	$3,069,500 College Completion General Support
MDRC	Ford Kresge Lumina	$900,000 College Completion
Institute for Higher Education Policy	Gates Lumina	$2,810,179 Advocacy/Engagement College Completion Policy Cost-Effectiveness

Note: As selection of these entities have also been featured, which includes recipient names, their funders, granting amounts (filtered for higher education) and granting issues. Excludes non-higher education coded purposes.

Together, this demonstrates that funding has slowly shifted away from colleges and universities and toward IOs, who, in many instances, have been active in the college completion

agenda. In addition, working with an array of policy actors have been linked to this trend. Below, I will explore some of the motivations and strategies behind this strategy.

<u>Question 2:</u> What are some of the motivations behind funding IOs?

The Push for College Completion

Since 2009, the College Completion agenda has emerged as a powerful reform movement in higher education (Bernstein, 2014; Kelly & Schneider, 2012). As Kelly and Schneider (2012) have noted, "These goals have place newfound emphasis on the idea that institutions of higher education must play a prominent role in promoting student success and institutional productivity, and that federal and state policies should emphasize student retention and completion" (p.1). Many in the policy community have argued that philanthropic foundations have not only mobilized actors into the completion agenda (Bernstein, 2014), but have also promoted completion as the preferred policy preference in higher education: "So it's like the idea sort of came from, you know, the field and Lumina helped to make that happen ….and then other foundations started focusing on completion," as one former Obama official put it.

Indeed, an informant from an influential think-tank described this shift in the following way, "So I think you had kind of the policy environment shifting dramatically to start talking about college completion issues and then you had philanthropic funding to sort of free up time and bring in personnel that could also grapple with that issue" Philanthropic organizations, especially Gates and Lumina, have been early supporters of college completion and student success. As I have demonstrated, many IOs supported by educational philanthropists have been leaders in the college completion agenda— who have engaged in advocacy, policy, and research

efforts for these aims (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Hall & Thomas, 2012; Kelly & James, 2015). In particular, these non-institutional entities are able to offers alternative voices in crucial policy debates. Gates, for instance, draws on this strategy to amply specific voices and ideas that may otherwise not be introduced in policy discussions. As this Gates informant noted,

> We also work with groups that don't have or aren't dedicated to particular constituencies. Why? Because the limitation of constituency-based groups is sometimes that they are not in the position to speak truth because their members don't always want to hear it. So, we fund think tanks, we fund the Center for American Progress, we fund the American Enterprise Institute, we fund New America, because they help throw ideas into the mix that perhaps others can't.

While this informant pointed to think-tanks, philanthropic foundations work with an array of IOs depending on the goals. As this Gates leader put it, "…our partners play different roles. So we talk mostly about partners that have policy roles or advocacy roles or research and evaluation roles; we have partners who are associations, they act as intermediaries between large bodies of the people that they represent… I would probably suggest that there's a taxonomy of partners." Bernstein (2014) has argued that Gates and Lumina have drawn on this strategy of funding IOs based on Ford's experiences with social activism. According to Bernstein (2014), Ford has had a long history of funding non-profits and other external entities who were involved in the civil rights movement. She concluded that Ford "convinced Lumina and Gates that it was important to engage these 'outside' groups in the college completion agenda" (Bernstein, 2014, p.115). In cases like Complete College America and Achieving the Dream, these organization received their startup funding from the advocacy philanthropists. The approach of starting up an entirely new, single purpose organization has been linked to the advocacy philanthropists (Hall & Thomas, 2012), who,

according to many foundation officials, view themselves as "social investors." As this grant recipient noted,

> You know, in other cases, I think it's interesting that you see that the philanthropic role kind of occupy a little bit of the role that like venture capital might in another industry, so you know that would be like providing a startup funding for, you know, a new program to try something and really see if it actually works. What my understand is like College for America, the Southern New Hampshire thing kind of got off the ground with support from I think it was Gates….

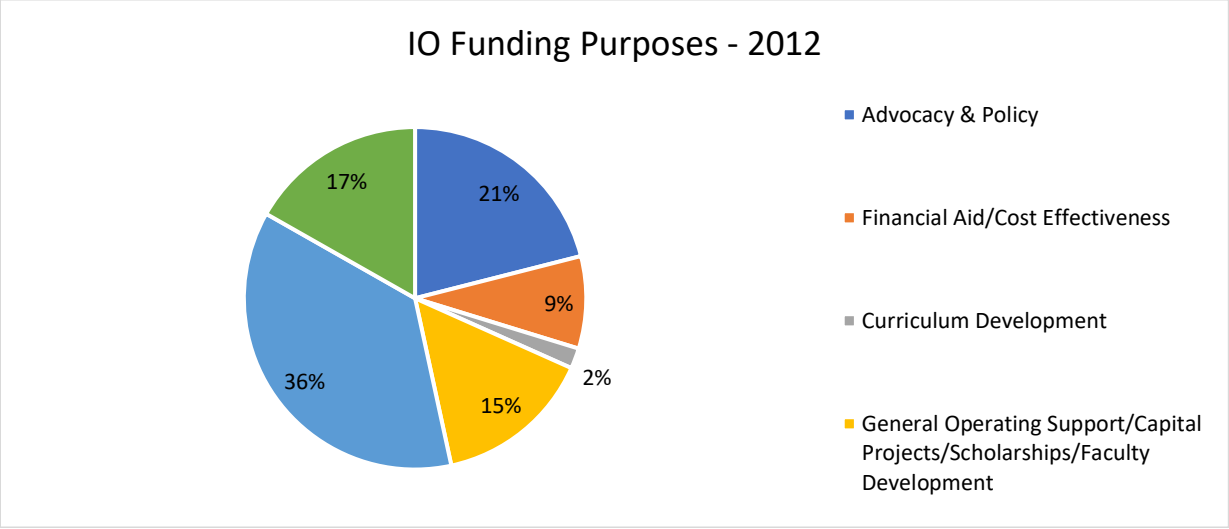
This social investor ethos has been a theme among Lumina informants. However, it is different from venture capitalism. As this Lumina official explained, "Social investing does not prioritize financial return but it's not entirely neutral about financial return, I mean we'd certainly like to see a tiny bit of that but we can deal with it if we don't see growth but we want to invest our portfolio in something that could produce a business model that ultimately is going to get people into and through college with a quality degree."

Philanthropic Agendas and IO Directed Investments

To provide deeper nuance behind some of the motivations of investing in IOs, I drew the grant database to quantify funders' agendas for 2012 (Figure 8). In particular, I assessed grants directed to IOs and excluded non-higher education purposes. According to data in Figure 8, the granting purposes which received the largest share of funding was college completion (direct services and research grants were collapsed) (36 %). An example of an IO directed completion investment is a Kresge grant to Jobs for the Future "To support a network of Student Success Centers. The purpose of the centers is to organize community colleges within states-including their leaders, faculty, and staff-around common action to accelerate their efforts to improve

persistence and completion." Advocacy and policy grants made up second largest share of IO directed grants, at 21 percent (Figure 8). Advocacy and policy grants have been important investments when foundations want to amply voices in public discourse. For example, this Lumina grant to the Education Writers Association was provided "To educate and train a national community of journalists covering higher education issues critical to achieving the Big Goal in effort to build public will for change." Tech and innovation purposes also received a significant amount of funding (17%), which is not surprising considering how large the Gates Foundation's investments in educational innovations are (Kelly & James, 2015). An example of such a grant is a $1.4m investment to Ithaka Harbors, an educational non-profit that works to integrate digital technologies into the classroom. This grant was "To assist in the implementation, measurement, and analysis of learning outcomes and potential system-wide cost savings via multiple massive open online course-based (MOOC) blended learning pilots within the University of Maryland System."

Figure 8.



Note: Data collected and analyzed by author using foundations' PF-990 tax filings. Excludes non-higher education coded purposes.

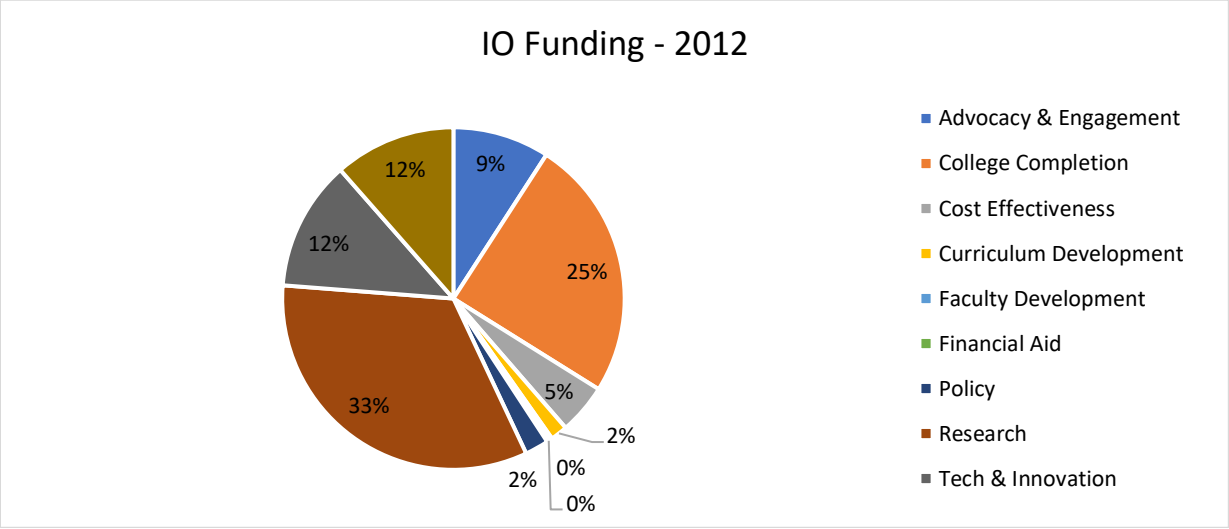
Data and analytics for student success reform has been a theme among foundations informants. As this Kresge leader noted," …we are privileged to see some amazing interventions and innovations. You know, use of big data to improve student success. And you would think that people who are equally committed at the college level would be equally familiar with these things and they're not. And that raises questions about how do you scale, how do you disseminate thoughtful ideas, so that other people can adopt them? Because in many cases…you still do have people who still focus on the needs to change the students rather than change the college." IOs, then, provide a place where foundations can test and pilot innovations before bringing them to scale. As this Lumina official put it, "…obviously there's sort of, like, direct operate, sort of a direct operating grants which go to school and systems and nonprofit like actually test out educational stuff and then there's obviously the sort of funding around like, you know, we think that policy development in a given area would be valuable so we're going to support that…" In other words, IOs can act as testing grounds for broad scale projects.

Policy Deliberation

As the quote above notes, policy deliberation has been another motivator in supporting IOs. To provide a greater nuance, I disentangled grants between direct and research grants, which is visualized in Figure 9. Specifically, research on completion, financial aid, policy, tech & innovation, and cost-effectiveness have been collapsed in the "research" bucket (again, all grants directed toward IOs). According to the grant data calculated in Figure 9, the highest proportion of IO directed grants went toward research (33%) (Figure 9). These research investments are unlike traditional scholarly grants, which allow scholars to work on their research. Rather, these grants are intended for policy analysis. As this high-level official at Lumina put it, "It's more action-oriented research. So, we are not supporting or funding research

that is going to sit on a shelf or reside in an academic journal." Indeed, these grants have a "primary purpose … to inform some aspects of the postsecondary attainment agenda," as the same Lumina informant noted. The next largest share of grants were programmatic grants for college completion (25 %), followed by tech and innovation (12%) and general operating support (12%).

Figure 9



Note: Research variable has been disentangled. Data collected and analyzed by author using foundations' PF-990 tax filings. Excludes non-higher education coded purposes.

The importance of knowledge producing IOs have been a theme among foundation informants. "So, you know, the way I view it is like it's much more kind of we don't have the answers but we want to hire or we want to sort of fund hopefully smart people to think through what the answers could potentially be and sort of feed a bunch of ideas out there on things," as this foundation official noted. Lumina has always been a foundation that prioritized research and analysis when it engaged in policy and advocacy efforts. At one point, Lumina even produced its own research,

> Lumina, out in time way back when, probably before 2006, had an in-house research function. We do not have that anymore, so we did it, one time, perform original research. Since that time, and even before that time, we fund quite a bit of research by third-parties

but mostly on, well anymore it used to be funding to find out which interventions work for us and which models are testing well. We were doing a bit of research to understand attitudes about public higher education. Some of that research is in the form polling, and may have relationships with Gallup, for example.

Together, I have demonstrated that foundations have many motivations behind funding IOs. In particular, advocacy, policy, and research around college completion and student success are important factors.

Conclusion

When speaking to the general field of philanthropy, Callahan (2017) posited that "One trend of the past decade or two is that donors of nearly all stripes are getting better organized, recognizing that there's strength in numbers— whether they're trying to conquer Parkinson's disease or trying to make social change" (p.200). Indeed, philanthropic organizations can act as policy entrepreneurs in promoting educational reforms (Reckhow, 2013). Shifting our focus back to higher education, there has been limited scholarship in this area of philanthropic foundations and IOs (Ness et al., 2015). According to Ness et al. (2015), "The state higher education interest group literature is also nearly void of attention to national or regional intermediaries that act as interest groups with the states." (p.153). Through a mixture of data and qualitative interviews, this study demonstrated that six of the largest funders in higher education have increasingly relied on IOs in the attainment agenda. In particular, the probability of major funders giving a grant to an external entity over colleges and universities has increased since 2006. Indeed, funding IOs have become a preferred policy strategy for many of the newer philanthropists in higher education as well as the older funders (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018).

Furthermore, many foundations have worked with an array of IOs. As this Lumina official put it, "I think Lumina wants to find new partners. We are thrilled to work with the non-profit organizations, think tanks and policy makers already passionate about our work and university centers already doing great work…" However, this does not suggest that philanthropists have abandoned colleges and universities. Rather, IOs have just become an influential policy sector in the ecology of higher education, similar to what we have seen in K-12 education (Reckhow, 2013; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Tompkins-Stange, 2016).

IO policy networks have also been important for philanthropists. Haddad and Reckhow (2018) have found there has been an increase in purposeful convergence in higher education grant making. Specifically, a networked strategy to promote educational reform has been an important strategy for philanthropists. As this high-level official at Lumina put it, "… the great thing about the network of colleagues that we have at the other organizations is that we have developed great professional relationship but also good friendships as well. And so we can pick up the phone and call each other or for example with [redacted] at Kresge and I have a standing meeting every six weeks, where we just update each other." These forms of informal and formal discussions allow major higher education patrons to identify key organizations, and co-fund accordingly.

Additionally, many have pointed to the influence of Lumina's second CEO and President, Mr. Jamie Merisotis, as the pioneer behind this trend of funding policy-oriented IOs. As this Lumina official put it "He's the only CEO we've had beside our founder and he was brought on because he used to run a policy think tank and understands that policy advocacy can be a powerful tool without a foundation having to take a position for specific legislation, and one of the biggest changes for Lumina since Jamie's arrival, is that bold step." This has positioned Lumina to be bolder than many other foundations in higher education, who tend to operate above the fray

(Bernstein, 2014). As the same informant stated, "…Jamie came at a time when Lumina practiced more traditional philanthropy, kind of behind the curtain, quiet. We were not the brand. Jamie said 'no, Lumina needs to be a brand. We are a large foundation.'" Policy engagement has been closely linked to the college completion agenda, a theme among interview informants. "We think that policy is key to making progress towards attainment because there are many policies in place actually going to hinder who has been able to make progress towards attaining high quality of degree that's what we need to address those…. And so policy is certainly one key lever," as one foundation official put it. It is not surprising that this trend occurred during Mr. Merisotis' arrival.

Though these are initial findings, they do provide insights into some of the shifts among leading philanthropists in higher education, and the motivations behind supporting IOs.

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