



FREELANCE
INVESTIGATIVE
REPORTERS +
EDITORS

2017 Reporter Feedback

DRAFT

December 23, 2017

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Overview

- **Background:** The online feedback survey was available to all 2017 FIRE applicants. The survey invited journalists to comment on aspects of FIRE's application process. In addition, all 8 Virtual Newsroom recipients received questions about reporting services, as utilized. Additionally, those individuals were interviewed by a third party consultant to gain more substantive qualitative information.
- **Respondents:** Fifteen (15) valid sets of responses were obtained from the online survey -- five FIRE Virtual Newsroom and 10 Editorial Consultancy. Additionally, 21 FIRE reporters – 8 Virtual Newsroom and 13 Editorial Consultancy – were interviewed by the consultant, a veteran investigative journalist.
- **Purpose:** Summaries of the feedback from the previous survey and interviews, including critiques, were used to improve FIRE's 2017 application and programmatic offerings. In January, 2018, we will analyze this year's results for similar improvement.
- **Content:** This summary highlights key quantitative and qualitative data gleaned from both online surveys and interviews.

Key Findings (1)

- **Expectations:** **80%** of Virtual Newsroom and Editorial Consultancy recipients stated that FIRE met or exceed their expectations.
- **Importance of Services:** **100%** of Virtual Newsroom recipients and **80%** of total respondents rated FIRE's services as very or extremely important to their stories.
- **Helpfulness of Services:** **100%** of Virtual Newsroom respondents rated several of FIRE's services as helpful to extremely helpful.
- **Customization of Services:** **60%** of Virtual Newsroom respondents rated FIRE's services as extremely customized to their needs.
- **Comparison to other organizations:** Over **75%** of Virtual Newsroom respondents rated several of FIRE's services as better or much better compared to other freelance facilitators or grantmakers.
- **Stipends:** Respondents overwhelmingly cited the importance of stipends in the decision to apply to FIRE. **66%** of the total respondents and **80%** of Newsroom recipients rated stipends as highly or extremely important to their decision to apply.

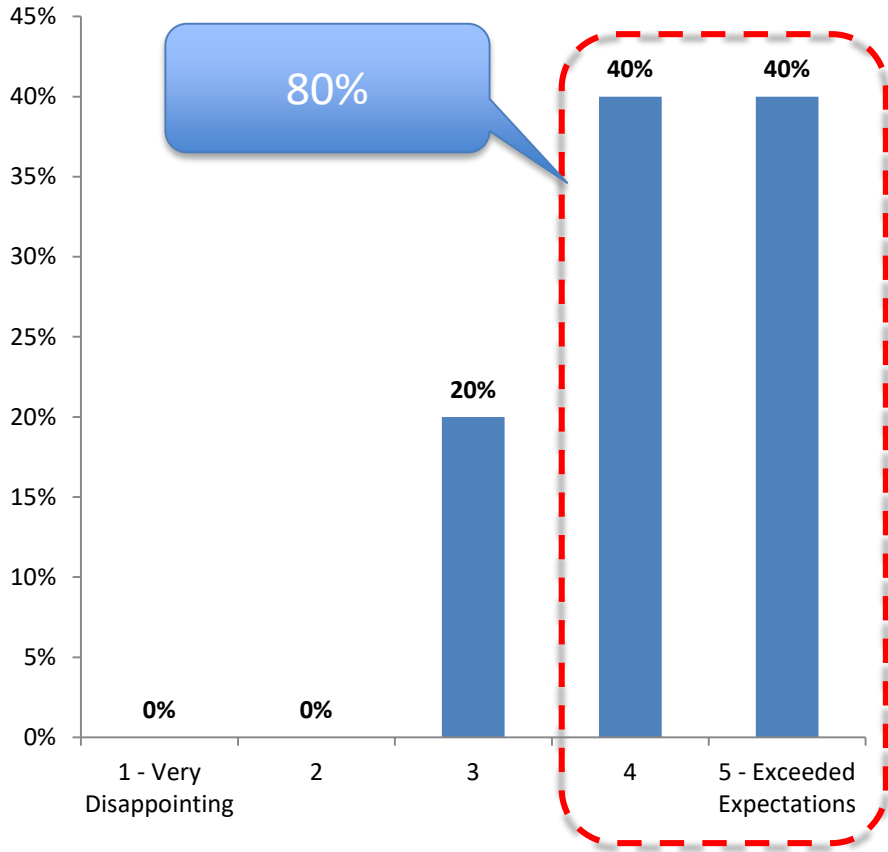
Key Findings (2)

- **Reporting Services:** 86% of the total and 80% of Virtual Newsroom respondents stated that if they did not receive a stipend that they would be interested in receiving reporting services.
- **Qualitative feedback:** Reporters found the Editorial Consultancy invaluable. While most reporters had not previously received that kind of guidance, those who received services from other organizations noted particular appreciation for FIRE's thoroughness and responsiveness.
- **Interview Comments:** Reporters of all experience levels were grateful to FIRE. When asked to compare FIRE to other organizations, many receiving Editorial Consultancies replied that they had never received similar services and attention. Those who received Virtual Newsroom Services particularly appreciated the time saved by FIRE's research assistance and other services.

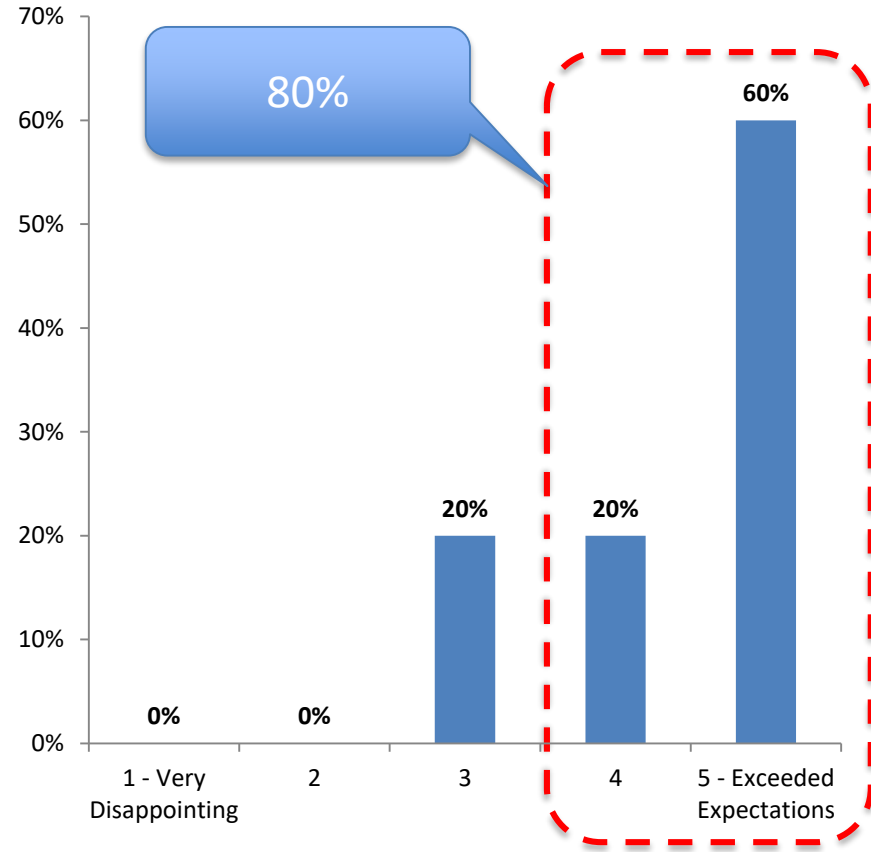
Meeting Expectations

Overall, how well did FIRE's services meet your expectations?

Combined N=15



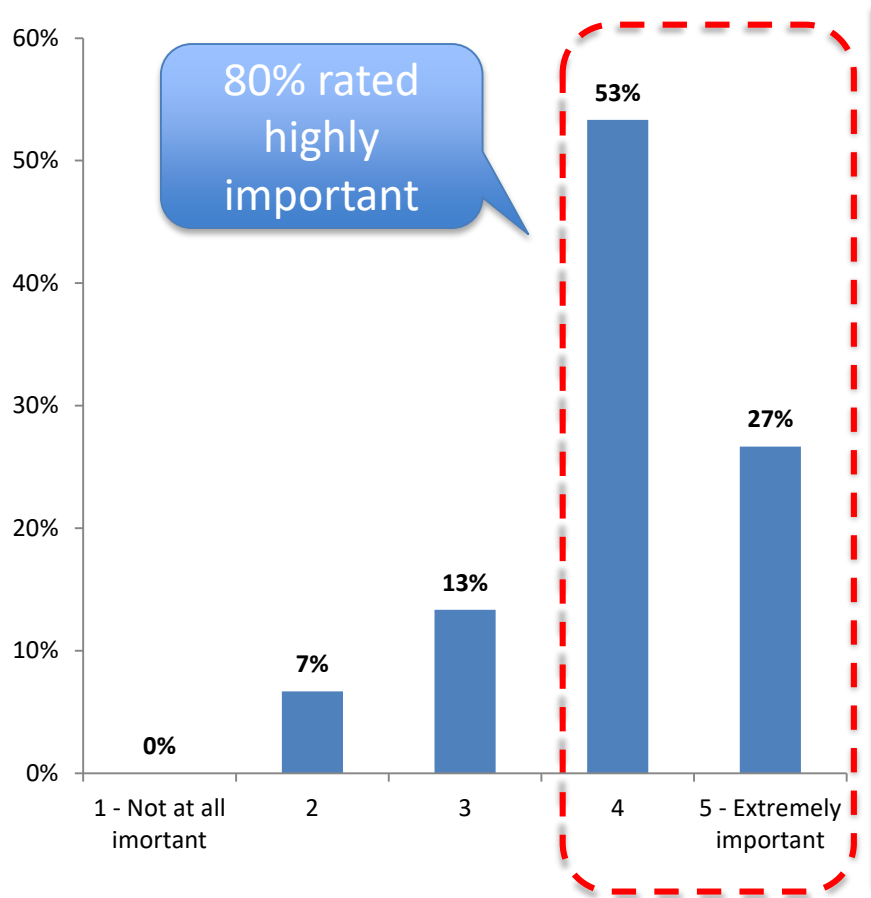
Virtual Newsroom N=5



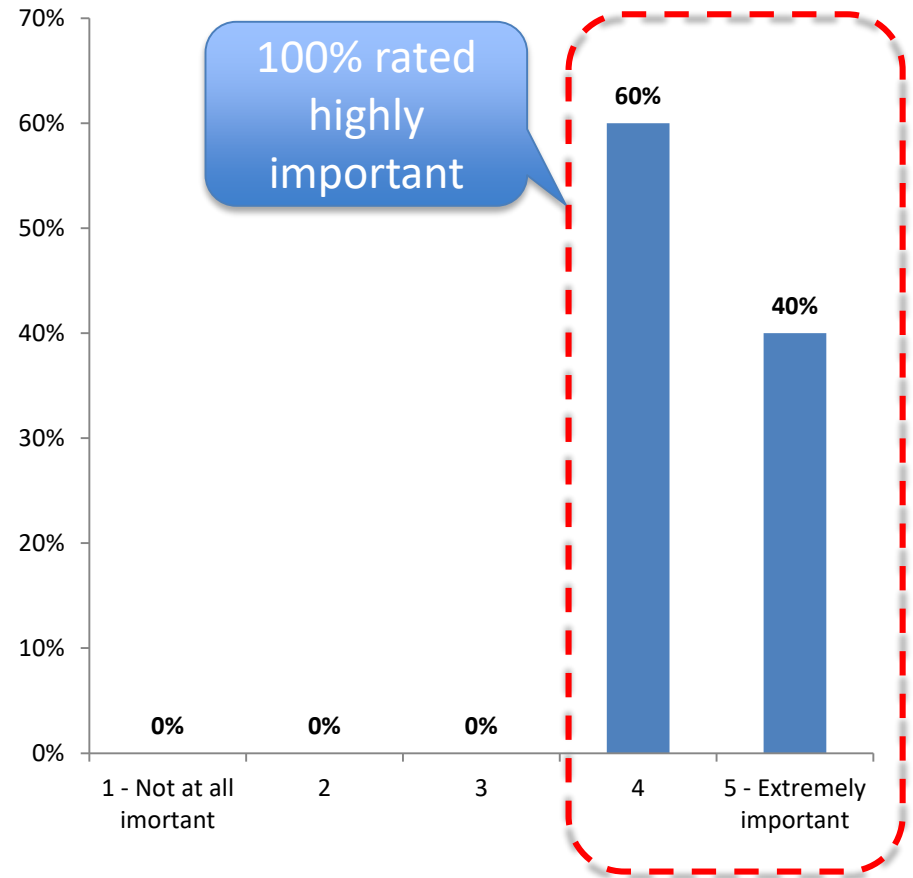
FIRE's services highly important to stories

How important were FIRE's services to your story or project?

Combined N=15



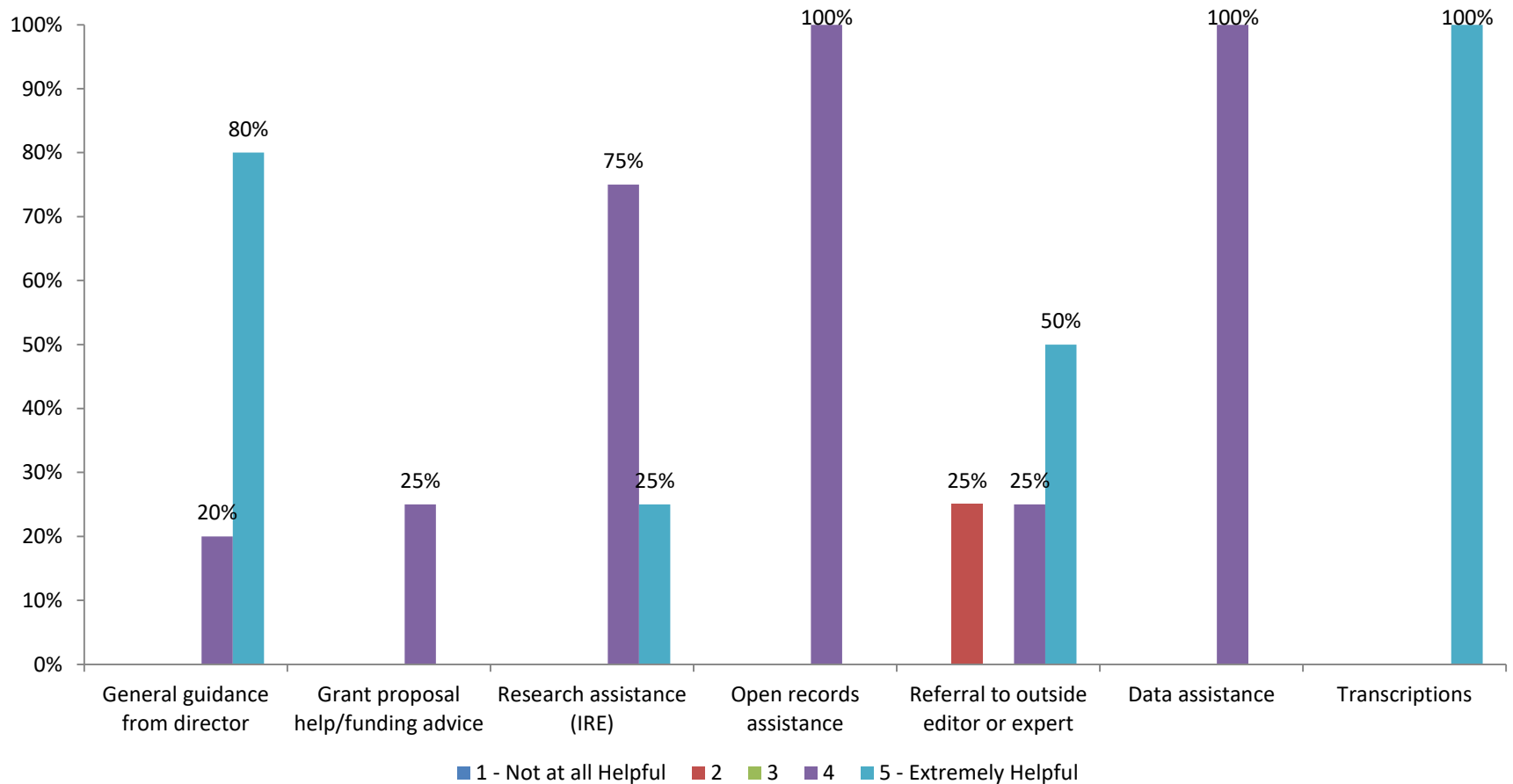
Virtual Newsroom N=5



Services rated extremely helpful

Please rate the helpfulness of the services you received.

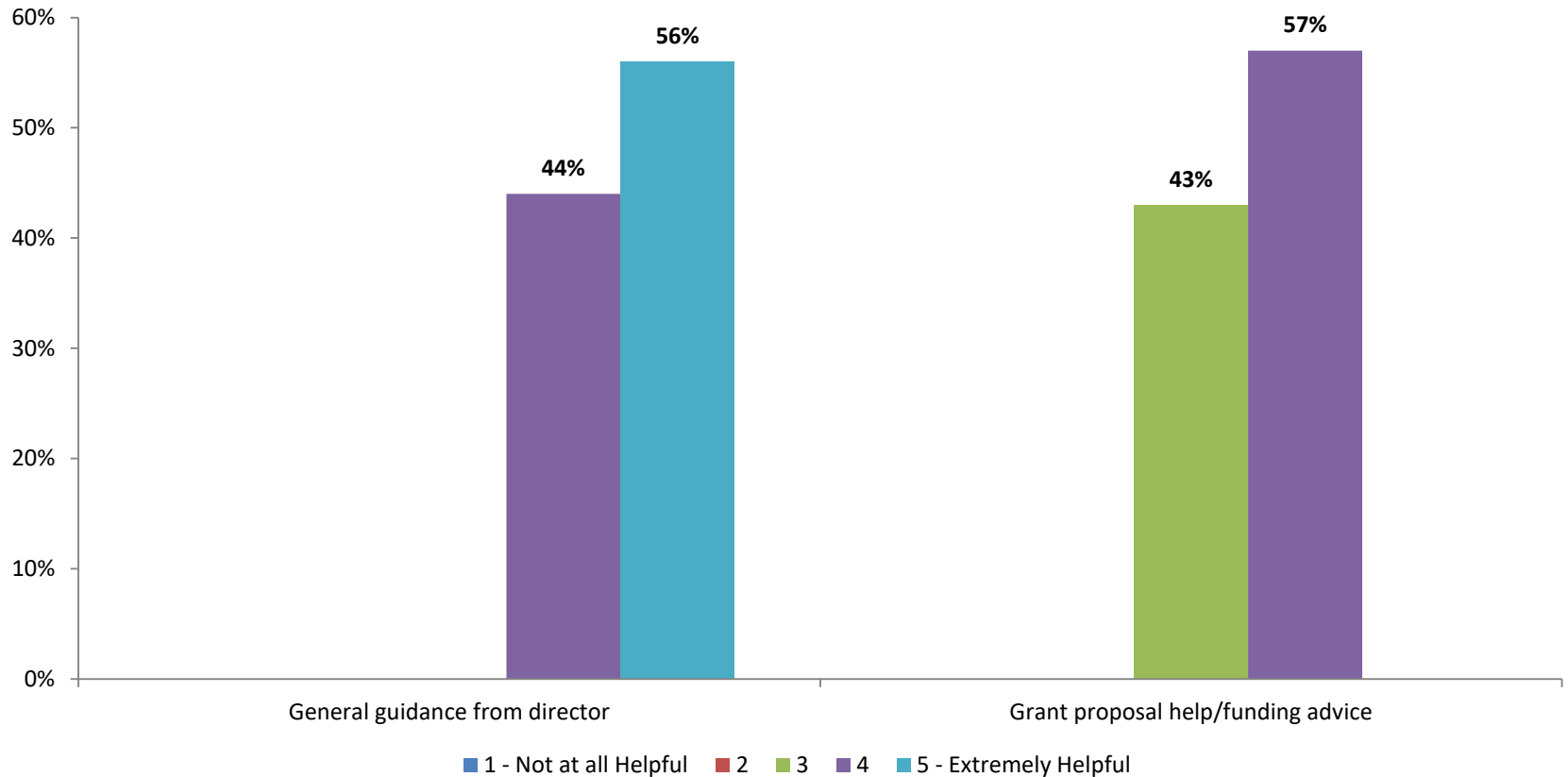
Virtual Newsroom N=5



Services rated extremely helpful

Please rate the helpfulness of the services you received.

Editorial Consultancy N=10

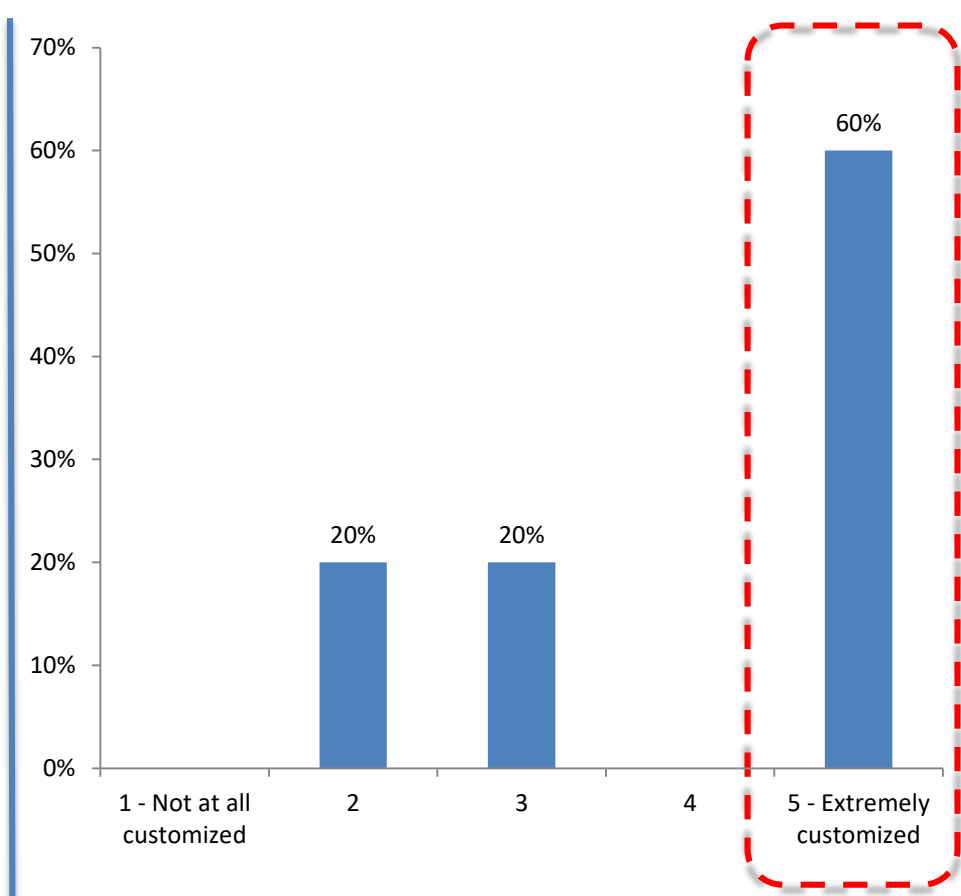
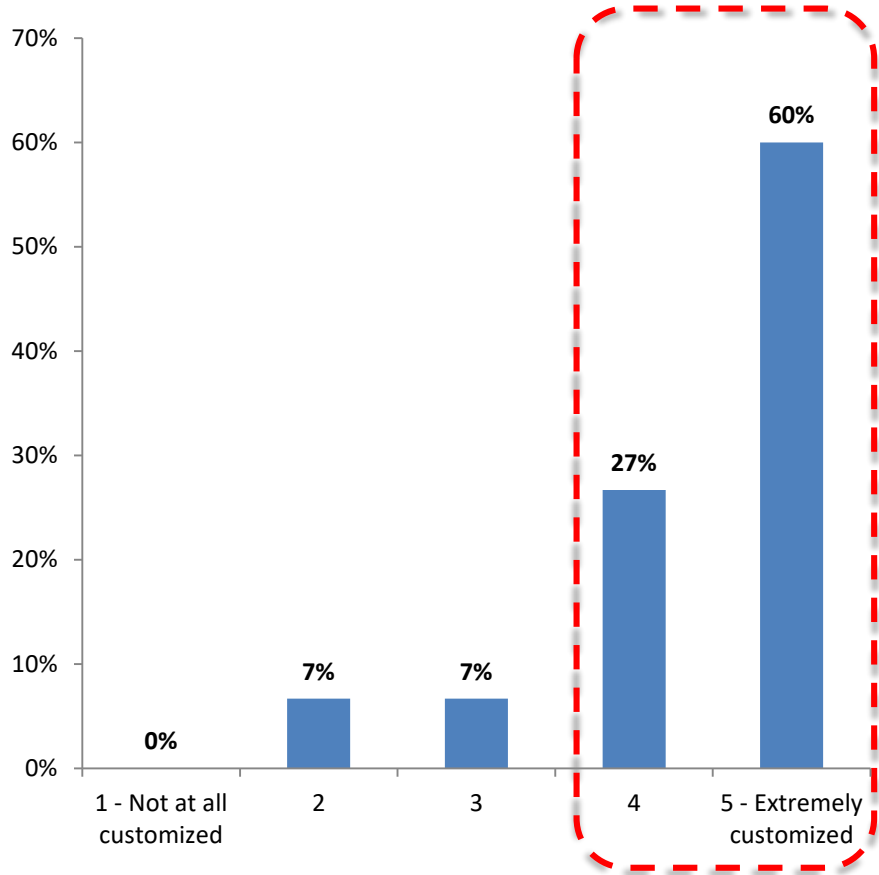


Extremely customized services

Needs-sensitivity: How well were FIRE's services customized to your needs?

Combined N=15

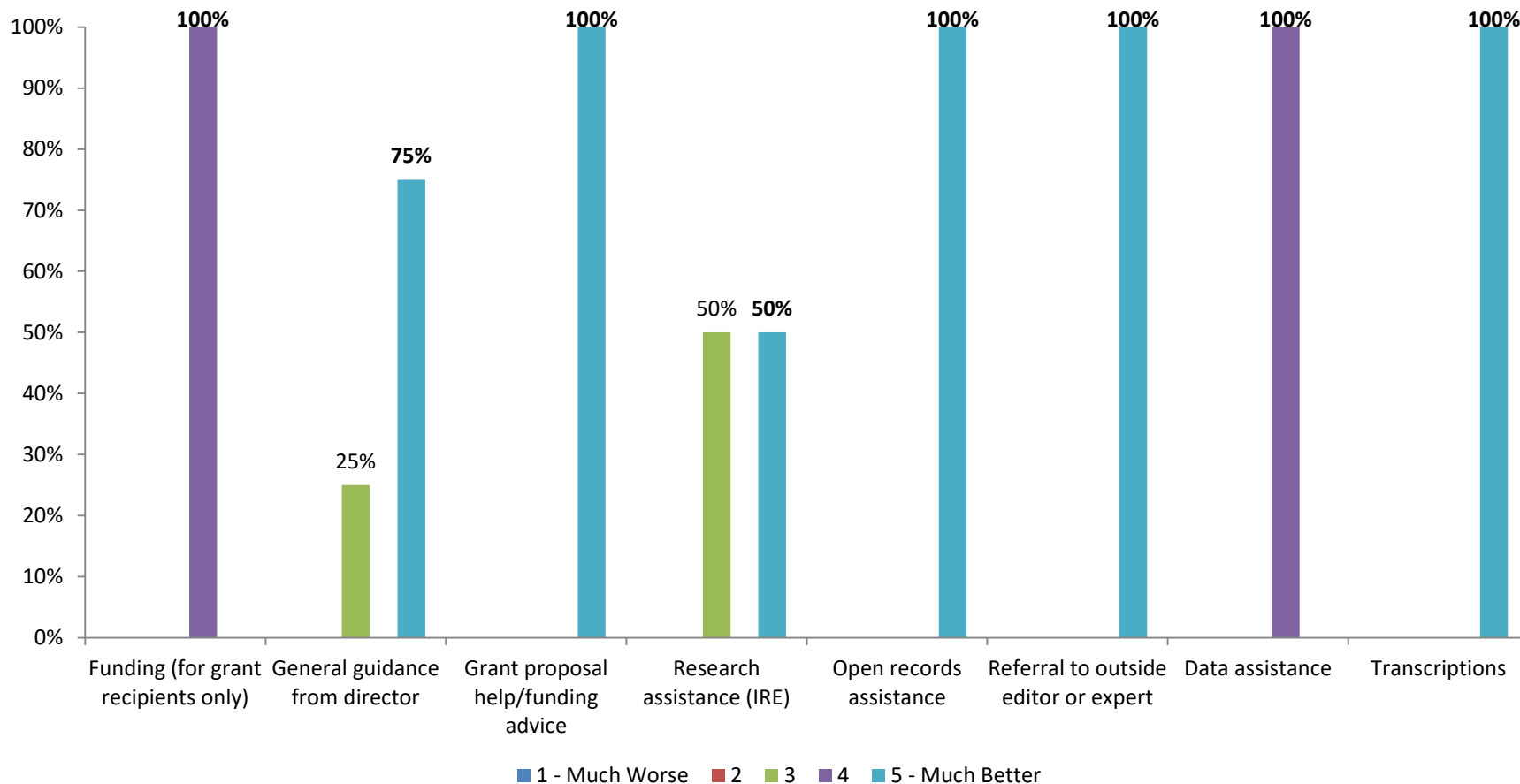
Virtual Newsroom N=5



FIRE's services rate highly across multiple categories

How would you rate FIRE's service relative to other freelance facilitators or grantmakers?

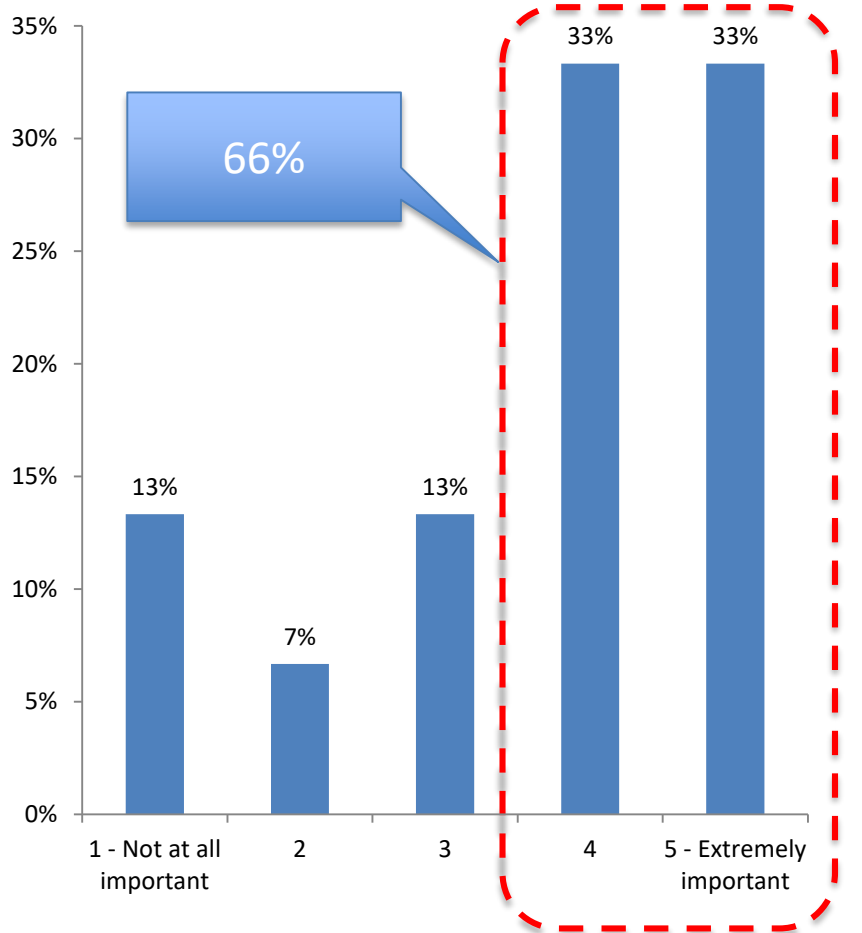
Virtual Newsroom N=5



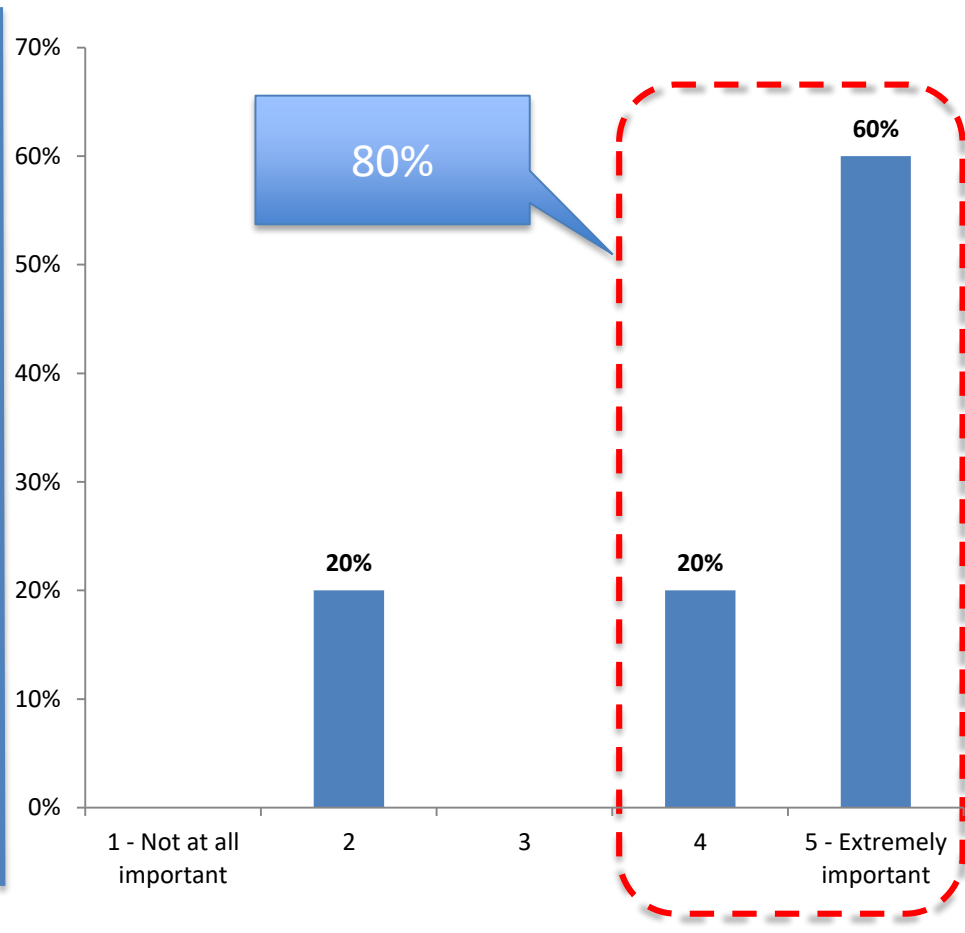
Stipends critical for decision to apply

In weighing whether to invest your time in applying to FIRE, how important was the prospect of a financial support (stipends)?

Combined N=15



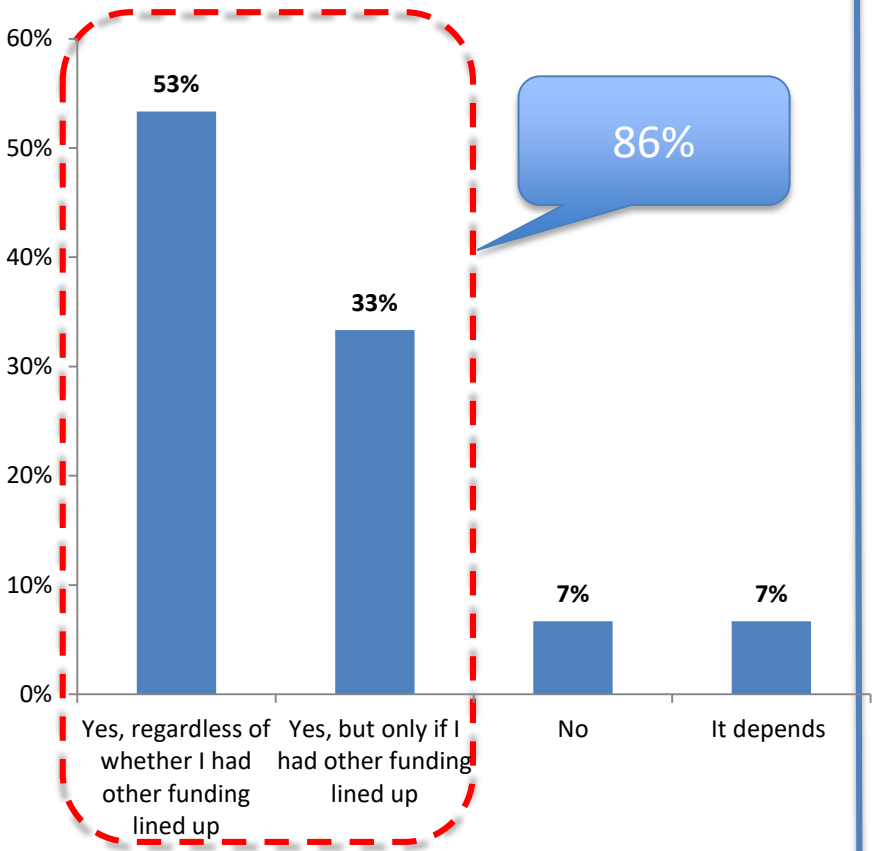
Virtual Newsroom N=5



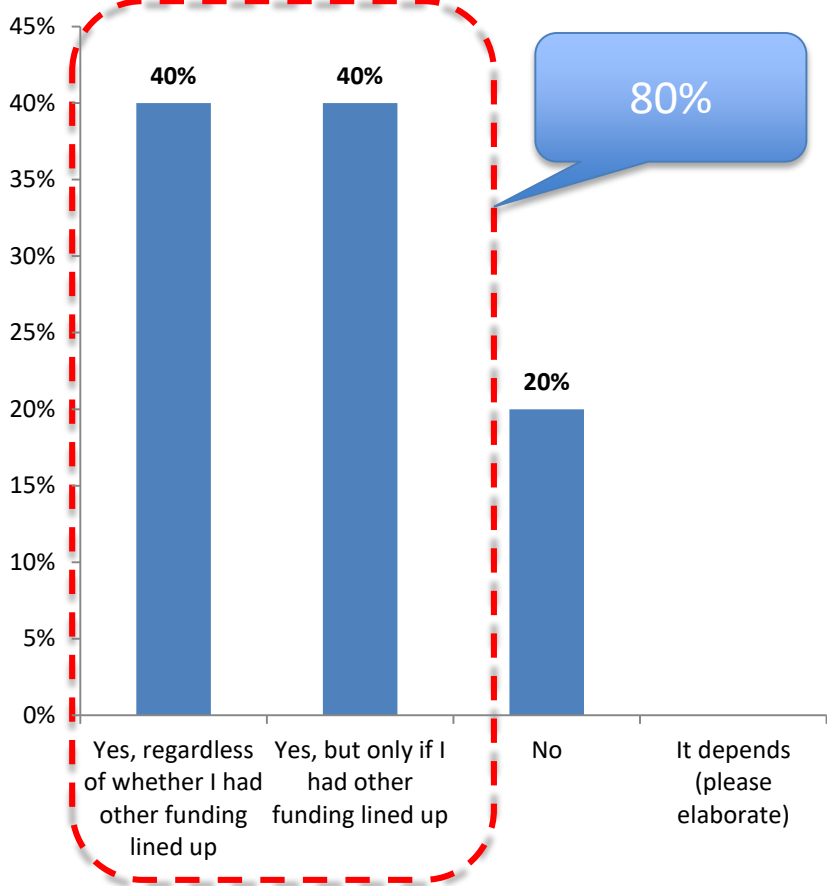
Reporting services vital to applicants

If you applied for a stipend in the future and didn't receive the stipend, would you still be interested in receiving reporting services?

Combined N=15



Virtual Newsroom N=5



Comments from Surveys/Interviews

Category	Illustrative Quote
Invested in creation of projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “FIRE is invested in the ideas and the creation of a project, and how to move forward. They don’t expect a fully fleshed-out plan [at the start]. That is unique.” –Recipient #13 • “FIRE offers resources for freelancers working on investigative projects, which can be unwieldy. It’s difficult to know how to put those projects together. FIRE provides resources and support for freelancers who are doing this very specific and complicated thing.” –Recipient #6 • “Other services that I’ve received in the past have been grants that were very hands-off. Here’s the money, do it. And that was it. That’s not what FIRE is about. So, I think that FIRE seems almost unique in helping me direct and craft the story.” –Recipient #18
Provides crucial advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The editorial advice I received was a crucial and foundational piece of advice on framing the narrative.” –Recipient #1 • “FIRE helped me to figure out what to prioritize, in terms of sitting down with a whole bunch of sh*t and being like ‘Where do I go? What’s important here?’ Especially when an investigative story isn’t placed yet, it can be hard to know what exactly to focus on.” –Recipient #6 • “FIRE was incredibly helpful, responsive and thoughtful. They helped me think of creative ways to get around problems.” –Recipient #5

Comments from Surveys/Interviews

Category	Illustrative Quote
Sense of conversation and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The thing that distinguishes FIRE from other fellowships is that with others, there’s less of a sense of conversation. There’s not much back and forth. With FIRE, there’s a lot less in terms of money, and it’s more like a conversation. That’s really helpful as a freelancer. What’s even more awesome is the editorial support and perspective and just having a second set of eyes, and a new set of questions and ideas. The conversations with Laird have been by far the most valuable, and also the most unusual, part of the experience.” –Recipient #8 <li>• “There seems to be more of a reciprocal relationship between the selected journalists and FIRE than there are with other funders. There's a lot more back-and-forth, and also something rare: early conceptual-stage editing as well as specific late-stage reporting advice. FIRE ends up being a more collaborative process than other funders.” –Recipient #7 <li>• “I think that [FIRE] is more personal ... rather than emailing with someone back and forth, or talking with someone who doesn’t have the time to really sit down and work through something with you. [FIRE] is a lot more accessible and helpful, on a person to person basis.” –Recipient #15
Effective use of consultancy time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A lot of times, a one-hour conversation doesn’t end up in a lot of concrete steps, but with FIRE, it did. All of the notes I took are now my project roadmap. It was even more productive than I expected.” –Recipient #13 <li>• “[FIRE] was great with flexibility. Upfront, they asked: What’s the most useful to you? What’s the best way to use my time, and to use yours?” –Recipient #5

Comments from Surveys/Interviews

Category	Illustrative Quote
Sorely needed resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There are a very limited number of places to go to for funding and for support as a freelancer. It would be even more limited without FIRE.” –Recipient #7 • “[Without FIRE,] fewer resources would be available to freelancers who already have too few resources! If FIRE didn’t exist, then there would be even fewer chances than there already are for successful freelancers to engage in investigative work.” –Recipient #1 • “Nothing currently offered in terms of grant and fellowships seems as extensive and focused as FIRE.” –Recipient #4
Non-monetary resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “FIRE is very focused. I don’t think what they offer exists elsewhere... having those communal resources all put together at once, with access to legal support, is really unique.” –Recipient #6 • “I certainly wouldn’t have taken that kind of time I have taken, getting the documents and data that we obtained, if not for FIRE support. [The research] would have been much more limited in scope.” –Recipient #7 • “I’ve seen data fellowships and training, but I’ve never had an actual researcher. That was pretty different. And pretty remarkable.” –Recipient #5

Comments from Surveys/Interviews

Category	Illustrative Quote
Antidote to isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Without FIRE, I guess we’d all feel horrible. We’re alone out here.” –Recipient #8 • “Everyone at FIRE knows that things can be very difficult for freelancers who don’t have an institutional support network. What FIRE’s doing is wonderful, and I hope that they can continue.” –Recipient #13 • “Working as a freelancer now, after having worked for years in magazine newsrooms, I really value the perspective of good editors. Freelancing is a lonely job in that respect, unless you have an organization like FIRE, or an editor who’s willing to help you shape an article.” –Recipient #17 • “It’s so encouraging to know that an organization exists to help freelancers do investigative work. It’s really, really appreciated.” –Recipient #1
Strong mentorship for beginners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Investigative reporting is obviously many things: it’s difficult, it’s time consuming, it’s tough for beginner younger journalists to figure out how to know the ropes of an investigative project. For that reason, FIRE is a wonderful resource.” –Recipient #13 • “[FIRE is] very supportive. It’s like having Newsroom Support when I otherwise wouldn’t have it. FIRE gave me a mentor, which has been so key.” –Recipient #9 • “What FIRE does differently is that it offers a mentorship component for people that might not have a couple of big pieces under their belt.” –Recipient #10

Comments from Surveys/Interviews

Category	Illustrative Quote
Stories would be lost without FIRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Who gets to do investigative work? It takes a lot of time and money. Without FIRE, there would be fewer people doing the kind journalism that is actually really important to society.” –Recipient #17 <li>• “If it weren’t for Laird’s encouragement and FIRE support, I would have given up.” –Recipient #9 <li>• “I might have published my article faster and as a less ambitious piece without FIRE. Or I would have given up on trying to find someone to publish it.” –Recipient #3 <li>• “I don’t think I would have had the confidence to move forward on my story without having the conversations I had with Laird Townsend and [another FIRE editor]. They were both really, really encouraging, and told me that I was on the right track. I needed that extra vote of confidence.” –Recipient #10 <li>• “Quite honestly, without FIRE, I might have given up on the story.” –Recipient #8 <li>• “FIRE gave me the resources I needed to take a second stab at a story I thought I wasn’t going to be able to do. And FIRE offered suggestions about how I to do it and approach it—ways I hadn’t thought of.” –Recipient #4 <li>• “[My consultation with Laird] saved the project, or kept it alive. And that’s priceless.” –Recipient #19

Appendix: Testimonials & Quotes

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- “I think a lot of people would be lost without FIRE.” –Recipient #14
- “FIRE’s definitely way, way more involved [than other organizations and funders.] They have a lot of benefits like doing like a business consultation or a publication consultation. It’s not just money. They offer editing, consultations, and other services in addition to cash.” –Recipient #15
- “Without support from FIRE, I would be hampered in several respects. I wouldn’t have had money that I needed to travel to do research and legwork in the field; and I would have had to find another way to get help from editors. The Virtual Newsroom services provided by FIRE is what really distinguishes them. Just the research request schematic has become a useful tool for me. I’m getting help from the IRE researchers, both in terms of analyzing the database I’ve concocted, and doing the data analysis. That service is really helpful. I don’t know that any other journalism assistance like the kind FIRE offers. In my experience, it’s completely unique.” –Recipient #16
- “People would be stumbling around a little more in the dark, trying to figure out how to do a good story, without FIRE.” –Recipient #4
- “Without FIRE, I wouldn’t have had the data or enough interviews to be able to back up my story. I would have reported a much thinner, much less documented story.” –Recipient #5

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- “FIRE is unique in that they offer services in addition to grants, which is unusual. There are editing services, research support and connections to people that can finance your story. What seems different about FIRE is that they emphasize editorial support, in addition to funding.” –Recipient #7
- “One thing that impressed me about FIRE is that it’s really well organized, and also offers follow-up resources. So it’s not about you either get the money or you don’t. There are a range of consolation prizes that are more than just consolation. They’re real and actually tangibly valuable.” –Recipient #1
- “FIRE has a special niche. That makes it distinctive and appealing to our sector, freelancers, who are underserved.” –Recipient #11
- “The FIRE stipend might not seem like much because it's \$100 here and \$100 there, but when you are getting data from dozens of courts, it really starts to add up. It can make a story financially unfeasible. FIRE allowed me to pay for the data, and they also helped me identify where data could be found in new places. I wouldn’t have been able to access that data on my own, since I don’t have access to Lexis-Nexis and PACER. FIRE also helped me interpret data, and identify what perspectives I was missing.” –Recipient #5
- “Other services that I’ve received in the past have been grants that were very hands-off. Here’s the money, do it. And that was it. That’s not what FIRE is about. So, I think that FIRE seems almost unique in helping me direct and craft the story.” –Recipient #18

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- “FIRE is much better and more personal [than other journalism facilitators.] The Pulitzer folks probably come close, but they have a whole team. Whereas with FIRE, I don’t know the inner workings, but it really seems like it’s just sort of Laird-driven. I don’t know, if other people work there; I’m not aware of them. Laird’s amazing. But I have wondered if this is scalable, because it seems like it relies a lot on one driven person. Maybe Laird has an army behind him, and if so, terrific, an army of Lairds.” –Recipient #8