Non-profit Project Funding

Non-profit organizations provide UC with funding to promote specific causes, humanitarian efforts and areas of research that might otherwise receive little governmental or corporate support.

Non-profit organizations make many enduring contributions to UC. In addition to sponsoring diverse research projects in sciences, arts and humanities, non-profit organizations have provided funding for many innovative programs, research centers and project initiatives that support the University’s instructional, research and public service missions. Institutional development efforts that non-profit organizations have created and supported at UC over the last five years, involving awards of at least $5 million include:

- a program to help relieve the shortage of nurses in the state of California;
- a research institute for theoretical computer science;
- a research center studying potential and risks of smart, networked sensors and actuators;
- a global project to reduce the number and improve the health of pre-term infants;
- a study of the health benefits of improved water quality and sanitation efforts in developing nations;
- a network of health centers specializing in treatment of wounded veterans;
- a residency training program for ob-gyn and family planning specialists in the US and Canada;
- a construction grant to build a 30-meter telescope;
- a consortium to observe and study oceanic changes;
- a center for digital media and learning;
- a program to develop improved solid state lighting technology; and
- a center for the study of the theology of immortality.

These examples are just a few of the nearly 16,000 projects sponsored at UC over the last six years by 2,800 non-profit organizations. While most of these projects are for targeted research efforts, and average about $250,000, many of the largest awards are intended to promote institution-building within UC, with a goal of creating programs and centers that will advance specific humanitarian causes and research agendas.

Growth in non-profit funding

UC’s funding from non-profit organizations has increased significantly over the last decade, keeping pace with UC’s growing support from governmental and corporate sources. In FY 2015-16, nearly 1,300 non-profit organizations provided about $765 million in awards to UC, representing about 13% of UC’s total project sponsorship of $6 billion. This amount compares to about $800 million in corporate funding, and $3.3 billion from federal agencies.
What makes non-profit support unique

The kinds of projects and programs that foundations, charities and interest groups support at UC differ from those funded by government and corporate sponsors because non-profit organizations are strongly issue-driven in their partnerships with UC. Broadly speaking, federal agencies primarily support basic, fundamental research through both individual project awards and long-term program grants. Most of UC’s federal funding comes from the National Institutes of Health and promotes basic medical research. Private corporations focus on product-driven research and development, and again, the majority of the funding is for work in medicine. By contrast, non-profit organizations focus on mission-driven projects, funding basic research, product development, instructional programs and institution-building at UC. Many non-profits concentrate their support on a single issue or research area, such as maternal health or a geographic region.

Of the nearly $4 billion that UC has received from non-profit organizations over the last six years, nearly one-quarter is designated to support social service and training programs, and to create new academic programs and research centers. By contrast, only about 15% of federal funding was for projects other than research, and only about 5% of corporate funding.

The disciplinary breakdown of project funding by non-profit organizations also illustrates the difference between their relationship to UC and that of federal and corporate project sponsors.
Compared to corporations, non-profit organizations show less emphasis on medical research in their funding preferences. Non-profits support few clinical trials, whereas nearly half of all corporate funding to UC was for clinical trial research of near-market therapies and medical devices — increasing significantly over the last several years. Non-profit organizations also provide proportionately less for science and engineering than either the federal government or corporations. And non-profits focus considerably more on the arts, humanities and professional disciplines than UC’s other sources of project sponsorship.

Non-profit project portfolios

The project portfolios of the six non-profit sponsors that have provided the largest award totals to UC over the past five years demonstrate both the extraordinary impact and the great diversity of issue-driven project.

Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

UC’s largest non-profit sponsor provided $255 million over the last six years, mostly aimed at creating new programs and facilities promoting healthcare and advancing knowledge in physical and environmental sciences. The largest single effort is a total of over $78 million to create and sustain a new nursing program at the UC Davis School of Medicine. Nearly $51 million was provided for construction of the thirty-meter telescope on Mauna Kea, Hawaii, and other major research instrumentation grants throughout UC amounted to nearly $15 million. Other funding areas for the Foundation include:

- physical sciences - $25 million
- ecological and environmental projects - $35 million
- medical and healthcare delivery projects - $20 million
- life sciences - $15 million
- data science institute at UC Berkeley - $13 million
- science education, principally in the SF Bay Area - $5 million

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

With over $187 million in awards to UC over the last six years, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation focuses on issues of global health and nutrition, with a special emphasis on child and maternal health.

- child and maternal health - $55 million
- applied medical research projects - $32 million
- combating malaria worldwide - $30 million
- global health projects - $27 million
- social and educational projects - $16 million
- global food and nutrition - $16 million
- HIV/AIDS projects - $11 million

Simons Foundation

Of the $124 million that the Simons Foundation has provided to UC over the last six years, more than half of the total supported just two large projects. UC Berkeley received $31.5 million to establish the Simons Institute for the Theory of Computing at UC Berkeley. And UC San Diego received $32.6 million to fund the Simons Observatory, based in Chile’s Atacama Desert. This project builds upon the Simons Telescope Array, which was previously funded for $6 million. Other major areas of support include $27 million for work in medicine and life sciences, $16 million for physical sciences and $6 million for mathematics.

Northern California Institute for Research and Education (NCIRE)
NCIRE, also known as the Veterans Health Research Institute, is the nation’s largest non-profit research organization focused on advancing research on veterans’ health concerns. The Institute’s connection with UC is mainly focused on a single issue — research on diagnosis and treatments of Alzheimer’s disease. A particular focus is the connection of traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder on Alzheimer’s onset. Of the $86 million provided to UC over the last six years, about $53 million directly supported the Alzheimer’s Disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI), a project conducted largely at UCSF but with some components performed at other UC medical centers as well. NCIRE also provided $31 million for Joint Personnel Agreements, which are used to support the research and clinical work of UCSF personnel at and on behalf of the San Francisco VA Medical Center.

Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation

The single issue that motivates the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation’s $79 million in funding to UC over the last six years is family planning. Of this amount, $54 million was provided to support the Kenneth J. Ryan Residency Training Program, a program based at the department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences at UCSF that provides family planning training for Ob-Gyn residents at medical centers and hospitals throughout the United States and Canada. About $4.6 million of this amount was directed to residents at UC’s other medical schools at Davis, UCLA, San Diego and Irvine so that they could participate in this residency program. In addition, the Foundation sponsored the $8.5 million Turnaway Study at UCSF’s Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health Center, examining the health and socioeconomic outcomes for women with unintended pregnancies.

Microelectronics Advanced Research Corporation (MARCO)

MARCO is an industry-funded, not-for-profit organization that is connected to the Semiconductor Industry Association and that supports and manages university research focused on microelectronic technology. While semiconductor companies directly sponsor many product-oriented research projects at UC, MARCO’s recent funding, totalling about $66 million over the past six years, has been designated to create and support two large centers conducting basic, fundamental research on semiconductor materials and computing technologies. UC Berkeley has received $29 million for the TerraSwarm Research Center, which is dedicated to assessing the potential and risks of smart, networked sensors and actuators (in common parlance, the “Internet of Things”). Some of this funding was provided to MARCO by the Federal Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). UCLA also received about $28 million for the Function Accelerated Nanomaterials Engineering center (FAME), which conducts basic research on atomic-scale materials and structures to promote innovation in logic and memory semiconductors.

Non-profits and project diversity

Support from these six major non-profit organizations has made a major impact in shaping UC’s projects and programs. The funding they collectively provide, however, represents only one-fifth of the $4 billion UC has received from the 2,800 non-profit organizations that have sponsored projects at UC over the past six years. Each of these organizations has a specific and often unique charter to advance a social issue or an area of research that might otherwise receive little or no attention from governments or corporations. Their concerns range from research into the causes and cures for medical conditions to purely theoretical research in the physical and social sciences, to support for graduate and undergraduate training in the humanities.

This collection of several thousand distinct interests and priorities has produced an extraordinarily diverse portfolio of sponsored projects at UC, and contributes to the unparalleled breadth and depth of the research that UC conducts, the instructional programs it offers, and the services it performs worldwide.

Data source: UC Information Center Data Warehouse Contracts & Grants system. Aggregate award amounts are adjusted for inflation. Amounts noted in the non-profit project portfolios are not inflation-adjusted.
For more information about sponsored projects and UC’s research activities, see Chapter 9 of the 2016 Accountability Report (http://accountability.universityofcalifornia.edu/2016/chapters/chapter-9.html) and the UC InfoCenter visualization on Research Sponsorship at UC (http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/research-sponsorship-uc).