

MEASURE WHAT YOU TREASURE

Well-being and young people, how it can be measured and what the data tells us

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From David Cameron to Ban Ki-moon, Dr Anthony Seldon to Professor Richard Layard, many agree that encouraging well-being is a priority. But what is its role in public policy, particularly with regards to young people? How can we measure progress on such a subjective issue? And what does data on well-being tell us about how girls and boys are faring?

This paper looks to answer some of these questions and shares new data, with the aim of bringing fresh insight into how to understand and measure the impact of interventions designed to improve the well-being of children in the UK.

What is well-being?

*'Good birth, plenty of friends, wealth, good children, a happy old age, and also such bodily excellences as health, beauty, strength, large stature, athletic powers, together with fame, honour, good luck and excellence.'*¹ (Aristotle, 350BC)

Since Aristotle, philosophers, policymakers, economists, doctors, psychologists and sociologists have debated the concept of well-being. Today most agree that it is:

1. **Multidimensional:** It incorporates all those aspects of life that we need to make us happy, including the physical, material and social.
2. **A positive concept:** It is not merely the absence of negative aspects of life, such as illness or poverty, but must also account for the presence of all the things one needs to lead a good life, such as strong friendships and self-esteem.

Whether a person has all those things that are meant to make them happy—health, happiness and money—and whether they actually feel happy with their life, is the difference between objective and subjective well-being.

Research has shown that happiness is related to objective circumstances; for example, there is a close relationship between wealth and well-being up to a certain threshold.² But happiness is also dependent on subjective well-being—people's values, views and assessments of their life circumstances, including self-esteem and feeling connected to a community.³

The UK vs. the rest of the world

*'While children and young people will be the first to bear the brunt if we fail to safeguard their well-being, over time society as a whole will pay the price.'*⁴
(Anita Tiessen of UNICEF UK)

UNICEF's Report Card 11, published in 2013, considers five dimensions of children's lives: material well-being, health and safety, education, behaviours and risks, housing and environment.⁵ 26 international comparable indicators are included, ranging from infant mortality, child deprivation and NEET⁶ rates to housing determinants, such as how many people share a bedroom, and healthy behaviours like eating breakfast and taking exercise.

At 16th out of 29 developed countries, the UK lags behind the Nordic countries, but is ahead of Canada, Austria and Spain, with Romania remaining at the bottom of the table. Overall, this underlines that there is no clear relationship between per capita GDP and child well-being: the Czech Republic is ranked higher than Austria, and Portugal higher than the United States.

The report notes a general improvement in British children's experiences since initial research in 2007.⁷ Children reported an increase in their life satisfaction, moving the UK from 16th to 11th place, and action on smoking, drinking and obesity seems to have paid off.

But despite the fall in drinking levels, the UK still has one of the highest alcohol abuse rates by young people between the age of 11 and 15 at approximately 20%. Teenage pregnancy remains a concern; we are one of only three rich countries with a pregnancy rate of more than 30 per 1,000. The report also identifies figures that show the UK as having the lowest rates of further education in the developed world, with fewer than 75% of young people studying, compared with more than 80% in other populous developed countries. We also have the highest rates of young people not in education, employment or training, affecting 10% of 15 to 19 year-olds.

UNICEF UK explained that *'the downgrading of youth policy and cuts to local government services are having a profound negative effect'*.⁸ More than £300 million was cut from services for young people in the Department for Education's 2011-12 budget, a 26% drop from the previous year, falling by 10% between 2012-13⁹ and a predicted further 10% during 2013-14.¹⁰ With these changes still coming into effect, the future of many young people's services looks precarious.

Well-being and government policy

*'It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong.'*¹¹ (Jeremy Bentham, 1776)

In the past, governments have tended to focus on objective well-being by increasing GDP and improving factors such as employment levels and literacy rates, and reducing violent crime.¹² However, economists and policymakers have increasingly come to realise that gross domestic product (GDP) on its own is an inadequate yardstick of national progress. Indeed, the "Easterlin Paradox"—named after the economist George Easterlin—suggests there is no link between a society's economic development and its levels of happiness. The UK saw a rise in GDP between 1973 and 2006, but life satisfaction stagnated.¹³

With this realisation, governments began to design policies with the aim of improving subjective well-being.

In the UK, this resulted in legislation such as the 2000 Local Government Act, which gave local authorities in England the power to commission services on the basis of improving well-being. A few years later, the Every Child Matters framework (2004) set out the New Labour government's strategy for bolstering children's well-being and called on services to focus on five key outcomes: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive

contribution and achieve economic well-being. Under this programme, schools had to account for how they were looking after all aspects of pupils' lives, and efforts were made to join up education and children's social care across central and local government.

In Scotland, the National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being was launched in 2001, and the 2004 Curriculum for Excellence required schools to promote not only learning but also positive psychology, confidence and community participation.

With these new policies came a drive to measure well-being. Most developed countries now collect data on well-being, and the OECD has provided a framework that helps comparison.¹⁴ Research continues to rapidly build our understanding of the drivers of well-being alongside growing numbers of organisations working on improving the well-being of different groups in society, including Action for Happiness and the New Economics Foundation.

Developments under the Coalition

*'The Ofsted framework has been transformed so that, rather than peripherals, teaching now matters above all—in particular, the sort of teaching which generates excellence.'*¹⁵ (Michael Gove, 2013)

David Cameron declared that finding out what could help people live the “good life” was a serious business for government, launching the UK Measuring National Well-being Programme, led by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), in November 2010.¹⁶ The aim of the programme is to develop *'an accepted and trusted set of National Statistics which people turn to first to understand and monitor national well-being.'*¹⁷

These measures include objective indicators of individuals' well-being—health, economic security, education and employment—as well as other contextual drivers such as the environment, governance and culture. Subjective indicators comprise overall life satisfaction and those associated with feelings about experiences—the quality of relationships with family and friends. However, measures to do with feelings about self—those factors that affect your everyday sense of your own worth (self-esteem) and how you cope with difficult events and setbacks (resilience)—are absent. And while data on well-being is valuable, it is not an end in itself, and it should, ideally, be connected to decision-making in a way that drives up policy standards.

Here, it is clear that the commitment to well-being is patchy across different government departments.

Efforts have been made to move this in the right direction when it comes to public health. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 established well-being boards to have strategic influence over commissioning decisions, and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), accountable to the Department of Health but operationally independent of government, has published recommendations for local authorities and partner organisations on social and emotional well-being for children and young people.¹⁸

Elsewhere, however, the Coalition government has sought to distance itself from the rhetoric of the Every Child Matters agenda, archiving ECM content and replacing the phrase with “help children achieve more”. In an attempt to quell fears that the new language signalled an end to a strong focus on children, including their well-being, it claimed the newly created Department for Education would *'carry through radical reforms in schools, early years and child protection'*.¹⁹

The Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, forging ahead with education reforms that included free schools, increased independence and parental choice, promised *'much more rigorous exams'* so that children can better compete with young people around the world, whom he feared were *'better equipped to succeed than our own children'*.²⁰ This thinking is reflected in changes to the Ofsted inspection framework, which the Minister said would enable inspectors to concentrate on academic excellence and forget what he dismissed as “peripherals”.²¹ The new framework requires inspectors to check on the behaviour and safety of pupils, but gone are the

references to health, emotions and relations with the wider community. Indeed, the word “well-being” has entirely disappeared.

While some welcome the new emphasis on “rigour”, Gove has been accused of creating a neo-Victorian curriculum for primary schools²², appointing an all-male cast of school regulators²³, and undermining school standards.²⁴ Dr Anthony Seldon, founder of Action for Happiness and Head of Wellington College, explains that the education system now *‘focuses too heavily on academic learning and attainment and not enough on education for life. And too often it fails to adequately support the many children who are struggling to cope with anxiety, stress and depression.’*²⁵

This policy void is visible in other areas too. Former UK Cabinet Secretary and Chair of the Commission on Wellbeing and Policy, Lord Gus O’Donnell, asks government to do more to apply well-being analysis to policy across health, social care, and law and order, commenting that *‘focusing on wellbeing could, and should, change public policy.’*²⁶ The Commission recommended that schools should explicitly teach life skills, that parents should be offered classes to cover emotional and physical aspects of child rearing, and that employers should be more sensitive to mental health problems in their workforce.²⁷

Well-being and young people

*‘Genuine learning not only depends upon many of the ingredients of mental well-being...it also leads to them, creating a virtuous circle.’*²⁸ (Ian Morris, Wellington College)

Many experts agree that educational achievement and well-being are two sides of the same coin: children need to feel safe, well fed and happy in order to fulfil their potential at school.

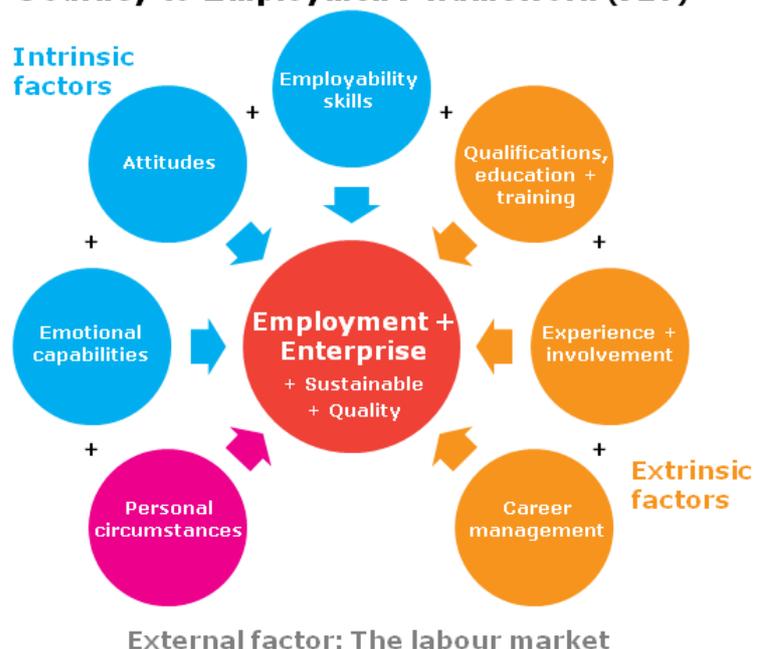
Research published by the Institute of Education and Childhood Well-being Research Centre found that children with better emotional well-being make more progress in primary school and are more engaged in secondary school.²⁹ As children move through the school system, their emotional and behavioural well-being become more important in explaining school engagement, while demographic and other characteristics become less important.

There is also evidence to suggest that the well-being of school-goers will have a knock-on effect in later life.

Emotional capabilities are one of the factors that contribute to young people finding employment, and can be just as important as qualifications, experience and personal circumstances, according to NPC’s *Journey to*

Employment (JET) framework (see diagram).³⁰ For example, young people with low self-esteem are less likely to attain post-secondary education and to be employed 14 years later³¹, and resilience—an important aspect of well-being and defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals—is linked to success in these areas.³²

Journey to Employment framework (JET)



NPC's Well-being Measure

*'NPC's Well-being Measure provides us with a comprehensive approach to measuring this complex issue.'*³³ (Diarmid Campbell-Jack, Save the Children)

NPC has focused on well-being for many years, conducting initial research into the subject in 2005 and launching its ground-breaking Well-being Measure in 2011. While schools and charities typically measure objective outcomes like school grades or attendance to prove that they are having an impact, this is only part of the picture. Whether a child is enjoying school and getting the most out of it matters too. Although these 'soft' outcomes can be harder to quantify than 'hard' outcomes, feelings must be understood if we are to comprehend the effect an intervention has on a child's life.

NPC developed its Well-being Measure to help address this need. Through this online tool, NPC has been able to support organisations to understand their impact on the well-being of the young people they help. Over the last three years, we have also built up a baseline for the well-being of 7,000 children in the UK, presented on page 7 and analysed on page 8.

The Well-being Measure was launched after three years of development and piloting with various charities, and funding was provided by The Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Private Equity Foundation and Esmée Fairbairn. NPC also received valuable support and guidance from Public Zone and steering and advisory groups.

Based on a set of carefully designed and researched questions, the Well-being Measure provides a way of quantifying outcomes robustly and reliably. It measures eight aspects of well-being—self-esteem, resilience, emotional well-being, relationships with friends and with family, satisfaction with community and with school, and life satisfaction itself.

Young people complete a survey and results are captured on a group level. By tracking these results over time, organisations can look at changes within a group of young people. The results of the survey provide the evidence not only to improve charities services and help young people in more effective ways, but also to prove to funders exactly what has been accomplished.

The standard cost for using the survey is £800+VAT (to measure the change in well-being between two points in time for 200 young people). With this comes the ability to customise surveys to incorporate additional questions and tags enabling results to be filtered and comparisons between sub groups to be made. A free version of the tool was launched in 2013 and enables organisations to trial it for a limited time period.

How does it work?

NPC's Well-being Measure uses a multiple-item measurement scale to measure aspects of an individual's well-being. For example, participants are asked to think about their life at the moment, and say the extent to which they agree with the following statement: 'In general I like being the way I am'.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Not sure
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

This question is taken from a scale designed to measure self-esteem, and the way a participant answers will depend on how they feel about themselves. They are asked to do the same for a further nine statements which explore other aspects of self-esteem. The sum of their answers gives them an average score which can be compared to others on the baseline. The seven other aspects of well-being are measured in a similar way.³⁴

What do others say about the Well-being Measure?

Eltham Hill School

Eltham Hill School in south east London used the tool to assess how well young people entering the school were integrating with their classmates. At the start of the autumn term, pupils scored highly on satisfaction with school but had lower scores for friendships. Pupils eligible for free school meals had lower scores than the rest of the year group, particularly in terms of satisfaction with their community, but also in self-esteem and emotional well-being. At the end of the autumn term, there was a slight reduction in satisfaction with school, although scores remained high.

Madeleine Griffin, head teacher of Eltham Hill, said:

'There is nothing like direct feedback from students. For me it is a great tool...I would highly recommend it to other heads.'

As a result, the school created a student council to enable pupils to voice their opinions on school issues and feed in thoughts to the renovation of the school (carried out in 2011). It also made improvements to its transition programme and social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme.

The Outward Bound Trust

The Outward Bound Trust is an education charity that uses outdoor experiences and challenges to develop young people's self-esteem, motivation and aspiration. By using the Well-being Measure at two points in time, the charity was able to create its own baseline and compare the difference in well-being before and after an Outward Bound activity.

Based on a sample of 620 young people, the trust found improvements in young people's self-esteem, resilience and, more surprisingly for the charity, emotional well-being. It also analysed which activities work best with different groups of children, and evaluated the differences between girls and boys, which has informed future programmes. These results provided evidence for its impact, gave confidence to its funders, and were presented in its 2011 Impact Report (available on its website).

Head of Impact Evaluation, Emma Ferris, told us:

'The well-being questionnaire is really exciting. It helps you to capture the essence of what you do but in a very strong, credible way.'

Toynbee Hall

Toynbee Hall is a community organisation in east London that provides support to local people in Tower Hamlets. Its flagship Aspire Project works in eight local schools to give young people aged 13-14 the chance to take part in creative, fun experiences and challenging activities—aiming to build their confidence, improve their social well-being and help them express themselves in more positive ways.

Toynbee Hall used the Well-being Measure in 2011 to track the progress of a group of around 80 young people during the project. It surveyed them at three points in time: at the beginning, half-way through, and at the end. At the first follow-up, there were significant improvements in how young people felt about their school and community. After the second, there were improvements in young people's self-esteem and life satisfaction.

Aspire's funder, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, said:

'With the results of surveys NPC sends to users, organisations are much better placed to understand where they make most impact and where they might need to re-think their approaches.'

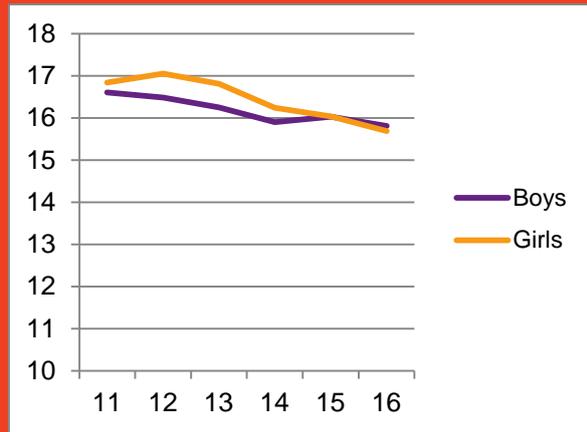
Latest data from the Well-being Measure

Data on almost 7,000 young people provides the basis of analysis of the well-being of young people in the UK. A combination of charities, schools and local authority projects have used the Well-being Measure with participants across a variety of interventions, including residential trips, mentoring, and transition into exam-taking school years. The data was collected from 6,603 11-16 year olds (3,047 girls, 3,556 boys) between 2011 and 2014. Please note that, our findings cannot be applied to the population as a whole due to the sampling..

The most common trend throughout the analysis is that the scores for girls across all aspects of well-being decreased more sharply with age compared to boys. Overall, girls started with lower scores than boys.



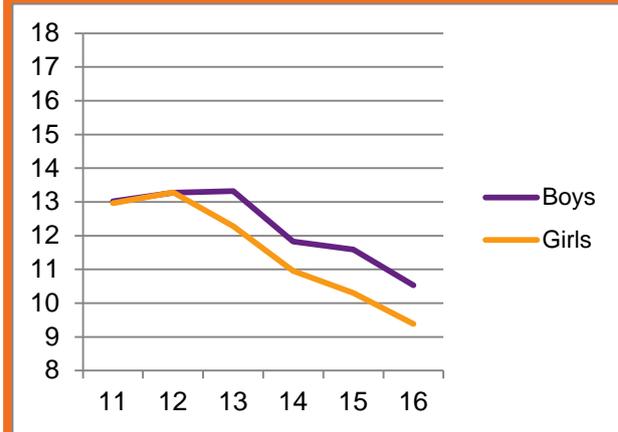
SATISFACTION WITH FRIENDS



Both boys and girls show a slight decrease.

Scale: 0-20

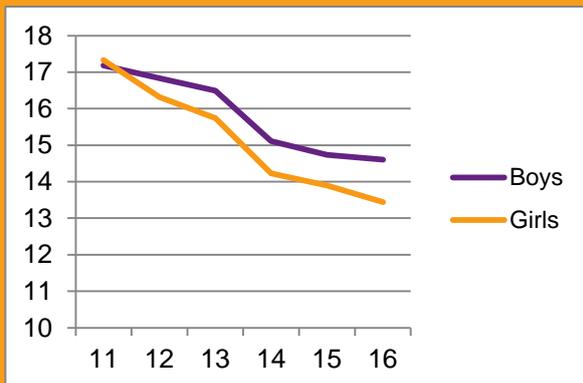
SATISFACTION WITH COMMUNITY



Both boys and girls follow a downward trend from the age of 12-13.

Scale: 0-20

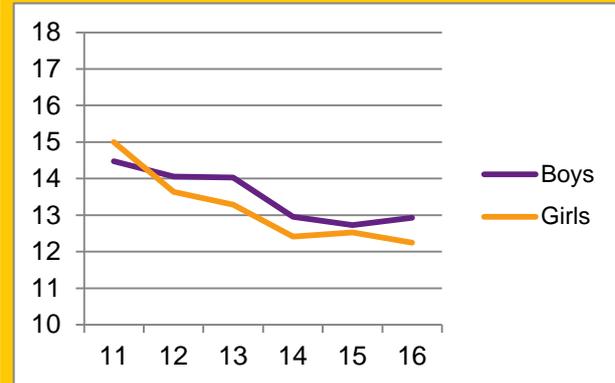
SATISFACTION WITH FAMILY



Both boys and girls show an increase between 11-12, but follow a downwards trend towards the age of 16.

Scale: 0-20

SATISFACTION WITH SCHOOL



Both boys and girls show an overall decrease.

Scale: 0-20

Why does this matter?

NPC's data reveals a number of things—the falling levels of happiness of young people as they go through adolescence, the shortage of support many find even among friends and families and at home. But most strikingly of all, it shows something deeply worrying about girls' well-being.

By age 11, girls' emotional well-being is already below that of boys, and it keeps dropping. Their self-esteem levels fall away badly, while boys' remains relatively stable. Girls start off happier with their friends, but by age 16 this has tumbled below the level for boys.

The data is unsettling, echoing research by the Children's Society that well-being declines between the ages of 8 and 15³⁵, and by Girlguiding that girls today face challenges that previous generations did not.³⁶ Commentators have recently queued up to ponder why girls and women today feel under such pressure. Home news editor at *The Times*, Fay Schlesinger, shared her fears about newer pressures on children borne of advances in technology: what are the implications for mental health when young people have no space in which to switch off from mobile phones and ipods?³⁷ *The Guardian* (aligning itself with some government ministers) goes one step further, and asks whether pressures are greater than ever before: does anxiety among the current generation of

professional women have its roots in assumptions made when girls and boys are growing up?³⁸ Our findings could also reflect recent concerns about the insidiousness of sexism to which girls are now subject: the profusion of sexualised imagery in everyday life; readier access to pornography; and, again, new technology, and specifically the ease with which images and videos can be shared among peers.³⁹

Whatever the causes—and if our data provokes more people to pause and ask why this is happening, it has already achieved something important—it is clear that there is an urgent problem here. We know it affects the thousands of girls sampled for our data; most likely it affects thousands more besides.

It is worrying, then, that much public policy seems to be moving in the opposite direction.

Michael Gove promises to bring new toughness to the national curriculum in schools, including a focus on core skills, and a commitment to help British school children compete on a world stage academically.⁴⁰

This might result in stronger academic performance. It will almost certainly herald more debates about how girls' and boys' grades compare at exam time.

But such academic “rigour” must complement, rather than overwhelm, the sort of issues thrown up by data like ours. It cannot be allowed to push “soft skills”—the kind of confidence-building, relationship-centred activities which can be practised inside and outside of school—into irrelevance. At a time when young people are growing up with a volatile, troubled sense of themselves, these are the activities with a track record of reversing individual crises. Great teaching is to be encouraged, of course, but extra Latin classes are not the answer for every girl or boy.

As the organisations using our Well-being Measure begin to learn which interventions actively improve children's happiness, and how this differs by gender and other variables, new opportunities will open up. For example, the insights generated by the measure can support the tailoring of activities for the children who will benefit most.

Where next?

The well-being of young people in this country—and the related issues of how their well-being is reflected in policy—is likely to remain on the radar for some time to come. Similarly, the pressure to measure the difference that organisations and interventions make is here to stay. Despite the challenges of measuring—and improving—‘soft’ outcomes like self-esteem and resilience, it is clear that a focus on ‘hard’ outcomes alone (the non-peripherals) will not work.

The new data on the well-being of 11- to 16-year olds discussed in this paper, shows sharply falling levels of well-being among children during their teenage years. It also points out important differences between girls' and boys' well-being, which practitioners in schools and charities, as well as policymakers, should take note of as they could inform more tailored approaches. They also underline the value of measuring impact and suggest that exploring how other factors (such as affluence) could help us to serve the needs of young people in our society.

Many other groups would benefit from adaptations of the Well-being Measure, including organisations working with young people above and below the current age band or with those who have visual/hearing impairments or learning difficulties. We are currently working with Tri-borough in west London to develop a programme of monitoring and to report on changes in well-being for High Needs Students in its schools. We are also keen to explore how the Well-being Measure might be used with other groups, such as older people, and how NPC can support organisations in their mission to improve lives.

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TRANSFORMING THE CHARITY SECTOR

NPC (New Philanthropy Capital) occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders, helping them achieve the greatest impact. We are driven by the values and mission of the charity sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

Increasing the impact of charities: NPC exists to make charities and social enterprises more successful in achieving their missions. Through rigorous analysis, practical advice and innovative thinking, we make charities' money and energy go further, and help them to achieve the greatest impact.

Increasing the impact of funders: We share the passion funders have for helping charities and changing people's lives. We understand their motivations and their objectives, and we know that giving is more rewarding if it achieves the greatest impact it can.

Strengthening the partnership between charities and funders: Our mission is also to bring the two sides of the funding equation together, improving understanding and enhancing their combined impact.

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