



**Hiding in Plain Sight: Are foundation  
website changes masking their values, or  
pulling off their masks?**

**July 2025**

Charitable foundation websites and social media suggest the ongoing authoritarian crackdown has produced appeasement from some, active resistance from others, and widespread apprehension.

The current presidential administration and their allies in Congress have mounted an unprecedented assault on the First Amendment rights of nonprofit organizations since they took office in early 2025. With executive orders targeting nonprofits “promoting DEI” and federal green energy grantees and with draft legislation giving presidential appointees sweeping new authority to revoke tax exempt status, the federal government has been weaponized against associative freedoms in the U.S. to an extent unseen in generations.

Ironically, [prolific philanthropy](#) has helped build the institutional power necessary for this full-frontal assault on liberal democracy in America, [especially in the courts](#) whose [rulings](#) have emboldened the backlash to anti-racist policies. It remains to be seen how effective the attempt to bully the third sector out of their free speech rights will be. American civil society is broader and deeper than many others that have succumbed to assaults on their independence. Many of the administration’s orders have been [legally challenged](#), some successfully, and the tax exemption rescission power was struck from the current budget bill. In the escalating confrontation between foundations, schools, and community-based organizations on the one hand and the Trumpist movement’s elected and appointed officials on the other, scholars recognize a [pattern of authoritarian crackdowns on civil society](#) across the globe in the last two decades.

The question of what an independent civil society is worth has never been more alive in the U.S. than it is now. How have the country’s largest charitable foundations—whose *raison d’être* is to promote the public good with private means, some of them in perpetuity—responded to this test? NCRP researchers built a process to find out.

First, foundation website home page text was chosen as a way to rigorously analyze the changing “public face” of foundations. NCRP researchers identified 773 of the Candid [F1000](#) data set foundations with active websites.

After matching websites to foundations, a Python script compared each live webpage’s content (as of March, 2025) with an archived version from the Wayback Machine dated between March 1 and November 4, 2024. The process detected line-by-line changes in homepage source text by comparing raw HTML-stripped content from both versions. The results—including the site name, URLs, snapshot timestamps, and the actual content differences—were saved to a database, allowing for structured querying by keywords.

NCRP researchers used a dictionary of a dozen keywords, all of them related to the climate, DEI, and gender speech that the administration has attempted to make illegal, to identify relevant home

### Candid’s Foundation 1000

Candid’s [Foundation 1000](#) list is 1,000 of the largest U.S. private and community foundations. The Foundation 1000 makes up only about 1 percent of U.S. funders, but together their giving account for 50-60 percent of the grant dollars Candid tracks from U.S. foundations in a given year.

page text changes since 2024 and confirmed each change manually by comparing the archival text to the live web page.

What we found is concerning.

The 773 foundations within the F1000 with websites account for \$30 billion in giving each year, ranging from \$15,000 per year to over \$1 billion. **One in twelve foundations, responsible together for \$1 out of every \$5 given (\$5.7 billion per year) and nearly \$1 in every \$4 given for marginalized communities have made changes to their websites that seem to be attempts to comply in advance** with arguably illegal executive orders that attempt to forbid “promotion” of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the social sector. We will refer to these as “self-censoring” foundations.

While **self-censoring foundations on average gave twice as much as the other F1000 foundations**, more than half of self-censoring foundations gave less than \$25 million per year. That giving level implies assets of less than \$500 million, below the floor the administration set for their first round of “civil compliance proceedings” against violators of the order.

NCRP observed self-censorship in various forms. **Some funders have rewritten homepage headers, menus, and even entire blocks of content to remove references to race, diversity, equity, or inclusion, but otherwise to leave the impression very little has changed on their site. Others have gone further, disappearing sections of their website that had formerly described their “commitment” to diversity and inclusion in their funding.**

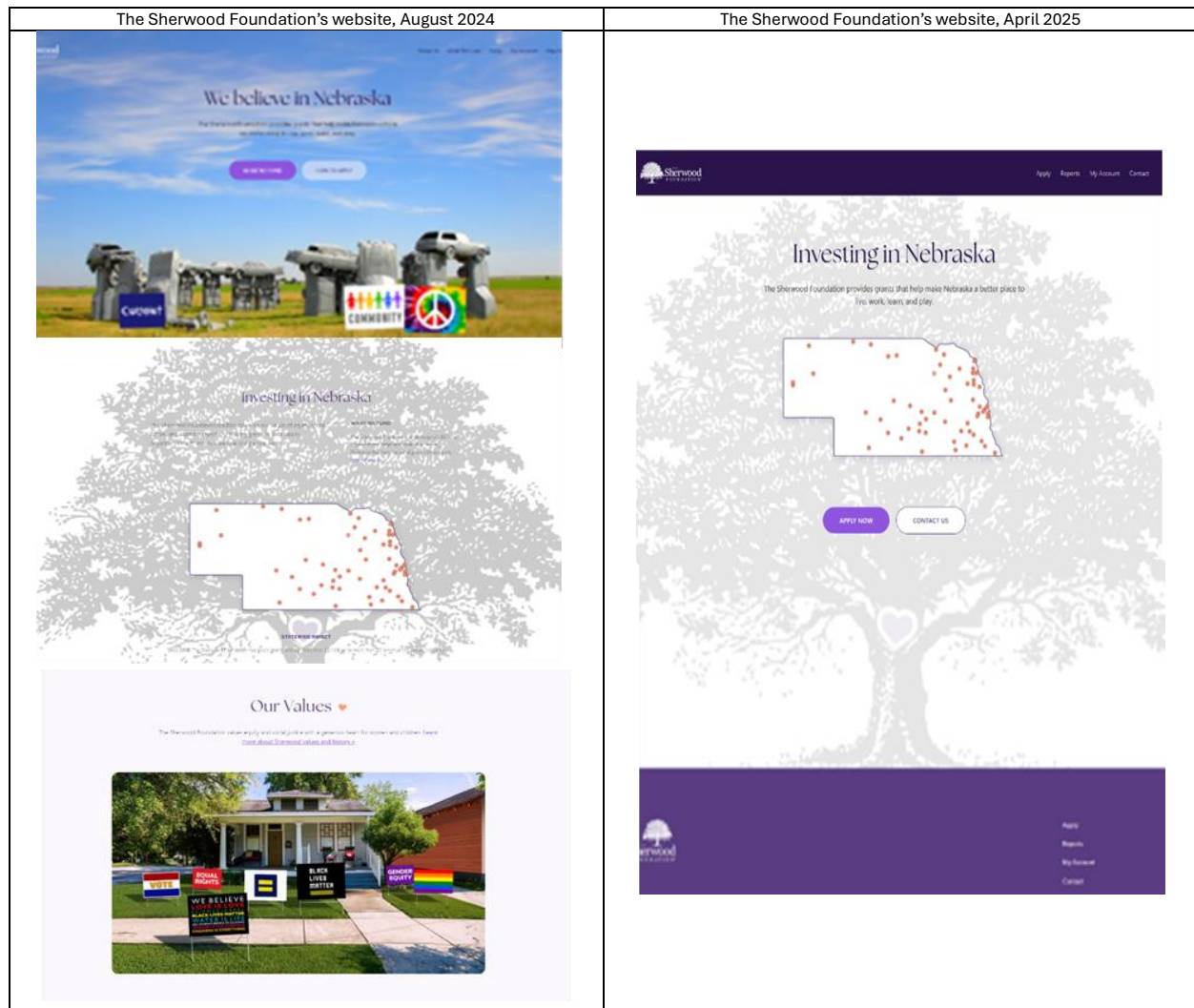
Funder Website Text Changes

BEFORE	AFTER
Black, Brown, and all people of color Diverse communities in need LGBTQ+ youth Equity and diversity Advancing equity and belonging Ending racial injustice	All people Communities in need Youth initiative Building social capital [NO REPLACEMENT] [NO REPLACEMENT]

A few illustrative examples:

- From a focus on “Black and Brown” people to “all people”
- From giving for “diverse communities” in New York City to “communities” in New York City
- From a grantee feature about “LGBTQ+ youth” leadership program support to strengthen “LGBTQ+ organizations” to the same grantee feature about “youth initiative” program support for “growth capacity...across the organizations”
- Changing a section called “Equity and Diversity” to be called “Building Social Capital” and removing from the section a paragraph on “advancing equity and belonging”
- Removing “Ending Racial Justice” altogether from the foundation’s stated “Purposes” and editing the page to which that button had formerly pointed to remove all of the “racial justice” language
- Restructuring the website to bury pages on reproductive rights and racial justice that had been prominently linked on the home page

The Sherwood Foundation (\$291 million/year in giving), a Buffett family foundation, changed their website in ways that caught the [San Francisco Chronicle's](#) attention. While a particularly visually striking one, it is not dissimilar from the other self-censorship NCRP researchers observed on the web pages of a numerically small but financially powerful set of foundations.



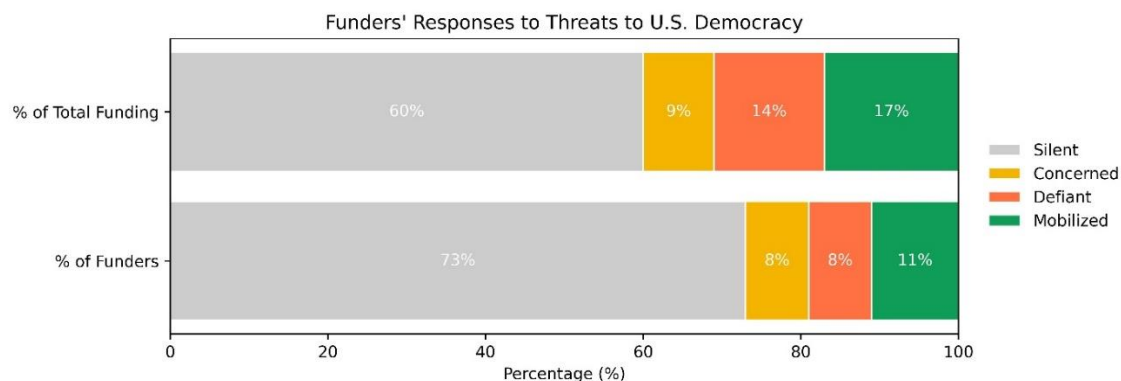
Other funders have completely retooled their description of their strategic focus to de-emphasize structural barriers to equity, and still others have removed grantee lists or significantly reduced the information available about them via their website.

**The many different ways funders appear to be changing how they speak about their work suggest there are different motivations driving their actions.** NCRP researchers hypothesize that some are self-censoring out of raw risk aversion, either to the risk of losing donors (in the case of public foundations) or to the risk of being threatened with federal investigation (however lawless and ultimately ineffective those investigations may ultimately prove to be). Some are likely acting out of a paternal instinct to protect their grantees whose work engages with race or gender. Some are probably relieved to have a plausible cover—political or legal—to renege on public commitments they felt compelled to make in the first place. Some of the changes may be pure coincidence.

Taken all together however, and at a time when the community-based organizations that knit the nation together are groaning under the burden of austerity, they comprise a troubling trend. Whatever may be driving these attempts to comply with the new administration’s speech rules, they are short-sighted. **Ultimately, there is no level of silence or compliance that will satisfy the Trumpist movement’s well-articulated desire to transform not just the country’s government but its society and culture into their narrow image.**

## What about those foundations who have used their public platforms to assert their independence from the attempted authoritarian crackdown on association and speech?

NCRP researchers closely examined the websites of F1000 funders with annual giving over \$25 million for speech that was responsive to the historic challenge facing civil society and US democracy. We looked specifically at foundation speech since inauguration, when administration attacks have demanded new leadership from the philanthropic sector. Free philanthropy can amplify injustices like the Trumpist federal government’s multi-pronged assault on Constitutional rights. By calling us back to our shared values in times of crisis, even small groups of philanthropists have the power to shift the sector forward—to innovate like the opponents of Constitutional, multi-racial democracy are innovating. Silence on the part of 9- and 10-figure endowments in times like these, however, would point to a deep complacency in our increasingly unequal philanthropic sector.



NCRP researchers combed through funders “About Us” pages, “The Latest From Us” pages, Blogs and Newsletter pages—any place the foundation shares content detailing their current work or agenda or making announcements to the public. Together the 230 funders whose public communications NCRP canvassed were responsible for \$25 billion each year in giving.

Across their public channels, four patterns emerged:

**SILENT:** First, **73 percent of funders, together responsible for 60 percent of the \$25 billion in annual giving, appear not to have publicly addressed the crisis in US democracy.** Most of these funders had been regularly updating their website with new content, but nothing on their newest

news, no blog posts, or any relevant press releases that spoke to the ongoing attacks on democracy, civil society, and the rule of law.

**CONCERNED:** A relatively small group of funders have made statements expressing concern but in cautious language meant to avoid claiming or using their substantial power. Among the 230 funders we examined, **eight percent have mentioned the potential impact of executive orders or funding cuts, but without specifics about why this is happening or what they or we, the public, can do to help.** As a “concerned” funder, they consider their job done after making one post that vaguely addresses the fear any vulnerable person might have.

Some examples of a few phrases “concerned funders” might use include:

- “In these times of uncertainty”
- “This time of crisis”
- “Prepare for the next few years”
- “There’s much to be fearful about”
- “Communities are being threatened”

This eight percent—responsible for nine percent of funding—are taking an empathetic stance toward their communities, but worrying together is not the same as solidarity, and none of these funders spoke to how we got here or how they might help get us out.

**DEFIANT:** Another **eight percent of funders, who together gave 14 percent of annual funding, have expressed defiance.** These funders have noted their resistance to the administration’s new speech rules or to the assault on the rule of law while still shying away from any speech about the ways to combat either. They are more direct than their concerned peers in naming the threats, and they even express the will to stick to their values, but they are still silent or vague about the actions required—either on their own part or the people’s—to reassert popular sovereignty and Constitutional government.

**MOBILIZED:** Silence and trepidation aren’t the only paths funders are choosing, however. NCRP researchers identified 11 percent of funders, responsible for an outsized 17 percent of all funding, whose speech indicates they’ve mobilized: not only are they willing to speak, but they are speaking about action they are going to take. These **11 percent have spoken plainly about the threats to democracy in the US and they have spoken about meeting those threats with action** from sector and the broader public alike.

A few examples of foundations that have used their platforms to mobilize are:

- **Meyer Memorial Trust:** “Committed \$1 million to funding organizations that were preparing for this moment... and funding frontline organizations that have experienced some funding freezes.”
- **MJ Murdock Charitable Trust:** “We are also having conversations with nonprofit and philanthropic leaders, seeking legal counsel, and engaging in national dialogue...and continuing to contribute above the 5% threshold.”

- **Kataly Foundation:** “Kataly is in the process of moving \$2.4 million in rapid response grantmaking to support the needs we have heard expressed by our grantee partners: social movement defense, safety, and security for organizations and community leaders, climate disaster relief following Hurricanes Helene and Milton, and U.S.-based Jewish and Arab organizing for land and liberation in solidarity with Palestine.”
- **Marguerite Casey Foundation:** “Philanthropy must do something different. Protect the most vulnerable among us who are being kidnapped, exploited, and starved by this administration. Come together with healthcare providers and labor unions fighting to protect Medicaid, food banks, and public schools working to protect SNAP, and legal service providers, like CUNY’s Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility, working to limit this administration’s overreach.”
- **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation:** “Bill Gates has reportedly warned President Donald Trump’s administration that his philanthropic endeavors are no replacement for the U.S. government’s funding of global health care efforts.”
- **The James Irvine Foundation:** “Threats to round up and deport millions of undocumented workers would damage our state, and worsen conditions for businesses, our economy, and families already struggling to make ends meet.”
- **The San Francisco Foundation:** “We choose to double down on our commitment to social justice and racial equity, to embrace a vision of a Bay Area – and a nation – where everyone, regardless of background or identity, can thrive.”

These funders leave no room for misinterpreting the side of history they are on. Their messaging is even stronger when it’s paired with the exact ways they plan on aiding in their mission, like funding frontline organizations, streamlining and increasing funds elsewhere, and even naming the ways that others can get involved. This bold 11 percent is ready to meet regime backlash or donor withdrawals, displaying the civic courage for which the majority of funders seem still to be searching.