

How Philanthropy Can Support Movement Leadership

“ In an ideal world, foundations would fund a movement like we mean it.”
—Desiree Flores, Arcus Foundation

Many funders are already successfully engaging in approaches and practices that support movement leadership. Others are putting changes in place as a result of the pandemic and uprisings that could become permanent.

This guide accompanies the video about best practices to support movement leadership. After watching the video, follow the steps in the guide to deepen reflection and discussion, and to foster change.



Foster Genuine Partnerships

Partnerships between funders and grantees require trust and are developed and nurtured over time. In the video, Crystal Hayling (Libra Foundation) mentions that it is important to “interrupt the normally adversarial relationship” that sometimes occurs between funders and grantees. When funders acknowledge all the ways in which power shows up in a funder-grantee relationship, from personal privilege to institutional influence, it can make a significant difference to grantees. Deferring to the judgment of grantees and following their lead can also deepen trust, as embodied in the relationship between Foundation for A Just Society and Naripokkho.

“ In terms of just the power dynamics, the first thing we do is acknowledge and name that they exist... that in the larger scheme of things, the relationship is not on equal footing not because we don’t want it to be but because there’s inherent dynamics when money comes in play.”

—Prachi Patankar, Foundation for a Just Society

Move The Money: Practices and Values for Funding Social Movements is a set of resources produced by the Building Movement Project.

Move The Money is geared towards grantmaking institutions seeking to deepen and transform their support of organizations, networks, and leaders involved with social change movements. These resources draw and build upon the wave of ongoing efforts that encourage the philanthropic sector to invest in movements.

This guide is one of four that are available along with accompanying videos at www.buildingmovement.org.

When Foundation for A Just Society approached us, their approach was different, and we were so relieved. It really felt like they were women on the other side reaching out to us because they understood what we were trying to do and that was a whole different experience.”

—Shireen Huq, Naripokkho



Another example of trust-building comes from the experiences of Greisa Martinez Rosas (United We Dream) and Taryn Higashi (Unbound Philanthropy). Greisa recounted the early days of UWD, when “[w]e were a ragtag group of young people, coming out as undocumented and unafraid.” UWD members did not know what to wear or how to act during a site visit. Greisa remembered that even at this initial stage, Taryn Higashi was a believer and supporter. Taryn attended early UWD meetings and took a deep interest in the experiences, needs and demands of undocumented youth members. Soon, Unbound Philanthropy made the first grant that allowed UWD to hire salaried staff.

These shifts don’t just happen in one direction alone. Taryn recalled how the relationship between Unbound Philanthropy and UWD shaped the foundation’s own trajectory. “It was my first year at Unbound when I met United We Dream and we all entered into this together. So, I feel like as UWD grew up, Unbound grew up. It really shaped the way that we built our relationship with others. It really prepared us; it created a model. And it was more instinctive than it was intentional.”

Another way of building relationships is to demonstrate to the grantee that it is the foundation that is worthy of the grantee’s trust – rather than the other way around. Crystal Hayling (Libra Foundation) offers a description of this straightforward approach: “Let’s actually put the money on the table to demonstrate that we are trustworthy, that we can be partners, and then let’s begin a conversation and a relationship.”

Finally, Uma Viswanathan (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation) explained that it is important to develop relationships that can tolerate and address conflict. “It has to do with the valuing of relationship over short term outcomes, the ability to be able to navigate conflict, because there is going to be conflict when you’re talking about power, when you’re talking about money, when you’re talking about resources.”

Reflections:

- When genuine trust develops between a foundation and its grantee-partners, what could be possible?
- How does your institution build authentic relationships with your grantee-partners? How do you express and acknowledge privilege, power and positionality now? What could shift in your orientation and how might that make the relationship become more equal?
- Consider Crystal Hayling’s quote above about demonstrating trustworthiness. How could your institution demonstrate trustworthiness to potential grantees?
- Keeping Taryn Higashi’s story about United We Dream in mind, how do you challenge your organization’s assessment of ‘readiness’ for a grant?
- Consider Uma Viswanathan’s quote above about building the capacity for conflict. How does your foundation currently address conflict with grantees?





Practice Flexibility

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council on Foundations rallied philanthropy to endorse a pledge signed by over 800 grantmakers to ensure that frontline groups received resources to respond efficiently and strategically to the crisis. The [pledge](#) called on grantmakers to loosen restrictions on existing grants, make new grants that were flexible and unrestricted and to trust that grantee partners already knew the solutions towards creating systemic change. In our funder-movement leader dialogues, it became evident that many foundations were already practicing flexibility in different ways including:

- Adopting Verbal Reporting
- Being Amenable to Changing and Shifting Timelines and Priorities
- Providing Flexible and Unrestricted Funds
- Providing Funds Quickly Without Requiring Lengthy Application and Vetting Processes

Whether these changes will become permanent remains to be seen. Funders shared that it is important to create an institution-wide commitment to change which includes working not only with program officers but also with senior management, board leadership, finance teams, donor relations staff and grants management teams that monitor compliance and due diligence. The alignment between these various parts of a foundation can ensure that grantees aren't completing 20-page applications, evaluating their programs through metrics that don't apply to their communities and contorting to meet stringent requirements on grants.

“

These choices that we've made, these policies that we've set up—all of these things are not that permanent. They were created by people—and they can be changed by people.”

—Uma Viswanathan, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

How can philanthropy get creative about getting funding out the door more quickly? It should not take six months to process grants. If you're supporting movement leadership, in six months, the world has changed.”

—Meg Busse, Roddenberry Foundation

Reflections:

- How has your foundation changed practices and policies in the wake of the multiple crises in 2020? What steps are necessary to make these changes permanent? What other flexible practices are grantees requesting at this time?
- Consider the quote above from Meg Busse. What does Meg mean about the world changing in six months, and how could this knowledge inform the timelines for funding? What is the minimum amount of information needed to process grants?
- Consider the quote above from Uma Viswanathan. What are the ways in which existing requirements and roles that don't center grantees can be undone?





Support Movement Ecosystems and Solidarity

Additionally, it's important for philanthropy to support movement ecosystems as a whole, rather than create competition between organizations in an ecosystem. Movements can be more effective and sustainable with a well-resourced and interdependent ecosystem. When philanthropic entities fund movements to scale by supporting many organizations and collectives engaged in diverse strategies rather than a limited scope of groups, the entire ecosystem can be transformed to create a larger impact.

An example of resourcing a diverse ecosystem comes from Kris Hayashi (Transgender Law Center) and Desiree Flores (Arcus Foundation) who shared how a national trans coalition has emerged over decades of struggle together, from pushing back against anti-trans legislation at the state level to resisting federal immigration attacks to addressing the murders of Black and Brown trans community members. Kris noted that several funders committed early on to support the growth of this national trans coalition and continued to invest in the growth of a movement ecosystem that included legal, organizing, communications and other strategies. One of many outcomes of an ecosystem approach in resourcing trans-led groups is that local and grassroots organizations, which are often left out of national funding initiatives, have been able to obtain resources as well, and that POC-led trans groups have been supported.

Another example of ecosystem funding occurred in the wake of the uprisings in 2020 after the murders of Black people by the police. Crystal Hayling (Libra Foundation) and Charles Long (Movement for Black Lives) shared that many foundations created specific funds to resource Black-led groups. For example, the Libra Foundation created the [Democracy Frontlines Fund](#) which is committed to funding power building organizers and Black-led groups through multi-year general operating support. Such an approach has enabled networks like the Movement for Black Lives and the broader ecosystem of racial justice groups to receive support quickly and efficiently for the long run.

Reflections:

- Judith LeBlanc (Native Organizer Alliance) explains the importance of ecosystem support in this way:

“ Philanthropy would make a mistake in thinking that investing in one organization is enough. Philanthropy needs to be aware of an ecosystem. It's a way of strengthening the collective leadership.”

What has your foundation learned about the importance of collective leadership?

- What does it mean to facilitate cooperation between groups instead of competition? How does funding an ecosystem enable deeper partnerships among organizations?
- Movement leaders emphasized the importance of working in solidarity with each other's causes and communities. How can philanthropy more effectively support solidarity practices?





Practice Accountability

Throughout our dialogues with movement leaders and funders, we heard about the importance of accountability and transparency. For example, funders can assess how they are moving along in the process to decolonize their foundations by identifying oppressive systems and practices both historically and now. Funders can also evaluate themselves vis-à-vis their impact on their peers. Taryn Higashi from Unbound Philanthropy explained self-accountability in the following way:

“

Because we talk to other grantmakers all day, we have a sense of what they are interested in so we can pitch the work in different ways. We want to help work with our grantee partners to see how to position folks to access very large investments from places far larger than us. It's part of our self-evaluation: how much work have you done, in addition to your grantmaker role, to help your grantees, to help the field?”

—Taryn Higashi, Unbound Philanthropy

In addition, funders can engage in collaborative funding practices such as creating a [Brain Trust](#) like the Libra Foundation did to identify movement advisors or inviting a group of movement leaders to identify organizations that are emerging. These accountability practices can ensure that foundations are considering their impact not only on their grantees but on their sector and on movements as a whole.

Reflections:

- How does your foundation evaluate its support of movement building and movement leaders? How is the input of grantee-partners and movement advisors gathered?
- What could happen if foundations influenced their peers to adopt the strategies in this guide?
- If foundations were transparent about their attempts to change practices and policies, how could they prepare for critical feedback from grantees?



