

FUNDER COLLABORATIVES

Can foundations make a bigger impact as part of a funder collaborative than by going it alone?

IN THIS GUIDE

Contributors describe how collaboratives help grantmakers learn together, distribute risks, and aim for larger goals, like trying to move an entire field. But these joint ventures also come with challenges: establishing ground rules, sharing control, and keeping your own foundation apprised of what's happening. Get suggestions for handling inevitable tensions and see how critical nonfunders can be to this type of grantmaking.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Designing a collaborative that fits the purpose**
- **Bringing nonfunders into the process**
- **How to assess whether your collaborative is working**



"If we want to make a difference we're going to have to collaborate because there's no way we can 'fix' things ourselves."

—A foundation president

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A sample from the guide:

Nuts and Bolts: Questions to Ask and Answer Together at the Start

The members of a prospective collaborative have a host of important decisions to make together. Experienced funders said that clarity on these issues early on is essential for good relations and success later on. Here's a rough guide to aid the start-up process.

PURPOSE

- Are we interested in advancing an issue, a field, a strategy, or something else?
- On what level will we focus: local, state, regional, national, international?
- What are our short-term goals? What are our long-term goals? How long do we plan to operate?
- What are our core values and commitments?
- How will we safeguard the interests of grantees; for example, will we require that donors commit "new" money?
- Are we interested in influencing other funders by educating them about an issue or strategy, alerting them to opportunities, or encouraging them to work in alignment?

OPERATIONS

- What type of collaborative do we want? A learning network? Strategic alignment? A pooled fund?
- Should we hire full or part-time staff or an intermediary to coordinate the work? Consultants?

MEMBERSHIP

- Should we limit the size of the membership or involve as many funders as possible?
- Who will be eligible to participate: foundations, individual donors, governments, others?
- Are we aiming for a range of members: for example, small and large, national and local, private and corporate?
- Will nonfunders participate; if so, how?
- Is a financial commitment required? Will there be a minimum commitment? Should larger institutions commit more; for example, will we use a "sliding scale"?
- Will members be expected or required to participate in meetings and events, review grant proposals, serve on committees? How much time do we expect these responsibilities to demand?
- How will we identify and incorporate new members, and how often will we do it?
- How will we build and maintain trust and good relationships among members, including new ones?

GOVERNANCE

- Do we want to rely on a chairperson or steering committee to handle some responsibilities? What will those responsibilities be? How will they be selected?
- Will the full membership make grantmaking and resource decisions? Will others (staff, steering committee, advisors, grantees) be involved; if so, how?
- How will we make decisions? Will each funding institution or member have one vote? Or will voting privileges be proportional to the amount of members' financial commitments?
- What if we reach an impasse and can't decide? How will we move forward?

GRANTS AND RESOURCES

- Will we use an RFP process or open application? Or will we invite applications or otherwise narrow the pool of potential grantees? Will we use a common application?
- How many grants or PRIs will we make per year? Of what amount, and on what grant cycle?
- If we intend to do regrants, will smaller or local institutions be required to "match" commitments in some way?
- Will we provide financial resources only, or will we offer other supports, such as technical assistance, networking opportunities, or advocacy?
- Will the collaborative itself undertake strategic communications activities such as research, dissemination, policy advocacy, or networking?

EVALUATION

- How will we evaluate the effort? What measures can we agree on?
- Will nonfunders play a role?

TERMINATION

- What is our exit strategy?
- How will we know we're ready to end the collaborative or move it to a new home?