

Ten Tips to Better Resource Civil Society

Within grant construction

1. Space for community control – in aspects of how a grantee is given funds, even for set purposes, find choice that they can offer to relevant communities, helping those communities gain ownership over the grantee's overall work. For example, a CBO can generate 3 potential cost share activities that fit under the overall program umbrella and select which to do in the first year through community engagement. Experiment with further devolution of control, such as over grant or subgrant decision-making, in strategy design and TOC definition, and in deciding who gets to be at the table to decide the above.
2. Ask for exit plan – rather than the donor planning for exit, ask the grantee to define an exit plan for how they will ensure their organization benefits from and maintains as much value from the partnership as possible.
3. Shared understanding and curiosity in learning and Theory of Change – in working with a grantee, ask them to highlight the 2-3 areas of most uncertainty regarding how the program is supposed to fit to their context, and to update learning around this. The language of systems thinking can be useful for this in some instances, by highlighting that discovery is an ongoing process, and so updating the TOC reflects dynamic contexts rather than uncertain plans.
4. Be clear about saying no – if an application is not core to your focus, do not ask for adjustments and changes from the applicant to try to make a fit.
5. Statement of values – in calls for proposals and in grants, issue a statement of donor values that reflects community philanthropy ideas as well as the donor's mission. Ask the grantee to offer feedback, at regular review periods, on what more the donor could do to live up to its values.

Within project design

6. Connect actors through work, spotlight connections – in working with grantees, ask them to note key connections made during a quarter or year. Spend time linking grantees with local businesses, other foundations, or other groups – particularly those addressing issues in the same community but not the same topics, e.g. connect grantees working on education with folks working on clean water. If desired, set targets for the number and quality of connections to be made, and recalibrate with input from both sides, with mutual responsibility for reaching those targets.
7. Invite perspectives and diversity not biased by funding – set up advisory boards of stakeholders in the outcome who are not affected by the funding flows directly. Ask these advisors to provide regular input on what is working well and not working, as well as key trends in the context. Model a thick skin in encouraging and welcoming critical feedback, with an emphasis on fit to context of the programming rather than quality of

execution (see point 3 above). Support such gathering of diverse views to be overseen and carried out by the grantee over time.

8. Triggered resources (matching funds, surveys, TA) – reserve some support intended for a program to be unlocked by grantee actions consistent with community philanthropy. For example, if a grantee points to an area within their efforts where uptake is lacking but it is unclear why, you can use funds to commission a household survey to help answer the question; if the grantee secures a cash donation from local businesses, you can offer a matching grant; if the grantee suggests an information campaign, you can contract a marketing firm to work with them. These are all actions that donors typically conduct during their own planning, rather than with and through grantees (e.g. surveys to adjust approaches), or else they are framed as grant requirements rather than grant opportunities (e.g. cost share rather than matching funds).

In Language Used

9. Frame change as bigger than you, e.g. [Collective Impact](#) – in the language of the program, consistently situate the expected impact of the effort as beyond the scope of the grant. This helps remind both parties and others that both donor and grantee are contributing to social change, and other actors and drivers are vital as well.
10. Simple language for expectations, e.g. Expect/like/love to see from [outcome mapping](#) – help grantees answer questions around what they expect the program results will be, as distinct from aspirations for program impact if it is successful, as a triangulation and reality check on donor planning and theories. This can easily be incorporated into the theory of change.