

# Worksheet: How to Fund a Coalition of Nonprofit Partners



It is very likely that no matter what type of funder you are—a *sustainer*, *campaigner* or *launcher*—at some point in your philanthropic journey you will hear from the groups that you fund a desire to collaborate more formally together on a particular project.

This usually requires more funding than just the baseline amount of funding. It also requires you as a funder/donor to take some proactive steps to ensure that the collaboration is funded in a manner that will really work for the groups and support them crossing the finish line.

You can fund a collaboration badly if you are not careful—hence I devote an entire lesson to this subject. Examples include giving only one or two of the most charismatic organizations money to lead the collaboration while not also offering capacity support to the smaller organizations who are so busy doing the work they may not have a sophisticated fundraising or development team available to promote their work.

If you are not clear on the areas of agreement and disagreement at the start, you could end up empowering only one faction, and that may end up hurting more than helping progress for the coalition. I have seen all of this happen. Thus I offer you some guidelines so that—while it does not guarantee success—it will reduce your chances of failure.

When a collaboration works well everyone is facilitating one another and helping them excel at the piece of the puzzle that they are good at. For example, a group that is good at media will lean into that, and another that is good at data and statistics will produce the research needed, and so forth.

***It does not work well*** when there is a leadership void, turf and ego issues within and between groups, or a disagreement about strategy and outcome so serious that the organization can't move forward with a unified vision at all.



“The groups need to be clear about how they will navigate the differences”

## ■ Key Questions to Ask

### Pre-proposal

- Ask them how they want to submit the proposals. Some groups want to submit one proposal that shows how they all will work together; but it is also OK if they want to submit separate proposals, as long as they are clear about how it all fits together.
- Ask how their goals align between organizations on the issue. Let the groups know it's OK if they don't all agree on the strategy; but they need to be clear about how they will navigate the differences, so that they can work well together overall.
- Ask how they are sharing the workload across organizations. Make sure it is clear who is responsible for what from the beginning so that you can be sure everyone is compensated appropriately.
- Talk personally with each organization one-on-one and then convene them as a group. It is so important to talk one-on-one with each leader in the collaboration because they often can tell you things in confidence in a personal meeting that they never could say in a larger group setting.



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## ■ Once you get the proposal

- Are the benchmarks and outcomes similar between organizations? By the time you get the proposal, if you did your pre-work well, the benchmarks and outcomes should be similar. It's still good to double check to be sure however.
- Are the funding requests fair and equitable? Make sure that all the groups are asking for what they truly need to succeed.
- Are they missing anyone that should be part of the group? Now that you have the full picture of requests, it is easier to see if there are any gaps. Maybe there is a nonprofit you know about that should be in this mix and should submit a proposal.
- What do other experts say? It's important at this stage, once you have talked at length with the nonprofits that are requesting funding, that you also get perspectives from additional experts *who are not seeking funding* but who know in depth the issue and whether the collaboration is necessary for the result.
- Are other funders also interested? An enhanced collaboration among organizations often requires more funding and support than any single foundation can offer. Therefore—especially when we are talking about collaborations—it is important to identify other funders potentially interested in supporting the cause.

## Homework

1. In your experience with the issue you care about do you see a potential benefit to supporting a collaboration?

2. Out of all the items listed in this summary, which seem to you the most challenging aspects of funding a collaboration? How do you feel you can get through the challenges?

3. What for you is the most exciting part about supporting collaborations?

*If you would like my direct feedback, please fill out the online assessment provided in this lesson.*