

Movement Building & Philanthropy:

Learning from Grantees' Priorities
& Recommendations for Funders

Gender
Fund
Co_lab

This report was produced by Gender Funders CoLab. Founded in 2014, Gender Funders Colab brings together a group of private foundations around the question of how to contribute most effectively to the rights of women, girls, and trans people and to feminist movements. Gender Funders Colab's members make more than US\$200 million in grants for women's rights annually and consist of 11 private foundations: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Channel Foundation, Ford Foundation, Foundation for a Just Society, Oak Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Packard Foundation, Sigrid Rausing Trust, Wallace Global Fund, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
Introduction	6
Defining Key Terms	6
Scope & Methodology	9
What is movement building? Priorities from the field	10
Strategies & Priorities	10
Barriers	13
Funding Movement Building	16
Promising Donor Practices	16
Gender Funders Colab: Learning Toward Action	19
Recommendations for Funders	20

Executive Summary

Women's rights and feminist movements are at the forefront of social change in every region around the world. Yet the ways in which they organize – sometimes outside of formal institutions, often across issues and regions, and always in response to their specific contexts – is rarely matched by typical philanthropic grants. This report aims to spark dialogue about how foundations can responsibly, effectively, and meaningfully support movement building that advances the rights of women, girls, and trans people.

The analysis is based on a yearlong learning process by Gender Funders CoLab a group of 12 private foundations that, together, make more than US\$200 million in grants for women, girls and trans rights annually. Through a survey of more than 70 women's rights and feminist organizations in 29 countries, Gender Funders CoLab gathered direct input on groups' needs, priorities, and assessments of how philanthropy can do better to support movement building. This report is an opportunity to share these lessons more broadly within the field of philanthropy.

The findings point to two distinct areas where funders can best support movements: grants for movement-building activities and advocacy within the

philanthropic sector. Along with promising donor practices, the report provides four concrete recommendations for funders:

1. Provide flexible, core support and multi-year grants.
2. Center women, girls and trans rights as a key strategy to achieve social change objectives.
3. Identify funding spaces where you can advocate for more and better funding for women's rights and feminist movements.
4. Fund the long-term and informal work of movement building.

Drawing from movements themselves, this report is designed to provide practical ways for funders to support women, girls and trans rights and feminist social change.

Introduction

“Large scale social change is not created by philanthropy, but philanthropy does have an impact on who has the resources to engage and at what scale.”¹

“As foundations seek to catalyze broad-based social change, there is a need for greater understanding of what social movements are, how they evolve, and how foundations can support them.”²

The field of philanthropy is based on the promise of transforming resources into impact. For foundations seeking to support the most pressing issues of our time – from climate change to racial and economic justice to women’s rights – this promise means understanding how best to deliver funding to movements and organizations at the forefront of social change.

Founded in 2014, Gender Funders CoLab brings together a group of private foundations around the question of how to contribute most effectively to the rights of women, girls, and trans people and to feminist movements. Gender Funders CoLab’s members make more than US\$200 million in grants for women’s rights annually and consist of 12 private foundations: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Channel Foundation, Dietel Partners, Ford Foundation, Foundation for a Just Society, NoVo Foundation, Oak

¹ Daniel, V. (2017.) “America is Burning: White people in philanthropy, what is your move?” Medium. <https://medium.com/@GroundswellFund/americaisburning-4f154e201a3a>.

² Masters, Barbara and Osborn, Torie (2010) “Social Movements and Philanthropy: How Foundations Can Support Movement Building,” *The Foundation Review*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 3. P. 14. <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1094&context=tfr>.

³ See Arutyunova, A., & Clark, C. (2013). *Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots: The Status of Financing for Women’s Rights Organizing and Gender Equality*. Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID). Toronto: Canada. https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/WTL_Starving_Roots.pdf.

⁴ Just Associates (JASS). (2013). *Feminist Movement Builder’s Dictionary*. Second Edition. <https://justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/feminist-movement-builders-dictionary-jass.pdf>. Page 14.

⁵ Gottlieb, H. (2015). “Building Movements, Not Organizations.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/building_movements_not_organizations.

Defining Key Terms

“More and better” resourcing is a rallying cry for women’s rights and feminist movements. “More” includes new funders directly supporting women and girls and current funders investing on a substantially larger scale. “Better” includes resourcing in forms that are accessible to women’s rights organizations and movements and fund movements’ priorities, including through core and multi-year support.³

Core support is funding that is not restricted to particular activities or projects and can be used flexibly, including for salaries, organizational strengthening, or for programming. In contrast, “project support” is funding that is restricted to a specific program or project.

Movement building is process of political organizing that mobilizes communities or constituencies toward a common agenda, involves short- and long-term strategies for change, and strengthens the individual and collective agency.⁴

While movements often include organizations, movement building is not the same as capacity building for individual organizations.⁵

Just Associates (JASS) also distinguishes feminist

Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Sigrid Rausing Trust, Wallace Global Fund, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Gender Funders CoLab members vary in size, scope, and mission and fund a range of women's rights issues, from gender-based violence to young women's leadership to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Some members fund women, girls, and trans people exclusively, while others have a dedicated women's rights portfolio in addition to other portfolios. Several fund women's rights in connection with cross-cutting issues such as disability rights, migrant rights, racial justice, and labor rights. Gender Funders CoLab members are united in their commitment to mobilizing **more and better resources for women's rights** organizations and feminist movements.

Women, girls, and trans people are at the forefront of social change in every region around the world. Yet the ways in which they organize within feminist movements – sometimes outside of formal institutions, often across issues and regions, and always in response to their specific contexts – is rarely matched by the kinds of funding typical in philanthropy. This reality has inspired Gender Funders CoLab to focus on understanding what a movement-building approach to funding means for its members.

Over the past year, Gender Funders CoLab has undertaken a process of **learning toward action**, asking hard questions about how each institution can more boldly resource women's rights and feminist movements. Core to this process, Gender Funders CoLab has engaged directly with grantee organizations to understand their needs, priorities, and assessments of how philanthropy can do better to support movement building.

This report brings Gender Funders CoLab's internal learning process to light with three goals. First, it aims

movement building, which “brings a feminist analysis and principles, and specifically, the equal role and voice of women into other agendas and movements, including the environmental, human rights, peace and labor movements.”⁶

Feminist movements refer to women, girls, and trans people mobilizing to confront systems of oppression based on gender and overlapping and interrelated forms of oppression, including based on sexual and gender identity, race, age, ability, and class.

Women's human rights (or “women's rights”) recognize that gender has been a barrier for full access to the rights enshrined in Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent frameworks. Women's rights are the full enjoyment of these rights regardless of gender.

This report defines women's rights as inclusive of trans women and attentive to the specific and overlapping forms of oppression that lesbian, bisexual, trans and gender-non-conforming people face.

⁶ JASS. (2013.) Page 14.

to strengthen Gender Funders CoLab's accountability to movements, and especially members' grantee organizations involved in movement building. By mapping the feedback and recommendations from women's rights organizations, the report is designed to **spark dialogue with movements** about how funders can be responsible movement partners. This is a beginning to that important conversation.

Second, the report is an opportunity to share the lessons Gender Funders CoLab is exploring more broadly within the field of philanthropy. These lessons provide a window into what it means to resource movement building and women's rights. Gender Funders CoLab is not alone in this journey. For instance, a 2013 report from Justice Funders explored approaches to funding movement building the Bay Area.⁷ Gender Funders CoLab aims to contribute to this emerging dialogue about the role funders can play in supporting movements on their own terms.

Finally, the report is designed with **recommendations for funders**. Drawing from movements themselves, the recommendations provide practical ways for funders to support women, girls and trans rights and feminist social change.

⁷ Lerza, Catherine. (2013.) Funding Movement Building: Bay Area Approaches. Justice Funders. <http://justicefunders.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Funding-Movement-Building-Bay-Area-Approaches.pdf>.

Scope & Methodology

In 2017, the members of Gender Funders CoLab invited 150 current grantees they considered movement building organizations to participate in a survey about their needs, priorities, and recommendations to funders. The survey generated 73 responses from 29 countries and included rich data on barriers to and possibilities for funding women's rights and feminist movements. The recommendations and findings shared here are based on data from the survey.⁸

This snapshot is, of course, confined to the sample. Movements involve a range of communities, individuals, and informal networks, not only formal organizations like those surveyed (see defining key terms). However, the sample does include many organizations that explicitly engage in movement building and are connected closely with others organizing in less formal ways. The extent of their involvement in movements is clear: respondents report that 60% of their time is spent on movement-building activities, detailed in the next section.

Regional representation is also limited. Notably, there are no respondents from the Middle East and North Africa and the smallest sample is from Central & Eastern Europe and Central Asia (4 groups). Over half of the organizations are based in the Global North, of which 22 groups work globally (57% of Global North-based respondents). 43% of the groups are based in the Global South and East.

At the same time, the data cover a large range of types of organizations. The largest group is women's rights organizations (23), followed by women's funds (12), mixed organizations (such as women's rights programs within larger institutions or organizations) (7), and networks and coalitions (6). There are also academic, re-granting, and LGBTQI organizations in the sample. Though all respondents focus on women's rights in some form, often exclusively, they also work with a diverse range of issues and movements (see Movement Collaborations on page 12).

⁸ The survey and original analysis by ImpactMapper <https://www.impactmapper.com/>.

What is movement building? Priorities from the field

Responses from over seventy organizations working on women’s, girls’, and trans rights help shed light on what movement building means in practice. This section explores the strategies, priority areas, and barriers that organizations face in contributing to sustained and robust movements. The next section, “Funding Movement Building,” translates these findings into concrete recommendations for funders.

Strategies & Priorities

Organizations in Gender Funders CoLab’s sample report that

60% of their time is spent engaging in movement-building work.

Their strategies to support movement building include:

Movement-Building Strategies

- **Joining networks**
- **Strategically building bridges for other parts of their movements**
 - *“We’ve worked to make use of our position as an INGO to create access and leadership pathways for our grassroots partner”*
- **Forging alliances across sectors and across regions**
 - *“Working on abortion in the context of human rights and bodily autonomy, we have success collaborating with LGBTQI and sex workers movements in many countries. We also work closely with human rights lawyers and researchers.”*
- **Bringing women’s rights and feminist analysis into non-gender-specific spaces,** including human rights, climate change, racial justice, and economic justice.
 - *We have started to mobilize women’s NGOs and groups to protect respective environment, to increase women’s participation to environmental justice issues, learn to raise women’s voice to be heard to decision making process.*
- **Cultivating new leadership,** including youth leaders
- **Developing shared frames of reference**
 - *“We have worked particularly well with [the] economic justice movement by deepening our interlinkages approaches and identifying common priorities.”*

These are just some of the many strategies groups describe. They parallel research on what constitutes movement building. For instance, Masters and Osborn identify five core elements of movement building: 1) organizing an authentic base; 2) leadership; 3) vision and ideas; 4) alliances; and 5) advocacy infrastructure.⁹ These forms of mobilization underscore the sample's deliberate actions to go beyond the goals of their individual organizations. While such efforts are clear priorities for movement building, they are also some of the most underfunded aspects of the work. (See "Barriers" below.)

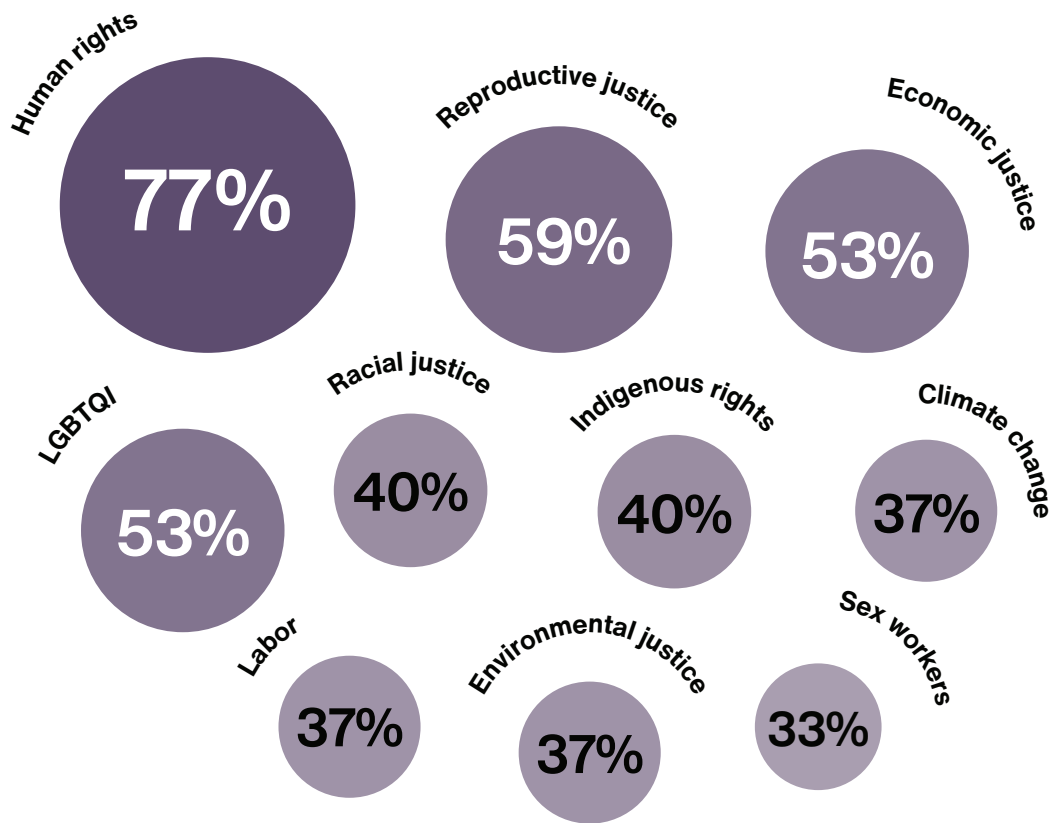
One of the most resounding findings is the high rate of collaboration across movements. This trend extends beyond women's rights and feminist organizing. Paul Hawken describes in his 2007 book, *Blessed Unrest*, high levels of collaboration marks a "growing global movement to create a healthy, humane world—work that is happening not under a single banner, but by millions of unaffiliated individuals and groups around the world."¹⁰

Cross-issue organizing reflects the complexity of people's actual lives, highlights the interrelation between feminist social change and many other social issues, and points to the clear need for support and funding that is not confined to a single sector.

⁹ Masters, Barbara and Osborn, Torie (2010). P 12.

¹⁰ Quoted in Gottlieb, H. (2015).

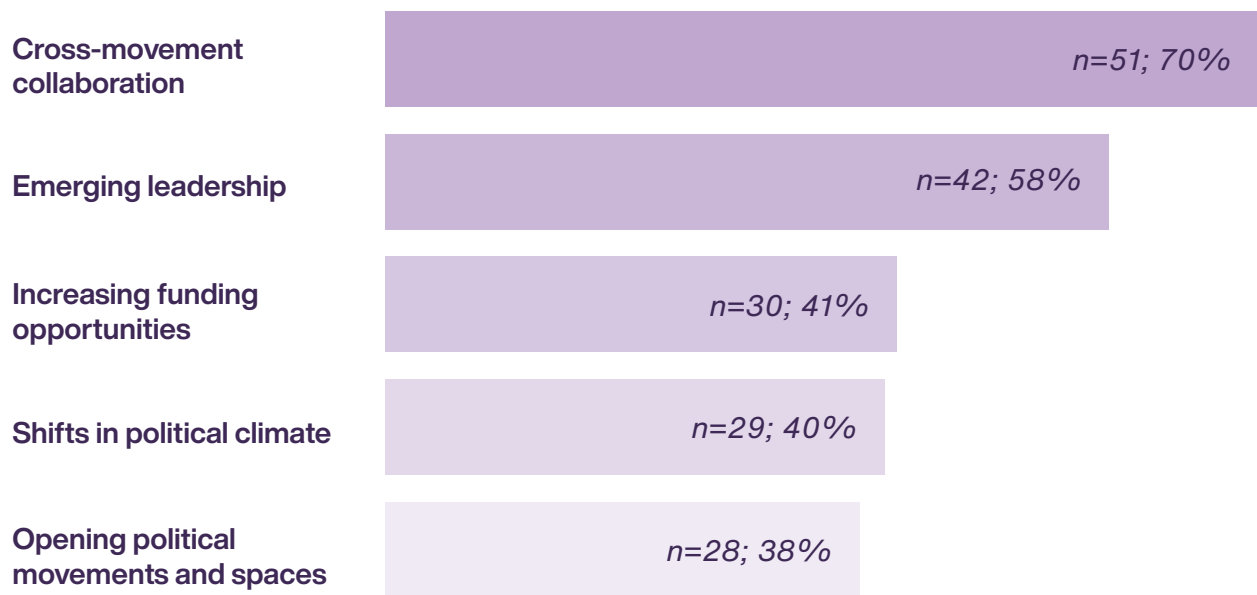
Top 10 Movement Collaborations



% of sample collaborating across each movement

In addition to their interrelated issues areas, respondents identified promising areas to strengthen feminist movements. These priorities underscore the potential for movements to seize political opportunities with agility and to cultivate leadership within the next generation of women's rights activists. While these may be movement-led strategies, they also shine light on areas where funders can strengthen their contributions to movement building.

Opportunities to Strengthen Feminist Movements



Legend: % of sample identifying this as a top opportunity for movement building

Barriers

Just as they cited many promising strategies to advance movement building, survey respondents also identified significant barriers they face.

Top 5 Barriers to engaging in more movement-building work

1. Lack of available funding
2. Lack of organizational capacity (e.g. skills, knowledge)
3. Lack of human resources (e.g. time)
4. Shrinking civil society space
5. Challenges in cross-movement collaboration

In Our Own Words

(Movement-Building Organizations Describe Challenges)

Lack of Funding

*“There is a marked lack of broader funding (for us and for other women’s orgs) for the work that is not a direct program or project, especially collaborations between organizations or among activists. **These under-resourced spaces are fundamental to maintain and strengthen movements, but***

most funding models support single organizations and project approaches with short impact horizons, as opposed to the long-term and often invisible work of building movements.”

*“Due to chronic underinvestment, **the global women’s movement is comprised of lots of little, clustered efforts. It is rich in its diversity and resilience.**”*

Movement building takes time *“You can only really presume to use the word “movement building” when you are able to stay the course for 10+ years...”*

Collaboration challenges *“It has taken us many years to get “a place at the table” in the mainstream human rights world... And still, it’s not an equal place at the table - we have more work to do in building these collaborations.”*

Living in Threat

Security threats and threats to the safety of women's human rights defenders is a concern across the board, but reveal some important differences for those working in the Global South and East, and those working in the Global North. While 59% of all respondents to the survey have faced threats in the past year, this number was slightly higher for those working in the Global South and East.¹¹

The types of threats also differed. All groups faced extremely frequent digital threats (423 total instances reported over the last year), but groups based in the Global South and East faced an additional level of violence.

31% of respondents had staff or board members detained in the previous year, and roughly a quarter reported a physical attack.

One group based in Latin America experienced seven physical attacks in the previous year alone. Groups based in the Global South and East also had their offices broken into (22%), their organizations de-registered by the state (10%, with an additional 33% facing threats of deregistration), and at least one group had its bank account frozen. These reports are consistent with the wealth of evidence that show that State repression and fundamentalist and conservative actors are increasingly targeting women's human rights defenders and feminist and LGBTQI movements.¹²

Summary

These findings show clearly that women's rights and feminist organizations around the world are mobilizing across movements, adapting to uncertain conditions, and engaging in sustained movement building. However, by their own accounts, much of the funding they receive fails to reflect the complexity of their strategies for long-term social change.

¹¹ Groups working in the Global South includes those organizations based in the Global North but which work globally.¹⁰ Quoted in Gottlieb, H. (2015).

¹² Rights Eroded: A Briefing on the Effects of Closing Space on Women Human Rights Defenders. (2017.) Urgent Action Fund (UAF) and The International Human Rights Law Clinic (IHRLC) at the Berkeley School of Law. https://urgentactionfund.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2017/12/UAF_UCB_REPORT.WEB-FINAL.pdf

Funding Movement Building

Movement building support requires that funders be both more responsive and more strategic in their grantmaking. As Masters and Osborn write, “Movement building presents unique challenges to foundations. Because movements, by definition, must be driven by the people who are most affected [by injustice], foundations cannot determine the goals and timetables of a movement.”¹³

Indeed, throughout this study,

women’s rights and feminist organizations are calling on funders to engage boldly, to take risks, to engage in the long-term processes of social change and support women’s leadership in all movements and issues.

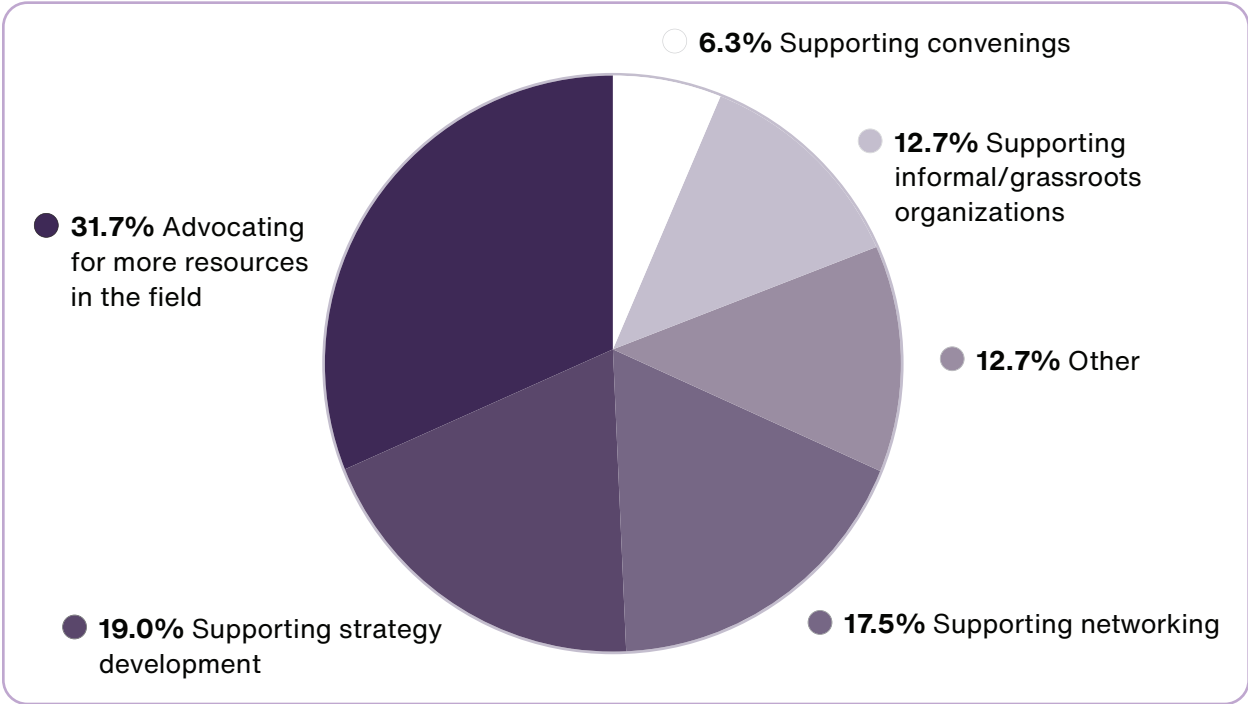
This section outlines the donor practices that grantees are calling on from funders, including around funding and advocacy. It also offers practical recommendations for grantmaking to advance social change led by women, girls, and trans people around the world.

Promising Donor Practices

When asked, “What primary role do you believe that Gender Funders Colab members and other private foundations hold in terms of supporting movement building via their funding strategies?” respondents identified the top five suggestions below.

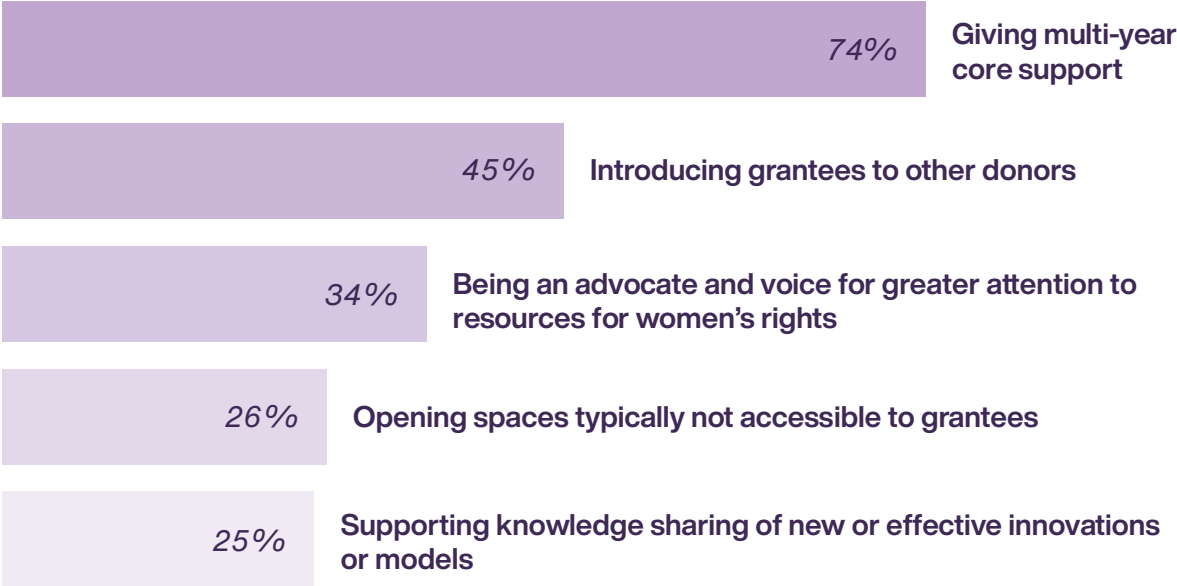
¹³ Masters, Barbara and Osborn, Torie (2010). P 12.

Role of Private Foundations Supporting Movement Building



These suggestions are brought to life in the top donor practices that respondents would like to see more from funders.

Top Five Good Donor Practices



Legend: % of sample identifying this is a top donor practice

Together, these findings point to two distinct areas where funders can best support movements: grants for movement-building activities and advocacy within the philanthropic sector.

In the realm of **grantmaking**, the need for core and multi-year grants is a direct response to the lack of funding for movement building. That is, given a more typical project-based approach to grantmaking, funds are often locked into specific activities. These do not, therefore, address the kinds of activities that respondents have identified as necessary to build and sustain movements, including working in collaboration and networks, adapting to opening political moments, and strategizing across issues and movements. Core and multi-year resources enable organizations to participate more fully in such movement-building activities. They also enable agility in the face of changing contexts, responsiveness to the lived realities faced by activists, and financial security over a longer period.

Respondents detail other promising grantmaking practices, including: 1) funding for network-building and convenings; 2) support for strategy development; 3) and resources for knowledge sharing, including across regions and movements. Whether through core support grants or through co-developed activities, respondents focus on the need for funding that enables informal, long-term, and movement-wide activities, not just those confined to a particular organization or project.

The survey results also point to the need for foundations to adopt a more intersectional understanding of women's rights and feminist social change. This includes funding that matches the extent of cross-movement organizing and the leadership of women's rights actors within other movements. A number of respondents specifically stressed the importance of grants to those at the margins of women's right and feminist movements. As one respondent wrote, "It is imperative that philanthropy invest in women of color and transgender and gender non-conforming people of color leadership and organizations led by these people who are at the heart of base building and movement building work."

In the area of **advocacy**, respondents underscore the power that foundations have to inform and influence the field of philanthropy, with 34% of the survey respondents calling on foundations to be "an advocate and voice for greater attention to resources for women's rights." Respondents encourage funders to use their political power and financial networks to open space for movement organizations. This may take the form of joint strategies (as one group described, "Look for stakeholders and make a joint plan with them to influence new actors/donors i.e. bilateral organizations") or bringing local and grassroots voices into strategic spaces with new audiences.

The combination of grantmaking and advocacy invites funders to learn with and from the movements they support. As one organization concluded:

“Be brave and build collaborations with your grantees based in mutual trust. Share your strategies, thoughts and learned lessons.”

Gender Funders Colab: Learning Toward Action

Gender Funders CoLab’s work to spark new ideas about how to support movement building began as an internal journey. While many funders conduct grantee surveys, this exercise is unique in its effort to look across more than 70 grants and 12 different funding institutions. Through this collective exercise, Gender Funders CoLab members have been able to learn together and critically examine their own funding practices.

As a direct result of the findings, Gender Funders CoLab members have made three concrete steps. First, Gender Funders CoLab is tracking the percentage of core and multi-year support grants each member makes and setting collective targets to increase such funding. Second, Gender Funders CoLab is piloting a common application and reporting process for a subset of grantees to streamline grantmaking and reduce the administrative cost of grant seeking. Finally, Gender Funders CoLab is taking seriously its power and responsibility to advocate for more resources and is currently developing a strategy for influencing the philanthropic and development funding fields starting in mid-2019.

These steps are part of the effort to learn toward action and mobilize more and better funding from Gender Funders CoLab members and within the larger philanthropic field.

Recommendations for Funders

Movements are engaging in the hard work of long-term and sustained mobilization of communities to lead their own solutions for social change. For funders seeking to support movement building, women's rights organizations in this study have provided many ideas and tactics. The following recommendations represent the top strategies for funders to support and strengthen movement building for the rights of women, girls, and trans people.

1 Provide flexible, core support and multi-year grants. Listed by 73% of respondents, this is the single most consistent recommendation for funders. Core and multi-year resources enable organizations to participate more fully in movement-building activities.

2 Center women's rights as a key strategy to achieve social change objectives. Understand how gender intersects with the core mission of your organization and explicitly prioritize leadership by women, girls, and trans people in allied movements. Fund and make the case for supporting women's rights and feminist organizing as a part of all social change grants programs.

3 Be an advocate. Identify funding spaces where you can advocate for more and better funding for women's rights and feminist movements, including in non-gender-specific portfolios in your own institution, with peer funders, and in bilateral and other government fora. Work toward breaking down issue-based silos.

4 Fund the long-term and informal work of movement building, such as convenings, networks, and cross-regional and cross-issue learning exchanges. Support groups whose collaborations extend beyond their single organizations. Where movements identify the need, facilitate capacity building and other forms of leadership strengthening that can contribute to the longevity of movements.