

5 Principles of Global Feminist Philanthropy

By Kellea Miller and Caitlin Stanton, with Esther Lever

The year 2012 marks some big birthdays in the world of feminist philanthropy. Global Fund for Women and the New York Women's Foundation each celebrate their 25th. Mama Cash, the oldest international women's fund, turns 30. And our big sis here in the U.S., the venerable Ms. Foundation, is approaching the big "four-oh."

Before blowing out the candles, we gather the collective wisdom about best practice and look forward to the next generation of global grantmaking for women's rights.

1. OWN THE "HOW"

Global Fund for Women's founder, Anne Firth Murray, writes, "The medium is the message: the way you do your work is more important than what you do." But that vital medium of *how* we do our work is often the least visible and the hardest to measure.

Our grantmaking – from how we seek and review applications to how we interact with grantees – makes the difference between top-down, one-off investments and long-standing social transformation. Many of us can cite best practices by heart, but we rarely set them down in print. We share our list here:

- **Be accessible.** This might mean accepting applications in multiple languages, ensuring that your web site is compatible with screen readers for the blind, or prioritizing funding for emerging issues.
- **Listen to grantees.** Involve the voices of those closest to the work

you fund in your decision making on grants and grant strategy. Listen to the strategies and solutions they propose.

- **Don't waste busy people's time:** publicize your funding priorities, application process and timelines.
- **Provide flexible funding.**
- **Provide long-term funding.**
- **Think beyond projects.** Look at networks, movements and systems of change.
- **Set goals and evaluate progress jointly with grantees.**
- **Share your challenges:** learn with and from grantees.

For the next generation of feminist philanthropy, the practice of flexible grants is a must. Too many funds for women and girls still follow project-by-project approaches, despite compelling evidence that short-term, project-based funding is unlikely to produce the changes we seek. NCRP was a pioneer in this research, and publications from Blue Shield of California Foundation, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and MIT's Sloan School further link flexible funding with higher impact.

High-quality funding is also long-term. In particular, multi-year grants provide predictable resources and free organizations to do important programmatic work rather than constantly seek funds. Owen Barder's research at the Center for Global Development has found that the costs of one-time funding decrease its value to an organization by 15–20 percent.

We need to share, discuss and evaluate what it takes to enact our principles in not just what we do, but how we do it.

2. KNOW YOUR POWER. USE IT.

The best feminist philanthropies don't just work for the rights of women and girls; they understand their strategic power as donors.

First, they challenge traditional donor-grantee relationships. They acknowledge the power they have as philanthropists, then give some of that power away. They support grantees' decisions on strategy, work to build respectful partnerships and jointly set goals and evaluate progress.

Second, they engage donors in a movement for women's rights. That movement includes philanthropists of all kinds: over 25 years, 93 percent of gifts to Global Fund for Women have been in amounts of less than \$1,000 – a grassroots movement of donors supporting women's choices and leadership. But getting big impact will take big money. The \$100 million in grants provided by Global Fund since 1987 is just 10 percent of the more than \$1 billion in qualified requests received by Global Fund from women's groups worldwide. That gap represents untapped potential for change.

Recently, the levels of funding needed to fill that gap have begun to emerge. The Women Moving Millions campaign has motivated more than \$200 million in giving. Jennifer Buffet's Novo Foundation is a billion-dollar philanthropy benefiting women and girls. Public and



Photos by Paula Gianturco.

collective approaches to philanthropy, many pioneered by women's funds such as donor circles, build community while increasing resources.

At the fulcrum between resources and action, feminist philanthropies can leverage more than funding. We also have networks, access to influential people and media, and a public voice. We should use this power to change not only the terms of the conversation, but also who has a chance to participate in it.

3. FUND CONNECTED ACTIVISM

In February, NCRP released a report by Sarah Hansen, former executive director of the Environmental Grantmakers Association, blasting funders for approaches that "favored top-down elite strategies and neglected to support a robust grassroots infrastructure. Environmental funders spent a whopping \$10 billion between 2000 and 2009 but achieved relatively little because they failed to underwrite grassroots groups that are essential for any large-scale change."

This example calls to mind the distinction between broad funding and social justice philanthropy for women and girls. The latter can continue to offer a different approach, one that prioritizes grassroots and marginalized communities and supports their visions of change. This takes an in-it-for-the-long-haul commitment and relationship building, even when it might feel less efficient. It means thinking differently about concepts like "impact" and "sustainability." What is sustainability for an LGBT rights

group in a country that criminalizes homosexuality? Or for a girls' group led by youth? What is impact when the most realistic outcome is merely holding the line against further retrenchment?

One deep thinker in U.S.-based philanthropy, Katherine Fulton of the Monitor Institute, rejects both top-down and bottom-up strategies, favoring instead approaches that build networks between the two. The seeds of this approach already exist at many feminist philanthropies, but they can become intentional strategies, funding the grassroots and building connections with powerful and non-traditional allies. One recent example, the Red Umbrella Fund, launched in April 2012 and hosted at Mama Cash, is the result of a three-year collaboration between sex workers' rights activists and donors, who came together to develop resources to protect the human rights of sex workers.

4. MAKE A BIGGER PIE. OR BAKE A WHOLE NEW ONE.

The language of gender equality is finally on the global development agenda. The Foundation Center and Mama Cash's recent study found that 90 percent of European foundations express interest in funding women and girls. However, it also documents that the median percentage of *total grant monies allocated by European foundations in support of women and girls was just 4.8 percent*. This year, the African Development Bank published a meta-evaluation of gender policies at devel-

opment institutions. Their finding: leadership of bilaterals and multilaterals like the World Bank, UNICEF and UNDP "has not consistently supported or prioritized the mainstreaming of gender equality ..." Making a bigger pie means getting past rhetoric to action.

At the same time, new opportunities are opening unforeseen spaces to access large-scale development monies while maintaining feminist grantmaking principles.

The UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality is recent innovative partnership that prioritizes women's rights organizations and leverages the United Nation's relationships with government donors. Since its founding in 2009, the fund has delivered \$70 million to women's rights organizations and government agencies working to advance women's economic and political rights. One of the most substantial resources for gender equality globally, the fund follows a competitive grantmaking process that upholds feminist principles from application to review to monitoring and evaluation.

We also need to know when to say no. Scholar Gita Sen has said, "If development currently is a poisoned pie, then why would women want a larger share of it?"

Fundraising often requires compromise and negotiation from different positions of power. At its worst, this can mean co-option of social movements. So, do we grow the pie? Bake a new one? We expect this debate will continue. It should.

New and Renewing Members

Annie E. Casey Foundation
Arca Foundation
Bank of America Charitable Foundation, Inc.
CalNonprofits
Carnegie Corporation of New York
Consumer Health Foundation
Daphne Foundation
David and Lucile Packard Foundation
East Bay Community Foundation
Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund
Grantmakers for Effective Organizations
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
Korean American Community Foundation
Melville Charitable Trust
Mertz Gilmore Foundation
Nathan Cummings Foundation
National Partnership for Women and Families
Needmor Fund
Retirement Research Foundation
Robert Bowne Foundation
Rosenberg Foundation
Scherman Foundation, Inc.
Stewart R. Mott Foundation
Surdna Foundation, Inc.
Tides Foundation
UM School of Social Work
United Way of Greater Los Angeles
United Way of the Bay Area
Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation
Walter and Elise Haas Fund
YWCA USA
Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation



Schoolgirls in Memuna Mahama Yahaya's electoral area. Photo by Paula Stromberg.

5. LEARN AND SHARE

Donors – in all shapes and forms – are movement actors. We have a responsibility to share learning and refine our contributions.

How can foundations hold up their end of the deal?

First, we can apply feminist monitoring, evaluation and research practices. As activist and scholar Srilatha Batliwala has stated, “Organizations are responsible to their causes to learn through monitoring and evaluation.” We extend the same to grantmakers.

Good evaluation not only helps us improve our work but makes us better advocates for women’s and girl’s rights. To do this well, we need high quality data, feminist evaluation processes and a commitment to transparently share our learning. The International Network of Women’s Funds has launched a promising initiative on evaluation and feminist philanthropy. Global Fund for Women’s evaluation partnership with Dr. Brooke Ackerly at Vanderbilt University yielded learning on the connection between rights-based approaches to change and tangible results for gender equality.

Second, we can reflect back the strategies and priorities we hear from women’s movements and *learn from the feedback we get*. (What issues matter most to you? What are we missing? What is new?)

Third, we can continually refine our own practices and processes to become

even more effective, responsive and accessible. For example, Kellea Miller’s academic analysis of the Fund for Gender Equality’s grant pool spurred the fund to adopt new requirements that increased its accessibility to feminist organizations around the world.

CONCLUSION

Looking to the next milestones, we hope to spark debate of how feminist philanthropy deals with money, power, access and understanding and communicating our impact. We will be more effective, responsive and respectful grantmakers for laying bare our assumptions and our vision for the future. ■

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