Grantmaking for

Social Justice and Peace:

Some Practical

Lessons

*This short paper is a companion piece to the report by the Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace, **Grantmaking for Social Justice and Peace: Approaches Drawn from Shared Practice**, which can be found on www.psjp.org. It draws on the same material but, unlike the full report, which provides a detailed discussion of the results of a survey of some 54 funders, this emphasises the practical elements of the lessons drawn from those funders' experience. It is meant to offer guidance, not a prescription – given the complexity of the issues involved in grantmaking for social justice and peace, no prescriptions are possible. Our hope is that the distillation of practical wisdom offered below will help others think through what they will need to put together a cogent and workable approach to social justice grantmaking.*

1. Framing the issues: some crucial factors

Social justice issues are often a difficult 'sell'. They require long-term commitment and they often venture on sensitive ground. Moreover, foundations often need to present the rationale for tackling them to very different audiences: board members; donors (where necessary); foundation staff and volunteers; broader public (where appropriate).

Among the factors identified in the research as highly important in framing social justice issues were:

* Consulting the most disadvantaged and affected groups;
* Ensuring voices from the Global South are taken into account;
* Consulting other NGOs or community organizations;
* Speaking to experts;
* Speaking to other funders involved in the area;
* Studying the literature.

Internally or for those close to the organization:

The following were seen as important steps in producing a rationale for trustees and supporters:

* Undertaking or collating research to demonstrate cause and effect of an injustice. Social mapping of an area's needs and assets can be a good place to start, particularly for locally-based funders with limited means.
* Identifying ways in which philanthropy can be used to make a difference
* Drawing on the experience of the victims of injustice to complement the objective research.
* Use the credibility of partners who have a reputation for work in the field. Other funders' experience can be particularly valuable here.

Funding social justice issues can create a particular dilemma for trustees who are part of an establishment that perpetuates the injustice in question. One respondent, for instance, spoke of trustees who, while 'genuine', were 'conflicted, especially when we critique the aid and development industries of which they are (often) part.'

One way of helping to overcome this is to have a dedicated social justice funding stream which might enable a foundation to concentrate on these issues.

Looking inwards

It is important for funders to be self-critical when framing the issues. Are they helping to perpetuate them? This self-criticism should apply not only to their programmes, but to their assets and investments too.

Organizational size is no barrier

The fact that an organization is small or its influence only local does not mean it can't do valuable work in the social justice field, as the range of respondents to the larger study show. While a large funder might have the depth of pocket to commit to an issue for the length of time that social change normally requires, smaller, local organizations often have the advantage of being closer to their constituents.

II. Participation

Participation in practice - it is important to consult those who are most affected by the social injustice in question. **The study illustrates two ways of doing this:**

- By organizing events in which those most affected are brought together to air their experiences. For example, in response to a challenge from black activists in their region about the relevance of their programmes, one funder embarked on 'listening tours', which helped to crystallize the issues important to constituents;
- Actively collecting feedback from grantee partners who are working on the issues.

  This not only produces fairness in action, it can also help bring issues to the surface.

Challenges

However, respondents also pointed out difficulties involved in collecting and processing information gained on the ground:

- It needs to be kept fresh and up-to-date. This implies the use of resources and could pose difficulties particularly for those funders that work at a remove or have limited means;
- Communities immediately involved have their prejudices, too, therefore a wider view on the control of resources, power and influence is needed to balance this. Commissioning research

into this is expensive. In the case of this and of the point above, a way of offsetting this is to collaborate with other funders working in the same area.

☀ Results often come filtered by someone else's perception, since external organizations are often commissioned to do the work.

III. Improving the state of knowledge of the field

Sharing results either by publishing reports or posting on website – this can both improve knowledge and practice in the field and help pave the way to collaboration. As an example of this given in the research, the women's funds surveyed suggested that their ongoing monitoring of women's needs and issues could be a useful source of information for funders at one remove.

Another way to improve a foundation's knowledge of a particular issue is by hiring people who are experts in their field. This brings not only knowledge and expertise, but also contacts.

IV. What grantmakers need to do/show

As was repeatedly pointed out in the research, the relationship between funders and their grantees is not a one-way process and funders need to be able to show grantee partners that they understand the issues and the means of addressing them. Many of the points raised are similar to those made in relation to persuading staff and supporters to undertake the work. Funders need to demonstrate to all concerned parties:

☀ Clarity on the issues to be addressed and on the rationale for the design and implementation of grantmaking programmes;

☀ An evidence base for the work;

- Engagement with the groups in question as well as with other informants and potential partners;
- Awareness of the political dynamics of addressing power relations and the possible reaction it can provoke;
- An understanding of context;
- The ability to build coalitions and to exercise facilitative leadership using their reputation as well as their financial capital (this is also mentioned in the section on what non-monetary resources funders can offer grantees).
- Related to this is helping to build organizations (again, this might be done by funding or by other means, such as training. Where the intended beneficiaries are isolated, support for organizing can be valuable. For example, one respondent talked of the work they are doing to support workers' organizations among rag pickers in Delhi.

V. Difficulties of achieving and measuring social change: How do you know when you're winning?

What emerged most strongly here in what is perhaps the most difficult area of social justice grantmaking is the need for what is clear, tangible and achievable. Where ultimate aims are remote, it can be particularly important to break those aims down into smaller, shorter-term goals.

Material yardsticks for changing attitudes
Changes in attitude are both hard to achieve and hard to measure yet they are indispensable to social change. Material yardsticks (laws, increased media coverage of issues, etc) can be a useful thermometer by which to gauge changing attitudes.

Training implementing agencies
Putting legislation into practice is another key element of bringing about change. One survey respondent spoke of 'traintning key [government] agencies on how to better understand and implement policies, budgets, laws that are gender and human rights grounded and how can

these officials exercise power in favour of these issues and in favour of women in situations of marginalization; and how women in these situations could one day themselves be in a position of power.'

Long-term commitment

It can be hard to sustain commitment among staff, board members over a long period where the ultimate goal remains stubbornly distant:

> *'a relevant work plan; engagement with current policy developments; likely achievements in the short and medium term; people committed to working on an issue or programme for the long term.'*

It's not a linear process: setbacks will happen

Even over the long term, there is no guarantee of success, so committed funders will need to be resilient enough to endure failures. One funder talked of the experience of supporting the campaign for a Freedom of Information Act in the UK:

> *'we supported the organization through the research phase, the policy development phase, the drafting of legislation phase, the advocacy phase, the getting the idea on to party manifestos, getting the legislation passed, getting it implemented, monitoring its impact, preserving the Act from amendment. This sounds like a linear process. It's not! The campaign suffered setback after setback. For years it looked like it would never happen.'*

Providing adequate resources

Here again, there is no one right answer. What constitutes adequate resources will have to decided on the basis of what the funder can provide and what the grantee and the task at hand require. If a funder spreads resources too thinly in the belief that this will amplify the work they are supporting. However, this can limit the effectiveness of individual grantees' work, especially in policy change, so in these cases, it's worth considering more concentrated funding. On the other hand, the use of small grants can be immensely valuable. Often, it is small grassroots groups who are doing important work and a small amount of money is all they need and all they can use.

VI.   What to look for in grantees

This can perhaps be summed up as effectiveness in bringing about change, but a combination of at least some of the following attributes were cited by funders in the survey:

* Clarity of values, purpose, objectives and strategy;

* Evidence of work delivery and effectiveness from past experience;

* Ability to mobilize local people to be agents of change;

* Ability to be inclusive of marginalized groups and participative in approach;

* Knowledge of their constituency and perhaps even being part of that constituency;

* The ability to identify and to take opportunities;

* Leadership;

* The capacity to learn and disseminate learning;

* Ability to build networks and coalitions. It is likely to require a significant body of opinion before the critical mass necessary to shift opinion and take action on an issue are reached.

It's notable that some of these attributes apply as strongly to funders as to grantees – clarity, inclusiveness and leadership, for instance. It's almost as if there is a chain of virtues which all those working in the social justice field should ideally possess.

The importance of personal knowledge

For some respondents, however, knowledge of the applicants was more important than strict adherence to these criteria. For one thing, with grassroots groups, 'the written word is not necessarily a reflection of their [the grantees'] commitment or capabilities.' For another, 'community commitment is probably the single biggest determining success factor,' so 'hard and fast criteria are not as useful as getting to know the applicants. We conduct a series of workshops on proposal writing, not only to increase grantees' capacity to submit quality proposals, but also to get a sense of how committed the community is to the project. '

How to find grantees

In practice, the approach adopted here is often determined by organizational constraints or areas of work. For example, an open call can make big demands on funders with limited staff capacity, while a community foundation might be obliged to adopt such an approach because of the demands of transparency.

Open calls for applications

* These can produce new ideas and approaches;

- They are an indication that funders are practising what they preach in terms of openness of process;

- They help combat an assumption that funders know best.

Closed calls

These can be imposed by the nature of the work or the specific scope of the grantmaker (one funder in the survey worked specifically with 'indigenous communities in Napa Province in the Ecuadorian Amazon'.

In sensitive questions, confidentiality is often needed which militates against open calls.

A two-stage approach

This can be useful in preventing both would-be grantees and funders wasting time and resources. Several funders use a short 'expression of interest' document to determine if there is a fit between the two. If there is, this is developed in a more detailed application.

VII. Non-monetary means of support

Funders have more to offer grantees than grant funding. A number of ways in which they do this emerged from the study:

- Working with applicants to help them identify objectives within the context of a clear theory of change, and then allowing them to decide on their preferred methodologies;
- Providing informed feedback on applications. This can both help them with the first point above and can also help them approach other funders with confidence;
- Training and capacity building;
- Organization of meetings to bring different groups together. One example given in the research was that of the Equal Voice campaign which 'mobilized thousands of two-income people around a programme of issues and facilitated a range of networks and alliances between groups around the country. Many of these groups had not worked together effectively and now they have formed strong and effective alliances and coalitions. In the

process, they have built capacities and extended their constituent and issue base and have been able to more effectively press for policies and changes that impact low income people.'

☀ Brokering relationships between communities on the one hand, and researchers, the media and policymakers on the other. This can increase the influence and the authenticity of both sides. For example, a domestic workers' group in Cameroon 'were connected to the Labour Ministry through the UN representative there… The governmental agency began to learn and understand more about them, and because of the UN "mediation" took the group seriously.'

☀ Where the intended beneficiaries are isolated, support for organizing can be valuable. For example, one respondent talked of the work they are doing to support workers' organizations among rag pickers in Delhi.

☀ Supporting evaluation and advocacy. Grantees may not be in a position to do this themselves, either for want of resources or of expertise, but it can help to strengthen and publicize their case. More is said about possible techniques of doing this in the next section

VIII.   Evaluation and learning

Given the problems of assessing the impact of social justice work, evaluation and learning is both crucial and difficult. Some means suggested in the research are:

☀ 'Emergent learning' – which focuses on how complex systems (of which social change is clearly one) emerge, adapt and become resilient;

☀ Outcome mapping – this involves keeping in constant touch with projects and making regular site visits;

☀ Qualitative assessment – given the difficulties of reducing social change to statistics, many foundations use some form of qualitative assessment. One example: 'A set of questions answered annually or, if needed, core questions also put to the grantee. The central question is: has learning taken place?'

Recognizing the difficulties of measurement in this field, one funder placed the focus on measuring what is most useful and what learning can be shared widely.

IX. Summing up

Overall, any funder approaching the social justice and peace field will need patience and, at times, courage. They will also need to demonstrate – to themselves, to their partners and to the communities they claim to be working for – empathy, real understanding and a genuine sense of shared enterprise with those at the sharp end of the questions they are tackling. Finally, it's a mistake to think that any funder, no matter how experienced, knows all the answers. Respondents repeatedly pointed out that, individually and collectively, they have a lot to learn.

Compiled by Andrew Milner for the Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace, based on the Discussion Paper 'Grantmaking for Social Justice and Peace: Approaches Drawn from Shared Practice' by Avila Kilmurray and Barry Knight.

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