

**The Partnership for Freedom:**

**Reimagining Grant Competitions for a Stronger Anti-Trafficking Field**

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At the 2012 Clinton Global Initiative, President Obama delivered a landmark speech about a crime that is almost unthinkable in the 21st century: in his words, an "injustice - the outrage of human trafficking, which must be called by its true name – modern slavery." His was the longest speech by a U.S. president on the issue of slavery since Abraham Lincoln.

Human trafficking manifests itself in many forms – from forced labor to servitude to sex trafficking – but each is alike in that it poses a severe threat to human rights and exploits the most disadvantaged and marginalized in society. An estimated 21 to 30 million people live in slavery around the world today.

During his speech, [President Obama announced](#) the formation of a new public-private partnership to confront some of the deepest challenges facing survivors of human trafficking in the U.S. In highlighting the new [Partnership for Freedom](#), we also wanted to share some lessons we have learned that may be of relevance to other funders interested in mounting prize-related efforts. The Partnership is an initiative led by Humanity United, the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



The Partnership for Freedom aims to inspire and enable organizations and communities to identify the most innovative and sustainable ways to address major barriers facing trafficking survivors in the U.S. Through a series of innovation challenges, the initiative helps groups create, strengthen, implement and scale the best new ideas from across the country. The challenges are run as competitions, with prizes incentivizing communities, practitioners, professionals, and innovators to take risks and think broadly about and beyond current practices.

With these goals in mind, the Partnership for Freedom launched its first challenge in September 2013. [Reimagine: Opportunity](#) seeks new ideas to offer trafficking survivors better options for housing, social services, and economic opportunities. The challenge is broken into three phases:

**Ideation:** Competitors submitted simple applications highlighting their idea. The Partnership for Freedom received more than 160 applications from 39 states in the U.S.

**Incubation:** In January 2014, twelve finalists worked with one another and with expert coaches in complementary fields to refine and sharpen their proposed project in a collaborative, capacity-building space. The workshop helped finalists challenge their assumptions, wrestle with new ideas, and take advantage of different tools and frameworks. Following the workshop, finalists now have two months to redesign and strengthen their idea for final proposal submission (due in March 2014).

**Implementation:** One to three winners will receive two-year grants totaling \$1.8 million to pilot their idea, as well as technical assistance from the Partnership for Freedom to implement their project.

As the first challenge comes to a close, there are several lessons that may be useful to other foundations interested in implementing prize competitions or in joining forces with the Partnership for Freedom:

- *Grant solicitations* work best when the problem and the solution are both clear, but the implementer is not. *Competitions* often work better when the problem is clear but the solution and who should best implement it are unclear.
- Competitors can be collaborators! Practitioners know best what will and won't work, and bringing competitors together in a structured way to critique each others' ideas may allow them to productively channel their competitive spirit and their deep commitment to strengthening the field. Organizations focused on trafficking are often highly competitive due to the lack of resources, and a donor community that signals the importance of collaboration and partnership by working together can help set a positive tone for organizations seeking funding.
- Governmental partners are key when thinking about how to influence national programs and are a great resource for understanding the lay-of-the-land. Government agencies often know well what 'standard' practice looks like, making innovation easier to define. Innovation can be more challenging for governmental agencies, so it is crucial for donors to have clear ideas of how and when to engage them.
- Communication and outreach are a must in operating a prize, including dedicating sufficient resources for branding and outreach. The best idea is only as good as the best submission, so the more targeted outreach – and therefore the more applicants – the better.

Humanity United designed the Partnership for Freedom to be unique in both its program design and in its potential to build capacity and partnerships among grantees and funders seeking to address human trafficking. A growing list of private philanthropies, including [Goldman Sachs's 10,000 Women Initiative](#) and Steven Spielberg's [Righteous Persons Foundation](#), have signed on to support the partnership.

The Partnership for Freedom will build on these lessons as we launch future competitions. The next two challenges will focus on using technology and data to combat trafficking and on ensuring that victims of trafficking are treated as survivors, not as criminals. As with *Reimagine:Opportunity*, the Partnership will encourage innovation and collaboration in the search for modern solutions to modern-day slavery.

*For more information on the Partnership for Freedom, please contact [info@partnershipforfreedom.org](mailto:info@partnershipforfreedom.org). To become involved with the Partnership for Freedom, please contact [apadilla@humanityunited.org](mailto:apadilla@humanityunited.org).*