

**SEMI-ANNUAL CONFERENCE
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**Funding Human Rights Victories: Comparing Five Strategies for Building
Winning Movements**

Friday, July 12
9:00 – 10:30am

***Note: This conference session was recorded. Information about how to access the
video recording can be found at the end of these notes.***

Facilitator:

- Meg Gage, President and Executive Director, Proteus Fund

Panelists:

- Nikhil Aziz, Executive Director, Grassroots International
- Annmarie Benedict, Programme Executive, Reconciliation and Human Rights, The Atlantic Philanthropies
- Surina Khan, Director, Gender Rights and Equality Program, Ford Foundation
- Tim Parritt, Programme Officer, International Human Rights Programme, Oak Foundation
- Rebecca Rittgers, Program Officer, Abolition Fund

Sponsor:

- Proteus Fund
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This session examined five specific funder strategies to build movements that have long-term multi-faceted capacities to achieve huge goals.

Annmarie Benedict, Programme Executive at Atlantic Philanthropies, discussed the importance of supporting convenings. Convenings help to show who is not yet part of the conversation and what gaps need to be filled, they improve communication and trust, and they define ways for new people to join. Three years ago, The Atlantic Philanthropies, funded several groups working to reduce stop and frisk in New York City. They noticed that these groups had similar ideas but were not speaking with one another. Atlantic and Open Society Foundations supported a series of three convenings over six months, starting with their grantees working on this issue.

Benedict was asked what happens when you have a great plan, but do not have sufficient money to fund it. She responded that it is important to manage expectations from the beginning. As a funder, if from the onset you share that you only have a limited amount of funders to support a coalition, it can stunt creativity. Groups can “come up with a Cadillac when there is only enough funding for a wheel.” Better

to say, “No matter what ideas you come back with, we don’t have sufficient funds to support them. However, in the next two years, we’ll bring you two new funders.”

Tim Parritt, Programme Officer at Oak Foundation, then spoke about Oak’s support for communications. Oak funded reports, but realized they weren’t winning the larger hearts and minds battle and needed to support collaborative communications infrastructure to provide communications capacity to the sector. In the United States, Oak has been involved with Rethink Media, a communications hub that provides services to the national security and human rights field, including messaging research and guidance, training and strategic communications planning. They believe that without an overarching compelling narrative, issues will be defeated within the public opinion sphere. Supporting communications hubs can significantly benefit the human rights field.

Parritt was asked if you are trying to convene a cohort with diverse experience and needs, how you design a communications strategy that creates buy in. He replied that conducting a needs assessment first makes visible the common desires and capacity needs. One important question is how neutral should a hub be; the hub needs to be a neutral player without self-promotion, but if it does not have adequate stature it cannot function as a credible convener. Communications can range from communications planning to advocacy planning. A hub provides a venue for discussion, growth of unusual alliances, and space for larger organizations share polling information and research.

Nikhil Aziz, Executive Director of Grassroots International, followed by sharing his experiences supporting global movement building. One of the big challenges is addressing the negative impacts of corporate behavior and the extraction of natural resources that operate across national borders. How can groups with low resources address such a huge, global problem? Learning exchanges across national borders can bring together people who are similarly affected to coordinate together and launch a campaign with impact beyond their own national boundaries. Grassroots International has provided multi-year grants to build the capacity of organizations to launch campaigns such as the World March of Women and Via Campesina (which now has over 200 million members). Peer learning and sharing experiences has a greater impact than experts talking down to people. But supporting this work is expensive, as it requires being there for the long haul.

Aziz was asked how you can support maintaining connections following the convening. He replied that you build trust through face-to-face interactions. CS Fund, as one example, supported a monthly conference call for the *Our World is Not for Sale* movement. Monthly conference calls enable people from across the world to engage between in person convenings. Grassroots also funds repeated in-person gatherings. It is important to use a variety of strategies, both in person and not.

Surina Khan, Director of the Gender Rights and Equality Program at Ford Foundation, spoke about supporting organizations to play a lead role in building capacity toward a shared goal and connecting local and state-level work. She provided an example from the LGBT rights movement about coordinating a national strategy to secure non discrimination. Ford made a grant to the Movement Advancement Project to coordinate state-based equality organizations and a communications strategy with the

following objectives: 1) understand how discrimination is experienced by the LGBT community and identify specific stories to share; 2) conduct focus groups to understand how non LGBT people see discrimination and identify spokespeople; 3) test narratives; and 4) coordinate messaging.

Another example relates to building the policy advocacy capacity of organizations in the southern United States to address HIV and AIDS. Ford supported a national level organization to build this advocacy capacity and sub-grant. They built the capacity of 31 organizations to promote smart public policies to end AIDS. There are several challenges to working with national organizations, such as who gets credit for the work and competition between the organizations for resources.

Khan was asked whether there is a tension when funding a national group to come in to “help,” instead of supporting the capacity of local community organizations, especially as it affects getting credit and funding. She responded that one example is the Basic Rights Oregon campaign. A state-based organization spoke with local communities and learned that the state was not ready for that level of campaign. It is a delicate balance and the emphasis needs to be on what is best for that state. It is important to remember that when we ask organizations to coordinate, we should also look at how we are coordinated as funders.

Rebecca Rittgers, Program Officer for the Abolition Fund, spoke about campaigns as a funding strategy to build movements. Campaigns have well-defined goals and are a coordinated response to advance that goal. They are time-bound and in response to an opportunity; they are an all hands on deck moment for a movement. Desired change can be policy-based or attitude change-based. People need to understand what they need from other colleagues in the movement and communicate that. It is important to begin campaigns with the understanding that there may not be a clear “yes” or “no” in terms of victory. Evaluation should be set up in a way to measure progress, not just a “yes or no” end. Campaigns are a great tool for making movements stronger. Organizations themselves understand where they short on capacity.

Rittgers was asked how funders choose which part of a campaign to support, given the range and complexity of campaigns. When do you facilitate funding a central coordinator to a campaign, without being too prescriptive? She replied that the goal for the campaign does not come from funders, it comes from advocates. That’s the starting point. Funders help to bring people together to help understand what commitment will be required. It is asking organizations to take leadership.

Rittgers was asked how funders decide where on the spectrum to support – from capacity building to winning. She responded that either way, you may lose the battle, but won’t lose the war, groups learn along the way.

Question & Answer Session

A participant asked, when funding a national organization to bring local organizations to the table, who are you funding? All of the groups? Panelists responded that you fund the strategy and priorities. Often funders can't support the entire campaign, but should look at the entire campaign.

A participant asked how funders can say 'no' to organizations when they are supporting their collaborators in the campaign. Panelists replied that this is usually because somehow they are not a fit with the funders' strategic priorities. Sometimes it is helpful to explain your priorities and ask the organization where they see themselves fitting in.

Another participant asked who watches to ensure that 501(c)(3) regulations (U.S. regulations around engaging in advocacy and limitations on engaging in lobbying) are respected. Rittgers replied that a lot of campaigns do not engage in lobbying at all. Organizations themselves understand what they are trying to achieve. This is an area of opportunity to build the capacity of grantees – provide access to trainings on how to stay compliant.

One participant shared that convenings can also create an opportunity to provide access to extremely marginalized communities to national level and United Nations representations. As a funder, they will often attend if invited.

Another participant asked about when there are two strong movements within a country and several strong leaders. How do you decide whom to support? Aziz mentioned Haiti as an example, as there are many political divisions that impact movement building and organizing. Funders can play a role in helping to bridge those divisions, but one cannot be prescriptive and cannot expect things to happen overnight. He highlighted another example of when a funder's effort had negative consequences. In Pakistan, there is a very powerful movement for land rights and fighting against land grabs. This funder provided all support to one organization with this coalition and didn't take ethnic and religious issues into account. The funder was seen as a foreign actor supporting a largely Christian organization in a Muslim context.

Benedict shared that Atlantic, because it is a funder, has been able to get people into a room that wouldn't otherwise be in the same space. Funders can provide a space for people to come together and set their own agenda. It is important to understand this responsibility, don't waste advocates time. If people come up with an integrated plan, there is a responsibility to fund it. Also, if advocates and organizations are expected to "play nice," funders should "play nice" as well.

The session concluded with a discussion of the funders required to support these strategies. Communications hubs and campaigns are expensive. There is also a tension with funding groups to be in "campaign mode" versus providing general support to "keep their lights on."

To view the recording of the session:

Visit IHRFG's [Vimeo](#) channel (you will need to enter the password "humanrights").