

IN FOCUS

*Bridging Divides in Human Rights Grantmaking  
Through Innovative Partnerships*

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Collaboration among funders is an important strategy for winning lasting change on social justice and human rights issues of critical importance. Funders use various models of collaboration to address complex problems and leverage their investments.

Support for movement and coalition building including outreach to “unlikely allies” brings strength to the advocacy work of funders and their grantee partners. As a result, opportunities for change are greater and more sustainable.



As explained in GrantCraft’s *Funder Collaboratives: Why and How Funders Work Together*, “members of a collaborative may come together to work on a specific project or support a key organization. More often, though, they are looking for opportunities to strategize together about how to define an agenda – and then move it.”<sup>1</sup> What funders share is a **common grantmaking focus** around which to organize themselves that involves one or more of the following criteria:

- **Field:** Some collaboratives seek to develop or advance a particular sector, often one that is new or growing, such as disability rights.
- **Solutions:** Some collaboratives form to address a specific issue, such as federal immigration reform, especially when funders see a moment of policy opportunity.
- **Strategy:** Some collaboratives support a particular approach, such as community organizing.
- **Identity:** Some collaboratives work together to improve the circumstances of people of a particular race, ethnicity, ideological persuasion, religion, gender, sexual orientation, educational circumstance, economic status, or other characteristic.
- **Geography:** Some collaboratives support organizations, issues, solutions or strategies in a particular locality.<sup>2</sup>

Funders sometimes forge **strategic alignment networks**. There are examples of such networks of funders in the U.S. criminal justice sector who share a mission, strategize together, and work in concert to obtain publicity, traction, and impact around specific reform goals, while making grants independently, collectively or both.

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<sup>1</sup> *Funder Collaboratives: Why and How Funders Work Together*, GrantCraft, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

### ***Specific Examples of Funder Partnerships***

The **U.S. criminal justice reform movement** has utilized a variety of collaborative funding models to effectively support cross-constituency advocacy. Such coalitions are attempting to bring together allies that have traditionally opposed each other (e.g. crime victims and offenders, prison guards and parents of youth serving long sentences) to secure important policy and practice change.

One example of a grantmaker partnership is *Funders for Alternatives to the Death Penalty* (FADP). FADP is comprised of a small group of grantmaking institutions with varying budget sizes. Some FADP funds are pooled, but the vast majority of FADP's giving is done by individual institutions in support of a common goal: ending the death penalty in the United States. [A pooled fund "is a 'pot' of money toward which funders contribute and from which grant dollars (or program-related investments) are disbursed. Money from the pot is used without distinguishing the original donor."<sup>3</sup>]

FADP informs its grantmaking through a continual feedback loop with the field. In order to work toward the common goal while at the same time ensure that each individual grantmaking institution can honor its mission, the coalition aligns them all with one strategic plan; the FADP model provides funders different "points of entry." For example, one funder may prefer to support litigation while another may prefer supporting research or organizing. FADP has a strong interest in expanding the funding base for this work and is engaged in creative outreach to bring more resources to the field.

Another donor collaboration model is the U.S. Human Rights Fund's Juvenile Life Without Parole (JLWOP) Sub-fund. Together, the Fund's donors seek to halt the practice of JLWOP by supporting organizers, advocates and litigators who are fighting for reform. Similar to FADP, these donors share information and resources around key legal, communications, and legislative issues on JLWOP. They help to educate one another about strategic opportunities to support JLWOP work—particularly efforts that use human rights values, standards and strategies.

The Fund's donors and staff engage other funders to support JLWOP reform via: presentations at donor affinity group meetings; presentations at issue-specific conferences where donors are in attendance; articles in the philanthropic press; philanthropic case studies; and donor briefings. In 2009-2010, Sub-fund members collaborated with advocates to raise almost \$900,000 for advocacy, litigation and communications work on *Sullivan v. Florida* and *Graham v. Florida*. These cases were brought before the Supreme Court to determine if the Eighth Amendment prohibiting "cruel and unusual punishment" has been violated in JLWOP sentences for non-homicide crimes committed by those under the age of 18.

**Juvenile life without parole was ruled unconstitutional for non-homicide crimes** and dozens of individuals are now entitled to relief.

### ***How to Build Successful Partnerships***

The examples above have many successes and benefits to celebrate, but these collaborations are not without challenges and pitfalls. These include time commitment, institutional shifts, control and compromise, team dynamics, and – as experienced by the JLWOP funders – the need to develop a responsible exit strategy, as the Fund ends in 18 months.

To learn more about how FADP and the JLWOP Sub-fund achieved their successes and addressed the obstacles – and to apply these lessons to your own movement-building work, please attend **IHRFG's pre-**

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

conference institute, *Diverse Stakeholders, Unlikely Allies: Bridging Divides in Human Rights Grantmaking Through Innovative Partnerships*, on July 11 in New York City.

At the institute, participants will also learn from examples of coalitions as they explore the following questions:

- How do funders and advocates build authentic partnerships with diverse stakeholders – especially those who might traditionally be thought of as opponents?
- How does working with "unlikely allies" change movements, and how do funders address the challenges that inevitably arise?
- When do funders decide that the pitfalls are too great for supporting movement-building, and when do they decide it is worth the risks? How do funders themselves collaborate in funding cross-sector work?

**Resources for Funders:**

- 1) Attend IHRFG's Preconference Institute on July 11, 2011: *Diverse Stakeholders, Unlikely Allies: Bridging Divides in Human Rights Grantmaking Through Innovative Partnerships*. For more information, visit <http://ihrf.org/events/new-york-2011-pre-conference-institute>.
- 2) Review Grantcraft's guide, *Funder Collaboratives: Why and How Funders Work Together*: <http://www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=1386>.
- 3) Contact Martha Toll, Butler Family Fund at [mtoll@butlerfamilyfund.org](mailto:mtoll@butlerfamilyfund.org); Kirsten Levingston, Ford Foundation at [k.levingston@fordfound.org](mailto:k.levingston@fordfound.org); and Sue Simon, U.S. Human Rights Fund at [ssimon@publicinterestprojects.org](mailto:ssimon@publicinterestprojects.org) for more information.