# WINGS 2014 FORUM

Istanbul, Turkey

*The "Networked" Network: Collaboration for More Strategic and Effective Philanthropy*

Collaboration Resource


This session explored the "why and how" of collaboration among funder networks and philanthropic support organizations. What are common challenges? What strategies can be employed to address those challenges? And why collaborate in the first place?

Panelists shared their experiences with collaboration referring to two case studies: 1) Advancing Human Rights: Knowledge Tools for Funders, an initiative to map and analyze the state of global social change and human rights funding and 2) the BRIDGE Project, an initiative to create a shared system with unique IDs assigned to NGOs in order to access information on the social sector. Session participants also shared some of their experiences with collaboration and strategies for assessing challenges that arose.

This resource is a product of this conversation. It highlights common challenges, collaboration "must haves", the "why" of collaboration, and tips for collaborating effectively. Thank you to everyone who participated in this session and contributed his or her thoughts and experiences to the creation of this document!


**Common Challenges**
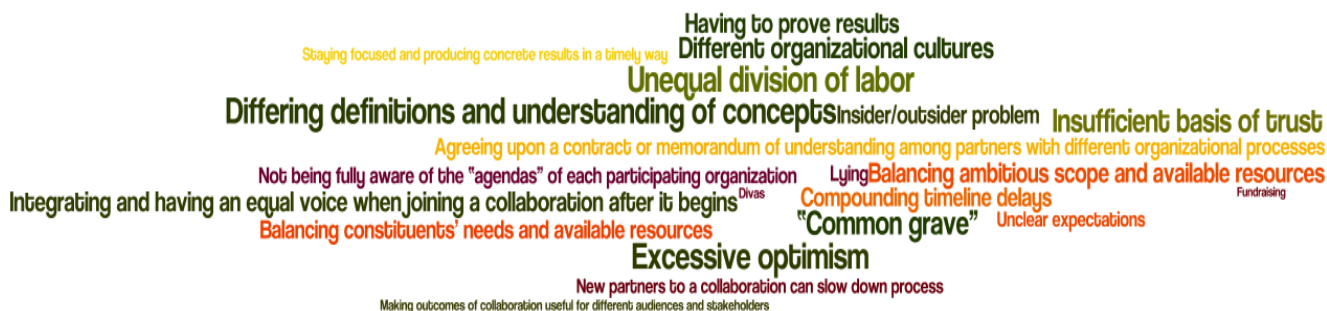


- Unclear expectations
- Divas
- Lying
- Insider/outsider problem: who is "in" the collaboration and who is "out"? How does that impact the legitimacy of the work?
- Balancing ambitious scope and available resources
- Making outcomes of collaboration useful for different audiences and stakeholders

- Staying focused and producing concrete results in a timely way when bringing in many actors
- "Common grave": collaborating for its own sake, without a specific shared aim, and the collaboration becomes counterproductive. Organizations lose their identity and it's difficult to determine what went wrong and where the accountability lies
- Integrating and having an equal voice when joining a collaboration after it begins
- Differing definitions and understanding of concepts
- Balancing constituents' needs and available resources (e.g. ensuring access to internet-based tools for organizations and individuals without consistent internet access)
- Fundraising: who leads it? Who is responsible for reporting?
- Compounding timeline delays (e.g. a delay in one organization is exacerbated in a collaboration)
- Insufficient basis of trust established prior to collaboration
- Different organizational cultures
- Not being fully aware of the "agendas" of each participating organization
- Having to prove results
- Excessive optimism
- Unequal division of labor between collaborating partners
- New partners to a collaboration can require revisiting decisions already agreed upon and could slow down the process
- Collaboration among different types of organizations (e.g. a service based organization used to relating to organizations as clients versus an organization that relates to others in a collaboration as partners)
- Agreeing upon a contract or memorandum of understanding among partners with different organizational processes

**Collaboration Essentials**
- A core purpose/aim
- Trust
- Flexibility and nimbleness on all sides
- Openness to adapting and compromising
- Passion for and commitment to the collaboration
- Shared vision
- Clear and open communications throughout
- Aligned expectations and shared understanding of expectations (can be helpful if detailed in writing)
- Time for relationship building
- Cultural competency
- Very clear boundaries

**Why Collaborate?**
- Create wider and more powerful impact
- Address a need or gap articulated by member funders, the sector, or constituents
- Provide an opportunity to draw attention to actors usually overlooked (put them on the "map")
- Facilitate more informed decision-making

- Broaden the scope of the work and be relevant to and meet the needs of a broader constituency
- Further strengthen and build the field/sector
- Go beyond your usual audience
- Reduce/avoid duplication
- Learn from the knowledge and experiences of others
- Opportunity to open dialogue way beyond own membership or what initially imagined – field building
- Help the field or sector work better

**Tips for Collaboration**
- Good intentions are not enough! Results, process, and relationships are equally important and are interdependent
- Engage in collaborations that are "demand-driven" and encourage the participation of multiple actors. This helps to ensure that the outcomes of the collaboration are utilized and sustainable
- Build in time and resources for ensuring that constituents understand how they concretely benefit from and can engage with the collaboration
- Choose your team wisely (and pay attention to personalities)
- Over communicate – be proactive about raising doubts with partners
- Meet and discuss in person, in addition to virtual communication
- Don't become so complacent with the current collaboration that you close the door to new potential collaborating partners or other voices, perspectives, or opportunities. Always remain resilient and open
- Collaborations can be like marriages. Be careful of painting too positive a picture. Sometimes problems will arise that you can't anticipate. Small changes within collaborations, such as a change in staff, can have a big impact. When things go wrong, you'll need to decide when to "fix the marriage" or "divorce"
- Sometimes collaborations are like "planned parenthood"– they are entered intentionally after joint thinking and planning
- If staff of funder networks collaborate, it is important to connect members across those networks as well