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**Funding Nascent Movements:  
Lessons from Global Trans\* Groups**

Tuesday, January 28, 2014  
1:30-3:00pm

***Session Organizers:***

- Sarah Gunther, Associate Director of Programs, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice
- Rebecca Fox, Program Officer, Wellspring Advisors

***Facilitator:***

- Sarah Gunther, Associate Director of Programs, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice

***Panelists:***

- Justus Eisfeld, Co-Director and Co-Founder, Global Action for Trans\* Equality (GATE)
- Rebecca Fox, Program Officer, Wellspring Advisors
- Natasha Jiménez, General Coordinator, Mulabi: the Latin American Hub for Sexualities and Rights

***Sponsors:***

- Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, Wellspring Advisors, Global Philanthropy Project
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Sarah opened by defining “trans\*” for the purposes of the session. A trans\* person is a person whose gender identity or expression differs from the gender assigned at birth. Global activists have started using the asterisk in “trans\*” to denote the wide range of culturally specific identities that can fall under the trans umbrella. Trans\* people face extremely high levels of violence across the globe and have higher unemployment rates. Many countries don’t legally recognize them, and others require sterilization in order to legally change their gender. Their very existence disrupts predominant understandings of sex and gender.

The trans\* movement has seen several victories. Argentina has passed the most progressive law on gender identity in the world and Chile may pass a similar law this year. There are also groups working to depathologize trans\* identities in the World Health Organization’s International Classification of Diseases (ICD).

The trans\* rights movement is quite young and requires that donors fund in a different way.

Global Action for Trans\* Equality (GATE) and American Jewish World Service (AJWS) engaged in [research](#) on the scope and funding of the trans\* rights movement. According to their survey, most groups were founded after 2008. The organizations are young, but the experience of the activists involved is not. Many have been active in other movements, such as the LGB, women's, or indigenous rights' movements. Three hundred and forty groups responded to the survey from every region of the world. The fewest responses were from the Middle East and North Africa.

Natasha, a trans\* and intersex activist who leads Mulabi, a Latin American organization focused on gender and sexuality rights, shared that although the movement is in its early stages, there have been significant victories. In Colombia, as one example, people can change their name to conform with whatever gender they identify with, however can only make that change once. In Costa Rica, people can change the photo on their ID, but cannot yet change their name or gender marker. Progress on trans\* rights is a perfect example of how activism in the Global South is leading the way for global change.

*Q: How contentious was passing the law in Argentina? What strategies worked well?*

A: Justus said that GATE is currently analyzing the law. There were two key factors at play: attention to human rights generally in Argentina, and the refusal of trans\* rights groups to back down. It was also the first time that Argentinean groups focused on gender diversity united and worked together. Open Society Foundations will soon release a report about advocacy to pass the law.

Rebecca shared that Wellspring intentionally does not use "LGBTQ" and instead uses "sexual orientation and gender identity", as those are two things that everyone has. The difference between policy and lived experience for trans\* people is even more pronounced than it is for LGB people. In Argentina, as one example, the law has been a great success, but many doctors refuse to treat transgender patients. In many countries, being gender non-conforming can be just as dangerous as being trans\*. This is why the Wellspring program is structured as "sexual orientation and gender identity."

When supporting nascent movements, it is important to remember that it involves more of a program officer's time for learning and capacity building with grantees. It also involves more collaboration with donors, especially when resources are limited. You need to be an "activist donor."

### **Landscape of the Trans\* Movement**

- Leadership demographics: more than half of groups are lead by trans\* persons or intersex persons, however there are a significant number that are not self-led.
- Budget: half of groups have budgets of less than \$10,000/year. Very few groups have budgets greater than \$250,000/year.
- Budget, savings, and staff by leadership demographic – huge disparities!
  - Intersex-led groups: only 30% have budgets over \$10,000/year; 30% have paid staff; and 0% have savings
  - Trans\*-led groups: 39% have budgets over \$10,000/year; 44% have paid staff; and 22% have savings
  - Not self-led: 72% have budgets over \$10,000; 84% have paid staff; and 44% have savings

## Question and Answer

*Q: What conversations should donors have with their LGBT grantees to ensure that they are inclusive of trans\* rights?*

A: Ask grantees: “Who are your staff?” “Who is in leadership?” “What do your health benefits look like?” “How do you support staff undergoing transition while working at your organization?” “Is your trans\* rights work staffed by top level people or by interns?”

Natasha shared that her organization values both core and project support. It is important to have support that ensures projects can survive over time, as they don’t want to be just “putting out fires.” Most related funding to Central America is HIV-focused, so that is how people think about the trans\* community. She recommends a more holistic approach – trans\* people need more than condoms. Since it is a new and growing movement, support to create strategic alliances with other movements, such as the indigenous movement and the feminist movement, is really helpful.

Justus added that groups want support apart from money, such as networking and skill-building. Helpful areas for skill-building are fundraising and grant writing; program development; and budgeting and financial management. Running a NGO requires a different skill set than being an activist. One challenge for groups is that it is often unclear which funders actually support trans\* issues. Funders need to be explicit when saying they support “LGBTI rights” – does that really include trans\* and intersex?

Rebecca stated that it is important to provide separate money for leadership training and coaching, in addition to core support. It is also important to support trans\* groups in coming together in their own space with their own agenda, and then not attend if it would negatively impact the dynamic. Funders should use their power in positive ways, not in over-privileged ways.

*Q: It is encouraging to see so much interest in supporting trans\* rights. I can also anticipate numerous comments from foundation boards and trustees questioning the importance of supporting this work. A few possible examples:*

- *Isn’t this a really small number of people?*
- *Wouldn’t it be easier to start with LGB issues and rack up victories?*
- *Won’t addressing trans\* specifically splinter the movement?*

A: You could look at issues by how many people are impacted or by the impact that those violations have on the particular group. Torture is an issue that most people are not affected by, but it still gets significant attention. People also think that there are less trans\* people than there really are. There isn’t an exact number because there hasn’t been funding available to conduct this research. One estimate is that in the Netherlands, 1/200 people self-identify as trans\*.

You could also broaden your scope to think about the impacts of violating the gender binary norms. The movement is already splintered; it’s about balancing power. If you fund trans\*

groups, you give them power and show other LGB groups that they need to pay attention to them. In addition, this is an issue where there is a lot of “low hanging fruit” or “easy wins.”

It is important to also think across sectors: if you fund education, you can look at discrimination against trans\* students. The same with health.

*Q: Human rights funders focus on structural change, but in the survey trans\* groups said that service provision would be their top focus if they had more money. How do you reconcile this?*

A: Many trans\* groups engage in everything, ranging from health care to policy change advocacy. It can be difficult to fundraise when you cannot cross borders or find a doctor who will see you. We should consider whether we consider access to services a human right. We see service provision as a community organizing and social change strategy. People may not engage in advocacy if their basic needs are not met. Sustainability and self-care also need to be funded.

Direct services trans\* people need include: access to healthcare, support for transition, counseling, employment training, and adult education. Access to these services will bring the movement forward. A very significant number of trans\* people cannot finish school due to discrimination. As a result, many leaders of organizations do not have formal management training.

*Q: Why doesn't “women and trans\*” work as an area of focus?*

A: Women and trans\* are not a community. It's not immediately clear whether you mean trans\* women, trans\* men or both. If you mean trans\* women, it's offensive not to include them in the category of women. Do you then mean trans\* men? Women's groups do not automatically accept trans\* groups.

*Q: Should you push LGBT groups be more trans\*-inclusive or fund trans\*-specific groups?*

A: It depends on where the heart of the group lies. All groups need to decide their focus for themselves. Funders should respect those decisions and then take that into account when looking at their full portfolio.

Natasha: It is an error to think that all trans\* people have the same needs – this is an act of trans\*phobia. Trans\* people have unique needs; “T” should not be just another letter you add.

#### **What funders can do**

- Ask grantees what they mean by “T” and what work they do to support trans\* rights
- Support trans\* groups in learning from one another
- Take time to ensure that trans\* groups can fill out grant application forms
- Acknowledge that supporting trans\* groups may challenge our definitions of human rights grantmaking and how we feel about providing grants for direct service