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**More than Money:
Moving Beyond Grantmaking to Build the Power of Grantees**

Tuesday, January 28, 2014
3:30-5:00pm

Session Organizers:

- Yael Falicov, Executive Director, EcoViva
- Bern Johnson, Executive Director, Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW)

Facilitator:

- Bern Johnson, Executive Director, Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW)

Panelists:

- Rajasvini (Vini) Bhansali, Executive Director, International Development Exchange (IDEX)
- Kyra Busch, Program Officer for Agro-biodiversity & Food Sovereignty and Resilient Biocultural Landscapes, The Christensen Fund
- Yael Falicov, Executive Director, EcoViva

Sponsors:

- The Christensen Fund; EcoViva; International Development Exchange (IDEX)
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This session explored the spectrum of actions funders can take to support their grantees, ranging from making grants to engaging directly in advocacy.

Vini opened the session by explaining International Development Exchange's (IDEX) work. IDEX is a social justice grantmaker that goes beyond solely making grants. Through an external evaluation, grantee partners asked IDEX to: 1) provide support with organizational resilience; 2) take action in solidarity with regional and global movements and facilitate links to these movements; and 3) be an advocate within philanthropy. As a result, IDEX recently released a [new theory of change](#).

IDEX invests in long-term, authentic partnerships with grantees and starts with the assumption that the groups they work with have incredible potential. IDEX sees its biggest role as amplifying learnings from the Global South and getting people excited about solutions coming from the grassroots. It also plays a role in bridging silos and brokering resources. IDEX makes referrals for grantees to other donors and holds itself accountable for leveraging specific amounts for

grantees. IDEX sees philanthropy as an advocacy target and encourages increased funding for social justice.

The Christensen Fund supports stewards of biological and cultural diversity. It sees its role as going beyond grantmaking, and being involved with initiatives that take action on the issues the Fund cares about. The Fund is involved with the [Global Alliance for the Future of Food](#), an alliance of foundations committed to leveraging resources to help shift food and agriculture systems towards greater sustainability, security, and equity. They also are part of another donor collaborative with the Tikvah Fund and New Field Foundation called the International Fund for Amplifying Agroecological Solutions (IFAAS). Through these collaborations, The Christensen Fund draws attention to agro-ecological solutions that already exist and share these models with others. “I have never met a group that feels that they have enough money and I have never met a funder who feels like they have enough to give. What other resources can be leveraged?” said Kyra Busch.

EcoViva was born out of refugees returning to El Salvador after the end of the Salvadoran Civil War. EcoViva has always provided funding and technical assistance, but as advocacy by its grantee organizations grew, it realized that there was a role for EcoViva to play in sharing the messages of grantees in spaces that they were unable to access. EcoViva provides direct technical assistance to grantees and engages in strategic alliance building and collaborative advocacy, both in El Salvador and Washington DC. Staff and consultants meet daily with partners in Central America and they work together to identify the most strategic alliances. As one example, EcoViva partnered with Engineers without Borders. After massive floods in El Salvador two years ago, the government wanted to rebuild the same substandard levies that broke, and Engineers without Borders was able to provide evidence that the original design was faulty, which needed to be taken into account with new construction.

Vini shared one example of how IDEX supports resilience. AFEDES: Women’s Association for the Development of Sacatepéquez, a Guatemalan organization and IDEX grantee used to focus on providing microcredit for indigenous women. Over time, they found that poverty within that community was increasing, as husbands were pressuring their wives more if they took the credit. Even though the program was well-regarded internationally, AFEDES stopped the program and started a school for political education and sustainable agriculture for women. As this program supported less women overall, many donors stopped their funding, but IDEX continued its support. The school has become quite successful and IDEX has helped to attract a new funding base for AFEDES. In this case, supporting resilience meant supporting an organization dedicated to remaining relevant and community-driven during a time of transition.

EcoViva shared a second example of being community-driven. They used to focus on sending as much money as possible to directly to community-led organizations. However, one grantee partner, the Mangrove Association, recently requested that instead of sending a grant, they preferred the money be used to hire a former Mangrove Association volunteer as a full-time staff person at EcoViva. They wanted to continue working with him, as they saw him as a bridge to building power both in El Salvador and the United States. While EcoViva would have usually send the grant directly to the Mangrove Association to support their work, they listened to the group’s request and hired the graduate student on as the full-time Programs and Policy staff person at EcoViva.

Roles & Strategies for Donors Beyond Grantmaking

- Advocacy
- Multi-donor funding relationships
- Donor alliance building and strategizing
- Brokering resources and amplifying leanings
- Maximizing grantee organizations' potential
- Skilled volunteers
- Grantee speaking tours
- Cross-regional learning through exchanges
- Strategic partners
- Grantee partners as co-trainers/organizers
- Press conferences
- Congressional briefings
- Well-being of grantees (e.g. retreats)
- Capacity building, e.g. leadership training
- Amplify voices in international venues
- Communications and storytelling support
- Serving as a fiscal agent
- Grantee convenings
- Neutral convener
- Strategic planning
- Hiring advisors
- Introductions to other funders
- Co-authoring articles
- Peer evaluation (grantee to grantee)
- Budget line for organizational development
- Honest funder-grantee conversations
- Reflective about own practices
- Not pressuring grantees

Barriers to Engaging Beyond Grantmaking

- Power dynamics in donor-grantee relationship
- Not being able to track ripple effects of partnerships/sub partners/networks
- Assumptions behind grantmaking and who choose to partner with. If assumptions or expectations differ, you set both partners up for failure. Shared values, overall vision, and mutual accountability are critical.
- Time investment and prioritization
- Difficulty building consensus and decision-making
- Staff capacity
- Accountability. Who is making decisions about tradeoffs, why, and who is affected?

Kyra: One challenge when entering a multi-donor fund is that it takes more staff time to engage with. It involves grappling with how to streamline the amount of time it takes to build consensus. However, grantmaking is fraught with tradeoffs of some sort; it's not unique to this particular situation.

Yael also suggested thinking about tradeoffs within the context of overall impact. What combination of strategies will be most effective in achieving goals? When deciding whether to spend resources on granting more project money or engaging in advocacy directly, it's important to figure out a balance, as both are important.

One funder commented that he is uncomfortable with the conflict of interest that may arise. When he contributes to a foundation, he wants to give funds to a neutral arbitrator to support groups local directly. He is uncomfortable with the funder being as much a “doer” as the grantee and the funder being the one deciding about the tradeoff of making an additional grant to a grassroots group or engaging in advocacy itself.

Vini responded that IDEX doesn't view it as a tradeoff. They see their role as creating opportunities for grantees to network among one another and in international spaces, as opposed to IDEX staff coming up with solutions themselves.

One participant shared that the Connect U.S. fund has released three papers exploring the challenges associated with multi-donor alliances.

Things Funders Should Consider:

- Is what you are trying to help your grantee with helpful to the grantee? (e.g. taking grantees out of the office for a learning exchange or speaking tour)
- Impact of staff turnover in a funder collaborative
- Delicate balance between grantmaking foundations and operating foundations
- Giving up ownership of new ideas/projects
- Danger with thinking money itself will solve all issues
- Making grants is a political act
- Moving out of mindset that funding is only way to create social change

Question and Answer

Q: How do you feel about investing resources into a staff person at a grantee partner organization, when they soon leave to work for the World Bank or United Nations?

Bern: We invest more in staff who have demonstrated strong commitment to the organization and have a track record of work in the particular issue.

Vini: We love it when they leave; it means that the sector and range of influence is widening. TCC Group has a resource on deepening capacity building for deeper impact.

Q: Why are human rights principles not germane to strengthening organizations?

Vini: Human rights principles are germane to everything we are talking about. With the example of AFEDES, they made a strategic shift from focusing on direct service to a rights-based framework. The reason we may not have used that rights language as much in this session is that many of us are led by specific contextual initiatives and the groups we fund use different language.

Kyra: We are rooted in the philosophy of indigenous rights. The Christensen Fund is private foundation and moving beyond grantmaking has been a journey for us. Both IDEX and EcoViva have strong partnerships with private foundations. These partnerships are not just about funding, but about how we can all be part of a movement together and be accountable to grantees.

“I don't believe in charity. I believe in solidarity. Charity is so vertical. It goes from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other person. I have a lot to learn from other people.”

— Eduardo Galeano