



A Statement of Values to Guide Philanthropic Collaboration

A Letter to Grantmakers from Practitioners

Individual organizations seeking to address complex social issues cannot achieve their missions on their own. They must combine resources and knowledge with others to make progress. This feels especially acute for many nonprofits and grantmakers now, as many in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector are considering the role they can play in addressing systems change and as these actors face a shifting and uncertain environment in the months and years ahead.

As interest in collaboration within the philanthropic sector has increased, so has the range of models, how-to guides, case studies, and debates on best practices. There is a strong desire in the sector to ensure that collaboration is done thoughtfully, respectfully, and effectively, yet the abundance of terms, tools and frameworks can be overwhelming and confusing to grantmakers and their partners. For the past two years, a number of the leading organizations supporting and facilitating nonprofit and philanthropic collaborations have been coming together to share our experiences and perspectives. Called the Collaboration Champions, this group has collectively published dozens of papers on the topic and worked with hundreds of different collaborations. We are the creators of a variety of the terms, tools and frameworks on collaboration in the field.

Through our work together, we've realized that there are some ethical principles, or values, we all hold in common in our approach to building and supporting successful collaborations. We articulate those principles here in hopes of sparking further conversations on values related to social sector collaboration and offering guidance on how grantmakers and nonprofits might think about approaching their own collaborative work with other foundations, nonprofits, government, private entities or some combination. These values are grounded in experience, and admittedly reflect a viewpoint of what it means to collaborate ethically in the philanthropic sector. They are designed to be applicable to philanthropic-sponsored collaborations broadly. We focused on underlying values to guide collaboration rather than attempting to offer a synopsis or synthesis of best practices, with the understanding that others have tackled (and will continue to learn) about the practices of effective collaborations.

Seven Ethical Principles to Collaboration in the Philanthropic Sector:

1. Each collaboration should aim to achieve a clear social good. Collaboration is not self-justifying.

2. How we collaborate is as important as the goals we seek to accomplish. While it is important to have a goal, considerate and values-driven process matters in collaboration. The ends do not justify the means.
3. The social currency, trust and relationships that evolve as part of a collaboration are just as important as — and play a critical role in contributing to — the programmatic outcomes a collaboration seeks to achieve.
4. Collaborations should seek to elevate voices from the affected individuals/communities and provide space for their leadership.
5. Participants in collaborations should acknowledge power differentials and prioritize an active approach to dealing with them.
6. Collaboration carries explicit and implicit costs. The principle of equity should guide resource allocations, including, where appropriate, compensating for participation.
7. Reflection and learning are deliberate acts to ensure that a collaborative is living its values and best serving the membership, the community, and the stated goal.

We hope these principles will be helpful in a range of ways, from checking for values alignment with potential partners to providing considerations for the design of a collaboration. **We ask grantmakers to consider these principles as a guide to how they approach collaboration, and we invite other practitioners in collaboration to sign on with us to help ensure that value-driven collaboration is not subordinated to, but is held jointly with, outcomes-driven collaboration.**

Signed,

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