

Private-Sector Pressure



Background

The business and private sectors have been important sources of philanthropic funding. However, their interests at times conflict with those of transparency, accountability, and participation (TAP) organizations. According to the Funders' Initiative for Civil Society, "In a significant number of countries, state violations of civic space relate directly to the protection of business and corporate interests."⁵⁶ Activists have been jailed or assassinated for resisting mining projects or exposing corruption or land disputes.

The benefits of a healthy civil society clearly extend to the business sector as well. However, business perspectives on the TAP space can range from hostile to encouraging. Therefore, it is crucial for funders to identify which businesses may be most inclined to partner with and support grantees. The goal of these partnerships would be creating an enabling environment and shaping the public narrative in support of a strong civil society.



Civic actors have at their disposal a host of methods for navigating the business environment. Grantees can research when and why businesses speak out against civil society repression, improve communications with business and economic ministries, document business-related attacks, and engage investors and companies to determine how investors might positively influence companies. To support grantees in these endeavors, funders must reframe the high-level conversation to highlight the long-term value of civil society over immediate profits. Funders are also well placed to communicate social standards and benchmarks for companies and incentivize progress with rewards. For many of these challenges, funders must coordinate their activities and strategize to fund grantee pushback on business resistance that is rooted in economic interests.⁵⁷

Strategies

- **Recruit business allies (Grantee):** Since there are many businesses that celebrate (or at least profit from) the cause of transparency, it can be effective to seek out partnerships to encourage this position. For example, in 2015, independent activist and journalist Rafael Marques was charged with criminal defamation because his book detailed the crimes of several prominent army officers in Angola's diamond industry. The partnerships that made the difference in advocacy for his release were Tiffany & Co., Leber Jeweler, and Brilliant Earth.⁵⁸
- **Research when and why businesses speak out (Grantee):** Bravo Alarcon's 2004 study of environmental consciousness in Peru shows how business interests can supersede social responsibilities or the public interest.⁵⁹

- **Communicate with business and economic ministries to establish positive partnerships (Grantee):** Open for Business, a coalition of global companies, advocates the idea that diverse societies are better for economic growth.⁶⁰ The group produced a report that has been used for outreach programs in countries with anti-LGBTI sentiment. It has also conducted trainings and roundtables to raise awareness of the business case for inclusion, creating allies and activists in local business communities.⁶¹
- **Engage with governments to campaign for new clauses to trade and aid agreements (Funder/Grantee):** Trade and investment agreements often provide opportunities to enforce protection of the environment and civil society. Trade agreements offer both an obstacle and an opportunity for creating space for civil society. For example, Canada's minister of natural resources, Joe Oliver, claimed that "there are environmental and radical groups that would seek to block this opportunity to diversify our trade . . . these groups threaten to hijack our regulatory system to achieve their radical ideological agenda . . . and use funding from foreign special interest groups."⁶² With effective communication and lobbying, trade agreements can become a tool to enhance social standards around protecting civic space; in the absence of such lobbying or protective clauses, their impact can be exploitative.
- **Help set realistic, actionable targets for companies (Funder):** [The B Team](#), a nonprofit initiative run by a group of business leaders, encourages businesses to become positive forces for social, environmental, and economic well-being. One of the B Team's approaches is to redefine reward systems for businesses. It seeks to "integrate social and environmental performance metrics into our compensation structures." The B Team has championed strong civic space as integral to a healthy business environment. It is also working with researchers and the private sector to develop a guide for chief executive officers and to create a business case for companies to engage with a civic rights agenda. Once these materials are finalized, the B Team plans to move from awareness-raising stage to an action-oriented phase, focusing on sustained civil society-business engagements that strengthen trust. Additionally, the B Team has a memorandum of understanding with Open Government Partnership (OGP). The organizations will coordinate on advocacy at the B20 and G20 global summits, and coordinate business support for country-level open government efforts reflected in their OGP national action plan (NAP) commitments.

Actor	Responses	Examples/Explanations	Key Resources (Reports or Organizations)
Grantee	Recruit business allies	In trial of Angola diamond industry activist Rafael Marques, leading jewellers stepped in to end the trial	Rafael Marques trial
Grantee	Research when and why businesses speak out	F. Bravo Alarcon's 2004 study of environmental consciousness in Peru shows how business interests can supersede public interests	Alarcon, F. Bravo. "Difficulties with Environmental Consciousness-Raising in Peru." <i>Socialismo y Participacion</i> 97(2004): 47-85.
Grantee	Communicate with business and economic ministries to establish positive partnerships	Open for Business: coalition of global companies promoting the idea that diverse societies are better for economic growth	Open for Business

Funder/ Grantee	Engage with governments to campaign for new clauses to trade and aid agreements	Trade agreements provide opportunities for and pose obstacles to enforcing the protection of civil society.	A“Radicals Working Against Oilsands, Ottawa Says,” Canadian natural resources minister on radical groups
Funder	Help set realistic actionable targets for companies	The B Team helps businesses to become positive social and environmental forces by integrating environmental and social metrics into reward systems	The B Team

References:

56. Challenging the Closing Space for Civil Society: A Practical Starting Point for Funders, 2016.
57. Challenging the Closing Space for Civil Society: A Practical Starting Point for Funders, 2016.
58. Challenging the Closing Space for Civil Society: A Practical Starting Point for Funders, 2016.
59. F. Bravo Alarcon, “Difficulties with Environmental Consciousness-Raising in Peru,” *Socialismo y Participacion* 97 (2004): 47-85.
60. Miller, Jon and Lucy Parker, “Open for Business: Strengthening the economic case – 2018 Report Highlights.” Accessed 2 July 2018.

https://www.open-for-business.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/BRU2_0558_Summary_Report.pdf

61. "About Open for Business." <https://www.open-for-business.org/>. Accessed 7 May 2018.