

The Changing Nature of Partnerships



Background

Many of the successful tactics funders employ to support grantees under threat include expanding local partnerships or enhancing existing relationships—whether with local philanthropic groups, grassroots organizations, or individuals. Several of these approaches go beyond the need to share information and collaborate toward achieving shared goals. While prior partnership tools focused specifically on the need to safeguard funding, coordination, and information sharing, a number of researched approaches present increasing partnerships as its own benefit.⁴⁸

For instance, there has been a global shift toward joint ventures with the private sector. Professionalized nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and service delivery organizations are seeking out new business models and broader mandates to serve communities in need. To secure funding, many grantees and civil society organizations (CSOs) are taking on commercial services and diversifying their activities beyond the core mission. Some specialized CSOs receive government contracts to provide select public services, creating a new revenue stream. Some CSOs have significant reserves, which could be invested to protect and develop CSO capacity, entering new markets and developing new business models.⁴⁹ Such initiatives are often possible through loans instead of grants.⁵⁰

The CIVICUS paper *Southern Philanthropy, Social Justice, and Human Rights* outlines additional avenues for funders to build partnerships with local organizations. In the

Global South, there is a culture of institutionalized philanthropy to support human rights. However, to date, Southern philanthropy has been unable to fill the funding gap left by reduced foreign donor support and increased government restrictions. Still, private, corporate, and family foundations have expanded and increased their activities. CIVICUS finds that cross-regionally, there is greater support for charitable philanthropy that emphasizes immediate and tangible results and service delivery in emerging economies.⁵¹ These additional activities mostly accompanied economic growth and a broadening middle class in the Global South and are buoyed by popular support.

Foundations can adapt to these changes in partnership characteristics. Some of the most common approaches to support grantees to build partnerships include increasing core funding, contributing to capacity building, and creating networking opportunities. Networking opportunities include platforms and space for dialogue. As mentioned in the toolbox above, the TechSoup platform features a global network of civil society partners and organizations that can be accessed to seek out local partnerships. Movements.org and GlobalGiving.com offer similar networking opportunities, often to build legal and advocacy capacity as well as information exchange. Organizations like the [Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression](#) in Egypt provides a more niche opportunity for academics to share legal findings and support each other in moments of repression.⁵²

Strategies

- **Support community organizing (Funder):** Provide space and capacity for community actors to come together, help grantees define problems, identify solutions, and act together. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee highlighted the importance of aligning nonstate local actors with a state-building approach that emphasizes and includes civil society actors.
- **Provide outreach to social service providers (Funder/Grantee):** Engage nonprofit health and social service organizations specifically to help them organize and participate in social change activities. The California Endowment Hmong Health Initiative in 2004 demonstrated the impact of involving health organizations specifically. The initiative helped refugees navigate the health care system. This was a multi-region collaborative focusing on advocacy and policy change that proved widely successful.⁵³

- **Provide umbrella grants to trusted NGOs (Funder):** NGOs with umbrella grants could manage micro-grants to local partners. For example, the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives manages partnerships through an umbrella grant to an NGO staffed by Pakistanis who manage relationships with smaller entities. Many larger aid organizations are now seeking to improve upon this streamlined approach rooted in local partnerships. ⁵⁴
- **Identify and train local leaders (Funder):** Provide one-on-one peer mentoring or retreats and sabbaticals for leaders. Leadership training stands as a tried-and-true strategy. It promotes more sustainable leadership and empowers actors at the local level to reduce their dependence on international actors for protection. ActionAid Denmark's [Shrinking Political and Civic Space Course](#) is an example of such training. The course "aims at enhancing the capacity of activists to address the growing global phenomenon of shrinking civic and political space whereby state and non-state actors are increasingly becoming intolerant of civil engagement, citizens expressions and advocacy and campaigns towards effecting [causing] social change."
- **Conduct development programs and training on coalition building (Funder):** These efforts could involve constituency development and communications skills-building.
- **Support travel, meeting space, and facilitated discussion (Funder):** Partnerships require more than a platform for introductions, they depend on safe physical spaces to expand their potential. Initiatives like "[The Spindle](#)," initiated by an association of Dutch NGOs working in international development, supports events series bringing diverse actors to workshop civic space challenges, facilitate innovation, and build an on and off-line community. ⁵⁵
- **Increase research capacity (Funder):** Involve think tanks and policy leadership in building institutions and vetting individual leaders who are strategic thinkers.

Actor	Responses	Examples/Explanations	Key Resources (Reports or Organizations)
Funder	Support community organizing	The OECD-DAC highlighted importance of alignment with nonstate local actors and a state-building approach that emphasizes and includes civil society	CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment: A Review of the Evidence
Funder/Grantee	Provide outreach to social service providers	California Endowment Hmong Health Initiative, 2004, helped refugees navigate health care system through multi-region collaborative focusing on advocacy and policy change	California Endowment

Funder	Provide umbrella grants to trusted NGOs	USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives manages partnerships through an umbrella grant to an NGO staffed by Pakistanis who manage relationships with smaller entities	USAID Office of Transition Initiatives, Pakistan Transition Initiative
Funder	Identify and train local leaders	ActionAid's Shrinking Political and Civic Space Course aims to enhance the capacity of activists at the local level	ActionAid Resources on Shrinking Political Space
Funder	Conduct development programs and training on coalition building	World Movement for Democracy has a "Defending Civil Society Toolkit" that helps CSOs enlist support from outside their countries	"Defending Civil Society Toolkit," Chapter 2: Engaging Civil Society

Funder	Support travel, meeting space, and facilitated discussion	With a diverse racial and economic profile, the California Alliance spans suburban and working communities and has been successful at engaging a wide range of voters on fiscal and tax reform	California Alliance
Funder	Increase research capacity	Involve think tanks and policy leadership in building institutions and vetting individual leaders who are strategic thinkers	

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