



Collaboration Case Note

Aligned Reporting

April 2019

TAI seeks to foster collaboration between two or more members around our shared strategic priorities. Collaboration case notes document and assess the utility of such initiatives from the funder perspective.

What Problem(s) Were We Addressing?

As TAI works to improve grantmaking practices, members recognized the burdensome and often duplicative reporting requirements that grantees face, particularly when they have multiple grants supporting the same anticipated outcomes. Creating numerous reports with different content, timelines, and often information is neither helpful nor a productive use of resources for donors and grantee organizations.

Who Collaborated and How?

A working group of Program Officers representing all four funders (though the Ford Foundation was undergoing strategy changes and therefore was less involved than the others in this engagement) participated in this initiative for a pilot cohort of co-grantees. Members engaged in different ways—through a series of phone calls, document reviews, feedback on items of interest, and message dissemination focused on grantee organizations with support from two or more TAI funder members. Respondents generally felt that the collaboration was equally led by both TAI and the members. One member noted that "TAI circulated documents, facilitated meetings, and kept us going. We did the decision-making. It was a clear division of labor." The TAI Secretariat put together an analysis of reporting requirements, asked for feedback, and helped

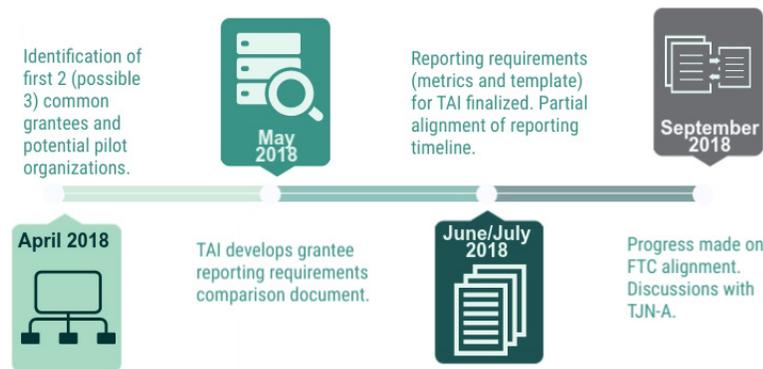
"In addition to the common funders, we're also having side conversations and deals...we're talking about developing a common set of indicators to align our reporting." -Funder

facilitate the identification of pilot grantees. Members came to agreement on the pilot organizations and identified specific funder member points of contact for each grantee. Those funders then held discussions with the designated grantee and disseminated information to the other funder members. Members felt this a productive and efficient use of time, though the Secretariat noted they were not always updated on progress and follow-up.

Grantee organizations had mixed views regarding this structure – with one feeling that it was fine in theory, but that they lacked sufficient communication from other funders beyond their point of contact. In practice, they were told that decisions on changes represented the views of all funders, but they did not receive anything in writing or additional communication beyond their point of contact to assure them it was indeed the case. Similarly, at least one member organization felt they were the only one really leading this work. Interestingly, side conversations between members began to happen outside of this particular collaborative initiative, and other donors became affiliated with similar bilateral projects, including the MacArthur Foundation (which did not become a full member of TAI until late 2018).

"I appreciate that they have listened to us and are taking concerns into account and updating us. They're all talking the same language, which is good. Just want to see the progress out of it and hopefully then we'll have other donors doing the same."

-Grantee



What Type of Collaboration Was It?

Generally, TAI members and the Secretariat agreed that this collaboration fell strongly into the ‘alignment’ category, though one noted it may have begun as exploration with respect to what was possible; and another stated that it turned to influence where full alignment wasn’t feasible. However, feedback from both grantees and members is more mixed regarding the extent to which it has achieved those objectives – with progress made, but much more work needed on at least two of the three pilots.

How Did the Collaboration Evolve?

The collaboration evolved largely as intended, with the identification of grantee organizations working with multiple donors on similar interventions and the comparison of donor reporting requirements. Following agreement on TAI’s reporting timelines and content, however, the collaboration devolved a bit more than anticipated. That is, members began to have more bilateral conversations and achieve some aligned reporting with grantee organizations not in the originally identified target organizations. At the same time, discussions and agreement on the metrics for Financial Transparency Coalition (FTC) and Tax Justice Network-Africa (TJN-A) took longer than

"We like the idea of reducing burden and requirements, but that change is really hard if it's not an institution-wide change. It's much less compelling for one small subset of the overall portfolio." -Funder

envisioned. Virtual discussions and side conversations took the place of regular, full-team phone calls and reports. This devolution caused the Secretariat to perceive this collaboration as much less fruitful than some members reported.

Grantee organizations generally felt that they were listened to and respected throughout the process, which was appreciated. That said, at least one also noted that they would have appreciated a bit more frequency and more detail of interactions; and more than one opportunity to have all funders on a call. Otherwise, most felt the process and timeframe of discussions was fine, albeit longer than expected. One member noted that, "While sharing a set of common values and intentions, I think we probably were naïve about hard it would be." This sentiment was echoed by others, who agreed that it became less formal and less prioritized over time given competing staff priorities.

What Have We Achieved?

- Common report and reduced reporting burden for TAI.
- Pilot in progress with TJN-A for common report (ongoing discussions, but not many changes to date).
- Significant progress on FTC pilot with common timelines, general agreement on reporting needs, and a single proposal for multiple funders. Still waiting on final MEL framework and first narrative report.
- Numerous bilateral agreements which establish common indicators, proposals, updates, and templates between 2-3 donors.
- One funder was successful in changing their reporting requirements from quarterly to semi-annual for a grantee.

Was the Collaboration Useful?

Most members agreed that this collaboration has been useful—either very useful or at least somewhat, though one respondent noted they were holding off judgment until a year from now, when they would be better able to assess the value to grantees and the funders. Members and the Secretariat appreciated that they could clearly see the benefits and that it felt very tangible, particularly in comparison to other TAI collaborative initiatives. While funders reported it as useful, it is unclear whether the initiative has indeed yielded more useful data for funders and grantees alike. Grantees believe the idea is great in theory, but they have not yet been able to reap much in the way of tangible benefits – in part due to the reporting cycles and how long it has taken to come to agreement on timelines, report structures, and MEL frameworks.

"It has gone beyond reporting and grantees and members are talking about having standing semi-annual calls with members across TAI for updates." - Funder

Barriers to Collaboration Use	Enablers of Collaboration Use
Inflexibility of some member institutions' systems	Communication: Slack channel and TAI's role in prodding along the conversation
Nature of the collaboration as PO to PO rather than broader institutional buy-in	Some members made it a priority and were committed to the collaboration
Harmonizing across multiple funding institutions is difficult—whether among TAI member organizations or when grantees are dealing with non-TAI members	Members work on similar issues, with common grantees
Lack of sufficient time and resources by grantees and funders to develop MEL frameworks and ensure adequate follow-up to one another.	Members trusted one other
Lack of sufficient engagement or communication by all members with all grantees.	Grantmaking cycle was well aligned timing-wise with this initiative, making it easier to change report requirements

Did the Collaboration Address the Problem?

Stakeholders found the collaboration addressed the key issues identified, though it was more difficult to advance than many had anticipated. While the funders generally have similar grantmaking principles, the flexibility of the institutional processes varies widely. As such, alignment between some donors was much easier than alignment between others, due to the systems and institutions in which they operate. While this was a quick win for some funders, it took more work for others. The grantees are the intended primary beneficiaries of this collaboration which could make it more difficult for funders whose systems are relatively inflexible to tangibly see that value moving forward. Similarly, the value proposition, burden, and tolerance for more individualized reporting requirements for specific grantees differs among funders. Each of the three pilots also are in very different stages with respect to achieving alignment, and tangible benefits have not yet been fully realized given the timeline. As such, almost all stakeholders believe the problem can and will be addressed through the collaboration but cannot yet state that it has been fully solved.

"The reduction in the burden that this represents has some potential consequences on the normal channels of communication upon which we would rely. Benefits will be felt and will be long-term, but there is still a necessity for one on one relationships moving forward. As such, something to complement the change, [like a one to one meeting once per year] would be helpful." -Grantee

Transparency and Accountability Initiative is a collaborative of leading funders of transparency, accountability and participation worldwide. It envisions a world where citizens are informed and empowered; governments are open and responsive; and collective action advances the public good. Toward this end, TAI aims to increase the collective impact of transparency and accountability interventions by strengthening grantmaking practice, learning and collaboration among its members. TAI focuses on the following thematic areas: data use for accountability, strengthening civic space, taxation and tax governance, learning for improved grantmaking.



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