



# Collaboration Case Note

## Natural Resource Governance Field Day

March 2020

*Transparency and Accountability Initiative (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 the field of natural resource governance (NRG) evolves, more organizations are working in this space, on similar issues, often funded by the same donors. The purpose of the NRG "field day" was to bring together grantees and TAI donor members working on NRG issues to share information about current initiatives, identify coordination gaps, and find synergies to enhance collaboration at the project level. At the same time, the field day aimed to find areas for higher-level strategic collaboration as a means of addressing emerging trends and challenges in the broader NRG field.

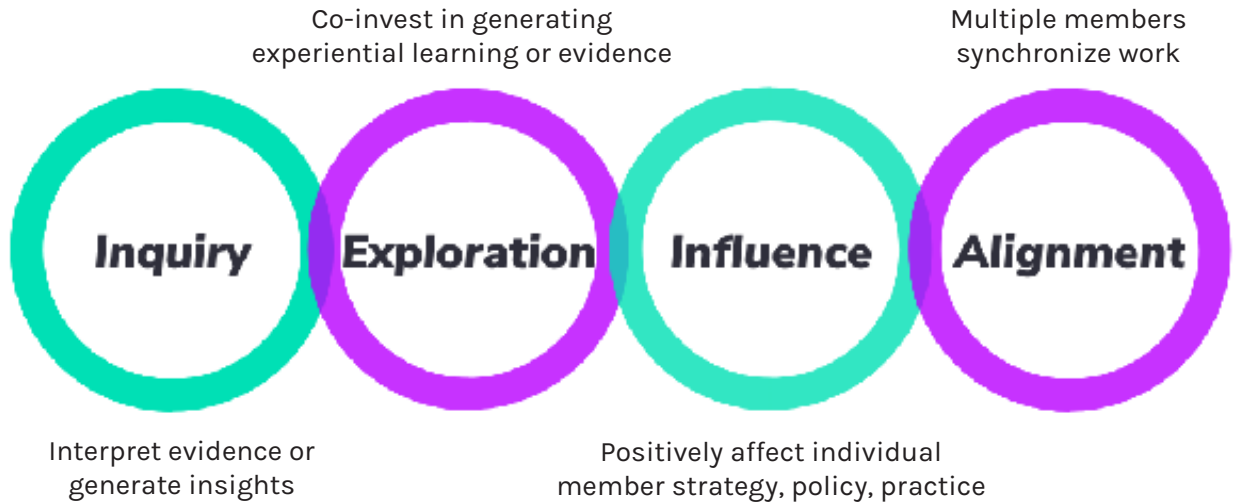
### **Who Collaborated and How?**

This collaboration primarily involved the TAI Secretariat and the Economic Justice Program at Open Society Foundations (OSF). OSF organized and hosted the field day with support from a facilitator and input from core grantees. The TAI Secretariat and a consultant drafted background documents for the field day. The TAI Secretariat, Ford Foundation (Ford), OSF, Luminate and seven grantees participated in the field day and follow ups.

Coordination took the form of planning calls and meetings, drafting and sharing documents, carrying out the convening itself, and circulating follow up notes with action items after the event.

### What Type of Collaboration Was It?

This collaboration is primarily focused on alignment of grantmaking work, which also included grantee efforts to align strategy and field activities, and the background documents are also a form of inquiry.

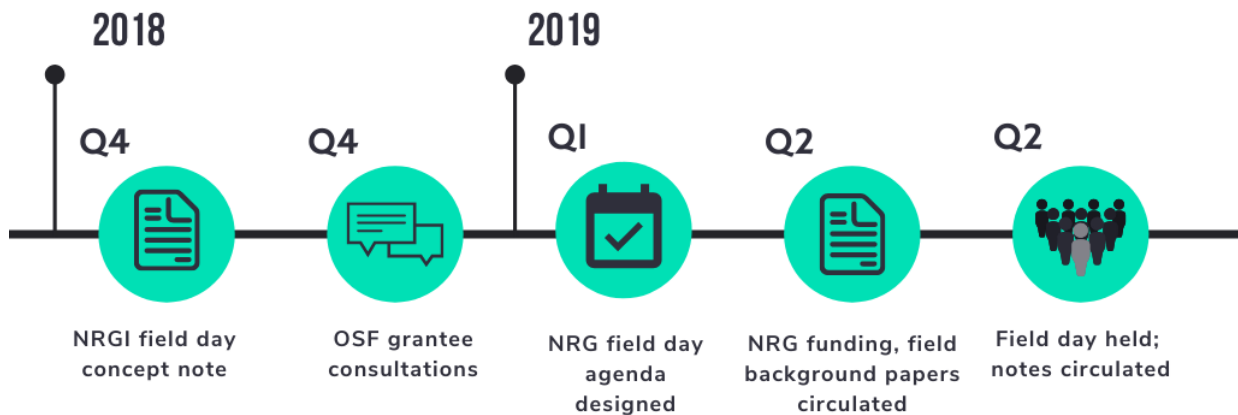


### How Did the Collaboration Evolve?

When OSF undertook a review of its reporting requirements in 2019, several grantees expressed the desire to go beyond activity-level reporting to examine broader trends and challenges in the NRG field. They felt this high-level reflection and information should be shared not only in reports to OSF, but also among other NRG grantees and donors to ensure they were appropriately trend spotting, improve coordination, and ostensibly increase collective impact.

*"Distinct from the NRG field day, this kind of [big picture analysis] is hands down one of the most valuable things that TAI does for the grantee community. The [funding and field background papers], while quick and dirty, [were] hugely useful. The caliber of writing and thinking - we just need more of this."*

– Non-funder stakeholder



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The Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI), a grantee of OSF and all TAI members (except MacArthur), drafted a concept note outlining how such a "grantee exchange" could be structured. Based on this note and feedback from other grantees, OSF and an external facilitator crafted an agenda and organized the field day. OSF intended to commission a paper on the NRG funding landscape, but the TAI Secretariat ultimately authored the document directly due to time constraints. The Secretariat also worked with a consultant to produce an NRG field background paper on emerging trends and gaps. Both documents were circulated ahead of, and referenced during, the field day to help frame discussions.

The two-day gathering aimed to help grantees and donors understand each other's geographical and thematic strategies and priorities in order to better coordinate activities at the country level. It was also meant to be a "forced reflection" on whether the NRG implementer community is adequately identifying and responding to emerging issues such as climate change. Donors held their own conversations during that day on how to better collaborate on and diversify their portfolios. After the field day concluded, OSF circulated notes and held a donor follow up call with the TAI members who attended. There was also some grantee follow up, including an Oxfam America-hosted conversation on country-level coordination in Ghana.

*"I wanted to mention how valuable I found the [funding and field background papers] perfectly timed to serve as a resource for our strategic plan refresh and I'm very grateful!"*

— Funder stakeholder

### What Have We Achieved?

Several respondents said the convening contributed to a **shared understanding** of what is missing in the NRG field, although many noted that it was less clear what should be done to address those gaps.

Some commitments made during the field day are being implemented. OSF and Ford earmarked money for a **grantee training** focused on oil and gas mining intersections with gender, race and social movements. The TAI Secretariat intends to start documenting factors that contribute to successful grantee convenings.

Some respondents saw **increased country-level collaboration** between grantees following the field day, including efforts to align theories of change and programmatic strategies. Partly as a result of the field day, NRGI and Oxfam worked with country teams and civil society partners who were not at the field day to submit a joint proposal to the International Budget Partnership (IBP).

Oxfam America referenced TAI's **funding and field background papers** in a separate event and as a result they will be published.

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## Was the Collaboration Useful to Members?

Many respondents found the opportunity to come together and think about strategy across the NRG field from both the grantee and donor perspectives useful; both grantees and funders felt that donors should use their convening power to create these types of spaces more often. Others found the process less useful because discussions during the field day failed to go beyond surface level and follow-up action was lacking.

Multiple respondents noted that organizations used input from the field day in revising their own strategies and used the TAI funding and field background papers to elicit feedback from their partners.

Barriers to Collaboration Use	Enablers of Collaboration Use
Excitement and momentum around new ideas or activities is difficult to sustain once everyone returns to work after an event.	OSF taking the lead on the organization and logistics of the day allowed TAI members to benefit without substantial effort.
The fast pace of work can make it challenging to elevate thinking from reactive to strategic.	The fact that the field day was convened by a funder resulted in active grantee participation.
Participant profiles were not always aligned, resulting in different levels of seniority, decision-making power, and functional versus substantive knowledge.	The TAI Secretariat's position as an objective, credible, and trusted source contributed to positive reception and use of the background documents in the field day discussions.
Institutional and personal agendas and priorities may inhibit participants' interest in or ability to commit to new activities, initiatives, or collaboration.	Existing relationships and trust between and among grantees and donors enabled honest, open conversation, and self-criticism.
While the discussion of common challenges was important, the event did not meet the expectations of some participants to surface solutions and commitment to action.	Several participating organizations were navigating or anticipating change moments, meaning they were in the right mindset for higher-level discussions.

## Lessons Learned

**Meeting peers in the field is an opportunity to tap into a brain trust that should be maximized.** One respondent called the day "a gathering of great minds," and was frustrated by what they saw as a missed opportunity to not only identify but address challenges. While OSF did have conversations with participants to co-create the agenda, several respondents felt that much "horizon-scanning" could have been done in advance to make better use of the limited time the group had together.

This also speaks to the importance of **setting clear expectations and objectives** for such a convening. Some grantees mentioned that they hoped for a "10,000-foot view" from funders, along with a clearly articulated vision of how to effect macro-level change in the

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NRG field. Instead of focusing only on implementation synergies, grantees sought to better understand and solve for strategy gaps, which could then lead to enhanced collaboration. Funders involved beyond OSF adjusted their initial understanding of their roles from being “observers” to preparing for more active preparation and participation.

*"The usual problem is people come together have good discussions and then everyone goes back to their daily lives but at least for this project I'm happy to see that it's still going, albeit slower than I might have hoped."*

— Non-funder stakeholder

While notes from the field day were circulated, several respondents felt that **more concerted follow-up** (such as phone calls) could have led to more action. As one person said, there were "great ideas, great momentum, and then it never went anywhere."

Consultation ahead of time might have allowed participants to come to the meeting **prepared to make institutional commitments**, particularly when trying to articulate and advance a joint, high-level theory of change for the field.

**Aligning similar donor-convened events could enhance their usefulness.** The field day was one of several donor-organized sessions for NRG field actors within a short timeframe, some of which were held by different TAI funders before and after the field day itself. Several respondents commented that the events could have been coordinated to build off of each other in a more holistic way to further unpack learning from the field, but instead felt disjointed and separate.

*"I don't think it changed much about how we actually implement."*

— Non-funder stakeholder

**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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