



Collaboration Case Note

From Open to Inclusive Governance: Voice Partnership

March 2021

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?

The transparency, participation, and accountability (TPA) field has grown in the last fifteen years, but resources remain concentrated within large, capital city-based civil society organizations or channeled via international non-governmental organizations. As one funder member stated, "we always talk about participation, but the question is: who participates?" This collaboration sought to expand funder TPA portfolios to be more diverse, inclusive, and relevant by introducing TPA tools to community groups not currently using them. In addition, there was interest in surfacing groups beyond established funder networks. Finally, the initiative sought to build stronger working relationships between grassroots organizations and more seasoned TPA practitioners to reinforce learning and use of TPA approaches.

Who Collaborated and How?

This collaboration was unique in that it substantively involved only one TAI funder member. Primary participants were the TAI Secretariat, TAI funder member the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Hewlett), and Dutch funding mechanism, Voice. Voice's host organizations, Hivos and Oxfam Novib, were initiators and active participants. Voice learning partner, the Coady International Institute (Coady) came on board when the learning component shifted online.

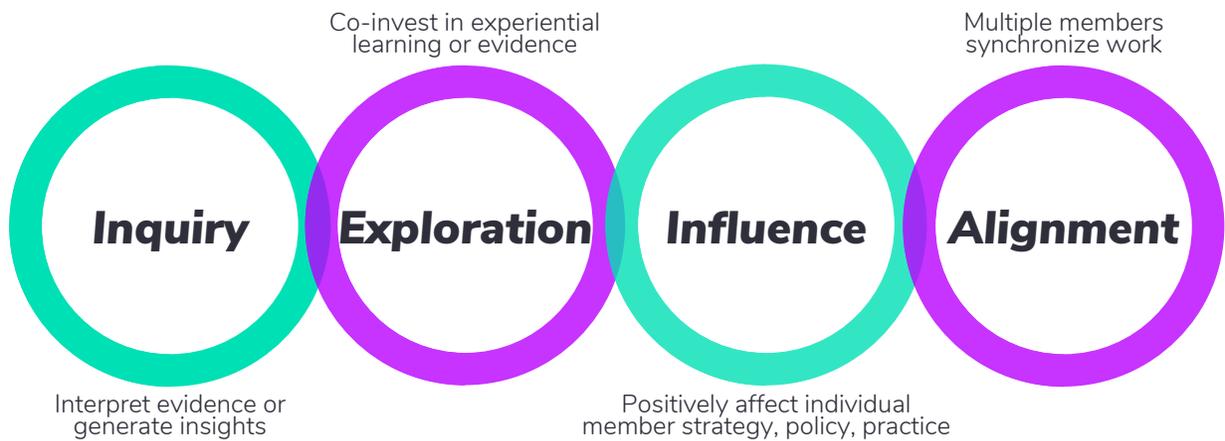
The Voice team led the *From Open to Inclusive Governance Call for Ideas*, a grant-making initiative. Hewlett funds to support the initiative received a direct match from an existing Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) commitment to Voice executed by Hivos and Oxfam Novib. Voice, Oxfam Novib, Hivos, and the TAI Secretariat co-designed the concept and participated in the proposal selection committee. The Secretariat shifted to an advisory role after the

co-design effort. In response to the pandemic, Voice initiated a partnership with the Coady Institute to provide a tailored online learning certification course on social accountability for the teams selected for the design-phase funding. Collaboration took place through a mixture of email and in-person and virtual meetings (especially after the pandemic began).

What Type of Collaboration Was It?

This collaboration involved strategy coordination through a novel funding mechanism to invest in knowledge and experience with a grantee cohort new to Hewlett. It is an example of alignment, albeit with fewer funder members involved than anticipated.

TAI Collaboration Spectrum



How Did the Collaboration Evolve?

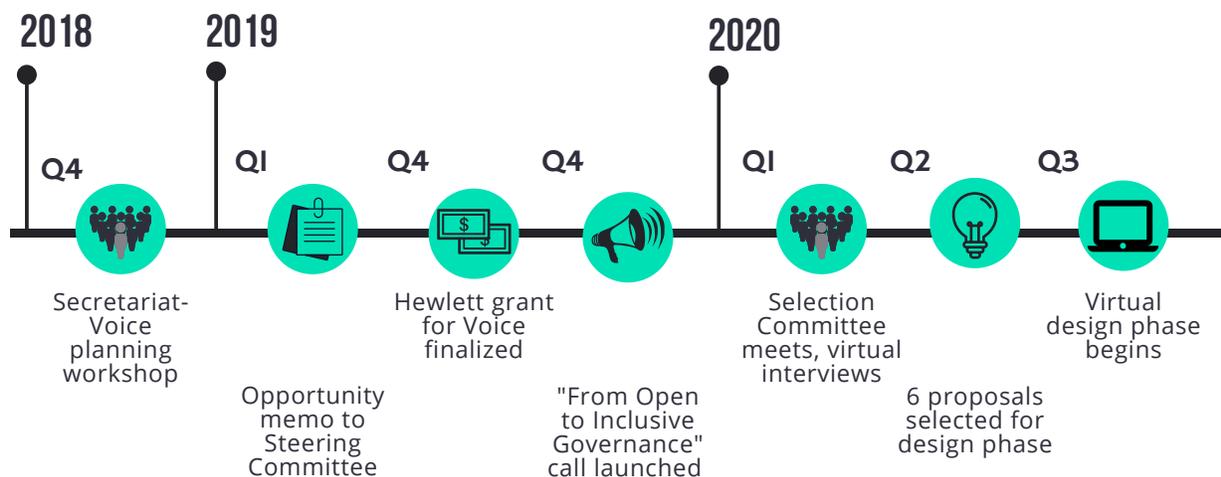
TAI members, in recent years, had discussed efforts to support diversity within and among the groups they fund. Voice’s mandate is to empower marginalized groups of rightsholders from within the communities they support or stand for to be in the pilot seat to solve their own problems. In 2018, due in part to prior professional connections, Voice and TAI Secretariat leadership started a conversation around how to break the silo between these two “islands of excellence”: TAI’s work on TPA and Voice’s work on diversity and inclusion.

TAI’s Executive Director participated in several brainstorming phone calls, and later a co-creation meeting with Voice, Oxfam Novib, and Hivos. These initial meetings resulted in the idea to make grants to organizations not currently working in the TPA space to introduce them to TPA tools and approaches. The Secretariat shared this concept in an opportunity memo with the TAI Steering Committee. Ultimately, while all members considered the opportunity, only Hewlett decided to participate. Other TAI members endorsed the Secretariat role to track learnings for the collective.

Voice and the TAI Secretariat formally launched *From Open to Inclusive Governance* at the annual partnership forum of the World Bank's 2019 Global Partnership for Social Accountability, whose theme that year was inclusive accountability. Interested applicants were invited to complete a simple online form to present "out of the box ideas." Voice staff reviewed 357 online applications and shortlisted 11 ideas. The Selection Committee reviewed and scored this shortlist of written and video concept notes. The Committee then convened in person to hear short virtual presentations from, and have a live conversation with, the applicants. The Committee invited six applicants, comprising 17 organizations in five countries, to submit a full proposal package. All of these teams ultimately received inception funding for a six-month design phase beginning in September 2020.

The initial idea was for those selected to use this first phase to harness TPA tools and approaches through an in-person knowledge exchange and co-creation workshop facilitated by TAI and Voice. After this design phase, applicants would submit reworked, full proposals to the Selection Committee, who would identify finalists for a second, 18-month phase of implementation funding. This process had to be redesigned due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which also meant a temporary commitment stop from the Dutch MFA to Voice as the government temporarily paused overseas development assistance spending. The pandemic also rendered further travel and planned in-person meetings unsafe for the duration of the design phase. As a result, Voice partnered with Coady, who adapted their online module in citizen-led accountability to explicitly include TPA learning as well as provide individual mentoring support to each project. By the end of 2020, all the groups had completed the online course and were due to submit their reworked proposals in March 2021.

Collaboration Milestones in 2020



All the non-participating funder members interviewed found the collaboration concept interesting and gave several reasons for their decision not to join. Chief among them were ongoing internal shifts (re-structuring, staff turnover, and strategic review) that tied up human and financial resources. For some, the concept did not fit well within their strategy. For others, the pooled funding approach did not align with organizational priorities or grantmaking approaches. One member also noted the timing of the opportunity, which was presented at the end of a calendar year, when existing budget commitments left little space for new initiatives.

3 Transparency and Accountability Initiative

Diverse institutional incentives and structures may have also contributed to TAI member decisions. It was suggested that some may not have wanted to sidestep their regional offices to provide a grant for Voice in its focal countries. Alternatively, some member representatives may not have advertised the opportunity well enough within their own institutions. As one member stated, "we did send it around but...I don't think we do a good enough job of providing connections within our own organization to TAI." One member suggested that direct communication between TAI member regional offices might have allowed for more collaboration. Currently, most active TAI member representatives are US/headquarters based. On that note, deeper connections at the country level may have been an incentive for Hewlett to participate, as the foundation does not currently have country staff.

"The unusual audience was what we hoped for. We succeeded in working with a group of people who were never on the radar of TAI. Now let's see if we can get them interested in accountability issues."

-Non-member funder

What Have We Achieved?

This collaboration is ongoing, but those interviewed noted several achievements. That a TAI member decided to fund the initiative itself indicates perceived value of this rather novel idea. The design phase consortia included groups beyond the "usual suspect" grantees, all of whom are working from within a wide range of marginalized community types – a positive outcome noted by all consulted. Several respondents described the richness of applicant pool and the diversity of partnerships and coalitions as eye-opening.

By working with these groups, funders have been able to think and hear about how those who work on issues "adjacent" to TPA issues think and talk about open governance work. Funders also found valuable the insight into what the grantee consortia perceive to be the TPA entry points for the work they are doing. One funder hopes that the experience will serve as a catalyst for how their organization might reach smaller groups in the future. Voice's [blog](#) on learnings from this process, which TAI helped to disseminate, is also an accomplishment in that it offers potentially useful lessons for others in the field.

It is worth noting that applicants and awarded consortia teams were not interviewed for this case note as the design phase is still ongoing. It remains to be seen how this will impact their work. The hope is that the learning and exchange around TPA tools and approaches will provide a useful and different lens through which the design phase participants might view their work.

Funders have also gleaned insights and potential new ways of working from how Voice manages grants and reporting. For example, the brief Call for Ideas and proposal template, which also allowed for video submissions, differs from the lengthier text-heavy formats more commonly used. The Selection Committee interviews allowed shortlisted organizations to describe their work in greater detail. "This was an exciting, yet efficient way to get to know the applicants and their ideas. They shared their fears, visions and passion. It also gave them a chance to share any questions and suggestions." The fact that most applicants were in fact consortia - a lead group with other partners - was also described as an interesting model for funding.

This collaboration process also had an intelligence-gathering outcome with potential value for all members; TAI now has a mapping of groups with an interest to work on TPA issues that TAI was not initially aware of. One respondent said they hope TAI can take that further, as "it's an asset that we didn't have before."

Was the Collaboration Useful to Members?

All the participants interviewed found the collaboration useful, primarily for its uniquely inclusive grantmaking approach and innovative process re-design due to COVID-19.

Barriers to Collaboration	Enablers of Collaboration
Dutch MFA funding was frozen for several months due to COVID-19, delaying project implementation.	Hewlett funds enabled certain processes to proceed despite Dutch MFA delays.
COVID-19 caused delays and prompted a re-design of the process from in-person exchange (which may have sparked more ideas and connections) to virtual training.	Voice was able to pivot from the in-person-focused design to Coady's online module and therefore keep the process moving forward.
Fewer TAI funder members than expected elected to participate in the process.	The Secretariat's design and advisory roles added value to Hewlett's financial investment and eased time demand on staff.
As only one TAI member invested, the Secretariat had to be mindful of the bandwidth devoted to this collaboration.	The prior relationship between Voice-TAI leadership, combined with their openness to innovation and risk-taking, allowed for a creative process and product. Alignment between TAI and Voice's priorities led to the idea; alignment with Hewlett's priorities made it a reality.

Lessons Learned

Be clear about the decision to pursue certain opportunities. Some non-participating members expressed mixed feelings about the process through which the Secretariat decided to present this opportunity, as opposed to myriad others that "do not make it through the filter." Ultimately, non-participants felt comfortable with the collective decision-making process that led to Hewlett proceeding. However, examples were given of past initiatives or themes presented to the platform by funder members, which some perceived as attempts to expand TAI's scope. Whether funder members or the Secretariat introduce opportunities to TAI, it is important to clarify the nature of the opportunity (invitation for thought partnership, co-funding, etc.) and TAI's potential role (host, advisory function through the platform, member collaboration outside of platform, etc.).

5 Transparency and Accountability Initiative

Starting small enables flexibility and creativity. Several respondents noted the importance of beginning with a small group to do the brainstorming, then slowly and steadily opening the space as ideas crystallize.

Inclusion is a lot of work, but well worth it. The Voice team was inundated with over 300 applications in response to the call for ideas. This itself reveals an untapped demand for TPA tools and points to the value of matching Voice and TAI's networks. Beyond that, Voice's

"This was one of the first times I have seen a TAI member and the Secretariat roll out a program. We thought of it as a mechanism to drive up that aspect of our strategy. Even though the process is still at the beginning, I'm hopeful this will help us re-evaluate grantmaking going forward."

-Funder member

equal opportunity, co-creation approach to arriving at that final group of grantees may be more time-consuming for funders than the solicited opportunities that TAI members usually share. But as a Selection Committee member noted, "getting overwhelmed with the ideas was useful...because it was all about creating that unusual new audience."

Diversify funding sources when possible. Reliance on certain funders can create risk, as seen when Voice's primary donor froze funds for several months. Different funder types can also complement each other advantageously. The unique combination of a government bilateral funder and a private foundation was noted as a good result and a model that should be

replicated more often. In addition, it was noted that, this process could help smaller, project-focused grantees become ready for core funding, creating a new audience for them in the form of TAI members.

Keep members updated even if they don't participate. Most of those interviewed were surprised that more members did not take advantage of the opportunity to try out "a new way of thinking and doing at a relatively low cost." Members who opted out did express an interest in hearing more about how the process is going. These members saw this as an opportunity for the Secretariat to add value by consolidating and sharing learnings more visibly, both within and outside of the TAI platform. This is particularly pertinent for the more inclusive, accessible grantmaking and implementation process the collaboration employed.

Crisis can be an opportunity for creative growth, particularly when you have the right partners. While the COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges, the diversity of institutional experience and ideas in the Selection Committee helped to turn many of them into opportunities. The transition to online social accountability training with Coady is an example of this innovative thinking, and was even called "a blessing in disguise" by one collaboration participant. It bears noting that there was no apparent African partner available to deliver this learning component to the grantees based in five African countries.