What drives successful donor collaborations?

Abstract

Background

Based on a landscaping done by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and initial discussions among USAID, CIFF and BMGF, a need was felt to improve coordination and collaboration among donors. BMGF has convened a meeting of donors for an initial discussion of how better to coordinate work on behaviour change, with a view to possibly increasing donor collaboration in this area. This paper was written to enable the participants of the upcoming donor meeting on behaviour change to better understand factors associated with a successful donor collaboration.

Methods

A review of the grey literature was conducted and indepth interviews were conducted with 17 key informants belonging to various donor organizations as well as researchers who have looked at donor collaborations.

Results

The findings show that successful collaboration is not based on the amount of resources committed but rather on an approach to collaboration which is based on agreed upon principles of collaboration, open communication among donors, recognition of the context of each donor organization's work and reliance on their particular strengths. Donors are more likely to rely on information provided by and learn from their colleagues than from external subject matter experts.

Conclusions

The findings support the idea of a peer network of donors, the need to build trust in such a network through face-to-face time and increased institutional support for such a collaboration form senior management of their organizations.

I. Introduction

The Paris Declaration (2005) sought to improve the quality of aid and its impact on development through alignment on five principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization, results, and mutual accountability. For "harmonization," donor countries agreed to coordinate, simplify procedures, and share information to avoid duplication.[1] However, coordination was still recognized as a problem at the Aid Effectiveness conference in 2011, when the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness noted that "co-ordination of donors often remains weak precisely where working towards common goals is needed the most, and weak national leadership and capacity become an excuse for uncoordinated donor-driven approaches."[2]

The purpose of this research is to understand what factors are associated with the success and failure of donor collaborations, particularly those focused on behavior change and research. The findings of this paper will inform participants attending the donor collaboration on demand and behaviour change meeting on December 3-4 2018, convened by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Donors and multilaterals interested in collaboration on behavior change programming attending this meeting include AFD, CIFF, DFID, Global Affairs Canada, Hewlett, Packard, UNICEF, USAID, Wellcome Trust, the World Bank, and WHO have confirmed their participation in this meeting. The meeting will enable donors to determine the type and extent of collaboration on behaviour change that would be optimal and the role of different organizations in this collaboration.

This document reviews findings from a review of the literature and interviews with representatives from multiple donor and multilateral organizations and researchers working on donor collaboration and presents recommendations for successful donor collaborations. The authors intend to make this paper available for comment on the Gates Open Research website, and to incorporate comments received on the paper into a final submission to Gates Open Research for publication, following peer review.

II. Methods

Data Sources

This research was conducted by reviewing literature and by interviewing staff at donor organizations and researchers who have studied donor collaboration. Relevant literature was identified purposively through internet searches and from referrals from interviewed donor organization staff. Donor organization staff were also identified purposively, and focused on those invited to attend the workshop on donor collaboration on demand and behaviour change.

Most of the relevant literature identified and reviewed was based on research conducted on donor collaborations in the United States. In addition, staff of multiple donor organizations were interviewed as key informants for this paper. We also conducted several interviews with the researchers who conducted these studies of donor collaborations in the US.

- Private funders (for example, Hewlett Foundation, CIFF; Surgo Foundation, Wellcome Trust; the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)
- Bilateral funders (for example, USAID, DfID), and
- Multi-lateral funders (for example, UNICEF, World Bank)

All interviews were conducted over the telephone or on Skype during October – December 2018. Interviewees consented implicitly to give an interview while scheduling the interview appointment over email. The interviewer typed notes during the interviews and sent the interview notes to the interviewee for review and edit if requested. The interviews were not audiorecorded.

[1] http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm

[2] Abdel-Malek, T. & Koenders, B. (2011). www.busanhlf4.org Progress towards more effective aid: What does the evidence show? Available: http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/48966414.pdf

Analysis

One author (CH) coded the data derived from literature and data derived from interview notes by theme, seeking primarily to find an emergent list of recommendations for successful donor collaborations. A secondary objective was to identify factors that inhibit successful donor collaborations, or factors that cause donor collaborations to fail.

III. Results

The sources of experience for nearly all the literature reviewed was from the US, but the sources of experience for most of the interviews was from lower and middle income countries outside the US. Despite these differing sources, the research findings for recommendations for successful donor collaborations from both sources of data were highly consistent, and are presented together below, not stratified by data source.

Motivations to Collaborate

Some of the reasons that funders collaborate are: to achieve a greater scale of investment, to gain access to complementary staff capabilities, having enough clout to pursue system-level change, improved coordination and consistency of efforts, and to balance risk of investment across multiple funders.[3] Funders' motivations to work with other funders may be identified along a continuum of wanting to learn, wanting to plan, or wanting to act.[4] Some funders want to learn with other funders but have no immediate intention to collaborate explicitly; others are actively planning collaborative work, and others are ready to act on their plans and make investments with other grantmakers. Knowing where other funders' motivations are on the learn-plan-act continuum is important, "otherwise some want to jump to action and others are in learning, and people can get frustrated."[5]

Donors normally come together around a technical issue, and then decide to collaborate on addressing the issue or on finding funding to address the issue, rather than coming together first and then choosing an issue on which to collaborate.[6,7]

Peers are trusted collaborators

Grantmakers prefer to learn from other grantmakers, including from collaborative efforts, and collaborations can foster important networks among grantmakers. "It is the peer-to-peer communication about and validation of ideas or practices that leads to the consideration and use of the knowledge."[8] Peers in the staff of the same or another grantmaking organization are valuable sources of insight and vetting of ideas and potential grant recipients. "Less informed peers are more credible to a funder than highly informed experts whose motivations are unclear."[9]

Types of Donor Collaboratives

Bridgespan identified five models of funder collaborations, depending on the type of structure and level of integration (Figure 1). The least integrated collaborations serve the purpose of exchanging ideas and raising awareness. The most integrated collaborations are regranting organizations, in which more than one funder invests in another funder with expertise in a content area.

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[3] Several of these motivations are described in Huang, J. & Seldon W. (2014) Lessons in funder collaboration: What the Packard Foundation has learned about working with other funders. The Bridgespan Group for The David & Lucile Packard Foundation, p. 5.

[4] Megan Thomas (September 2016). Guide to Collaborative Philanthropy. San Diego Grantmakers. Available: https://sdgrantmakers.org/sites/default/files/SDG%20Guide%20to%20Collaborative%20Philanthropy_Framework_Toolkit%20FINAL.pdf, Accessed 17 November 2018.

[5] Jennifer James, Harder + Co., personal communication, 14 November 2018.

[6] Paul Harder, Harder + Co., personal communication, 6 November 2018.

[7] Rafael Obregon, UNICEF, personal communication, 18 October 2018.

[8] Harder & Company Community Research with Edge Research for the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation. Peer to peer: At the heart of influencing more effective philanthropy.

[9] Paul Harder, Harder + Co., personal communication, 6 November 2018.

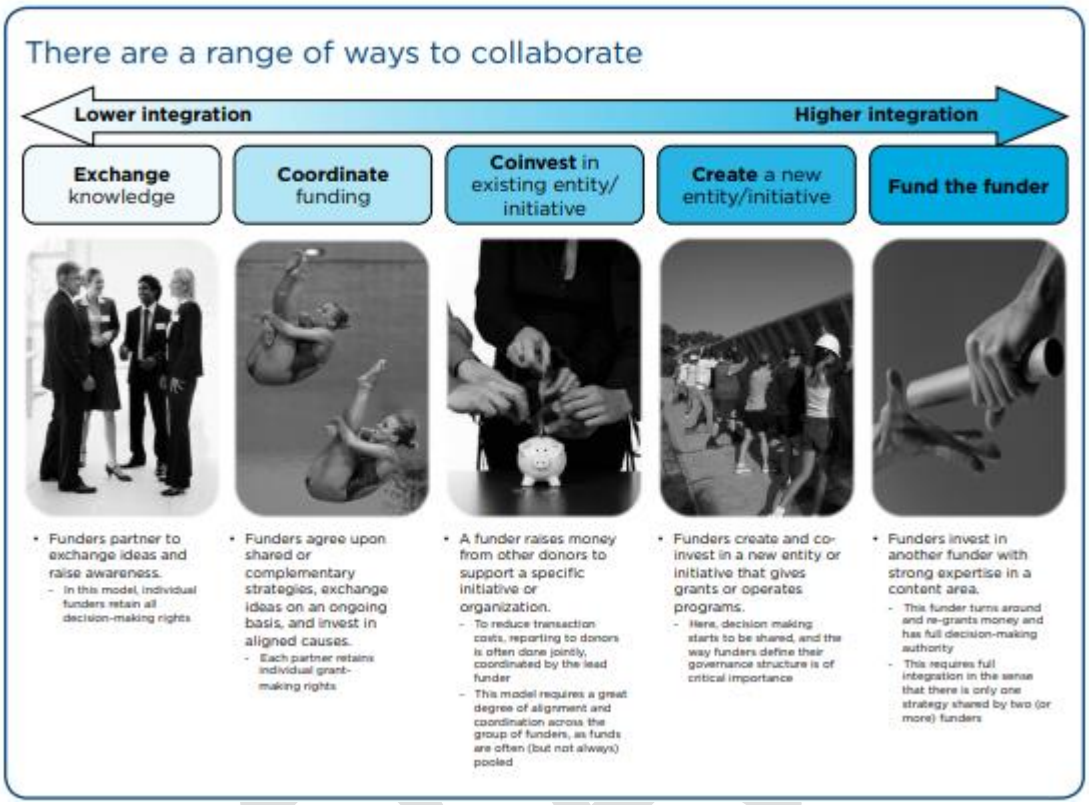

Figure 1: Bridgespan's five models of funder collaboration[10]

GrantCraft similarly distinguishes types of funder collaboratives based on how closely structured the participating funders are: most loosely structured are *learning networks*, more structured are *strategic alignment networks,* and the most structured are *pooled funds.*[11] A learning network is a group of funders that come together "to hear what's happening in a field or issue area, share information, and explore potential strategies for making more effective investments" (p. 4) These collaboratives enable donors to amplify their voices to show the rest of the funding world that the issues they support are important and deserve attention. Learning networks provide like-minded funders a "safe space" to share information about grantees and the field, and can grow into strategic alignment networks (p. 5).

A strategic alignment network is "made up of funders who share a mission, strategize together, and work in concert to obtain publicity, traction, and impact – but who still do all their grantmaking independently" (p. 6). A pooled fund "is a 'pot' of money toward which funders contribute and from which grant dollars (or program-related investments) are disbursed. Money from the pot often is used without distinguishing its original donor. Like a foundation, a pooled fund will analyse issues to identify effective grantmaking strategies, issue calls for proposals, visit implementation sites, assess and select potential grantees, and offer capacity-building (p. 6-7).

The term "Collective Impact" has been used since 2011 by FSG and others to describe a specific approach that involves collaborative problem-solving and a structured, cross-sector approach to solving complex social problems, with partners including donors.[12,13, 14] Collective Impact is

[10] Huang, J. & Seldon W. (2014), p. 4.
[11] Cynthia Gibson & Anne Mackinnon (2009). Funder collaboratives: Why and how funders work together. GrantCraft, a service of the Foundation Center. Available: http://www.grantcraft.org/guides/funder-collaboratives. Accessed 16 November 2018.
[12] Sheri Brady & Jennifer Splansky Juster (2016). How do you successfully put Collective Impact into action? Available: https://www.fsg.org/blog/how-do-you-successfully-put-collective-impact-action, Accessed 17 November 2018.
[13] Arani Kajenthira & Philippe Sion (2017). Collective Impact without borders. Stanford Social Innovation Review. See also FSG Collective Impact website.
[14] Jennifer James, Harder+Co., personal communication 14 November 2018.

> The commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Collaboration is nothing new. The social sector is filled with examples of partnerships, networks, and other types of joint efforts. But collective impact initiatives are distinctly different. Unlike most collaborations, collective impact initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants.[15]

FSG distinguishes Collective Impact from Isolated Impact, the commonly-used approach "oriented toward finding and funding a solution embodied within a single organization, combined with the hope that the most effective organizations will grow or replicate to extend their impact more widely" (p. 4). The authors also distinguish between *technical problems* and *adaptive problems*. For social problems that are technical problems, "the problem is well defined, the answer is known in advance, and one or a few organizations have the ability to implement the solution." In contrast, adaptive problems are complex, the answer is unknown, and even if it were known, no one entity has the resources or authority to effect the necessary change. "In these cases, reaching an effective solution requires learning by the stakeholders involved in the problem, who must then change their own behavior in order to create a solution."[16]

FSG describes five conditions that together produce alignment and results with collective impact: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations. "Funders must be willing to invest sufficient resources in the facilitation, coordination, and measurement required for organizations to work together in this way."[17] Collective Impact has three phases (Figure 2) the first two of which can take six months to two years to complete. "The scope of the problem to be addressed, the degree of existing collaboration, and the breadth of community engagement all influence the time required."[18]

[15] John Kania & Mark Kramer (Winter 2011). Collective Impact. Stanford Social Innovation Review, p. 36.
[16] Kania & Kramer (2011), p. 39.
[17] John Kania & Mark Kramer (2011) Collective Impact – Top Takeaways. Available: https://www.fsg.org/publications/collective-impact. Accessed 18 November 2018.
[18] Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, & Mark Kramer (2012) Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact work. Stanford Social Innovation Review, p. 4

Phases of Collective Impact			
Components for Success	**PHASE I Initiate Action**	**PHASE II Organize for Impact**	**PHASE III Sustain Action and Impact**
Governance and Infrastructure	Identify champions and form cross-sector group	Create infrastructure (backbone and processes)	Facilitate and refine
Strategic Planning	Map the landscape and use data to make case	Create common agenda (goals and strategy)	Support implementation (alignment to goals and strategies)
Community Involvement	Facilitate community outreach	Engage community and build public will	Continue engagement and conduct advocacy
Evaluation and Improvement	Analyze baseline data to identify key issues and gaps	Establish shared metrics (indicators, measurement, and approach)	Collect, track, and report progress (process to learn and improve)

Figure 2: Phases of Collective Impact[19]

Within the field of international development, one Elizabeth Fox of USAID identified three types of donor collaboratives. On the implementation side, donors may collaborate within a particular geography and decide who does what, "so that we're not falling over each other" in countries, and one donor focuses on some states and other donors focus on other states. Most USAID missions have a donor collaboration initiative, and collaboration is now a criteria of evaluation for Foreign Service Officers. A second type of donor collaboration in international development is to review evidence and research on what donors are supporting to identify what is known and where are the gaps in understanding. Finally, and a bit more parochially, donors coordinate to evaluate programs in international development, to agree on the types of data and evidence that the field uses, and compatibility of these data. For example, members of the International Health Partnership use the same data sources and coordinate actions.[20]

IV. Benefits & Challenges of donor collaboratives

Donor collaborations offer benefits and challenges. Among the benefits are the possibility for scale and efficiency of deploying financial resources. Collaboration can save staff time, for example by donors sharing responsibilities and expenses for conducting due diligence and evaluation. Donor collaboratives foster networking & individuals' understanding of technical fields, and save resource to create infrastructure that is already set up with other funders. Different donors have access to different information sources for learning. Local funders have an ear to the ground, whereas national or international funders may be more familiar with the larger field and with research and policy. A collaborative offers the strength of numbers and political cover for funding related to controversial issues. Finally a funder collaborative can offer non-financial resources like technical assistance, networks, consulting help, and convening.[21]

Some of these benefits are explored in the case studies, below. The global Learning Collaborative includes many different partners, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and USAID. "The

[19] Hanleybrown et al. (2012), p. 4.
[20] Elizabeth Fox, USAID, personal communication, 22 October 2018.
[21] Gibson & Mackinnon (2009), p. 10.

whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We've come up with ideas and approaches that are richer as a result of that joint conversation."[22]

Donor collaborations also have challenges. Donors must be willing to compromise and give up some control in a collaborative. They are not always able to get what they want or support a grantee in whom others in the collaborative have less confidence. Also, members of a collaborative must share credit for the group's accomplishments, although some institutions may need to claim attribution rather than contribution for their work – in which case collaboration may be less appealing. Collaborations require time and energy, and need to adapt as members and staff change. Not surprisingly, interpersonal tensions can arise, for example when members with access to greater financial resources and broader geographic scope overlook the unique perspectives of smaller, more local members who live in the community that the collaborative seeks to address, but have smaller or no funding resources.[23]

V. Recommendations for creating successful donor collaborations

This section proposes some recommendations for creating a successful donor collaboration.

1. **Establish and maintain trust and respect for individuals in the collaborative**.[24]

   Allow time to build trust on a personal and institutional level, and to build social capital among the group members. "Break bread with one another, laugh over your beverage of choice, and enjoy the long journey needed to build a stronger community."[25] Be aware that each individual in the group represents an organization, and may need time to sensitize the organization and navigate the organisation's priorities and ways of working.[26,27] Donors sitting down together is a giant step forward, and the power of establishing one-to-one personal connections is essential to cut through the noise.[28]

2. **Encourage open and proactive communication and informal discussion. Face-to-face meetings are essential to build and maintain trust.**

   In the Learning Collaborative, Linda Sussman notes that "people were proactive about communicating as things arose, we didn't have to wait until a scheduled meeting… There is not an underlying sense of competition, there's a sense of full collaboration."[29] João Rangel de Almeida of Wellcome Trust noted that regular monthly calls for the GloPID-R Funders Forum enable space for informal communication:

   > "We update each other about what we're doing in this space and how this fits with what each other is doing. We're able to share our pool of contacts, and make sure the programs each of us is running is achieving maximum impact, by bringing people who would not necessarily be in sphere of influence into the program. We provide a lot of informal feedback to funding calls."

   Also, an annual face-to-face meeting has built trust among the members, which has been crucial to the group's work. Trust among the group's members "allows very open conversations about problems we are facing."[30] Members of strong collaboratives stress "the importance of cultivating trust among members and establishing expectations and habits that facilitate

[22] Linda Sussman, USAID, personal communication, 17 October 2018.
[23] Gibson & Mackinnon (2009), p. 11.
[24] Gibson & Mackinnon (2009).
[25] Nancy Jamison & Jennifer James (2013). Minding the Ps and Ts of donor collaboration. Available: https://pndblog.typepad.com/pndblog/2013/12/minding-the-ps-and-ts-of-funder-collaboration.html. Accessed 17 November 2018.
[26] Richard Vezina, personal communication, 6 November 2018.
[27] Varun Gauri, Wold Bank, personal communication 20 November 2018.
[28] Paul Harder, Harder + Co., personal communication, 6 November 2018.
[29] Linda Sussman, USAID personal communication, 17 October 2018.
[30] João Rangel de Almeida, Wellcome Trust, personal communication, 9 November 2018.

constructive relationships over time – among existing members" and with new members who join the group.[31]

3. **Organizers should take time to build relationships, a shared vision, and establish an environment of assumed best intentions.**

A researcher who has studied and participated donor collaborations recommended that:

> "You have to take an exorbitant among of time talking to people, to get to the point where they can call you out when you overstepping and you can call them out when they're not holding up their end of the bargain… Figure out how to develop an environment of assumed best intentions. Assume we're not after each other. We need to know each other well enough to know you're not trying to throw me under the bus…. People [need to] see you as a systems leader, you're fostering common vantage point, you let people see you're vulnerable. Be able to fail openly in a thoughtful away, with a good way to recover.[32]

4. **The group should specify its purpose, goals, and roles (both institutional and individual) clearly and early on.**

Organizers should spend the time to be sure everyone is in agreement on the problem[33] and also to understand the politics and backstories and relationships among group members. "Reminding people to try to leave their singular agendas, but not their expertise, at the door can help keep the shared goal in perspective."[34] Similarly the Collective Impact approach requires that all participants

> "have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions… Each organization often has a slightly different definition of the problem and the ultimate goal…. Every participant need not agree with every other participant on all dimensions of the problem… All participants must agree, however, on the primary goals for the collective impact initiative as a whole.[35]

Especially for decentralized organizations like USAID, be sure there is a felt need to address a problem at the country level and that country staff are willing to prioritize solving it.[36] Participating organizations will be able to do some things and not do other things, and it is important to map out what these are and manage from this understanding, and be very transparent about expectations that may be different.[37] A shared workplan, shared deliverables, shared KPIs, shared outcomes, and shared indicators may facilitate this alignment and transparency for both grantees and donors.[38, 39]

5. **Make a plan, and expect to revise and adapt it.**

Be specific about the shared goals, make them "as detailed as possible from the beginning. What does it mean to "increase FP" – break this out. It's easy for organizations to have different perspectives, but be aware of what you're trying to achieve together from the beginning.[40] Have some sense of accountability in terms of where the participants want the collaboration to go and

[31] Gibson & Mackinnon (2009), p. 12.
[32] Jennifer James, Harder + Co., personal communication, 14 November 2018.
[33] Tim Wood, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, personal communication, 22 October 2018.
[34] Jamison & James (2013).
[35] Kania & Kramer (2011).
[36] Hope Hempstone, USAID, personal communication, 26 October 2018.
[37] Jennifer James, Harder + Co., personal communication, 14 November 2018.
[38] Linda Weisert, CIFF, personal communication, 20 November 2018.
[39] Geogia Bladon, Wellcome Trust, personal communication, 20 November 2018.
[40] Hannah Kemp, Surgo Foundation, personal communication, 8 November 2018.

identify some outputs that would be helpful.[41] Have a clear strategy for the group and how to make the group grow.[42]

An early step of the Collective Impact approach is to create a strategic action framework, which can be continuously adapted and can bring in new actors. The strategic framework balances the necessity of simplicity with the need to create a "comprehensive understanding of the issue that encompasses the activities of all stakeholders, and the flexibility to allow for the organic learning process of collective impact to unfold. This framework for action can serve a critical role in building a shared agenda." Successful frameworks include "a description of the problem informed by solid research; a clear goal for the desired change; a portfolio of key strategies to drive large scale change; a set of principles that guide the group's behavior; and an approach to evaluation that lays out how the collective impact initiative will obtain and judge the feedback on its efforts."[43]

6. Get the right people involved early on. Include senior people, a strong host government, and a nimble foundation.

Senior people from collaborating organizations

It's critical to figure out who needs to be in the room – the people with the detail may not be the authorities who can make decisions.[44] For the digital investment principles, "We made a huge leap forward because at the second meeting, we got a high-up USAID person who had political clout. Things accelerated because of his involvement and enthusiasm. USAID had been the closest partner in this collaboration, but with the worker bees; then his involvement made a big difference."[45] It matters to have leadership buy–in from the top of the organizations involved. For collaborations in international development, "if the country really buys into the value of the collaboration, and see it as an important part of their portfolio of work – that's good."[46]

Research on launching a collective impact initiative emphasize that three conditions must be in place: an *influential champion*, *adequate financial resources*, and a *sense of urgency for change*. "The most critical factor by far is an influential champion (or small group of champions) who commands the respect necessary to bring CEO-level cross-sector leaders together and keep their active engagement over time." [47]

Getting the right people from donor organizations involved early while the collaboration is being set up is also important It can be challenging to bring on donors after the collaboration is set-up and already working with implementing partners. There should be ways to bring in new partners as the collaboration progresses.[48,49]

Strong host country government

Host country governments can be strong advocates and can push for donors to collaborate. They know what is happening in the county or state and can make sure donors are not duplicating efforts and are aligned with the government priorities.[50] Country plans led by host country governments allow donors to line up underneath them, and can accommodate a lack of agreement among donors – each can support a portion of a country plan, in line with the donor's own strategies.[51]

[41] Rafael Obregon, UNICEF, personal communication, 18 November 2018.
[42] Joao Rangel de Almeida, Wellcome Trust, personal communication, 9 November 2018.
[43] Hanleybrown et al., (2012) p. 4-5.
[44] Jennifer James, Harder+Co., personal communication, 14 November 2018.
[45] Tim Wood, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, personal communication, 22 October.
[46] Hannah Kemp, Surgo Foundation, personal communication, 8 November 2018
[47] Hanleybrown et al. (2012) p. 3.
[48] Steven Chapman, CIFF, personal communication, 5 November 2018.
[49] Linda Weisert, CIFF, personal communication, 20 November 2018.
[50] Hannah Kemp, Surgo Foundation, personal communication, 8 November 2018
[51] Beth Schechter, FP2020, personal communication, 20 November 2018.

A nimble foundation can move money quickly and complement public funders' investments without much reporting burden, but they may change direction later

Many people interviewed mentioned how foundations' ability to move money quickly and act nimbly facilitated the progress of a collaboration that involved public funders, whose investment processes take longer.[52], [53] "We [Hewlett] have a lot of flexibility in the types of funding we have available. We're very clear about what our priorities are. Grantees love to have us on board because of the flexibility." Furthermore, Hewlett's monitoring system is straightforward and can work within another donor's more complex system.[54] Likewise, Wellcome requires grantholders to report annually, whereas DfID requires more frequent reporting. Also Wellcome does not need to forecast spending in the same way that DfID does. "If we don't spend this money this year, we can this next year no problem, but it's a problem for DfID. These things raise the operational cost of partnerships."[55]

USAID is a steward of public funds and has a bureaucratic process that is probably less flexible than Gates's, and designs interventions based on existing evidence. Private foundations, especially those that are rooted in technology innovation, may be better able to approach their activities with greater nimbleness and a larger appetite for innovation.[56]

The flip side of this is the fickleness of philanthropy -- if one part of foundation changes its mind, can impact the collaborative.

7. Put some skin in the game. Commit resources – time, money, networks, clout.

Members of collaboratives must have skin in the game, which could be co-funding, although that can be hard for some donors, depending on the funding mechanism.[57] Members need not commit equal amounts of funding to participate as equals in the collaboration; committing early and offering non-financial resource and influence are valuable too.[58] "We have more voice at the table than our investment would typically allow… Because we were willing to go in on something that others weren't, Hewlett has a place at the table and a voice in the discussions."[59]

"It's really hard to get this kind of initiative launched. It requires sustained effort, takes a long time, and needs someone on the ground who is committed to it…. We [USAID] didn't have staff in country who had time or mandate, or interest to do the heavy lifting to make happen. This would be different for an organization… that's more headquarters-driven.[60] Choose something that funders are able to facilitate by putting conditions on the funds, for example, "these two programs must talk to each other."[61] Collaborations on behavior change need enough time to become established and to show effect. Measurement should include measures of collaboration and a shared understanding of what success looks like.[62]

FSG recommends ensuring there are adequate *financial resources* to last for "at least two to three years, generally in the form of at least one anchor funder who is engaged from the beginning and can support and mobilize other resources to pay for the needed infrastructure and planning processes."[63]

8. Avoid redundancy. Divide and conquer.

The power of collective action comes not from the sheer number of participants or the uniformity of their efforts, but from the coordination of their differentiated activities through a

[52] Tim Wood, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, personal communication, 22 October.
[53] Richard Vezina, Harder + Co., personal communication, 6 November 2018
[54] Althea Anderson, Hewlett Foundation, personal communication, 8 November 2018
[55] João Rangel de Almeida, Wellcome Trust, personal communication, 9 November 2018
[56] Linda Sussman, USAID, personal communication, 17 October 2018.
[57] Hannah Kemp, Surgo Foundation, personal communication, 8 November 2018.
[58] Beth Schechter, FP2020, personal communication, 20 November 2018.
[59] Althea Anderson, Hewlett Foundation, personal communication, 8 November 2018.
[60] Hope Hempstone, USAID, personal communication, 26 October 2018.
[61] João Rangel de Almeida, Wellcome Trust, personal communication, 9 November 2018.
[62] Linda Weisert, CIFF, personal communication, 20 November 2018.
[63] Hanlybrown (2012), p. 3.

mutually reinforcing plan of action.[64] Donor coordination can enable donors to play to their strengths and organizational strategies. Be sure that expectations about what participants can accomplish are aligned with their resources to do it, otherwise there will be frustration.[65]

9. Establish procedures to handle business and resolve problems.

Participants in donor collaborations should establish ground rules for handling business and resolving problems early on.[66] Participants with resources (financial or otherwise) may attempt to sway group decisions that are not in the best interest of the group or the task at hand.[67]

10. Consider using a trusted intermediary to progress work.

The group may decide that one of its members will take work forward and bring it back for the group's use. In the GloPID-R Funder's Forum,

> The majority of funders don't have capacity to deal with complexity of this space. [Wellcome Trust] will define pathways to take to go forward. We do the framing around a solid document, which includes recommendations: here are possible funding packages. The initial group of funders – can't respond to the whole group.[68]

An intermediary or other staff can oversee the collaborative,[69] provide facilitation and leadership and be responsible for moving things forward, and following up, which allows donor organization staff to engage more directly as a donor rather than as a process-facilitator.[70,71,72] Secretariats

"Really sufficiently funding the cat herder is super important." This may not be just one person, it may be a group of people who can come together and work together. Everyone participates in the meeting, and the organizers are "the servant leaders" that make sure the participants are aware of what each other are doing.[73]

The Collective Impact approach calls for a separate organization to serve as the "backbone support organization" for the entire initiative. "The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails. The backbone organization requires a dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly."[74] Backbone organizations serve six essential functions: providing overall strategic direction, facilitating dialogue between partners, managing data collection and analysis, handling communications, coordinating community outreach, and mobilizing funding.[75] (Figure 3: Backbone Organizations.)

[64] Kania & Kramer (2011).
[65] Jennifer James, Harder + Co., personal communication, 14 November 2018.
[66] Gibson & Mackinnon (2009).
[67] Jamison & James (2013) blog.
[68] João Rangel de Almeida, Wellcome Trust, personal communication, 9 November 2018.
[69] Gibson & Mackinnon (2009).
[70] João Rangel de Almeida, Wellcome Trust, personal communication, 9 November 2018.
[71] Linda Sussman, USAID, personal communication, 17 October 2018).
[72] Tim Wood, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, personal communication, 22 October 2018.
[73] Jennifer James, Harder + Co., personal communication, 14 November 2018.
[74] Kania & Kramer (2011).
[75] Hanleybrown (2012) p 6.

Backbone Organizations

Types of Backbones	Description	Examples	Pros	Cons
Funder-Based	One funder initiates CI strategy as planner, financier, and convener	Calgary Homeless Foundation	◆ Ability to secure start-up funding and recurring resources ◆ Ability to bring others to the table and leverage other funders	◆ Lack of broad buy-in if CI effort seen as driven by one funder ◆ Lack of perceived neutrality
New Nonprofit	New entity is created, often by private funding, to serve as backbone	Community Center for Education Results	◆ Perceived neutrality as facilitator and convener ◆ Potential lack of baggage ◆ Clarity of focus	◆ Lack of sustainable funding stream and potential questions about funding priorities ◆ Potential competition with local nonprofits
Existing Nonprofit	Established nonprofit takes the lead in coordinating CI strategy	Opportunity Chicago	◆ Credibility, clear ownership, and strong understanding of issue ◆ Existing infrastructure in place if properly resourced	◆ Potential "baggage" and lack of perceived neutrality ◆ Lack of attention if poorly funded
Government	Government entity, either at local or state level, drives CI effort	Shape Up Somerville	◆ Public sector "seal of approval" ◆ Existing infrastructure in place if properly resourced	◆ Bureaucracy may slow progress ◆ Public funding may not be dependable
Shared Across Multiple Organizations	Numerous organizations take ownership of CI wins	Magnolia Place	◆ Lower resource requirements if shared across multiple organizations ◆ Broad buy-in, expertise	◆ Lack of clear accountability with multiple voices at the table ◆ Coordination challenges, leading to potential inefficiencies
Steering Committee Driven	Senior-level committee with ultimate decision-making power	Memphis Fast Forward	◆ Broad buy-in from senior leaders across public, private, and nonprofit sectors	◆ Lack of clear accountability with multiple voices

Figure 3: Backbone Organizations (Hanleybrown et al. (2012) p. 7)

11. Use honest conversations about failure to inform a joint learning agenda

Consider failure as a chance to inform a learning strategy, instead of as a demonstrated lack of accountability.[76] People are receptive to hearing donors say, "we screwed up."[77] "Funders really appreciate and benefit from invitation to speak openly with each other and with other philanthropies. But there are a lot of institutional and attitudinal barriers to doing it. A lot of foundations don't want to admit that their investments aren't achieving their intended goals." Sometimes funders are reluctant to express negative views of my grantees, because the grantees are working hard and the funder feels it is their job to support the grantees."[78] A paper on failure in family planning emerged from a donor research meeting in 2012. The research "emphasized the importance of iterative learning and adjustment to identify what is working, what is not working, and to make changes that will lead to strengthened interventions, while preventing major failure… The way that implementing organizations approach failure is strongly affected by the perspectives of their donors."[79] "Many philanthropic researchers and advisors also emphasize that a hallmark of strong organizations is their ability to use what they are learning to improve.[80]

Persistence and commitment to following up, even after failure, pays off; participants realize the organizers are not afraid to fail.[81]

12. Use a measurement framework to encourage shared understanding and commitment

"The measurement aspect of this is an organizational change tool to get the funders who enter together to agree on a set of outcomes" and is the most painful process because the funders come with

[76] Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) (2018). Understanding & Sharing What Works: the state of foundation practice, Available: https://cep.org/portfolio/understanding-sharing-what-works-the-state-of-foundation-practice/ p. 16

[77] Tim Wood, 22 October)

[78] Richard Vezina, Harder + Co., personal communication, 6 November 2018.

[79] Linda Sussman, USAID, personal communication, 17 October 2018

[80] CEP (2018), p. 6.

[81] Jennifer James, Harder + Co., personal communication, 14 November 2018.

different strategies about how to use the learning. For some funders, the idea of causing a change is different form the goal of protecting the grantees. Some funders are empirically-based, and others are keen to support a grantee.[82]

> "Competing priorities among stakeholders and fears about being judged as underperforming make it very hard to agree on common measures. Organizations have few resources with which to measure their own performance, let alone develop and maintain a shared measurement system among multiple organizations. Yet shared measurement is essential, and collaborative efforts will remain superficial without it. Having a small but comprehensive set of indicators establishes a common language that supports the action framework, measures progress along the common agenda, enables greater alignment among the goals of different organizations, encourages more collaborative problem-solving, and becomes the platform for an ongoing learning community that gradually increases the effectiveness of all participants.[83]

13. Early wins build confidence in the group.

Early wins demonstrate the value of working together. They are essential to holding a collaborative group together.[84] It is important to keep funders interested over the time that is needed to make progress on an agenda. Researchers recommend that collaborators show policy or advocacy wins – "very clear, tangible things that people can hold onto."[85] It is recommended that groups pursue a "portfolio of strategies that offer a combination of easy but substantive short-term wins to sustain early momentum for the initiative, as well as more ambitious, long-term systemic strategies that may not show impact for several years."[86]

14. Coalitions of funders are more effective in changing policy than are single funders.

Coalitions of funders are crucial on policy work. "If it's just me Wellcome doing it, it's one thing. But if it's me and Gates it's different. Coordinating that position is crucial."[87]

Failure Factors

One interviewee suggested the factors leading to failure are simply the opposites of the factors leading to success in donor collaborations. So, for example, failing to achieve an early win could cause group members to lose confidence in the utility of their participation, and they may stop participating. Failing to use consistent procedures to solve problems may cause members to mistrust the group's interest in fair play, and they may withdraw. Other failure factors identified were that a group lacked a clear purpose, and that organizers and members failed to appreciate the complexity of the problem that the group set out to solve.

The next section presents several case studies of different types of donor collaboratives.

VI. Experiences with donor collaboratives in international development (case studies)

One recent example of a successful donor collaboration was the development of principles for investment in digital. Motivated by a learning session with Bill Gates in May 2017, a BMGF internal assessment revealed that the digital ecosystem was broken. Donor fragmentation and challenges in the supply and demand of digital systems were the main problems identified. Starting with opportunistic discussions with 7-8 donors over dinner at an event in Oslo, it became clear that there was a lot of agreement of the challenges in this area. This was followed by a 2.5 day workshop in California which led to the development of donor principles for investment in digital. These were socialized with those who

[82] Paul Harder, Harder + Co., personal communication, 6 November 2018.
[83] Hanleybrown (2012), p. 5.
[84] Hanleybrown (2012), p. 4.
[85] Gibson & Mackinnon (2009), p. 11.
[86] Hanleybrown (2012), p 5.
[87] João Rangel de Almeida, Wellcome Trust, personal communication, 9 November 2018

were not present at the workshop. It was critical to have the right people in the room for the workshop. The involvement of senior leadership at USAID was critical to accelerate progress. UNICEF and USAID were the most motivated to develop principles which could be shared down their organizations. The principles focus on coordination of efforts but the most important principle was putting national plans first. The principles were formally launched at the World Health Summit in Berlin in October.

More case studies to come

VII. Conclusion

Based on a review of grey literature research and on interviews with key informants, this paper identified a number of factors that contributed to successful donor collaboration. The finding that donors usually learn more from each other than from subject-matter experts indicates the importance of a peer network of donors which enables horizontal sharing of learning and experiences. Trust is one of the fundamental aspects of successful donor collaboration and face-to-face time is required to build and grow personal connections. At the same time buy-in from senior leadership of the organization is important for successful collaboration. A shared vision and goals of the collaboration are important as is specificity in planning with the recognition that adaptation is likely to be needed. The strengths of individual donors must be tapped for efficient collaboration which avoids redundancy. A trusted intermediary may be important for continued progress in the collaboration.

VIII. References

Interviews

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