



Working with Donors (2017-2019) – KEY LEARNINGS

Through **Working with Donors**, PBA Associates have, in a range of ways, sought to engage with donors in ways that will help them (and PBA) better understand what it means to invest in building up partnering skills, capacities and competencies in both general terms and specific contexts. Given that many multi-stakeholder partnerships (and other forms of formal collaborative processes) fall short of expectations, our motivation has been to work out how donors can contribute to making partnerships more effective and achieve greater impact.

Our project involved drawing on the experience and expertise of PBA Associates, ongoing PBA work with funders, INGOs and bilateral donors, a collaboration with UNHCR and the Open Society Foundation, and PBA support for the Global Alliance for Community Philanthropy, involving 6 public and private donors (Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, C.S. Mott Foundation, US Aid, Aga Khan Foundation, InterAmerican Fund), as well as learning from the experience of the Toronto Atmospheric Fund, Oxfam International and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT).

Key learnings

1. Whereas money is often the driver for investing in more effective partnering, **it is often the unexpected non-financial contributions that partners bring to a partnership that makes the partnership generate greater impact** – trusted networks, specialist expertise, relevant knowledge and skills, access to important stakeholders, reputation, convening power are discovered together and leveraged to create new and unanticipated outcomes. These non-financial contributions are seldom measured or valued in the design or assessment of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Evaluation of non financial contributions continues to be a challenge, even when they are recognized as essential to understanding the total contribution of a partnership.
2. Many **Donors can and do support better partnering in their collaborations with stakeholders**, including grantees and prospective grantees, as well as through non-financial contributions through their own operations internally. Their explicit or implicit desire to see partnership brings that into the preparation of proposals and ongoing working relationships. But this leads to growing awareness that still more needs to be done to enable partnerships achieve their potential.

3. **Donors as cash-providers for partnership action often fail to act as partners who share in the risks, costs and benefits of a partnership and consider the grant process more contractual than transformative.** This is the case, despite the growing evidence that effective partnerships involve donors as active partners who co-create partnership operations. It appears to be the case that all partners are 'donors' (when contributions also include those that are non-cash) but not all donors are partners.
4. **Donors engaging as partners requires them to share (rather than shift) power and responsibility** with partners in a partnership by co-created and sticking to a common set of ground rules that can be adapted in response to changing needs, circumstances and opportunities. In many situations, this is difficult as grant-seekers see funders exclusively as cash-providers.
5. Being an effective partner **requires the donor to be deliberate about whether the intention is to operate as a partner in building a collaboration of interest** – sharing in the risks, costs and benefits or whether the intention is to remain external to that partnership, providing money or cash support. Partnering works best where the distinction is made explicit and communicated appropriately to stakeholders and to those seeking to shape a partnership. Grant recipients also need to have recognized that they will invest time and resources in partnering and Donors that include allocations for these activities will increase the chances of partnering success.
6. **The need is for resourcing arrangements for partnerships that combine financial and non-financial contributions.** In this regard, donors operating as partners can and do make a difference. More and more donors are seeking to take on a partnership brokering role to increase the impact of their financial contributions. Donors acting as partners can model a behavior change that can help their grantees and stakeholders transform into more effective partners.
7. **Donors acting as self-aware partners can and do make a difference** in making partnerships more effective, more transformational and help them achieve their potential. Both Donors and fund-seekers need more examples, stories and case-studies of Donors acting intentionally as self-aware partners. Documenting and sharing inspirational stories can help drive positive change.