



# ADVISORY COMMITTEE REVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE

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## THE COLLABORATION LAB PROCESS

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The Collaboration Grants planning process takes place in three stages: Discover, Define, and Refine.

In the **Discover Phase**, the facilitation team will create open spaces for connecting and exploring. At this stage, the women's funds will reflect on their areas of interest. Sessions will be set up based on themes that surfaced from the women's funds surveys and the Resilience Grants analysis. In each space, the women's funds will share their topic of interest and why it's important to them. They will talk about what they bring to the process, as well as how they believe it will benefit their work and the feminist movements they support. Spaces will also help the women's funds to get to know each other more deeply, especially as they invite participation from the women's funds positioned across varying regions and scopes. Coming out of this phase, they should commit to a topic and identify the group of women's funds with which they will collaborate.

In the **Define Phase**, the women's funds dive more deeply into their topics of interest. They continue to strengthen relationships with the other members of their collaboration as they define their goal, process, plan, and what they hope to gain from the collaboration. A facilitator will support the women's funds to think strategically about their work and a documenter to document their dialogues. These recorded dialogues will be used to draft the plan. The women's funds will define what support they will need and what resources they require.

Each plan will be reviewed by the Advisory Committee, which will share feedback and identify areas for further reflection for the collaborations. The collaboratives can then use the peer feedback to **Refine** their plan and clarify their strategy. In this process, the women's funds will continue to benefit from the facilitators and documenters. All plans will be shared with the community of women's funds.

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## THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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The Advisory Committee will lead the design of the Collaboration Grants process. They will work together to articulate the guiding principles, overall approach, and specifics of the process. During the three-phase planning process, the Advisory Committee will play a key role in reviewing the proposed topics and the plans that emerge. Based on their review, they will make funding recommendations for the Steering Committee.

The two major decision points are the end of the Discovery Phase and the end of the Define Phase. The decision-making process at each stage is outlined below.

### 1. Discovery Phase: Proposed Topic

At the end of the Discovery Phase, the women's funds will have formed their Collaboration Groups, decided on a topic, and articulated why the topic is important and its value-add to the group and the women's funds community overall.

The major decision at this stage of the process is whether the proposed topics fall within the parameters of the overall grant criteria and whether the group and their work proceed to the Define Phase. All groups that proceed to the Define Phase will be funded.

At this stage of the decision-making process, the Advisory Committee will do the following:

- Individually review all descriptions submitted by the Collaboration Groups. They will respond to a set of questions regarding each description and the collective group of topic descriptions.
- Meet as a group to discuss their comments and insights from their review, take each Collaboration Group in turn, and indicate whether they support funding for this group based on the key criteria.
- Discuss the full group of proposed topics to understand how the full set of emerging collaborations adds value to the community of women's funds.
- In-depth discussion on Collaboration Groups that raise questions or concerns.
- Make a collective decision on (a) groups that progress to the Define Phase and (b) groups that fall outside the parameters and cannot proceed as defined.

The key questions guiding the review of the topic descriptions include the following:

- **Topic and Rationale:** Does the topic solve a challenge, find solutions to a barrier, or take up an opportunity that supports the women's funds to fulfill their mission? Is their reasoning for selecting this topic clear and compelling?
- **Potential Value-Add:** Will the learning that emerges from the group benefit the women's funds in this group and potentially be useful for the women's funds community more broadly?

- **Relationships:** Does the group include women’s funds across geographies, scales, or interests? Does it create opportunities for women’s funds who do not normally work together to engage, or does it support women’s funds to deepen existing relationships through the specific challenge or opportunity that they will focus on in their collaboration?
- **Parameters:** Does the topic fall within the parameters of the Collaboration Grants? Does it meet the criteria?
- **Recommendation:** Does the Advisory Committee recommend that this group move forward to the Define Phase? Why or why not? What questions are there about what the group has proposed? Are there comments or offerings<sup>1</sup> for further consideration or clarification?
- **Overall:** What does the Advisory Committee find particularly exciting about what the Collaboration Groups contribute to the women’s funds community, both individually and collectively?

## 2. Define Phase: Collaboration Plan

At the end of the Define Phase, each group that completes their process of working together will have an overall plan that guides how they engage their collaboration, a timeline for that engagement, and a budget.

The major decision in this phase is how much funding each group will receive. In addition, the Advisory Committee will share their offerings to each Collaboration Group for their consideration in developing their plan.

At this phase, the decision-making process of the Advisory Committee will do the following:

- Individually review all collaboration plans submitted by the Collaboration Groups. They will respond to a set of questions regarding each description and regarding the collective group of topic descriptions.
- Meet as a group to discuss their comments and insights from their review and take each Collaboration Group in turn to articulate the insights, what is exciting, questions, concerns, or offerings.
- Discuss the full group of proposed topics to understand how the full set of emerging collaborations adds value to the community of women’s funds.
- Discuss the proposed budget for each collaboration, considering questions related to the budget in relation to the approach and activities.
- Discuss the status of the overall budget. If the funding is equal to or lower than the funding available, the Advisory Committee can reach an agreement on their funding recommendations.
- If the total funding requested is over the amount of funding available, i.e., USD 3 million, start a process to engage the women’s funds in adjusting budgets downward. This will be an iterative process that may require two steps, as described below.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "offerings" is intentionally used instead of "suggestions" or "recommendations" to reflect the non-hierarchical relationship between the Advisory Committee and the participants in this process.

## KEY QUESTIONS GUIDING REVIEW OF THE NARRATIVE

### Strategic Alignment

- How well does the proposed collaboration align with the intent and objectives of the Collaboration Grants?
- Does the proposed focus of the group fall within the defined grant parameters?
- Does the plan align with the principles?
- What are your overall impressions of the focus and design of the collaborations?

### Approach

- Is the proposed approach adequately developed, well-integrated, and appropriate to the aims of the collaboration?
- Is the proposed plan, timeline, and milestones reasonable for the group's objectives?
- Are potential risks clearly identified and acknowledged?

### Collaboration

- Based on the proposed plan, do you see opportunities for the group to deepen their relationships and collaboration?
- Has the group articulated how they will work together so that roles and expectations support the objectives of the collaboration?
- Does the group have the necessary support to achieve their goals? Are there other resources they need to consider?

### Budget

- Is the budget narrative clear and complete?
- Do the line items support the planned activities?
- Are costs reasonable for the activities described? Are there any costs not included?

### Defining Success

- Has the group articulated what success looks like in concrete ways?
- Does the outlined road map support them to move toward that success?
- Even if the defined outcomes(s) are not achieved, will the collaborative process have a value-add for the group and the community?

### Overall

- What do you find particularly exciting about what they contribute to the women's funds community, both individually and collectively?

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## KEY QUESTIONS GUIDING REVIEW OF THE BUDGET

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### ➤ Individual Budget Analysis

- What is your overall analysis, and what are your thoughts and impressions about the budget presented?
- Are all costs related to the activities included in the plan? Are they justified or explained in the budget narrative?
- Are allocations for administrative costs related to the administration of the funds and the coordination of the group included in the budget?
- Are costs reasonable? By reasonable, we mean the following: Are amounts for line items commensurate with your knowledge of costs for those items? Are they based on solid cost estimates? *Consider regional differences.*
- Is the overall budget appropriately sized? That means is the budget adequate for covering the plan, or has more funding been budgeted than what is required for covering the planned activities? In other words, is the budget over or under what is needed for the planned activities?

### ➤ Collective Budget Analysis

- What is the total amount of funding requested by the group of women's funds collaboratives?
- Is the total amount requested over, under, or within budget?
- If we are over budget and given the amount over budget, what is our next step?
  - Small amount over budget: Budget adjustment by each Collaboration Group
  - Medium amount over budget: Budget adjustment by each Collaboration Group, followed by a budget discussion with all groups
  - Large amount over budget: Budget adjustment by each Collaboration Group, followed by a budget discussion with all groups

### ➤ Final Recommendation

Based on both the distribution of funds and the total amount of funding, does the Advisory Committee recommend funding the proposed set of collaborations?

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## INDIVIDUAL BUDGET ADJUSTMENT STEPS

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1. Calculate and state the overall amount of funding that needs to be reduced among the Collaboration Groups.
2. Based on the analysis, discuss and decide whether all groups need to consider the budget adjustment or whether they approach some groups first based on (a) access to resources; (b) the size of the group relative to the amount of the proposed budget; (c) the scope and scale of their initiative and planned activities; and (d) the analysis showing that group may have budgeted over their needs.
3. Define an overall range that each group should use as they consider their budget reduction.
4. Send each group a set of reflection questions that can guide their critical thinking on budget reduction. The idea of the questions is to support the women's funds to make strategic choices to reduce the budget amount and also make the necessary adjustments to their plans while maintaining its integrity.
5. Send all the women's funds a summary of the current situation, with specifics on the amount of funding that needs to be cut and the range of the cut that each group is being asked to consider. Provide support and a time frame for submitting the adjusted budget.
6. Meet with facilitators who will support the women's funds to ensure they can hold the process with care, thoughtfulness, and intention.
7. Review the budget and narrative once it is submitted.

Use the steps in the budget review process to revisit the adjusted budgets and reach a final decision on funding recommendations.

### **Discussions with Individual Groups**

If it is helpful, members of the Advisory Committee and Fenomenal Funds team will meet with the Collaboration Group to share feedback and questions.

## Collective Discussion on Larger Budget Cuts Steps

1. Once the women's funds submit the revised budget, review all budgets to see if the women's funds have made significant enough changes that reduce the overall budget amount to fall within the available resources.
2. If the reductions proposed by the women's funds do not fall within the needed cut, discuss the budget and plans of each Collaboration Group as a committee, identifying some potential options for achieving the desired budget cut.
3. Facilitate discussion with the women's funds Collaboration Groups to consider the options of how the community can reach collective agreements on budget amounts. Send discussion questions to the women's funds ahead of the discussion. Work with a skilled facilitator to support the process of engaging the community in ways that build relationships.
4. Listen to the input from the women's funds and carefully consider the implications of each option.
5. Based on the discussion and input from the women's funds, ask the women's funds Collaboration Groups to consider proposed cuts based on the collective agreement reached during the discussion.
6. Ask each Collaboration Group to make the final adjustment and make any activity adjustments based on their new budget.
7. Review the final plans and budget to ensure that the activities have been sized appropriately to the budget.
8. Finalize the grant amount recommendations based on the submission from the women's funds.

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Please visit the Fenomenal Funds website for more tools and resources:

<https://fenomenalfunds.org/grantmaking/collaboration-grants/tools-resources>