FUNDING SOCIAL JUSTICE FUTURES:

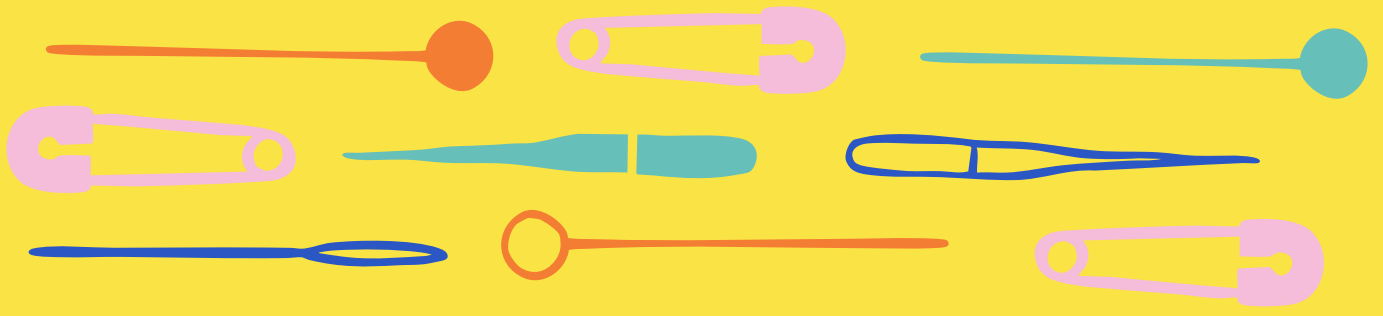## STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH COLLABORATIVE POWER

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Fenomenal Funds is a feminist funder collaborative using pooled funding, shared governance, and participatory grantmaking to support the resilience of women's funds who are members of the Prospera International Network of Women's Funds.

A MESSAGE FROM CO-CHAIRS

Anisha Chugh (Women's Fund Asia) and Mónica Enríquez-Enríquez (Foundation for a Just Society)

This report offers you an insight into the power of collaboration to drive organizational transformation, strengthen the support women's funds can deliver to grassroots gender justice movements, and reinforce resilience and solidarity among the feminist funding ecosystem at a time when increasing and constant crisis is becoming the global norm and ideological and funding challenges are making it harder to advance gender equality.

Through our Collaboration Initiatives, Fenomenal Funds have innovated new collaboration methodologies, distilled insights into effectively practicing collaboration across diverse groupings, and reflected on the mindset and practice shifts funders can embrace to bring the power of collaboration into their work. These investments by vital allies—private funders and other institutional donors—are critical to ensuring that women's funds can continue to provide efficient and effective funding to grassroots feminist movements.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, for a report focused on collaboration, what you are about to read is the result of the collective effort of many individuals—women's funds staff, private funders, movement partners, consultants, and others. Their vision and commitment have shaped the Collaboration Initiatives presented in this report, and we are tremendously grateful to all of them.

We hope, as you read this report, you are reminded of the transformative potential of building relationships and, through that, building trust. Without it, the shared governance and practices of collaboration flounder. With it, collaboration delivers strengthened organizational resilience and sparks new ideas for advancing women's rights.

We ask, as you take in its messages, you pay tribute to the resilience, leadership, and creativity of women's rights movements everywhere: these groups drive the transformative change we all seek.

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INTRODUCTION

STRONGER TOGETHER

We live in a time of complex change and challenge. As the dangerous implications of living beyond our planetary limits become more and more evident, the politics of fear and unchecked greed are being deployed to oppose progressive action for economic and planetary justice—to push back against feminist and other social justice agendas.

And yet activists still rise together in acts of resilience, resistance, and defiance: Defending people and our planet. Women's funds are with them, reaching women's rights and feminist movements who work in some of the most challenging contexts and are at the leading edge of the most pressing human rights issues.

Solutions are not simple, and lasting and effective change requires diverse actors to unify around a common goal. Collaboration becomes a vital tool of resistance and resilience: collectivizing risk, maximizing learning and creativity, and strengthening strategy.

Yet, while collaboration often succeeds, it can also flounder. So, understanding what it takes to activate effective collaboration as a driver for resilience in movements is pivotal to advancing our work.

This imperative has inspired Fenomenal Funds to resource collaborations focused on strengthening organizational infrastructure among the women's funds of the Prospera International Network of Women's Funds (Prospera INWF). As a feminist funder collaborative, Fenomenal Funds operates through a shared governance model and participatory grantmaking, pooling resources from four private foundations: Hewlett Foundation, Foundation for Just Society, Open Society Foundations, and Wellspring Foundation.

Women's funds are one of the main sources of funding for grassroots feminist movements[1] and, therefore, are crucial to their success[2]. But most of them face structural and bureaucratic barriers in accessing and leveraging resources from the global funding

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1 Preliminary findings of AWID's Where is the Money for Feminist Organizing? Survey, carried out between May and August 2024.(December 4, 2024 presentation at AWID Feminist Forum, Bangkok, Thailand). The final report will be published in 2026.

2 Peñaloza, A. (2020). Seven things the women's fund collaborative taught me about feminist philanthropy. Retrieved from **https://hewlett.org/seven-things-the-womens-funds-collaborative-taught-me-about-feminist-philanthropy/**.

ecosystem, particularly smaller women's funds based in the Global South, leading to chronic underfunding. With their interest in evolving feminist practices of collaboration, women's funds are positioned to offer unique insights.

Fenomenal Funds hypothesized that resourcing collaborative organizational infrastructure initiatives between women's funds would **strengthen their resilience and strategic capacity to mobilize more and better resources for the work of grassroots women's movements**[3]. An underlying assumption was that, despite the sometimes challenges of collaboration, women's funds would go further if they were together.

Understanding what it takes to activate effective collaboration as a driver for resilience in movements is pivotal to advancing our work.

3 See the Fenomenal Funds "Theory of Transformation": **https://fenomenalfunds.org/publications/theory-of-transformation/**.

INVESTING IN COLLABORATION: DRIVING IMPROVEMENTS TO ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Directed by the early insights and creativity of our shared governance model, Fenomenal Funds invested USD 6.6 million over two years, supporting 15 different Collaboration Initiatives focused on strengthening organizational infrastructure (see below for further information).

The results achieved by these Collaboration Initiatives validated our hypothesis: Women's funds could strengthen their resilience and strategic capacity to serve movements through collaboration. The women's funds reported that the collaborations achieved the following:

Stronger organizational results than the initiatives undertaken independently

- Women's funds leveraged peer knowledge, drew on diverse contexts, and collectivized lessons to deliver more robust and widely applicable organizational infrastructure[4] tools and approaches.

- The time-delineated and resourced approach of the Collaboration Initiatives enabled women's funds to both prioritize work on organizational infrastructure strengthening and then draw on collective energy to advance the work.

Enhancement of women's funds' capacity to serve the needs of their movement partners

- The collaborations delivered a range of practical tools and approaches that streamlined and advanced the internal operations of women's funds and the funds' work with partners.

- The collaborations contributed to the greater skillset and feeling of confidence among staff at women's funds to mobilize more diverse resources for movements.

Bolstering of relationships across the feminist funding ecosystem through deeper connections and trust between partners and women's funds

- This increased the understanding of the diverse contexts in which gender equality work is undertaken.

- These relationships and insights will inform the strategic evolution of feminist work, regardless of where the participants are working.

[4] "Organizational infrastructure" refers to the systems, processes, and practices that make an organization function well. A well-functioning women's fund is an organization that has the capacity, resources, and tools to carry out its mission in line with its values. Organizational infrastructure can include personnel, office space and equipment, and information systems and technical tools. It can also involve developed, agreed upon, and actionable policies, strategies, and planning and management procedures, as well as decision-making and governance mechanisms. Importantly, the utility and effectiveness of an organization's infrastructure is very much related to the depth and quality of the relationships among the people involved in the organization.

Women's funds also reported that these insights into the "how" of gender equality work, combined with the improved organizational practices, allowed organizational resources to be used for strategy, planning, and relationship building with their partners. These factors enabled them to better identify and fund emerging issues among grassroots gender justice movements and invest in the collective power of these actors to drive change.

While it is beyond the scope of Fenomenal Funds to track the impact of the work of women's funds' partners, our Learning Conversations pointed to anecdotal evidence of similar impacts to those described above.

Women's funds self-reported that their partners were taking in the insights generated by the Fenomenal Funds organizational infrastructure investments, leading to

- strengthened organizational capacity—for example, in the areas of monitoring, evaluation, learning, and accountability—and the capacity to mobilize resources for their grassroots work;.

- more open and reflective relationships with women's funds and their own communities, leading to more effective actions; and

- strategic insights into gender justice and the mobilization of resources for this work.

Women's Funds are enabled to better fund grassroots gender justice movements to drive change.
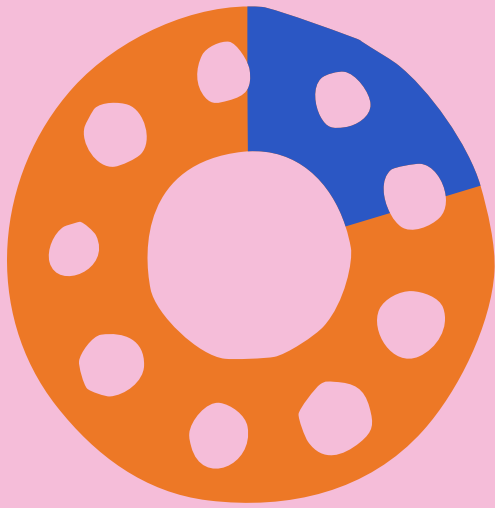
80%

of collaborations say that they now are **better able to serve the needs of their movement partners.**

"Establishing trust through social interactions with our participants/volunteers has allowed us to gather more honest, detailed, and meaningful data. This, in turn, has improved the quality and authenticity of our reports, ensuring they truly reflect the voices and experiences of those we serve."

Women's Fund Y

collaborations agree that bringing together women's funds across languages, scopes, and scales **made the experience transformative**.

ABOUT HALF

of the Collaboration Initiatives reported that they had developed or redeveloped strategies, tools, and insights to **strengthen harm reduction and risk mitigation** practices within their funds and with their partners.

"Collaborations help reduce risk by pooling experience and collective wisdom. They break down silos, prevent duplication, and underscore the importance of investing in collaborative infrastructure, like interpreters, documenters, or facilitators, to ensure accessibility and effective grant-making processes."

(Feminist Data Base Collaboration - Advanced Group)

THE STRATEGIC SHIFT TO INVESTING IN COLLABORATION

Fenomenal Funds' insights into collaboration extend beyond women's funds and feminist movements. Our learnings are relevant to any funder who recognizes the value of intermediary funds that bridge the gaps between private philanthropy and social movement to deliver better and more responsive resourcing of grassroots activism for systems-change work.

This report makes the case for strategic investments in organizational infrastructure collaborations among intermediary funds and provides practical, evidence-based guidance on making this strategic shift. We have distilled our experience into three sets of recommendations:

● "Five Critical Mindset Shifts to Leverage the Power of Collaboration"

● "Six Practical Tips for Funders Investing in Collaboration"

● "Ten Practices to Drive Effective Collaboration"

For a detailed guide on implementing the Collaboration Lab methodology, please visit our Collaboration Grants Toolkit[5]. This resource outlines the process Fenomenal Funds used to support women's funds to form collaboration groups and co-create their collaboration plans.

[5] Find the Fenomenal Funds Collaboration Grants Toolkit here:
https://fenomenalfunds.org/grantmaking/collaboration-grants/tools-resources

5 CRITICAL MINDSET SHIFTS TO LEVERAGE THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

Investing in collaboration, particularly collaboration to drive organizational infrastructure strengthening, requires critical mindset shifts from funders:

1 Pooled, Flexible, Noncompetitive Funding Drives Results in Organizational Infrastructure Collaborations.

2 Multiyear Funding Is Necessary to Ensure Spaciousness in Collaboration (and Delivers Stronger Outcomes).

3 Invest in Process and Co-Learning to Maximize Collaboration Impact.

4 Process Is a Collaboration Input, Output, and Outcome.

5 Self-Direction Leads to Better Collaborations.

6 PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FUNDERS INVESTING IN COLLABORATION

These six practical tips enable funders to move from the mindset shifts to program design:

1 Stretch Yourself in Determining Whether Your Funding Is Suitable for This Approach.

2 Fully and Flexibly Fund Both the Processes and Activities of an Organizational Infrastructure Collaboration.

3 Consciously Engage with the Power Dynamics Involved in the Collaboration.

4 Embrace the Opportunity for Unlearning and Shifting Away from Harmful Funding Practices.

5 Embed Responsiveness and Flexibility Into Your Relationships with Movement Partners.

6 Embrace a Continuous Cycle of Participatory and Collaborative Learning.

10 PRACTICES TO DRIVE EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

As you move from design to implementation, these ten practices will support effective collaborative initiatives:

1 Be Intentional About Collaboration.

2 Invest in Relationship Building.

3 Articulate Shared Objectives.

4 Build Power Literacy.

5 Collectivize Knowledge and Risks.

6 Embrace Flexibility and Plurality.

7 Navigate Clarity and Complexity.

8 Challenge Assumptions.

9 Leverage the Power of Reflection.

10 Enable Equitable Participation.

DISTILLING WHAT WE MEAN BY FEMINIST COLLABORATION

Building on the contributions of feminist theorists and practitioners[6] and evolving through distilling the lessons and insights of the Prospera INWF members we have worked with, we have come to the following understanding of feminist collaboration as a practical investment across funding ecosystems that could be applicable to all who are engaged in social justice work.

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6 See "A Note on Terminology" later in the report for further information.
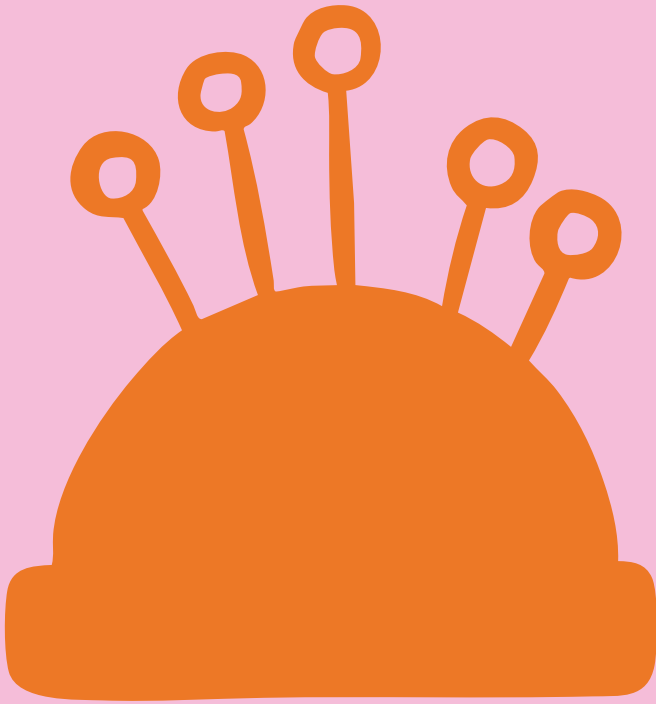
Feminist collaboration brings together diverse actors, uniting them to achieve a shared, self-determined objective.

This objective may be external (to achieve a system's shift in a community) or internal (to strengthen organizational and financial resilience). While shared values and ways of working can make collaboration smoother, without a shared objective collaboration is impossible.

Feminist collaboration requires naming and engaging with power dynamics, leveraging those that are constructive, and neutralizing or transforming those that are harmful.

This requires contextual analysis to recognize the impact of systemic and structural oppression and privilege on individual and organizational relationships within the collaboration, including the acknowledgment that these power dynamics are never fixed. A commitment to relationality, underpinned by emotional intelligence—particularly the ability to work with vulnerability and trust and to challenge one's own assumptions—is also vital if collaborators are to navigate power.

Feminist collaboration thrives in practicality. It is enabled by transparent processes and patience with complexity.

While time spent on the clarification of core concepts is important, moving from ideas to action is key. In this, collaboration must be powered by reflection and learning to enable the power of diverse contexts to be integrated with the solutions and strategies that the collaborators evolve. An openness to plurality is critical to enable the localization of response.

Finally, feminist collaboration requires flexible, noncompetitive, multiyear resourcing to enable equitable and sustainable participation.

In our experience, noncompetitive funding is essential to facilitate trust building. Flexible funding is critical in these complex times, enabling course corrections that address rapidly changing contexts to be made with ease. Multiyear funding enables collaborators to build the trust necessary for them to share honestly, collectivize risk, embrace creativity, and develop robust solutions that support the stability and structures of organizations.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

ON COLLABORATION

The methodology of our Collaboration Grants and our distillation of what collaboration means have benefited greatly from reflections developed by feminist theorists and practitioners.

- We have built on Obioma Nnaemeka's 2004 work on nego-feminism with its dual focus on the "feminism of negotiation" and "no-ego" feminism and its emphasis on listening, silence, and conversation as tools to deepen contextual understanding and create strategies for collaboration.

- We also drew on Eunice Karanja Kamaara, Elisabeth T. Vasko, and Jeanine E. Viau's 2012[8] work on feminist intercultural collaboration and the imperative of the honest naming of one's social location within the context of imperial and postcolonial realities.

- We have brought mindful attention to Richa Nagar's 2014[9] concept of "situated solidarities" and its insistence on "radical vulnerability" as a way of reshaping the traditional notions of transparency and accountability through multifaceted relationships of trust forged in the dialogues that interrogate and access the contours of success and failure.

More broadly, we have also taken guidance from Juliane Röll's 2017[10] work on "meaningful collaboration"—with its focus on dedicated effort— and Rachael Barbour's 2018[11] work, which points to deeper connection as fundamental to successful collaborations.

7 Nnaemeka, O. (2004). Nego-feminism: Theorizing, practicing, and pruning Africa's way. *Signs 29*(2), 357-85. **https://doi.org/10.1086/378553** (quotation on 377-78)

8 Kamaara, E. K., Vasko, E. T., & Viau, J. E. (2012). Listening and speaking as two sides of the same coin: Negotiating dualisms in intercultural feminist collaboration. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, 28*(2), 49-67. **https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.28.2.49**

9 Nagar, R. (2014). *Muddying the waters: Coauthoring feminisms across scholarship and activism*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press. **https://doi.org/10.5406/illinois/9780252038792.001.0001**

10 Röll, J. (2017). Encounters for meaningful collaboration (a few words on our organisation's purpose). **Retrieved from http://structureprocess.com/blog/encounters/**

11 Barbour, R. (2018). Collaboration versus cooperation: Grassroots activism in divided cities and communication networks. *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology, International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 12*(2), 234-237.

ON ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Throughout this report, we refer to the term "organizational infrastructure." We were informed by the Ford Foundation's work on **institutional infrastructure**.[12] They recognize that organizational infrastructure comprises individual and collective resources, systems, and practices and includes:

- people (leadership and board development; diversity, equity, and inclusion; organizational culture; talent management);

- strategy (mission clarity and coherence; organizational learning; adaptive strategy; network building);

- resources (financial management, operating reserve, fundraising);

- systems (physical and digital security; information technology; communications; legal compliance); and

- partnerships and engagement (collaboration and advocacy).

ON COLLABORATION INFRASTRUCTURE

We also reference the idea of "collaboration infrastructure" to capture the resourcing (in terms of finance and knowledge) that supports effective collaboration. In our experience, it is important to fully fund both the process and activities in an organizational infrastructure collaboration for both the partners in the collaborations and the funder team.

This applies both during the establishment and the implementation phases. We also came to realize that collaboration infrastructure includes knowledge about the practices of collaboration and the capacity to share these in a useful way at critical moments during the collaboration (for example, during co-design or budget development phases). It also includes support provided by the Fenomenal Funds staff team as Collaboration Initiatives encountered internal and external challenges.

ON LANGUAGE JUSTICE AND TIME ZONE JUSTICE

Grounding in the practices of the Prospera INWF, we integrated language justice into our work across the five years of our grantmaking. This takes care and resourcing. We direct readers to these **reflections**[13] from the Foundation for a Just Society on the multiple dimensions of language justice and their practical advice on integrating it into your work. We also endeavored to address time zone justice in our work. In reality, this is actually very difficult. But bringing care and attention to which time zones are often disadvantaged—and actively working to displace norms that privilege one set of time zones over another—has been a key strategy, as well as the rotation of meeting times so that the burden is shared more equitably.

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12 Read more on the Ford Foundation's page "How it Works": **https://www.fordfoundation.org/work/our-grants/building-institutions-and-networks/how-it-works/.**

13 Read more about them here in Alliance magazine's "Language justice: an invitation to get out of our comfort zones and build together": **https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/language-justice-an-invitation-to-get-out-of-our-comfort-zones-and-build-together/.**

INVESTING IN COLLABORATION: A SMART MOVE IN SYSTEMS-CHANGE WORK

Together, our findings and insights make a compelling case: Collaborative organizational infrastructure initiatives are a smart, long-term investment for donors interested in the work of systems change. This is particularly the case for donors who are using intermediary funds to spread risk, promote creativity, and more effectively support grassroots actors in their vital and strategic work. We invite you to read on as we unpack our insights into making this strategic shift and reflect on the efficacy of this approach.

ABOUT THE FENOMENAL FUNDS COLLABORATION GRANTS

42 Feminist and Women's Funds Collaborated in Initiatives

15 Collaborations across Geographies, Languages, Scope, and Scale

11 Focus Areas Driving Organizational and Movement Resilience

$6M+ Invested in a Two-Year Vision

COLLABORATION AS THE FIRST STEP: CURATING LABS

In 2022 Fenomenal Funds launched the Collaboration Lab—a curated process to facilitate meaningful collaborations among women's funds members of the Prospera INWF.

Designed by the Fenomenal Funds Advisory Committee, the Collaboration Labs supported women's funds to harness their collective power, wisdom, and creativity. The Advisory Committee **co-created their vision for a feminist collaborative methodology**:[14] a resourced, three-phase, noncompetitive process that would support diverse women's funds to build relationships and evolve their projects. The Discover, Define, and Refine Phases[15] were resourced by a mindset of flexibility and a commitment to reflection (which enabled adjustments

to the methodology as insights emerged). Critically, each phase was infused with practices of "power with" rather than "power over." This is perhaps best exemplified in the Refine Phase, where the review process was framed as peers offering support and connection rather than decision-makers perpetuating judgment and competition. Women's funds now had the power to determine whether or how they would engage with the reflective questions and problem-solving suggestions for areas of perceived risk. Practically, Fenomenal Funds engaged and supported skilled facilitators, documenters, and interpreters to accompany the women's funds through the journey. This supported the partners to participate in the process without the distraction of note-taking or meeting management.

14 See "Paving the Way: Collaboration as a Tool for Resilience":
https://fenomenalfunds.org/grantmaking/collaboration-grants/insights/paving-the-way-collaboration-as-a-tool-for-resilience/

15 See the "Fenomenal Funds Toolkit": **https://fenomenalfunds.org/grantmaking/collaboration-grants/tools-resources**

RESOURCING ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE: THE COLLABORATION INITIATIVES

With a USD 6.6M investment over two years, Fenomenal Funds supported collaborations across diverse geographies and languages and throughout women's funds with differing scopes of work and scales of operations and partnerships.

The Collaboration Labs delivered 15 different initiatives, clustered around four thematic topics.

ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS AND PRACTICES:
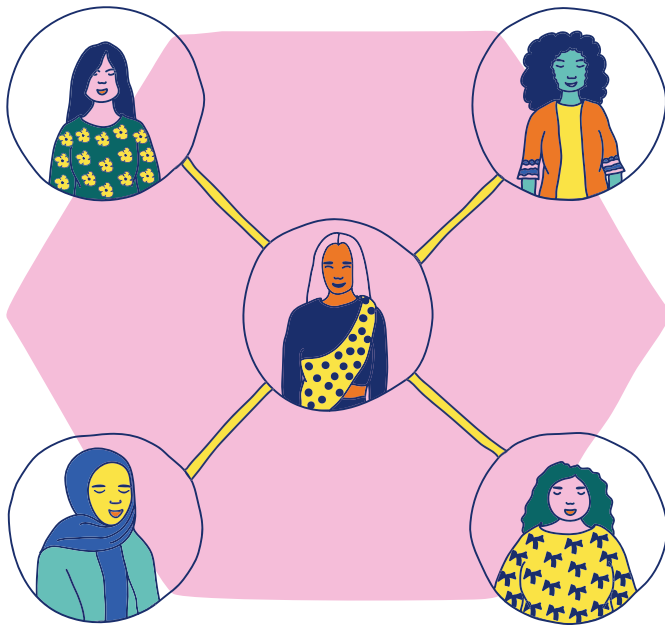
- **Feminist Organizational Development**
  One Collaboration Initiative bringing together three global women's funds

- **Feminist Leadership**
  One Collaboration Initiative bringing together two regional women's funds

- **Collective Care**

  - Three Collaboration Initiatives focused on collective care, with two working from existing collaborative structures (one that brings together four regional women's funds and the other that brings together four women's funds who between them include regional scope and global scope) and one establishing a new set of relationships (bringing together five national, regional, and global women's funds)

  - One Collaboration Initiative focused on feminist healing—bringing together three national women's funds from the same region

The Collaboration Groups and their Members

Feminist Organizational Evolution Collaborative

Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice
International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI)
Women Win

Feminist Leadership and Organisational Development in Women's Funds

Calala Women's Fund
Mediterranean Women's Fund

Communities of Collective Care

Doria Feminist Fund
FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund
Mongolian Women's Fund (MONES)
Tewa
Women's Fund Fiji

Communities of Collective Care (LFS)

Women's Funds Asia (WFA)
African Women's Development Fund (AWDF)
Fondo Mujeres del Sur (FMS)
International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI)

Collective Care Infrastructure: Building Collective Learnings

Urgent Action Fund - Women's Human Rights
Urgent Action Fund - Africa
Urgent Action Fund - Asia and Pacific
Urgent Action Fund - Latin America and the Caribbean

Feminist Healing Spaces

FemFund (Poland)
Women's Fund Armenia
Women's Fund in Georgia

GRANTMAKING AND ACCOMPANIMENT INNOVATION

- **Participatory Grantmaking**
  One Collaboration Initiative bringing together seven national, regional, and global women's funds

- **Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL)**
  One Collaboration Initiative bringing together four women's funds of similar scopes of work

- **Feminist Databases**
  Two Collaboration Initiatives: one focused on those with an emergent interest and bringing together five national and global women's funds, and another focused on those with a more established interest, bringing together five national and global women's funds

The Collaboration Groups and their Members

Collective Learning on Participatory Grantmaking

Fondo Semillas
Armenia Women's Fund
Women First
Women Fund Asia
Mones
Women's Fund in Georgia
Women Win

Participatory Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (FMEL)

Taso Foundation
Fonds pour les Femmes Congolaises (FFCRDC)
Women's Fund Y
Women's Fund X

Feminist Fund Database: Emergent Group

Bulgarian Fund for Women
Global Fund for Women
Taso Foundation
Women Fund Tanzania
Women's Fund Z

Feminist Fund Database: Advanced Group

Fondo Semillas A.C.
Global Fund for Women
Equality Fund
Mama Cash
Ukrainian Women's Fund

ORGANIZATIONAL FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

The Collaboration Groups and their Members

Collaborative Learning on Resource Mobilization

Calala Fondo Mujeres
Doria Feminist Fund
Ecumenical Women's Initiative
ELAS+
Reconstruction Women's Fund
Women First International Fund

Resource Mobilization

Korea Foundation for Women
Women's Fund Y
Women's Fund X

Feminist Financial Resilience

Women's Fund Tanzania
Women's Fund Z

● **Resource Mobilization**
Two Collaboration Initiatives, one focused on resource mobilization in restricted contexts, bringing together three women's funds, and another bringing together six regional and global women's funds

● **Financial Sustainability**
One Collaboration Initiative bringing together two national and regional women's funds

NARRATIVE POWER

Two additional Collaboration Initiatives emerged separately from the Labs, focused on narrative change—bringing together existing regional and interregional networks.

The Collaboration Groups and their Members

Alliance of Women's and Feminist Funds of Latin America and the Caribbean: Amplifying collective voice and power to advance gender justice amid regional crises

Fondo de Acción Urgente de América Latina y el Caribe Hispanohablante (FAU-LAC)

Fondo de Mujeres Bolivia Apthapi Jopueti (FMB)

Fondo Alquimia

Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (FCAM)

Fondo Elas+

Fondo Lunaria

Fondo de Mujeres del Sur (FMS)

Fondo Semillas

ON THE RIGHT TRACK (OTRT): Building networks in Latin America and Europe for democracy and human rights

Women's Funds in LATIN AMERICA (LATAM)

Fondo Alquimia

Fondo Apthapi Jopueti

Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres

Fondo de Acción Urgente para América Latina y el Caribe

Fondo Elas+

Fondo Lunaria

Fondo Mujeres del Sur

Fondo Semillas

Women's Funds in EUROPE

Bulgarian Fund for Women

Calala Women's Fund

Feminist Fund Poland

filia die frauenstiftung

Mediterranean Women's Fund

Reconstruction Women's Fund

Taso Foundation

Ukrainian Women's Fund

Women's Fund Armenia

Women's Fund Georgia

Ecumenical Women's Fund

SUPPORTING FLEXIBILITY THROUGH REFLECTION AND LEARNING

Fenomenal Funds grounded **its approach to learning and accountability in emergent learning**,[16] evolving three hypotheses (one on its funding model, one on Fenomenal Funds' own shared governance model, and another on its philanthropic advocacy). Learning Conversations[17] supported reflection on the Collaboration Initiatives, alongside thematically organized "Fishbowl Conversations" between groups.

Held twice, once in 2023 and again in 2024, Learning Conversations were scheduled with each Collaboration Initiative and provided guided and documented reflection sessions. Questions focused on the substantive insights into the topic of their collaboration, as well as insights into collaborative practices. The latter was unpacked both in the context of the collaboration and in the context of the relationships of the participants with Fenomenal Funds.

Through the last quarter of 2023 and the first quarter of 2024, Fishbowl Conversations provided Prospera INWF members with the opportunity to attend a discussion between Fenomenal Funds and thematically grouped Collaboration Initiatives. These curated conversations provided members with insights into the substantive content of the collaborations and offered the partners a pause point to distill emerging learnings (and make any pivots necessary for the final year).

16 See the Fenomenal Funds Learning Strategy: **https://fenomenalfunds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Fenomenal-Funds-Learning-Strategy.pdf**.

17 Learning conversations embody feminist approaches to knowledge sharing through reciprocal and generative conversations. Feminist ethics of care are at the heart of our work, and for this reason, we did not want to overburden collaborative members with report writing and documentation. Fenomenal Funds held space for these learning conversations with all collaboration groups and documented them in lieu of an annual report.

OUR LEARNING CONVERSATIONS JOURNEY

First Round
July - October 2023

13 Learning Conversations

Helped participants reflect on the process of collaboration and signaled preliminary insights

9 Fishbowl Conversations
November 2023 - May 2024

An opportunity to learn from thematically aligned Collaboration Initiatives and cross-pollinate with the work of others

Second Round
July - November 2024

15 Learning Conversations

A vital pause for self-assessment supported the pivots in the projects for the final year and deepened insights into the praxis of collaboration

This demonstrated a continuous trend of emergent learning and reflection across the grant period, and contributed to data harvesting that could later be analyzed to demonstrate impact.

Both forms of conversations provided the data that was used to formulate the insights, findings, and distillation of the mindset shifts, practices, and tips presented in this report.

PHENOMENAL IMPACT: ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE COLLABORATION DELIVERS RESULTS

IMPACT OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE COLLABORATIONS ON WOMEN'S FUNDS, PARTNERS, AND GRASSROOTS WORK FOR GENDER JUSTICE

While many of the Collaboration Initiatives are still finalizing their work, the insights from the Learning Conversations demonstrate:

- strengthened organizational and financial resilience among women's funds and

- deeper strategic insights and relationships across the feminist funding ecosystem.

Collectively, the Collaboration Initiatives have contributed to women's funds by

- enhancing their analysis, contextual understandings, and relationships;

- streamlining their systems and practices;

- boosting the confidence, skills, and insights of individuals and organizations; and

- redirecting staff time from inefficient processes into more strategic and relational work.

In turn, this has contributed to improving the strategic capacity of women's funds to

- build open and responsive relationships with partners;

- identify and fund emerging issues among grassroots activists;

- better meet the needs of gender justice movements; and

- co-create approaches to sustain a resilient and better-connected feminist funding ecosystem.

Significantly, women's funds perceived that the Fenomenal Funds' focus on collaboration delivered stronger results than if they had attempted to progress their organizational infrastructure work independently. The Collaboration Initiatives enabled them to leverage diverse contexts, experiences, and insights to

- produce more robust, flexible, and responsive organizational infrastructure tools and approaches that benefited from being tested in different contexts; and

- advance gender equality praxis through collective reflection on the intersecting experiences, strategies, and methodologies developed by women's funds and their partners.

ALL 15

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collaborations were **able to apply their learning**, and each participating fund was able to translate it into at least one concrete action.

Women Fund Tanzania Trust has already begun investing in government unit trusts as a very secure and liquid option, that allows funds access to its money within three days. Additionally, they also have a fixed deposit receipt (FDR) on their bank account fund, earning them a small interest.

ALL 15

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collaborations reported that the Collaboration Initiatives gave them **a network of peers to ask for support.**

A DEEPER DIVE INTO STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Through the Collaboration Grants, Fenomenal Funds sought to test this hypothesis:

If women's funds of the Prospera INWF have core, flexible, multiyear, noncompetitive funding to strengthen their institutional infrastructure, collaborate across geographies and scales, and build up their voice and visibility, then women's funds will have the organizational and strategic capacity to adapt to changing conditions; rise up to opportunities and remain responsive to grassroots women's movements; co-create strategies to sustain a resilient feminist funding ecosystem; and use their collective voice to influence the agenda and flow of resources.[18]

As flagged above, the Learning Conversations have pointed to four key areas of improved organizational infrastructure: strengthened organizational resilience, improved financial resilience, deepened relationships between women's funds, and more focused strategic insights across the feminist funding ecosystem, which we will explore in greater detail below. Women's funds reported a range of concrete outputs from their work together—both collectively and within individual organizations.

Women Fund Tanzania Trust pointed out how the collaboration came at the right time. They already had a long-term sustainability plan, and the collaboration **provided a roadmap on how to implement and operationalize** it efficiently.

STRENGTHENED ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

Women's funds reported the following:

1. Enhanced and Streamlined Organizational Practices:

Women's funds' internal policies, processes, and practices have been significantly strengthened, contributing to improved organizational resilience and stronger and more effective grantmaking, as well as more strategic and diversified resource mobilization by the women's funds.

- Several women's funds drafted new organizational policies or strengthened organizational processes based on the diverse insights shared, as well as the sharing of organizational documents with each other (e.g., Mama Cash, the Equality Fund, Bulgarian Fund for Women, Ukrainian Women's Fund).

- Several women's funds revised their Theories of Change and/or associated MEAL frameworks (e.g., Fonds pour Les Femmes Congolaises, Taso Foundation, two anonymous women's funds).

- International Indigenous Women's Forum created a foundational operational document for cross-learning and future organizational improvements.

One participant elaborated on the value of establishing connections, explaining how those connections now serve as a resource where she can reach out to people and access information about things that have already been done and tested in the other women's funds. She also reflected that the insights from the discussions have sparked a lot of conversations internally.

Women Win, Feminist Organizational Evolution Collaborative.

2. Evolved Grantmaking Frameworks:

The women's funds approaches to grantmaking, in particular active engagement with participatory grantmaking (PGM), have evolved.

- Several women's funds conducted reviews of their grantmaking systems that resulted in improved accessibility and efficiency in their practices (e.g., Women's Fund in Georgia).

- Several women's funds integrated collective care into their grantmaking frameworks (see point 7 about collective care for specific details).

- Fondo Semillas and Bulgarian Fund for Women streamlined grantmaking processes, reducing administrative time and focusing on capacity building and movement support.

- Women First International Fund systematized the PGM practices in their organization, including the provision of guidance on application reviews for their peer review panel, to address concerns about the power dynamics identified by panel members.

- Women's Fund Asia gained deeper insights into various models and tools used by other feminist funds on responsive and accountable funding practices. This encouraged Women's Fund Asia to further leverage the thematic expertise of their grantmaking advisory committee members and strengthen its role in the grantmaking process.

- The Urgent Action Sister Funds unified their vision for their climate justice grantmaking, including the integration of collective care in this approach.

3. Advanced Feminist Leadership and Organizational Development Approaches:

Women's funds have shared insights to advance their feminist organizational development approaches, particularly in the context of human resource practices and feminist leadership transition.

- Calala Fondo de Mujeres and Mediterranean Women's Fund—both facing similar movement contexts and demands for stronger feminist funding infrastructure—focused on what they could learn together about the contribution of transformative feminist leadership to their organizational evolutions.

- Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, International Indigenous Women's Forum, and Women Win focused on collective learning to embed intersectional feminism and decolonization in their organizational structures, processes, operations, grantmaking, advocacy, and programs.

- Mediterranean Women's Fund shared the reflection that sometimes "the final decision is not collective, but the process is," offering a pathway for feminist organizations to bring a collaborative twist to a hierarchical structure.

- Astraea reflected on their drive to seek "input from across the organization based on lived experience, identity, and organizational seat."

- Women Win highlighted the importance of "systems and partnerships being participatory and reflective to ensure [that]...our whole community can input into our decisions and directions of our work."

- Calala Fondo de Mujeres dispersed decision-making power to all staff in particular contexts; decisions that affect all staff are decided by consensus among the team.

4. Accelerated Technology Integration:

Funds have experimented with new technologies, such as online data collection platforms and artificial intelligence, and customized existing platforms to improve grantmaking processes, contributing to more effective, efficient, and relational grantmaking practices by women's funds. At least nine women's funds categorically stated that participation in their collaboration had accelerated technological integration for their organization.

- Bulgarian Fund for Women streamlined their grantmaking processes using the Feminist Fund Database, an open-source CRM system, improving efficiency and adaptation for multilingual support developed by the Global Fund for Women.

- Fondo Semillas is exploring new platforms to consolidate their grantmaking process.

5. Improved Knowledge Management and Data-Informed Decision-Making:

Women's funds have streamlined, contextualized, automated, and standardized key data management processes and strengthened documentation to facilitate whole-of-organization cultural shifts to use the knowledge management systems, contributing to more efficient grantmaking practices and enabling data-informed decision-making and insightful adjustments to women's fund's strategies and practices. At least four women's funds and their eight movement partners stated that participation in the Collaborations Grants had led to improved knowledge management and enabled data-informed decision-making.

- Global Fund for Women invested in version 2.0 of their Feminist Fund Database, improving flexibility and suitability through insights gained from incorporating customized participation in both of the databases Collaboration Initiatives.

- The Collaboration Initiatives have also been intentional about sharing open-source codes associated with database system and database system tips. For example, Mama Cash reflected that they had learned more about the functionality of database system and how to use some of the automated templates.

- The Collaboration Groups enabled sharing of documentation and best practices to implement cultural shifts at each participating Fund to support less-operationally focused teams to use grantmaking databases.

- Several women's funds reported the automation of data collection and analysis processes, which contributed to streamlined MEAL processes and enhanced strategic and programmatic decision-making by providing access to more comprehensive datasets and sharper analysis.

6. Enhanced Peer-Learning Strategies:

Feminist, trust-based approaches to reflection and learning have sharpened analysis and contributed to improved strategies and processes among the women's funds.

- Several women's funds embraced participatory methods and experimented with new qualitative data collection tools and collective sensemaking practices, deepening collective insight into how change happens and building more trusting and transparent relationships between partners and women's funds, which have contributed to more strategic work by both parties.

- Women's Fund Armenia reflected on the power of conversation and the importance of women's funds, recognizing that "they had to learn as well… it's a collective learning process." They reflected that framing these sessions of collective learning transformed not only the women's funds but also their partners in their context, strengthening the understanding of how to enact collective care in the women's movement in Armenia.

7. Deepened Understanding and Practice of Collective Care:

Seventeen women's funds have evolved their conceptual understandings, policies, and practices associated with collective care and feminist healing, incorporating these insights into adjusted organizational strategies, policies, practices, and advocacy initiatives.

- All of the Collaboration Initiatives on this topic reported rich conversations that expanded their conceptual understanding of collective care and/or feminist healing and facilitated engagement with new actors—e.g., with healers. In particular, FemFund, Women's Fund Armenia, and Women's Fund in Georgia reflected on the evolution of the term "co-healing" and its broad-based application across all dimensions of an organization's work.

- Several women's funds integrated collective care into their grantmaking practices, establishing targeted funding rounds or asking partners to provision for it in their budget. For example, Women's Fund Asia worked to learn and integrate collective care and well-being into its work with grantee partners by encouraging them to allocate 15% of their budgets for care, resilience building, contingency planning, risk mitigation, and other needs. Women's funds conducted research/surveys with staff and grantee partners to strengthen knowledge about practices and aspirations for collective care in their work.

- Several women's funds adopted new organizational practices or policies to institutionalize their commitment to collective care.

- Fondo de Mujeres del Sur, with their partners, submitted an advisory opinion on care as a human right to the Inter-American Human Rights Court.

Women's Fund Asia worked to learn and integrate collective care and well-being into its work with grantee partners by encouraging them to allocate 15% of their budgets for care, resilience building, contingency planning, risk mitigation, and other needs.

IMPROVED FINANCIAL RESILIENCE AMONG WOMEN'S FUNDS

Women's funds reported the following:

8. Strengthened Resource Mobilization:

Women's funds have deepened their organizational capacity to debate the ethical dimensions of a diversified funding base and increased their capacity to mobilize resources, including by developing and implementing stronger narratives and strategies to drive diversified and ethically aligned resource mobilization strategies. In turn, nine women's funds specifically agreed that through the Collaboration Grants, they have become more agile, able to pivot and take advantage of any resource mobilization opportunities that arise.

- Two funds reported a planned partnership focused on a new private sector actor.

- Calala Fondo de Mujeres initiated a partnership with a private sector partner.

- Two anonymous women's funds reported an improved understanding of the importance of audience-specific messaging in resource mobilization, including grappling with the realization that there is no "grand narrative" that can be deployed in collaborative resource mobilization.

- The Urgent Action Sister Funds were able to leverage their evolving insights into the theory and practice of collective care into donor advocacy and the negotiation of funding agreements.

- The Latin American Alliance of Women's Funds narrative power Collaboration Initiative enabled faster decision-making and proposal development, including a successful bilateral funding pitch.

- Korea Foundation for Women expanded its strategic understanding of resource mobilization and sharpened targeted messaging for specific potential funders.

- ELAS+, Reconstruction Women's Fund, Ecumenical Women's Initiative, and others reported increased confidence in their resource mobilization skills, arising, for example, from the opportunity to practice funding pitching at their in-person meeting.

9. Improved Financial Management:

Funds have developed financial resilience frameworks and tools, including elaborating financial dashboards to enable management and governance tracking and taking actions towards diversification of investment strategies to strengthen their resilience.

- Women Fund Tanzania Trust developed an investment policy and diversified its investment strategies.

- Two funds reported improved visualization of financial resilience data through the adoption of dashboards at the operational and governance levels.

"Learning more about [resource mobilization] and talking to people who had already done it alleviated my fear of going beyond familiar donors. "

Reconstruction Women's Fund, Collaborative Learning on Resource Mobilization (CLRM) Collaborative.

> **"Working in a small women's fund, I often felt that other people had all the answers. But the sharing of both success stories and unsuccessful experiences made me realize that they are all on this journey together and also helped build my self-confidence."**
>
> **Ecumenical Women's Initiative, Collaborative Learning on Resource Mobilization Collaborative.**

BOLSTERED RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS THE FEMINIST FUNDING ECOSYSTEM

Women's funds reported the following:
10. Transformed Power Dynamics and Increased Trust:

The work of the Collaboration Initiatives has contributed to more equitable relationships between partners, peers in the feminist funding ecosystem, and funders, shifting power dynamics to be more inclusive and collaborative and improving transparency around both successes and challenges encountered in partners' gender equality work.

- Women Win's participatory grantmaking processes were always reflective where concerns from the Advisory Committee members were embedded into all future processes. Women Win also systematized their PGM processes to provide guidance and clear examples to enable more consistency in the process and support reviewers to navigate their fears of being too lenient or strict when reviewing applications.

- The Feminist MEAL Collaboration Initiative recognized that participatory feminist MEAL is inherently relational and takes time to build trust. In their work together, they paid attention to power dynamics and sought to manage them transparently and transformatively, while also engaging in specific exercises grounded in asking participants to be vulnerable with

each other. These activities increased trust, enabled experimentation with flexible reporting approaches, produced stronger insights into partner work, and improved the understanding between women's funds and partners.

● The Feminist Funds Database Collaboration Initiatives reflected that the genuine peer-learning dynamic that they were able to foster was all the more extraordinary given that some of the larger members were funding partners of some of the smaller members. The practice of mutual resource allocation—where the funds collectively determined how to allocate the grant and also prioritized funding to the smaller funds—was important to the evolution of their relationships, culture, and practice.

11. Ongoing Relationships:

While the formal engagement period for the Collaboration Initiatives is coming to a close in mid-2025, there is evidence that some of the partners are continuing to work together, recognizing that their work continues to go further and farther when they collaborate. For example, there are reports of joint funding applications and ongoing peer support, including among operational staff who have benefited from being able to participate in collaborations—noting that these team members often do not have access to such opportunities.

A challenge we faced:

Although all funds are members of the Prospera INWF, not all knew each other and many had to spend time connecting and building relationships and trust. This slowed the process down, but was also important for building a foundation for the collaboration's work.

DEEPER STRATEGIC INSIGHTS ACROSS THE FEMINIST FUNDING ECOSYSTEM

Women's funds reported the following:

12. Strengthened Narrative Power and Advocacy:

Women's funds have strengthened their collective voices and strategic communications to shape narratives for gender equality and resource mobilization and influence the philanthropic sector.

- The two narrative power Collaboration Initiatives both reported improved strategizing, messaging, and communication with

- campaign planning and tactical tools to address backlash and oppose fake news and hate speech; and

- the development of a comprehensive communication strategy to shape and present the alliance's narrative.

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collaborations felt an **increased sense of solidarity** as a result of their interactions with each other.

13. Refined Understanding of Gender Equality:

The process of learning from each other and their movement partners has enhanced insights into gender equality changes and the contextual factors affecting them.

- The Feminist MEAL Collaborative Initiative process of collective sensemaking profoundly influenced the participants' understanding of the "what" and "how" of gender equality in each of their contexts.

14. Improved Insight Into Shared Challenges and Increased Sense of Confidence, Resilience, and Solidarity:

The opportunity to work together in the Collaboration Initiatives and the imperative to deepen the understanding of context and challenges provided women's funds with an improved understanding of shared challenges while also increasing a sense of resilience and solidarity, particularly among women's funds working in difficult contexts.

- Several Collaboration Initiatives had to navigate how to receive funds in the context of restrictions on foreign funding, which afforded women's funds with practical insight into the challenges of moving money and fostered creative solutions.

- Several women's funds, facing hostile external contexts, experienced individual and organizational support from their colleagues in the Collaboration Initiatives, contributing to a stronger sense of resilience and solidarity.

- Many of the Collaboration Initiatives reflected that their confidence in their own skills and knowledge improved, reducing their reliance on external consultants and improving their access to a network of peers to reach out to for assistance in problem-solving, confident that they would be talking with people who understand their work and contexts.

A challenge we faced:

Addressing needs emerging from shifting political contexts, including situations of conflict, war and related trauma, and financial restrictions that limited operations and grantmaking.

"Previously, I would present information to my board as a single voice, saying things like 'I think' or 'I know,' but now I can say, 'I heard from seven other sister funds, and this is what we are all experiencing.' This [mindset] has a very different impact and helps move my organization forward."

Women First International, Collaborative Learning on Resource Mobilization Collaborative.

While it is not within the scope of Fenomenal Funds to collect data on the work of women's funds' partners, the Learning Conversations did include some ad hoc, anecdotal evidence that pointed to changes in practice at the partner level, including transformative reconceptualizations of power and insights into gender equality change; practical experience using qualitative approaches to data collection and sensemaking; convenings by women's funds with their partners that contributed to new knowledge about collective care; and the strengthened capacity to write funding proposals as a result of being engaged in PGM.

"We always thought that solving certain problems required engaging consultants, but now we have learned to rely on the exchange of experiences and personal capacities within the collaborative."

Financial Resilience Collaborative.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE: SHIFTING TO STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE COLLABORATION

FIVE CRITICAL MINDSET SHIFTS TO LEVERAGE THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

1. Pooled, Flexible, Noncompetitive Funding Drives Results in Organizational Infrastructure Collaborations.

Our first mindset shift focused on the funding foundations of collaboration as a methodology to drive organizational infrastructure strengthening. Collaboration is in the DNA of our work, found in the pooled funding that birthed Fenomenal Funds. With the guidance of our shared governance model, we leveraged our combined resources into a flexible and noncompetitive approach to organizational infrastructure Collaboration Initiatives.

Flexibility from Fenomenal Funds has been a cornerstone of the approach during both conceptualization and implementation. Our flexible approach has supported partners to embrace experimentation, secure in the knowledge that we will not stand in the way of work evolving in a way that perhaps was not originally envisaged in the work plan.

The flexible approach is also just a very necessary part of working in a time characterized by persistent poly-crises. Over the course of the investment period, some partners experienced significant external disruptions that affected their capacity to engage with the Collaboration Initiatives. Flexible funding approaches enabled funders to respond to complex contexts in ways that do not add to the burdens already facing the partners.

We also recognized that collaboration would best be realized if our grantmaking round was noncompetitive. This means that our model for collaboration may not be applicable to all contexts, for example, open call grant rounds. But, in grant rounds working with a pre-existing set of movement actors or a grant round focused on movement building or place-based, multi-stakeholder initiatives, our model offers great benefits.

2. Multiyear Funding is Necessary to Ensure Spaciousness in Collaboration (and Delivers Stronger Outcomes).

The second mindset shift was related to the length of an investment. Organizational infrastructure collaborations require time—to evolve trust between partners, to accommodate multiple organizational rhythms/calendars into the process, and to support both the technical and the culture change components of adopting new systems and approaches.

Organizational infrastructure work can only succeed if you honestly interrogate the limitations of your current approaches. And you can only leverage the power of collaboration if you share those challenges openly and solve problems collectively. This requires trust, which in turn requires time. Trust is multifaceted. It is practical—grounded in doing the work. It is built consciously, strengthened through reflection and learning. And it requires spaciousness—to tend the relationships.

Organizational infrastructure strengthening is fundamentally connected to the organizational rhythms of work. Projects of this nature rely on

fallow periods where staff have the time and energy to identify challenges and co-create solutions. In a collaboration, developing a work plan that can integrate multiple organizational rhythms is even more complex an undertaking and part of the reason for multiyear funding being a more appropriate timeline.

Finally, organizations and their people need to have the bandwidth to adopt new systems or ways of working. Too often, organizational infrastructure projects focus only on the technical components, disregarding the people and culture shifts that will be necessary for successful implementation and failing to resource these periods of work. This is particularly the case where organizational infrastructure funding is attached to the technical components only. Multiyear funding is far more likely to be able to incorporate an adequate implementation period, with meaningful mechanisms for reflection and finessing.

3. Invest in Process and Co-Learning to Maximize Collaboration Impact.

The third mindset shift was to invest in process and co-learning as critical mechanisms to ensure that the Collaboration Initiatives maximize their impact. In this context, the process is an input, and funding is required for the activities that support collaborative work and the relationship building that enables trust

and powers effective collaborative practices, as well as supports a reconceptualization of accountability, learning, and reflection. The investment also needs to encompass the whole project cycle (see tip two in the next section for a more detailed consideration of the costs associated with the process).

4. Process Is a Collaboration Input, Output, and Outcome.

Critically, the fourth mindset shift was also about reconceptualizing the power dynamics and process of accountability and learning, alongside reframing what we understand as impact.

In the context of the Fenomenal Funds, while each project has delivered a range of individual or collective outputs (for example, new organizational policies, updated grantee databases, the evolution of participatory grantmaking practices, etc.), they have also delivered less tangible, yet nonetheless significant outputs associated with the methodology of collaboration. For example, partners reported shared opportunities for problem-solving, increased perceptions of solidarity, deepened relationships, increased appreciation of context, and insights into the diverse nature of gender equality change. To be able to document these types of outcomes requires a shift away from the traditional practices of (often quantitative) indicator reporting and the construct of accountability and learning as a necessary surveillance by the funder of the donor. This "power over" dynamic includes funding being withheld if the donor perceives that the indicators they have defined have not been achieved.

In contrast, co-learning aspires to a "power with" dynamic, where partners and donors generate genuine inquiries into the progress and challenges of the work. In particular, this approach seeks to generate sufficient trust to be able to unpack the internal and external dynamics of partners that may positively or negatively impact the Collaboration Initiative. This is particularly important during periods of crisis or in instances of ongoing repression/oppression. Co-learning as the dominant relational dynamic between funder and partner requires bandwidth and resources for both sides and reorients the relationship from surveillance towards mutual respect and a commitment to driving change.

Co-learning seeks to explore the "so what" of more traditional "what" lists of indicators (i.e., "what": this collaboration shall produce one kit and host three meetings; "so what": as a result of this kit and three meetings xyz happened and abc changed). This type of approach to learning and accountability supports partners to develop creative, context-specific, and collaborative solutions that draw on learning insights.

Co-learning relies on trust flowing between participants, opening up the space to reflect both on what worked well and what didn't work as expected. Too often, the frank consideration of "failures" results in partners being punished, with funding being withheld, delayed, or reduced. Co-learning infuses reflection with a peer energy, a sharing among equals, that facilitates creative, relevant solutions.

The insights gained from our Learning Conversations demonstrate that women's funds were able to achieve more through collaboration and that the strengthening of the organizational infrastructure meaningfully contributed to women's funds better meeting the needs of movements for gender justice. In our view, investing in collaboration is an efficient and effective use of organizational infrastructure funds.

5. Self-Direction Leads to Better Collaborations.

Our fifth mindset shift was our recognition of the importance of collaborations being self-directed and responsive to the specific contexts of the partners. Our Advisory Committee and Steering Committee set the broad direction: invest in collaborative organizational infrastructure initiatives and leverage the support of facilitators in the Collaboration Labs. But the scope of the focus areas and specifics of each collaboration were very much determined by the partners.

While our fiscal sponsor had a high-level budget template that we used in the final stages of planning, the Collaboration Labs did not require particular templates to be used. This required a mutual journey of "unlearning" for all stakeholders. Clear explanations of the objectives and activities of each phase were vital. Partners also reflected that access to the process needed to be simple and well explained. This had to be supported by clear communication, set templates, and calm repetition. Our "**Discover**, **Define**, and **Refine**" approach[19] provided partners with the opportunity to properly explore the work they could do together. There are rich lessons from this process.[20]

The majority of collaborations specifically mentioned **the key role coordinators played** in moving the group's learning forward.

2 groups specifically stated that finding and hiring a coordinator was a **pivotal moment** for their groups success.

19 See "Discover": **https://fenomenalfunds.org/grantmaking/collaboration-grants/discover/**; see "Define": **https://fenomenalfunds.org/grantmaking/collaboration-grants/define/**; see "Refine": **https://fenomenalfunds.org/grantmaking/collaboration-grants/refine/**

20 See the "Fenomenal Funds Collaboration Toolkit": **https://fenomenalfunds.org/grantmaking/collaboration-grants/tools-resources/**

SIX PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FUNDERS INVESTING IN COLLABORATION

We have distilled our practical guidance into six tips:

1. Stretch Yourself in Determining Whether Your Funding Is Suitable for This Approach.

- Determine whether the movement or issue you are focused on is suited to self-directed, noncompetitive, collaboratively focused grantmaking.

- Also, consider the commonalities and differences among your potential partners and reflect on how they could find shared objectives and manage power dynamics. For example, in our Collaboration Initiatives, partners ranged from global and large to national and small. Recognize that partners could derive different benefits from participation and value that diversity. In this context, trying to define a single quantitative measure to define the benefit is reductive and undermines the power of the collaboration.

- Be open to approaches that you would not normally consider and be creative in the ways you scope the potential for collaboration and the identification of movement partners. It is important to acknowledge that stretching requires thoughtfulness, time, and resources and is often actually quite hard work.

It is important to acknowledge that stretching requires thoughtfulness, time, and resources and is often actually quite hard work.

2. Fully and Flexibly Fund Both the Processes and Activities of an Organizational Infrastructure Collaboration.

● Collaboration thrives with unrestricted funding. This is particularly important for intermediary funds that are often required to direct all funding into programmatic activities at the expense of investing in efficient organizational infrastructure, which increases the effectiveness of their movement support activities.

● It is important to fully fund both the processes and activities in an organizational infrastructure collaboration, what we think of as "collaboration infrastructure." This applies to both the partners in the collaborations and your own team and during the establishment and implementation phases. Budget items you could expect to see include the following:

  ● Interpretation and translation services to enable participation and realize language justice.

  ● Design phase expenses for the collaborating partners, including

    ○ facilitators and documenters to accompany the process and

    ○ funding to support staff participation in the process, i.e., to backfill the team member to release their time into the process.

● Implementation phase expenses for the collaborating partners, including

  ○ Meeting expenses to enable relationship building, project planning, substantive discussions, and reflection and learning activities. Several of the Collaboration Initiatives noted that in-person meetings were pivot points: deepening collective knowledge, powering momentum, and supporting the distillation of learnings.

  ○ Regranting funds or giving remuneration to movement partners if they are being asked to share knowledge/insights, pilot approaches, or implement activities.

  ○ Engagement of subject matter, technical experts, or consultants to undertake specific activities, as well as facilitation and coordination support for the project. The latter was a particularly important resource, with one Collaboration Initiative that engaged a coordinator partway through the process reflecting that their work progressed more swiftly and meaningfully once that role was in place.

  ○ Funding to support staff participation in the project, i.e., to backfill the team member to release their time into the project.

  ○ Infrastructure investments—physical, such as land, or material, such as software systems.

- Collaboration infrastructure also includes the time investment of your team in building relationships and accompanying Collaboration Initiatives as they navigate external and internal challenges.

- Collaboration infrastructure also covers knowledge and advice to establish a thriving Collaboration Initiative, for example, protocols for decision-making, processes for co-design, examples of learning frameworks, etc.

- Flexibility is particularly important in these times of complex and constant change. Ensuring that partners have maximum flexibility in the framing of their work and their iterative amendments as they encounter internal or external challenges, or as they discover an area of work that they want to more fully explore, is mutually beneficial. In particular, minimizing the administrative impost of course correction is useful for both partner and funder, enabling resources to be redirected to, for example, conversational models of learning and reflection.

- As the movement of money becomes increasingly restricted, flexibility is also important across the life of the project to enable partners to address changes in financial regulations and requirements. Recognize that it may be necessary to alter organizational and financial arrangements over the course of a multiyear contract.

- Flexibility also applies to your own organizational processes—in our case, our planned grantmaking approach fundamentally pivoted as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A challenge we faced:

Finding in-country technical experts for support on topics such as narrative construction, financial resilience, resource mobilization, and database development.

3. Consciously Engage with the Power Dynamics Involved in the Collaboration.

● The "Ten Practices to Drive Effective Collaboration" offers important perspectives on power dynamics (both positive and negative) in collaboration.

● But there are also practical steps that donors can take to mitigate inequities in collaboration. For example, our facilitators were encouraged to consciously work with power structures and manage conflict with care. As a global initiative, we tried to consider issues of time zone justice (in which certain geographies are perpetually asked to get up at 2 a.m. to join a call) and language justice (in which the failure to resource interpretation in multilingual settings results in participation being easier for some people and more difficult for others). We also tried to move beyond practical adjustments to political analysis—noticing whose knowledge traditions we were drawing from in framing our calls or designs and considering how to reassert the power of marginal voices.

4. Embrace the Opportunity for Unlearning and Shifting Away from Harmful Funding Practices.

● Accompany movement partners in the "unlearning" process of self-directed collaborative work. It takes time and effort to move beyond the templates and rigid formats of traditional grant applications and budget tools and to explore the potential of an extended design phase. And it takes consideration to navigate when to offer advice, particularly to those who are newer to collaboration, and to do so in a peer-based rather than hierarchical manner.

5. Embed Responsiveness and Flexibility Into Your Relationships with Movement Partners.

● At various points in both the Collaboration Labs process and the Collaboration Initiatives, the Fenomenal Funds embraced responsiveness and flexibility to great effect. Partners were able to shift budget lines and deliverables in response to emerging learnings. Partners consistently commented that this approach enabled them to achieve stronger outcomes than if they had been required to follow the roadmap set out at the start of the project.

6. Embrace a Continuous Cycle of Participatory and Collaborative Learning.

- Embrace a continuous cycle of participatory learning[21] (within the collaborations, across the collaborations, and between yourself and movement partners). This requires a fundamental mindset shift from monitoring and evaluation based on surveillance to accountability and learning based on trust. Fenomenal Funds received universal feedback that the Learning Conversations had enabled deeper insights to emerge within the collaborations and were a welcome redirection of energy.

- Participants also reflected on the focus of the learning—that by bringing attention to the "so what" as much as the "what," they were able to gain more strategic insights into their work. This applies to the process of collaboration and the focus of the collaborations. For example, the collaboration on feminist healing reflected that "healing" is seldom linear or able to be rendered into a quantitative account of "one person healed."

This requires a fundamental mindset shift from monitoring and evaluation based on surveillance to accountability and learning based on trust.

21 See the Fenomenal Funds "Learning Strategy":
https://fenomenalfunds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Fenomenal-Funds-Learning-Strategy.pdf

TEN PRACTICES TO DRIVE EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

In each Learning Conversation with the Collaboration Initiatives, we asked the partners to reflect on what they were learning about collaboration — either through their practices with each other or in their relationships with Fenomenal Funds. Their insights have been augmented by our own reflections and distilled into these ten practices, which we share for organizations who are keen to boost collaboration outputs and outcomes. We have framed these observations constructively, but our insights are drawn from the reflections on both what worked well and the challenges we encountered.

1. Be Intentional About Collaboration,
Taking the Time to Explore the Many Ways a Collaborative Ethos Might Shift Practices and Relationships.

- From the outset of Fenomenal Funds, we have gone back to the drawing board and considered how a collaborative ethos can inform our processes and structures.

- We endeavored to embed collaboration at all levels—from governance to operations and in all our practices.

- Our Advisory Committee set the vision for our approach, giving rise to the Collaboration Labs, discussed above. The collaborative ethos infused all stages of this work—from the allocation of facilitators, documenters, and interpreters in the initial phases to the peer feedback provided by the Advisory Committee on a "take it or leave it" basis.

- We encouraged partners to extend the invitation to engage in the Collaboration Initiatives to all staff, not just the programmatic staff, and we provided translation and interpretation services to support their participation.

- Our Emergent Learning Framework and our focus on conversational co-learning is another way in which we embraced a collaborative ethos. This was enabled by embracing flexibility: maximizing partner authority to course correct with minimal administrative burden meant that we could bring our attention to a more resource-intensive approach to accountability and learning.

- We have continued to evolve our practices based on insights offered by the partners in each round of the Learning Conversations. These have informed the articulation of the remaining nine practices we share in this report.

"Non-English speakers were able to participate, which isn't always the case. It also allowed everyone to communicate in their preferred language, making it easier for all participants."

Mediterranean Women's Fund, Feminist Leadership in Organizational Development Collaborative.

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collaborations that budgeted and held in-person meetings felt that these **meetings were essential** to their working relationship and were a key success factor.

"Note-takers and interpreters contributed greatly to the quality of the meeting. Non-English speakers were able to participate, which isn't always the case. It also allowed everyone to communicate in their preferred language, making it easier for all participants."

Mediterranean Women's Fund, Feminist Leadership and Organizational Development in Women's Funds Collaborative

2. Invest in Relationship Building
Working with the Joy and Creativity of Connection.

"The really transformative power of trust that Fenomenal Funds showed to the funds then transferred to our partners... [they] keep telling us that when this genuine atmosphere of trust is established, so many things are happening without fear of being monitored and controlled all the time, and people are relaxed and doing so much better. So many amazing things are happening. It's really important, despite everything, to keep believing in each other and trusting each other from a very genuine place."

Women's Fund Armenia, On the Right Track (OTRT) Building Networks in Latin America and Europe for Democracy and Human Rights.

- All the Collaboration Initiatives reflected on the importance of relationship building—in particular, trust building—as a core strategy of their collaborations. Even where relationships were pre-existing, the type of collaboration envisaged necessitated the allocation of care and time to build or orient the relationship in service of the collaboration.

- Trust-building approaches included the following:
  - Conscious discussions at the start in which participants unpacked their understanding of collaboration and set guidelines for working together effectively. These discussions and agreements evolved, adapting to practical needs and changing circumstances.

- Creative storytelling activities in which participants established immediate and strong bonds of trust by sharing deeply vulnerable personal stories.

- Trust-based cooperation, with a focus on meaningful discussions to unpack power, was augmented by bringing care, empathy, and understanding to learning about each other's contexts and situations. This Collaboration Initiative also invested time to work on their own healing as part of the process.

- Preliminary conversations unpacked key terms and shared values, which enabled people to become more relaxed with each other and supported creative connections, which then enabled the shift to discuss outcomes.

- It is also important to pay attention to the impact of real and perceived breaches of trust. When relationship building has been built into the process, a subsequent action or way of behaving can then be more damaging to the individual or organization.

- Collaboration Initiatives also called in joy—for example, integrating joy into their framing of sustainable feminist activism and convening activist spaces as part of the collaborative work. (Collective Care Infrastructure - Urgent Action Sister Funds)

  - Conversely, one participant reflected that their work would have been better supported if they had "celebrated small wins and found joy during long processes of transformation."

- Celebrating small wins and finding the joy of that momentary pause - is also important as a tool for persistence during long processes of transformation.

3. Articulate Shared Objectives
That Connect the Organizational Infrastructure Focus to Strengthening Organizations and Movements to Advance Social Change.

- Several of the Collaboration Initiatives alluded to the connections between their collaborative focus and the bigger objectives of social change. This was a motivating force in negotiating their work together. Some examples include the following:

  - One Collaboration Initiative noted that finding common ground takes time and care, deep listening, and compromise, but it is necessary to frame shared initiatives.

  - Another partner flagged the importance of the vision for long-term impact inherent in these collaborative grants. She noted that in their collaboration from the beginning, there was a focus on ensuring that the outcomes would extend beyond just setting up their own organizational infrastructure— it would serve a broader network and have lasting effects.

4. Build Power Literacy
to Navigate Challenges and Practice Power Sharing.

- Being able to observe, name, and address power dynamics is critical to successful collaboration.

- This can be difficult as everyone's understanding and experience of power differs, and power literacy is not universal.

- There are a range of power dynamics that can impact collaborations, including those that arise from differences in the size of the fund, scope of work, geography, language, access to technology, and external contextual factors.

5. Collectivize Knowledge and Risks,
Leveraging Collective Wisdom and Shared Experience.

- All the Collaboration Initiatives reflected on the absolute benefit of being able to collectivize their knowledge to expand understanding, challenge ideas and preconceptions, find solutions to difficulties, and create new ways of working. The Collaboration Initiatives generated collective wisdom and a shared experience that participants could recall and use for contextually grounded problem-solving and also increased individual confidence in their own skills and knowledge.

- The benefit of sharing risk was also elaborated by one of the Collaboration Initiatives that reflected that collaborations help reduce risk by pooling experience and collective wisdom. Collaborations break down silos, prevent duplication, and underscore the importance of investing in collaborative infrastructure, like interpreters, documenters, or facilitators, to ensure accessibility and effective grantmaking processes.

6. Embrace Flexibility and Plurality;
## They Contain Strength and Potential.

- All of the collaborations spoke of the strength of Fenomenal Funds' flexible approach to delivering stronger results from their work. Being able to easily shift the parameters of their collaboration to respond to emerging insights enabled deeper learning. One partner reflected that "if they had just 'chased the deliverables,' there would have been significant gaps in their understanding."

- The Fenomenal Funds flexibility fostered a culture where partners felt free to express their needs, for example to request extensions and to share honestly about the challenges they encountered. In turn, this influenced relationships within the Collaboration Initiatives and opened the space for partners to reflect realistically on their capacity.

- Nonetheless, constraints on participation due to staff turnover, other organizational priorities, or external contextual challenges were a persistent challenge among the Collaboration Initiatives and required immediate and focused problem-solving, infused with grace and compassion.

- The diverse organizational and geo-political contexts also made flexibility and plurality a must and pointed to the importance of establishing realistic expectations around conceptual and operational convergences and divergences. Failure to do so resulted in frustration, unrealistic expectations and objectives, and diminished outputs.

- The flexibility Fenomenal Funds offered to adjust budgets via email was welcomed as a great practice. The capacity to engage in frank discussions related to resource limitations—commonly in the context of translation and interpretation expenses or meeting expenses (associated with significant increases in travel costs post-Covid-19)—and the ability to resolve them was also critical to enabling collaborations to continue.

- Additionally, the process of collaboration opened up the potential of plurality—of solutions, tools, and approaches—and in doing so, the collaborations prioritized locally nuanced and responsive mechanisms that drove stronger results. Some examples include the following:

  - The Feminist MEAL Collaboration Initiative experienced this in their "Approach and Way" tool—which each fund and set of partners used as the starting point for their own data collection processes. Being able to shift to elaborate data collection tools that resonated in their own contexts was critical to the successful story gathering in each community.

  - One of the resource mobilization initiatives found progress in failure. They had come into the process anticipating that it would be quite possible to establish a grand, unifying narrative. But in reality, there were very important differences in context that necessitated nuanced messaging. The answer to successful resource mobilization was found in embracing plurality.

7. Navigate Clarity and Complexity and Expect That "Things" Might Get Messy.

- A few of the Collaboration Initiatives reflected that coordination across different regions and languages was made more manageable by Fenomenal Funds' flexibility, the Collaboration Labs' support, the hiring of coordinators, and in-person meetings.

- Collaboration is an iterative process, so coming to clarity on project objectives and budgets was messy. Cultivating an attitude of embracing both clarity and complexity simultaneously was a valuable mindset for partners embarking on collaborations.
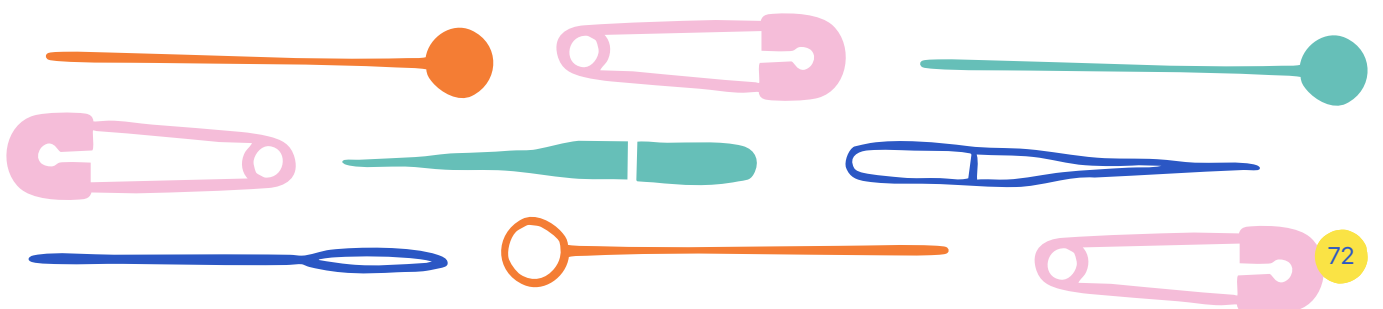
8. Challenge Assumptions
to Unpack Limiting ideas that Inhibit Reimagining Organizational Processes.

- One of the primary drivers of a successful collaboration is the capacity to shift perspectives based on new information. Having the time to unpack ways of work afforded the funds the opportunity to both do a stock take of current approaches and then reimagine the process in an evidence-rich collaborative environment. Furthermore, they were also able to draw on the collective brain trust to address challenges and limitations encountered in their piloting of these new approaches.

9. Leverage the Power of Reflection,
Including Unlearning the Drive for Perfection.

- Collaboration Initiatives were in accord that the Learning Conversations and Fishbowl Conversations were an absolute highlight of the Fenomenal Funds' approach to MEAL. The Learning Conversations were great opportunities to synthesize insights within the Collaboration Initiatives—providing a communal, iterative point of reflection, while also sparking reflections at the individual level about the personal skills and knowledge gained. The Fishbowl Conversations enabled participants to hear directly from their colleagues, ask follow-up questions in real time, and explore synergies between the initiatives.

- Challenging the fixation on success and encouraging questions that explore what can be learned from what worked and what didn't work as expected is critical to feminist MEAL. The participants noticed that the dominance of "cultures of success"—among grantee partners and donors alike—made it difficult to gather data on things that didn't work as expected.

10. Allocate Resources to Enable Equitable Participation by All.

- Finally, Collaboration Initiatives stressed the importance of embedding accessibility into their processes, carefully resourcing context-specific language justice and disability accommodations, and ensuring affordable, reliable internet. Straightforward solutions were key for those without access.

- In the context of interpretation and translation, this was both a practical necessity and a political imperative. Beyond enabling equitable participation, language justice often strengthened the work itself. For instance, in one multilingual Collaboration Initiative, as partners worked on a "reflection tool" the process of relay interpretation combined with the process of translation of key instructions in the reflection tool, would often reveal limits in the original proposal put by the facilitators. It would also draw out the distinctiveness of concepts within languages/cultures, and point to the way in which the English language was being privileged as the conceptual foundation of the tools.

COLLABORATIVE INSIGHTS:
WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

An integral component of Fenomenal Funds has been to strengthen the feminist funding ecosystem, and in this section of the report, we offer some of the substantive insights evolved by the Collaboration Initiatives into their specific areas of focus.

The observations are offered for two parties: those wanting to embark on organizational strengthening themselves (insights for women's funds and other funds) and those with the inclination to fund this type of work (insights for donors).

What follows are the "headlines" that capture the insights generated by this particular constellation of actors. We do not hold these reflections out as a comprehensive "how to" for any area of organizational infrastructure strengthening work. But they do represent a particular knowledge set that may be of use. Sitting behind each "headline" is a deeper analysis that will be accessible on our website by May 2025.

INSIGHTS INTO FEMINIST DATABASES

Insights for Women's Funds and Other Funds

1. Meet collaborators as peers regardless of information technology (IT) expertise.

2. Collaboration on an IT project is greatly aided by flexible resources.

3. Collaborations thrive with generosity and flexibility

4. Regular meetings maintain momentum.

5. Flexible work plans are grounded in organizational work rhythms.

6. Access to in-house expertise makes life easier, and peer collaborations are beneficial to IT developers.

7. Customization takes time.

8. Mindset shifts and an invested organizational culture are crucial to fully leveraging the database system.

9. Security concerns are real.

Insights for Donors

1. Flexible funding is important for tech projects.

2. "De-silo" thinking to recognize the broader organizational benefits of strengthening IT systems.

3. Resource people to support IT collaboration

4. Perseverance is vital to recoup sunk costs in IT projects.

INSIGHTS INTO FEMINIST MEAL

Insights for Women's Funds and Other Funds

1. Put participants at the center as experts and owners of the process.

2. Recognize the importance of supporting individual and organizational mindset shifts to center participants and shift focus to accountability and learning.

3. Bring greater focus to the "A" (accountability) and "L" (learning) of MEAL.

4. Integrate opportunities for trust building and vulnerability throughout a MEAL process to enable more robust sharing of views

5. Embrace participatory methods.

6. Embrace collective sensemaking and challenge the fixation on success.

7. Pursue a shift to an organizational MEAL culture

8. Frame MEAL practices in care and justice.

Insights for Donors

1. Feminist MEAL values contextual local knowledge and can recast power dynamics and relationships.

2. Collaboratively developed tools have wider applications.

3. Flexibility and language justice are paramount.

INSIGHTS INTO PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING

Insights for Women's Funds and Other Funds

1. A shift to PGM requires careful consideration of philosophical alignment and resourcing capacity.

2. Reconfiguring power dynamics is a fundamental component of PGM.

3. Your PGM approach should be well-documented.

4. PGM should only be implemented if you have sufficient resources.

5. PGM does not have to be universally applied to your grantmaking.

6. Embedding accessibility is a must.

7. Find the best fit for your needs regarding models, resources, and security considerations.

Insights for Donors

1. PGM and collaboration for PGM thrive with sufficient and flexible funding.

2. PGM is context-specific and flexible.

3. Donors can play important roles in PGM processes.

4. Invest in the development of a fit-for-purpose IT platform.

INSIGHTS INTO NARRATIVE CHANGE

Insights for Women's Funds and Other Funds

1. Navigating politics and power with apatience and trust are critical to narrative collaborations.

2. Crafting powerful narratives for transformative political projects is hard to outsource.

3. Politicized regional collaboration and coordination go hand in hand.

Insights for Donors

1. Resourcing relationships, regranting, expanding regional reach, and encouraging interconnection drive effective narrative collaborations.

INSIGHTS INTO ORGANIZATIONAL FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

INSIGHTS INTO FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Insights for Women's Funds and Other Funds

1. Recognize the power of peer expertise and move away from the dependence on consultants

2. Embrace an expansive, values-based, connected, and contextual definition of financial resilience

3. Financial resilience requires investment in technical tools and training.

Insights for Donors

1. Recognize and remedy the chronic underfunding of operational expenses and value the investment in organizational infrastructure.

2. Collaborations need to move from learning to supported implementation.

3. Back the project with expertise, either internal or external.

4. In multilingual groups, interpretation and translation are vital.

INSIGHTS INTO RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Insights for Women's Funds and Other Funds

1. Messaging and language must be tailored to the target audience.

2. Articulating clear and concrete requests is essential.

3. Resource mobilization with corporations requires strategy, investment, and knowledge building.

4. To nurture collaboration over competition, it is essential to have intentional and thoughtful decision-making.

Insights for Donors

1. Relationship building and accompaniment are an antidote to competition.

2. Flexibility delivers stronger projects.

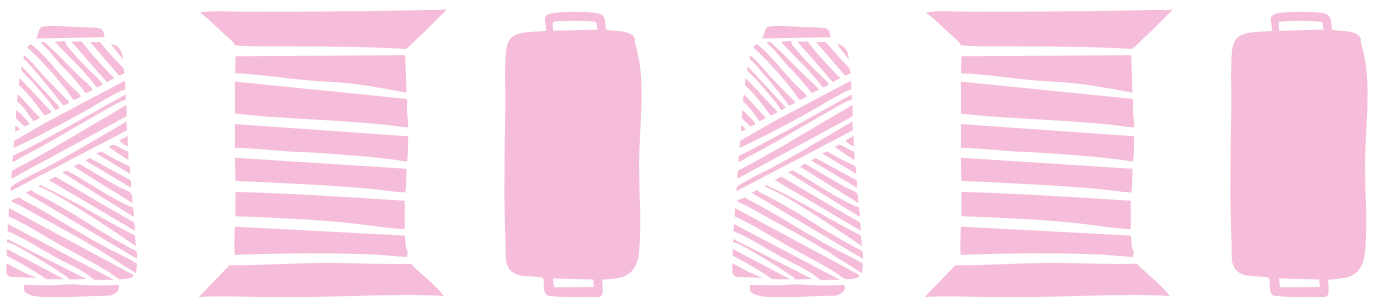# INSIGHTS INTO ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS AND PRACTICES
INSIGHTS INTO COLLECTIVE CARE

Insights for Women's Funds and Other Funds

1. Naming and framing are always political and an important starting point for any collaboration on this topic.

2. Collective care is deeply political and inherently contextual.

3. Women's funds collective care work is both internally and externally focused.

4. The infrastructure of collective care takes on many forms and engages new actors.

5. Collective care challenges the narratives of self-sacrifice and interrogates guilt.

6. Collective care is not a panacea for the increasingly difficult context of activist work.

7. Collective care requires advocacy and funding.

Insights for Donors

1. Flexible funding to support collaboration, activities, and infrastructure is critical.

2. Leverage social capital to power relationship building.

3. Learning conversations generate new insights among collaborative participants.

4. MEAL focused on "tangible results" run counter to nonlinear experiences of healing.

5. Nondirective budget guidance could be helpful for those new to collaboration.

INSIGHTS INTO FEMINIST LEADERSHIP AND FEMINIST ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (OD)

Insights for Women's Funds and Other Funds

1. Integrate power sharing and power analysis into leadership and organizational practice.

2. Reflection and learning drive feminist OD.

3. Care grounds feminist OD.

4. Diverse staff teams require political and practical commitment.

5. Collaboration is a constructive tool in feminist OD.

6. Collaboration for feminist OD requires resourcing.

Insights for Donors

1. Investing in feminist OD strengthens programmatic outputs.

2. Integrating a commitment to reflection, learning, and political analysis is critical to advancing decolonial feminist OD.

3. Funding for accompaniment and reflective leadership during transition periods can support the evolution of feminist organizational leadership and practices.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS: INVESTING IN COLLABORATION DELIVERS LASTING IMPACTS

Through our Learning Conversations and documented experiences of women's funds, we have gathered substantial evidence that collaborative approaches to organizational infrastructure strengthening deliver remarkable results.

The Collaboration Initiatives have strengthened organizational systems and practices while transforming how women's funds engage with and support grassroots gender justice movements.

Our findings demonstrate that investing in collaborative organizational infrastructure

- leverages collective wisdom to produce more effective tools and approaches for strengthening organizational resilience;

- releases organizational resources for strategic work through improved systems and practices;

- deepens trust and relationships across the feminist funding ecosystem;

- strengthens organizational resilience/stability through shared learning and distributed risks; and

- enables knowledge sharing and mutual support that continues beyond the funding period.

Specifically in transforming support to grassroots movements, women's funds have reflected that they are now

- better able to serve movement partners' needs, as reported by 12 of the 15 Collaboration Initiatives;

- more effective in building open and responsive relationships with movement partners;

- better positioned to strengthen their grantmaking practices through shared learning; and

- more capable of developing context-specific solutions through cross-regional collaboration.

The practical guidance distilled in this report—from critical mindset shifts to implementation strategies—offers evidence-based pathways for funders seeking to maximize their investments in intermediary funds and grassroots activism. Our experience shows that when funders embrace flexibility, trust, and collaborative approaches, they can unlock the transformative potential that transcends the limitations of traditional transaction-based, individual-organization funding models.

For donors working through intermediary funds to support systems change, collaborative organizational infrastructure initiatives represent a proven and promising investment approach. As the complexity of global challenges intensifies, these strengthened organizational capacities and deepened relationships across the feminist funding ecosystem become increasingly vital to sustaining transformative social change.

When funders embrace flexibility, trust, and collaborative approaches, they can unlock the transformative potential that transcends the limitations of traditional funding models.

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