



Healing as a means of resistance

The Feminist Healing Spaces collaboration group

Feminist Healing Spaces

- › Case study focus: Collaboration Grant
- › Number of participating women’s funds: Three
- › Participating women’s funds: FemFund Poland, Women’s Fund Armenia, Women’s Fund in Georgia
- › Geographical focus: Eastern Europe/Central Asia
- › Focus of the collaboration group: Promoting healing as a political, collective, and intergenerational process as a part of the feminist funding ecosystem

Executive summary

What does feminist healing have to do with political turbulence and war? Or with providing financial sustainability to the feminist movement and the fight for gender justice? These are some of the questions that the Feminist Healing Spaces collaboration group—comprising FemFund Poland, Women’s Fund Armenia, and Women’s Fund in Georgia—set out to examine with the support of Fenomenal Funds’ Collaboration Grant. They recognize that feminist healing is a way to address the long-term negative impacts created by conflict or financial scarcity, which is the reality for many organizations working on gender equality, and that addressing this at the root is necessary to ensure the wellbeing and sustainability of the women’s movement.

As such, the collaboration group embodies a pioneering approach to feminist resilience through collective healing. Its initiative highlighted the importance of collective care, healing, and solidarity in navigating complex political contexts—from the shrinking democratic spaces in Poland to post-war recovery in Armenia and legislative challenges and eventual political upheaval in Georgia. In a global context of heightened backlash against feminist movements, their collaboration underscores the transformative potential of healing as both a response to trauma and a strategy for systemic resilience.

Often conflated with individual self-care, the group redefined feminist healing as a political, collective, and intergenerational process rooted in feminist values, moving beyond neoliberal and individualistic frameworks of bubble baths and yoga.

In this redefined understanding, healing becomes an act of resistance—a way to reclaim power, solidarity, and agency within feminist movements. However, this does not mean that the work done by the collaboration group did not have practical outcomes. With the help of the Collaboration Grant it established autonomous physical spaces, owned and under the women’s funds’ control, where they could meet with their grantee partners and other activists.

Having an actual place of your own, that offers a physically safe environment for processing trauma, building solidarity together, or just catching your breath—especially in times of conflict—cannot be underestimated.

Internally, the grant was used to implement internal structural reforms, such as shorter work weeks, comprehensive health coverage, and reserve funds—linking financial sustainability with cultural shifts that prioritize wellbeing. These measures not only strengthened the three funds but legitimized healing as a funding priority, challenging the traditional philanthropic focus on immediate crises and paving the way for longer-term donor support.

Through this collaboration, the funds amplified transnational feminist solidarity, creating connections across networks of women’s funds and grantee partners. By prioritizing healing, the Feminist Healing Spaces group demonstrates that addressing trauma is not only essential for individual activists, but central to sustaining and strengthening feminist movements globally.

Introduction

This case study examines the work of the Feminist Healing Spaces collaboration group, an initiative funded by Fenomenal Funds’ Collaboration Grant. Launched in 2021, the collaboration unites FemFund Poland, Women’s Fund Armenia, and Women’s

Fund in Georgia in their shared focus on local healing practices. Recognizing the critical role that healing justice and collective care play in sustaining feminist movements—particularly in politically and socially turbulent contexts—the group aims

to operationalize healing more broadly within the ecosystem of women's funds, their partners, and feminist activists.

The funds define healing as a political, collective, and intergenerational process, and have embedded collective care into their organizational practices and collaborative initiatives with the aim of extending their efforts to the broader ecosystem of women's funds.

Here, we highlight how the Fenomenal Funds' Collaboration Grant has strengthened the resilience of these three women's funds by supporting them in centring and politicizing the concept and practice of healing. It also explores the broader contributions of this collaboration group to the feminist and women's funds ecosystem, focusing on four key findings that have driven this transformation:

- 1. Prioritizing healing as central to feminist work and feminist funding:** Emphasizing its foundational role in sustaining movements and fostering feminist resilience;

- 2. Redefining healing as a political act:** Moving beyond individual and neoliberal frameworks to embrace healing as a collective and systemic practice;
- 3. Implementing healing in practice:** Translating the concept into tangible actions, such as creating physical spaces and integrating care into organizational structures;
- 4. Spreading healing across the ecosystem:** Sharing lessons, resources, and solidarity to inspire and support other women's funds and their grantee partners.

The case study ends with a conclusion exploring how healing and care have been successfully integrated into feminist funding practices. Finally, it outlines how the collaboration group plans to sustain and expand its transformative work.

Uses and effects of the Collaboration Grant

Prioritizing healing in feminist work and funding

The Feminist Healing Spaces collaboration group has played a pivotal role in prioritizing healing within feminist work and funding, challenging the traditional frameworks that often overlook the importance of healing justice and collective care in times of crisis. Healing was already an essential focus for the three women's funds prior to the group's formation, as they had long recognized its importance—especially in **regions marked by political instability, conflict, and repression**.

The Fenomenal Funds' Collaboration Grant provided the collaboration group with the rare opportunity to elevate this often-sidelined issue within feminist

movements. The grant assisted the member funds in conceptualizing healing as an integral part of feminist work and gave them the space to implement it within their organizations, with their grantee partners, and across the broader ecosystem of women's funds. As one member stated:

"Core funding provided the freedom to dream, and dreaming is something we're always short on."

In the context of feminist movements worldwide, where resources are often stretched thin and immediate political crises take precedence, the recognition of healing as a core element of movement-building offers a transformative perspective. For many women's funds, **healing and**

care are too often deprioritized in favour of survival tactics, with the pressures of activism and the need for crisis response overshadowing the wellbeing of those involved in the work. The collaboration group's efforts to integrate healing into its organizational practices and funding strategies challenge this paradigm, signalling to donors and activists alike that **healing is not a luxury** or secondary concern but a critical part of sustaining resilient feminist movements. By centring collective care and healing in its work, the group has set a new precedent for how feminist funding can be better aligned with the long-term wellbeing of individuals, organizations, and the communities they serve.

Redefining healing as a political act

This collaboration group has significantly contributed to the redefinition and re-politicization of healing. In many contemporary discourses, healing is commodified and depoliticized, often reduced to a tool for individual self-care and personal wellbeing, detached from the systemic forces that perpetuate harm. However, the Feminist Healing Spaces group has actively worked to shift the conversation, positioning healing as a political, collective, and intergenerational process. For the group, healing is not a response to individual trauma alone but a collective endeavour that must address the roots of oppression, exploitation, and violence. In this redefined understanding, healing becomes an act of resistance—a way to reclaim power, solidarity, and agency within feminist movements.

This redefinition of healing also marks a departure from the individualistic, short-term approaches that are often found in neoliberal frameworks.

Rather than focusing on quick fixes or personal resilience as a means of surviving systemic injustice, the group has advocated for a long-term, collective approach that fosters sustainable change and transformation within feminist movements.

This perspective emphasizes the importance of creating spaces where healing is not just about recuperation, but about building a movement rooted in care, solidarity, and shared responsibility. By re-politicizing healing, the collaboration group has broadened the concept's scope, ensuring that healing practices are understood as integral to feminist movement-building rather than peripheral or secondary concerns. Its focus on collective care as a central tenet aligns with a vision of a feminist future in which healing, justice, and solidarity are foundational to feminist organizing and movement-building and not just reactionary responses to crises.

Putting healing into practice

Besides redefining, collectivizing, and re-politicizing healing, the Feminist Healing Spaces collaboration group has actively transformed these conceptual changes into concrete actions. Understanding that healing must be integrated into the everyday work of feminist organizations, the group focused on creating physical spaces dedicated to collective care and trauma response.

The group defines healing as a political, collective, and systemic journey.

‘Building on the work of countless movements, organizations, and feminists who have contributed to the concept of healing justice, we define healing as a political, collective, and intergenerational process. This process aims to challenge and dismantle the neoliberal, individualistic views of resilience and wellbeing. We see healing as holistic, systemic, and intersectional, recognizing that our traumas and oppressions stem from capitalist, racist, and individualistic neoliberal structures that are deeply interconnected. For us, healing is not just a political act, but also a collective practice that can transform the impacts of oppression on our bodies, hearts, and minds, while fostering a culture of regeneration, growth, and renewal.’

Healing is not an abstract, individual pursuit, but a collective process that requires tangible and safe environments in which to foster connection, empowerment, and long-term wellbeing. These spaces serve as physical, safe retreats in times of turbulence and conflict, where staff, activists, and feminist partners can come together. As the owners of these spaces, the women's funds can control the use of them and mitigate the risks of intrusions.

For Women's Fund in Georgia, having a physical space has been a priority for over a decade, and it already had one established. Meanwhile, FemFund Poland was in the process of acquiring land when the collaboration began, and Women's Fund Armenia, leveraging resources from both the Resilience and Collaboration Grants, successfully acquired a dedicated space at which human rights defenders and other activists could gather. The plans are to extend its use to activists across the region.

By embedding healing into their organizational culture and practices, the funds ensure that collective care is prioritized as a critical component of their work. All three have implemented diverse internal structural changes, such as adopting a four-day work week, ensuring healthcare coverage for all staff, institutionalizing the role of an organizational cultural development manager, ensuring that needs are met by budget allocations, establishing a working group for internal reflection on required changes, and developing longer-term strategic plans. These changes not only prioritize the wellbeing of their teams but also model the type of feminist, care-centred infrastructure that the group advocates for in broader feminist movements. As one member of the group expressed, once you start healing,

"You stop accepting the things that used to drain you, you stop accepting less."

Long-term sustainability, including financially, is deeply connected to the group's vision of healing—and its approach demonstrates that financial sustainability and healing practices are interconnected. For instance, the Collaboration

Grant enabled the group to foster financial resilience, establishing reserve funds for each member fund. Financial flexibility challenges traditional crisis-driven, individualistic funding models and allows funds to advocate for long-term investments in feminist infrastructure, with care as a central, ongoing practice.

Healing with others

The group firmly embraced healing as a collective exercise, emphasizing the importance of shared learning, co-creation, and mutual support. For example, to deepen its understanding and advance its practices, the group mapped and connected with existing healing initiatives, allocating part of the grant to learning from these. This included travelling to established healing spaces to observe how healing justice is operationalized, and considering how these insights could enrich the group's work and benefit its grantee partners. One outcome of this exploration was the creation of an online repository of resources on healing justice, feminist values, and collective healing as a feminist response to trauma. This repository, spanning from Georgian healing traditions to learnings from other organizations within the feminist movement, now serves as a tool for those in the feminist ecosystem, reflecting the group's commitment to spreading knowledge and fostering collaboration.

Within their own organizations, the funds adopted practices that reinforced healing as a collective process. **They shifted towards a co-creation culture, breaking down silos and embracing collective decision-making, and deliberately moved away from hierarchical, donor-driven structures in their engagements with grantee partners.**

Improved internal collaboration processes fostered resilience, as the funds cultivated an environment where differing perspectives could be openly shared and constructively debated, enabling them to tackle complex issues. This newfound ability to engage in critical reflection and mutual learning not only strengthened the group's collaboration, but also empowered each fund to align its work more closely with its values and goals.

The group’s work has sparked broader interest in healing within the feminist ecosystem, particularly among other women’s funds. Requests to utilize the physical healing spaces created by the group have already begun to flow in, reflecting the growing recognition of the value of having these safe places that are completely under the control of the women’s fund.

Finally, by focusing on healing, the collaboration group has contributed to changing the general understanding around this topic—increasing recognition regarding its importance as a shared, systemic process. As one group member noted: “The initial guilt of prioritizing healing amid so many ‘pressing issues’ has given way to a deeper appreciation of its necessity. At the end of the day, activist burnout is a real thing.” By nurturing these spaces and practices, the collaboration group not only supports its grantee partners but lays the foundation for a more resilient, interconnected feminist movement.

Collective healing in times of upheaval

The Collaboration Grant assisted the funds in strengthening their connections with each other,

Conclusions

Through their collaboration together in the Feminist Healing Spaces group, FemFund Poland, Women’s Fund in Georgia, and Women’s Fund Armenia have strengthened their resilience through:

- Reinforced **internal processes**, such as organizational culture, the availability of autonomous physical spaces, and the establishment of reserve funds, enabled through **elevating new areas of work** on collective healing and care;
- **New relationships and learnings** on the fundamental political role of **healing justice** at the centre of the feminist movement, supported by **resourced collaboration** through the Fenomenal Funds initiative;

but also with other women’s funds in the feminist ecosystem. This solidarity has been especially significant, as each fund has had to navigate complex and challenging political landscapes in the past five years. In Poland, FemFund faced what looked like a slow dismantling of democratic institutions before the 2023 elections. In early 2024, Women’s Fund in Georgia contended with the adoption of a controversial “foreign agents law”, which impedes them from receiving funding from international donors, only to be followed by what was deemed as fraught elections later in the year. Meanwhile, Women’s Fund Armenia continues to navigate the polarization and tensions arising from a pro-European government and a Russian-backed opposition.

In these turbulent contexts, the experience of transnational solidarity has offered a lifeline, helping the funds sustain hope and reaffirm their belief that healing happens within a supportive community.

The collaboration has provided both practical support and emotional reinforcement, demonstrating that collective care and shared vision can transcend borders and political uncertainty.

- **Disseminating their learnings and resources** on healing and care with their partners and, in doing this work, legitimizing the focus on healing justice within the ecosystem.

The case study highlights how healing and care—in theory and in practice—are necessary for the resilience of feminist movements. The historical and political contexts in which the three funds are working motivated them to take this step and pool their shared experiences. Their learnings highlight the power for women’s funds—internally in terms of capacity strengthening, and externally in responding to the movement they work with—to centre healing justice in their work.



What are the next steps for the Feminist Healing Spaces collaboration group?

Looking ahead, the Feminist Healing Spaces collaboration group will continue to legitimize healing as a core component of feminist activism, advocating for its recognition in donor spaces and securing long-term support. By leveraging the credibility gained through the Collaboration Grant and the backing of Fenomenal Funds, the group aims to influence more philanthropic actors to invest in healing and care as essential pillars of sustainable feminist work. It emphasizes the need to maintain focus on healing even as donor priorities shift, highlighting its importance for fostering progressive change when survival pressures ease.

A priority moving forward is to support grantee partners in reimagining traditional funding and organizational structures. By encouraging non-hierarchical, care-centred approaches in proposal preparation and organizational practices, the group seeks to foster healthier, more equitable relationships within the feminist ecosystem. This will help partners move beyond conventional frameworks, empowering them to innovate and prioritize care in their work.

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