



Funding that prioritizes institutional resilience is critical

Mama Cash

Mama Cash

- › Case study focus: Resilience Grant
- › Participation in collaboration groups: Feminist Fund Databases
- › Country: Netherlands
- › Region: Europe
- › Type of fund: Global
- › Size of fund: Large
- › Fund programme areas: Lesbian, bisexual, and queer rights; reproductive justice countering gender-based violence; sex workers' rights; racial justice; economic justice; disability justice; environmental justice; relationships with money; strengthening feminist funding architectures

Executive summary

This case study explores the outcome of the Fenomenal Funds Resilience Grant on Mama Cash, **the world's first international women's fund which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2024**. As with other women's funds in the feminist ecosystem, participatory grantmaking through flexible funding to feminist movements stands at Mama Cash's core. The organization has wide reach and a diversified donor and partner base, meaning the Resilience Grant was one of various funding sources supporting Mama Cash. However, **this grant stood out** from the rest, in that it was **non-competitive, non-regrantable, flexible, and multi-year**—and this positioning had an important effect on Mama Cash, allowing it to prioritize critical internal strengthening.

Through the Resilience Grant in particular, but also the collaboration with the Fenomenal Funds initiative at large, Mama Cash—both **a funder and a fundraising organization**—obtained resources to address key internal priorities. For instance, support received through the initiative was utilized by the organization to action planned but overdue

internal processes—such as updating the strategy for individual fundraising, improving the handling of databases to manage grants, and developing a new communications strategy.

The women's funds engaged with the Fenomenal Funds initiative are all members of Prospera's International Network of Women's Funds. Most funds within this network are categorized as small, with less than USD1 million in annual budget—so including a larger fund such as Mama Cash amongst our case studies allows for further exploration of the potential outcomes and impacts of deploying Fenomenal Funds' funding model to a wide range of organizations.

This study underlines the importance of grants that allow women's funds to invest in operational efficiency and prioritize and develop measures that sustain and strengthen internal resilience. Particularly for funds that have vast reach, such as Mama Cash, the positive effects of these actions are felt across the feminist ecosystem worldwide.

Introduction

The backlash against gender justice initiatives in recent years has further highlighted the importance of feminist funding and resource mobilization. Mama Cash has both led and participated in efforts to support the global ecosystem of women's funds and enhance the feminist funding architecture, partnering with likeminded organizations to influence philanthropy and encouraging government donors to collaborate with women's funds to realize their support for gender equality.

This case study explores two key outcomes experienced by Mama Cash resulting from the

support of the Fenomenal Funds initiative and the Resilience Grant:

- 1. Prioritized internal strengthening for sustainability:** We examine how the Resilience Grant¹ supported Mama Cash in ensuring internal capacity-building was given necessary attention.
- 2. The role of internal investments in operational efficiency:** We reveal how Mama Cash's strategic investments in areas such as resource mobilization, communication, and database development enhanced its operational effectiveness.

1 Note that Mama Cash also had access to other operating support grants, such as the BUILD grant from Ford Foundation and an unrestricted gift from McKenzie Scott.

The world's first international women's fund

Established in the Netherlands in 1983, Mama Cash is the world's first international women's fund, dedicated to resourcing and amplifying feminist-led initiatives globally. Over its 40-year history, the fund has mobilized and distributed more than EUR140 million in funding, supporting grassroots movements that promote the rights of women, girls, trans, and intersex people. It prioritizes groups addressing systemic injustices and underrepresented issues, providing long-term, core funding that enables sustained social change. The activists supported by Mama Cash globally push for structural and fundamental change and focus on issues that are under-addressed and/or contested. Through its strategic funding and partnerships, Mama Cash strengthens the global feminist funding ecosystem and advances its mission to create a just, inclusive, and sustainable world.

Uses and effects of the Resilience Grant

Prioritizing internal strengthening

Each year, Mama Cash uses most of its resources for grantmaking. One team member revealed,

"Because of our strong commitment with our grantee partners, when we receive core support, we prioritize grantmaking, using a good portion of the flexible funding to move money forward."

While this commitment underscores the organization's dedication to supporting its partners, it also means that assigning funds to internal strengthening is frequently deprioritized.

However, as the Resilience Grant came with the limitation that it could not be regranted, Mama Cash was provided a unique opportunity. Even though the Resilience Grant funding was modest relative to Mama Cash's overall budget, its specific focus on internal capacity-strengthening provided resources for the organization to prioritize its own needs—allowing the team to focus on enhancing internal systems, refining processes, and addressing strategic issues that are often overlooked due to external commitments.

The non-competitive nature of the Resilience Grant was also significant. Unlike competitive funding, which can create tensions among organizations, this grant was equally accessible to all the women's funds participating in the Fenomenal Funds initiative. This approach fostered solidarity and collective progress while simultaneously encouraging the women's funds to prioritize their wellbeing and internal sustainability.

"We wouldn't want to compete with our grantee partners or other women's funds for funding," stated one Mama Cash member. "The fact that everybody had access to the Resilience Grant in the same amount and frequency allowed us to participate and look internally and work on our own strengthening."

Additionally, the grant's structure promoted both internal and external accountability. It afforded Mama Cash opportunities to set internal milestones, reflect on its progress, demonstrate commitment to organizational strengthening, and adapt to changing contexts. A Mama Cash member

highlighted the significance of Resilience Grant's ethos to its work:

"The message was clear: 'Don't feel bad to invest in your institutions'."

Investing in fundraising, communications, and databases

The grant supported activities often not prioritized by other donors, such as database development, resource mobilization, and the creation of a new communications strategy. While these areas might not attract widespread funding, they are crucial for advancing strategic goals—and the Resilience Grant's dedicated investment empowered Mama Cash to focus on strengthening internal capacities and processes that are foundational to its broader mission.

The Resilience Grant allowed Mama Cash to make crucial enhancements to its communication strategy. "We try to make visible to funders the stories of the organizations we support," shared a member of the Mama Cash team. "We make visible how important core funding is for our partners." By sharing these narratives, Mama Cash not only highlights the transformational work being done by its grantee partners, but also **bridges the gap between them and feminist donors**.

In addition, communication is used to increase the visibility of Mama Cash and its work in different contexts. For example, the fund worked together with the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA), one of the world's most

prominent platforms for impactful storytelling. This allowed Mama Cash to highlight feminist activism and increase its visibility for resource mobilization in the Dutch context, not least related to individual fundraising efforts. This intervention highlights a synergy between the efforts of enhanced external communication and fundraising.

Mama Cash also harnessed the Resilience Grant to aid in improving its fundraising strategies.

For instance, even when Mama Cash receives funding that is restricted either geographically and/or thematically, it makes sure to be able to provide core and flexible funding to its grantee partners. This allows the grantee partners to focus on their core missions while Mama Cash takes on the administrative reporting burden.

For smaller organizations, which often operate under tight resource constraints, this flexibility can be transformative—enabling them to invest in internal capacity strengthening, strategic planning, and activities beyond immediate needs. As a member of Mama Cash noted:

"Some of our partners are in survival mode, just keeping going day to day."

However, the support provided by Mama Cash enables its partners to break out of this cycle and focus on long-term sustainability. By utilizing the Resilience Grant to update its fundraising approaches, particularly for individual fundraising, the fund enhanced its capabilities of raising more unrestricted funds to this end.

Conclusions

As a well-established and influential women's fund operating at a global level, Mama Cash has long played a leading role in supporting women and feminist organizations. Its strong relationships with donors, coupled with decades of experience,

has made the organization a key player within the feminist ecosystem and beyond. However, this did not exclude Mama Cash from needing to invest in its organizational structure—and the Resilience Grant was crucial in enabling them to do so.

Mama Cash's experiences and development following its five-year involvement with the Fenomenal Funds initiative highlights two key learnings, including:

➤ **Investing in internal systems, processes, and strategic areas:** The Resilience Grant demonstrated the importance of opportunities to dedicate resources to improving internal processes, such as communication, fundraising, and operations. Such enhancements are critical

for the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of women's funds, enabling them to be more responsive and adaptable in meeting their strategic goals.

➤ **Freeing up time by enhancing operational efficiency:** With the assistance of the grant, the fund was able to improve its database infrastructure—helping to streamline systems, reduce administrative burdens, and allow for more efficient operations.

What are the next steps for Mama Cash?

Looking ahead, Mama Cash is keen to understand whether the outcomes of the Fenomenal Funds initiative will lead to more sustainable, long-term support for women's funds. As such, it is asking two pivotal questions:

- What has shifted for the Fenomenal Funds' funding partners in how they plan to partner with women's funds in the future, in light of their experiences with core and flexible funding?
- Have the lessons and experiences of the women's funds following the grants influenced funders—particularly those who support Fenomenal Funds? Are they changing their approach to relationships with women's funds and other partners, the types of funding they provide, and their overall processes?

In addition, while Mama Cash appreciates the opportunities and support provided by the Resilience Grant, it highlights that “real change takes longer than five years”—the duration of the Fenomenal Funds initiative. Looking back over its four decades of experience as an ally and peer, the organization recognizes that strengthening women's funds and the feminist ecosystem is not a short-term endeavour, but one that requires sustained, continuous support.

Funding that prioritizes institutional resilience is critical

Mama Cash

KIT Institute

P.O. Box 95001
1090 HA Amsterdam
The Netherlands

ma
ma
cash

Visiting address

Mauritskade 64
1092 AD Amsterdam
The Netherlands



Prospera
INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF WOMEN'S FUNDS

Telephone

+31 205688711

E-mail

assist@kit.nl

Website

www.kit.nl

Visual summary by

Carlotta Cataldi

Designed by

www.wrenmedia.co.uk