



## From surviving to thriving: the transformative impact of flexible funding

Women's Fund X

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- > Case study focus: Resilience Grant
- > Participation in collaboration groups: Mobilizing Local Resources in Challenging Contexts, Participatory Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (FMEL)
- > Country: N/A
- > Region: N/A
- > Type of fund: National
- > Size of fund: Small

# Executive summary

This case study highlights the transformative outcomes of the Fenomenal Funds Resilience Grant on Women's Fund X, a small women's fund operating under anonymity due to restrictive funding environments.

The fund faced significant challenges prior to receiving the grant—including financial instability, constrained growth, and a lack of confidence among the team in its long-term sustainability.

However, the multi-year, core, and flexible funding afforded by the Resilience Grant provided the flexibility and financial stability necessary to address pressing internal needs, such as investing in strategic planning and expanding its staff, enabling Women's Fund X to enhance its organizational resilience. The grant also alleviated immediate financial pressures, allowing the fund to focus on governance, resource mobilization, grantee partner support, and capacity building—critical steps toward ensuring its long-term sustainability and adaptability.

In addition, the Resilience Grant catalyzed significant relational and network benefits for Women's Fund X. It supported staff members in participating in collaboration groups and international feminist

networks, allowing the fund to build relationships with sister funds and donors—in turn, helping to reduce the isolation of operating as a small fund and providing valuable learning opportunities. For example, through these collaborations, the fund adopted innovative strategies in areas such as participatory feminist monitoring and evaluation (M&E), expanded its approach to resource mobilization, and fostered a collective ethos that empowered it to overcome challenges and remain an integral part of the feminist funding ecosystem.

This case study underscores the importance of continued donor support for initiatives that prioritize operational costs, foster collaboration, and respect the contextual challenges of small funds.

By investing in these areas, donors can significantly contribute to the sustainability and impact of women's funds globally, ensuring their continued role as catalysts for feminist change and empowerment. Further, multi-year, core, and flexible funding is critical in fortifying the resilience of women's funds. This funding model provided Women's Fund X with the necessary flexibility to respond to evolving needs, invest in internal capacity, and support grantee partners more effectively.

## Introduction

Here, we explore the transformative outcomes of the Fenomenal Funds Resilience Grant on Women's Fund X, a small, local women's fund that operates under anonymity due to funding restrictions in its operating context. Before receiving the Resilience Grant, Women's Fund X faced significant challenges, including uncertainty about its future and the inherent pressures in managing a small fund with limited financial resources. These constraints created a lack of confidence among the team in its ability to thrive long-term. However, the Resilience Grant provided a unique opportunity to strengthen internal capacity and enhance its long-term sustainability, setting in motion a series of positive changes.

In this case study, we examine four key ways in which the Resilience Grant championed the resilience of Women's Fund X:

1. The grant helped it to **invest in its staff and basic operational needs**, alleviating some of the financial burden;
2. The grant supported it in **updating its governance strategies and adopting new approaches to resource mobilization**;
3. The grant afforded opportunities for **new collaborations with sister funds, which allowed**

**the fund to expand its network** and fortify its resilience;

4. The grant facilitated a **space for learning and solidarity**, which Women's Fund X shared with their partners.

Through these four elements, this case study illustrates the positive ripple effects of the Resilience Grant, providing a valuable example of how targeted, flexible support enables small women's funds, especially those operating under challenging conditions, to build long-term stability and confidence.

## Uses and effects of the Resilience Grant

### Strengthening internal capacity and stability

As a small and unstable women's fund, Women's Fund X has always faced financial concerns, which left it little room for growth or strategic planning. While the Resilience Grant was received alongside another significant grant, its assistance in alleviating some of the financial pressure cannot be underestimated—helping the fund to prioritize key internal activities that had previously been out of reach, such as strategic planning.

The Resilience Grant also supported the fund to invest in expanding staff in areas such as resource mobilization and M&E, allowing participation in initiatives like the Collaboration Group on Feminist Participatory M&E. The grant was also used to fund essential equipment like laptops and work phones, to support remote work and afford a better work-life balance. As one staff member said,

*"The funding allows us the flexibility to change according to our needs."*

Additionally, the grant facilitated staff training, wellbeing sessions, and collective care practices (including regular check-ins), which would have otherwise required fundraising or pro bono participation. Prior to the grant, "We didn't have time to invest in ourselves because we need every bit of money," stated one of the fund's members. Furthermore, the Resilience Grant has facilitated

learning opportunities, particularly in areas like feminist monitoring and evaluation, helping the fund fill critical skill gaps and enhance its overall impact.

The timing of the Resilience Grant during the COVID-19 pandemic was especially impactful. With the pandemic exacerbating financial pressures and limiting fundraising opportunities, the grant allowed the fund to maintain stability and support full-time staff. This was essential, as the fund faced high turnover rates and struggled to offer competitive salaries. In this context, the grant provided crucial relief and stability amid the challenges of both the pandemic and the fund's operating environment.

### Strengthening governance and strategizing for sustainable resource mobilization

The Resilience Grant meant Women's Fund X could address key organizational gaps and strengthen its internal infrastructure. Before receiving the grant, the executive director was heavily involved in programmatic work to ensure that limited funds could cover her salary. However, the stability provided by the grant has ensured a secure salary, allowing her to shift focus to improving the fund's governance and administrative functions. This includes developing a three-year strategic plan, making operational improvements, and enhancing human resource management. For example, the grant facilitated the creation of financial reserves and a financial reserve policy, reducing the time spent managing financial deficits.

Additionally, the Resilience Grant supported Women's Fund X in **engaging in collaboration groups, where team members connected with new potential donors and funders. This exposure opened up new fundraising possibilities and encouraged them to think more strategically about their future plans.** As a result, Women's Fund X is now better equipped to understand and target potential donors, and is revising its resource mobilization strategy accordingly. The activities and discussions from the collaboration groups are not only reshaping the fund's fundraising approach but also driving unexpected internal changes, making it more adaptive and forward-thinking.

## Building confidence through relationship and network expansion

Through its participation in collaboration groups, receiving the Resilience Grant, and engaging in the Fenomenal Funds initiative at large, Women's Fund X connected with other women's funds—developing critical relationships that are essential for mutual support and sharing learnings and solutions. One fund member shared,

*"It's really eye-opening for us to see what people are doing from the other side of the globe."*

Through Fenomenal Funds, the fund learned how collaboration could open up new opportunities and strategies that were previously constrained by limited financial resources.

The relationships formed have been crucial during difficult times, giving the fund a sense of community and shared purpose. As one member reflected:

*"It really encouraged us to believe that we can keep going, despite the obstacles."*

The ethos of non-competition and collective support has helped the fund's members build confidence and find strength in working with others: "It is difficult for funds to do things alone. When we work with other funds, together, it helps."

The grant also fostered opportunities for Women's Fund X to engage in international networks and broaden staff participation in meetings and travel. This has facilitated the adaptation of new learnings and strategies within its organization, made possible by the capacity to hire dedicated staff rather than relying on volunteers.

## Learning with and advocating for grantee partners

While the Resilience Grant was not used directly to support grantee partners, it supported Women's Fund X in better assisting them, by fostering power-sharing, trust, and open vulnerability. A fund member noted,

*"Without resources from flexible funding, it is difficult to have knowledge-sharing conversations with grantee partners."*

Through the Feminist Participatory M&E collaboration group, the Women's Fund X team learned the importance of amplifying grantee partners' voices and raising awareness of their work and needs, and have since involved their partners in group activities—helping to build trust and deepen collaboration.

A significant learning has been around advocating for and implementing language justice. Before engaging in Fenomenal Funds' collaborative spaces, Women's Fund X never considered the need for an interpreter when working with its partners. However, this new awareness is now a key element, enhancing communication and inclusivity in its work with grantee partners.

# Conclusions

The experience of Women's Fund X demonstrates how the Fenomenal Funds Resilience Grant can strengthen the resilience of small women's funds through the following mechanisms:

- › **Strengthening internal capacity** by providing the financial stability to invest in governance, strategy development, and resource mobilization, enabling the funds to focus on long-term sustainability and internal growth;
- › **Supporting collaboration and empowering women's funds** to build relationships with sister funds and engage in international feminist networks, reducing the isolation that often comes with working as a small, independent fund;
- › Becoming **better partners to their grantees** by creating spaces for feminist principles like trust, power-sharing, and knowledge exchange to flourish, thereby promoting solidarity and collective growth within the wider feminist ecosystem.

These elements collectively fortified the resilience of Women's Fund X, both individually and as part of a broader network, and enabled it to navigate challenges, seize new opportunities, and strengthen its role in the feminist funding ecosystem.

Finally, **multi-year, core, and flexible funding** has proven transformative for Women's Fund X. This model has provided the financial stability to address internal priorities, strengthen organizational capacity, and navigate external challenges with greater confidence.

This case study highlights how such a funding structure offers space to breathe and plan strategically—factors that are critical to building a fund's resilience in restrictive and challenging contexts.

## What's next for Women's Fund X?

To strengthen their resource mobilization, the Women's Fund X team is focusing on developing skills in visibility and networking, and building sustainable, mutually beneficial relationships with funders. The team emphasizes the importance of advocating for funding models that include operational costs alongside programming, allowing for flexibility and adaptability. Peer learning from sister funds regionally and globally remains a key strategy for growth, enabling them to adopt best practices and collaborative approaches.

One critical area they aim to enhance is collective care, which they see as essential for sustaining their resilience. However, the fund's need for anonymity poses challenges, creating additional stressors and limiting the extent to which collective care can be practiced. Addressing this tension would require creative approaches and support mechanisms that respect the team's need for discretion while fostering their wellbeing.

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