



FENOMENAL
FUNDS

PROVEN PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE: ORGANIZATIONAL INVESTMENTS THAT DRIVE TRANSFORMATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Around the world, gender equality and social justice movements are at the forefront of work to address the multiple and intersecting crises that are profoundly affecting the future of people and the planet. Within this context, women's funds are focused on mobilizing and moving resources to the determined activists who are challenging the actions of the few who too often trump the human rights of the many, particularly women and LGBTQI+ communities.

Fenomenal Funds, a five-year experiment in pooled funding, has leveraged shared governance and participatory grantmaking to invest in the organizational infrastructure of women's funds. Moving over USD 12 million to 44 women's funds between 2021 and 2024, we hypothesized that our Resilience Grants would act as a catalyst to unlock more and better resources for vibrant gender justice movements.

In our first report, *Reimagining Power to Build Resilience*,¹ we presented early reflections on the power of organizational resilience as a strategy to strengthen women's funds grantmaking and accompaniment.

Two years on, as we reflect on our last set of data, we argue that resilient organizations have become even more critical. The rapidly changing contexts necessitate almost constant recalibration of strategy and practice. Resourcing collective, persistent, and creative resistance is a vital intervention.


This report draws on compelling evidence to distill insights to support our hypothesis: When women's funds invest in their organizational infrastructure, their systems and structures become more robust and adaptable, their teams expand and deepen their skills, and they increase their competency at diversifying their asset base.

The data presented is from a self-reported survey of women's funds and validates that resilient feminist organizational infrastructure enables women's funds to adapt, rise to new opportunities, and remain responsive to grassroots movements. This, in turn, results in

- strategic, timely, and context-aware funding of feminist movements;
- a greater ability to weather crises like the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- deepened trust and collaboration with partners and within the feminist funding ecosystem.

Resilient feminist organizational infrastructure also contributes to strengthening the financial position of women's funds:

1. Please read it here: https://fenomenalfunds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Reimagining_Power_to_Build_Resilience-EN.pdf



A recent survey...shows that 80% [of] Prospera's members have financial reserves now, to take them—and the movements they are backing—through the coming period. We have proof of what can be done differently because of what you have done through Fenomenal Funds.

 **Laila Alodaat,**
*Executive Director Prospera International
Network of Women's Funds²*

Grounded in women's funds data, we distilled a feminist vision for organizational resilience, identifying seven ways of working:

1. Care for People
2. Develop Power-Literate Leadership and Organizations
3. Foster Resilient Mindsets Within Individuals, Organizations, and Movements
4. Build Relationships Within Both Organizations and Movements
5. Resource Organizational Systems, Structures, and Processes
6. Evolve Organizational Financial Resilience
7. Facilitate Collective, Political, and Feminist Knowledge and Strategy

These ways of working not only supported the sustainability of women's funds, but also transformed power dynamics, shifted internal cultures, strengthened relationships, created space for strategic thinking, and catalyzed women's funds' capacities to contribute to confronting systemic injustice through the work of partners.

2. Alodaat, Laila. (2025, March). Prospera comments. Proven Pathways: Collaborative Funding That Shows Impact. Fenomenal Funds multi-stakeholder event, New York.

We identified six factors that drive successful funding of resilient organizations and movements:

1. Pooled Donor Funding
2. Participatory, Power-Literate, and Partner-Focused Grantmaking
3. Relationship Building and Collaboration Rather than Competition
4. Flexible, Multi-Year, Partner-Led Grantmaking and Accompaniment
5. Reciprocal, Learning-Focused Accountability Between Partners, Funders, and Movements
6. The Complementarity of Organizational and Collaborative Granting Mechanisms

Phenomenal Funds' pooled model—bringing together four private foundations³ with shared decision-making among funders and women's funds—enabled equitable grant distribution without competition and supported real-time pivots, such as the creation of the Resilience Grants during COVID-19.

The strategy of equal, flexible funding catalyzed transformation, especially for smaller funds (those under USD 1 million in annual budgets), 92% of whom rated the funding as “vital to change.” This finding is particularly important given that the struggle to access funding has a huge impact on women's funds, particularly for national and regional women's/feminist funds. When they do receive funding, it is often short-term and restricted to projects. And all too often, the funds prioritize work in the community over a strategic investment in strengthening organizational infrastructure among key feminist collaborators.

Our emergent learning approach enabled continuous improvements during the grant cycle and gave rise to key recommendations for donors to support:

- Trust feminist funds and fund their vision, not just their projects
- Offer multi-year, flexible grants for organizational infrastructure
- Create non-competitive, partner-led funding mechanisms
- Invest in learning systems that empower strategic adaptation
- Support collaboration and peer-led initiatives
- Build power literacy and resilient mindsets
- Pool resources to meet the scale of global challenges

Our data demonstrates that robust organizational infrastructure and deep collaboration will position activists, organizations, movements, and funders to be strategic, connected, and transformative as they work to build a better future. The key ingredient is the political commitment to bring funders together to invest in organizations with the explicit intention of strengthening infrastructures, building resilience, and contributing to deeper, lasting relationships. When this commitment is put into practice, the result is strategic funding for social justice.

3. Foundation for a Just Society, Open Society Foundations, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.



www.fenomenalfunds.org