



FENOMENAL
FUNDS

PROVEN PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE: ORGANIZATIONAL INVESTMENTS THAT DRIVE TRANSFORMATION

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.

Cite as:

Fenomenal Funds. (2025). Proven Pathways to Resilience: Organizational Investments That Drive Transformation. Washington, DC: Fenomenal Funds.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the Fenomenal Funds community for their contributions to this report:

- 🌊 To the women's funds of the Prospera International Network of Women's Funds, whose hard work, dedication to gender equality, and commitment to learning are the basis of this report
- 🌊 To the current members of our Steering Committee and Advisory Committee for their enthusiasm in embracing this bold experiment:

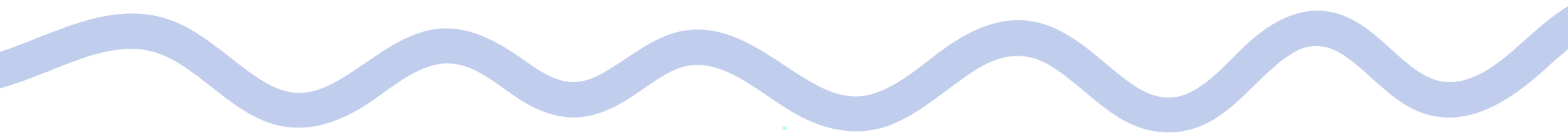
Steering Committee:

Anisha Chugh, Beatriz González Manchón, Tesmerelna Atsbeha, Diakhoumba Gassama, Mónica Enríquez- Enríquez, Maria Eugenia Olmos, Nina Madsen, and Elena Rey

Advisory Committee:

Kika Frisone Barrera, Prachi Patankar, Jebli Shrestha, Nino Asatashvii, Sneha Tatapudy, and Diana Medina

- 🌊 To the visionary funders for their commitment to learn and experiment in such a significant investment for gender justice organizational infrastructure:
 - 💧 Foundation for a Just Society
 - 💧 Open Society Foundations
 - 💧 William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
 - 💧 Wellspring Philanthropic Fund



🌊 To the previous members of the Steering Committee and Advisory Committee for their flexibility to pivot and center the experience of women's funds in grantmaking

🌊 To the Co-Leads Phoebe So and Shama Dossa for their committed leadership of Fenomenal Funds, unwavering commitment and dedication, strategy and smarts, and determination and care to distill the significant insights arising from the Resilience Grants

🌊 To our previous Director, Zanele Sibanda, for her agility in meeting the moment and determination to center the resilience of women's funds

🌊 To our accompanying consultants: Caroline Lambert for diving into the data with wisdom, a desire to pull the threads of interesting incongruities, and authoring the report with insight, creativity, and a determination to evolve thinking; Amanda Mercedes Gigler for harnessing her wisdom on communications in service of these learnings; June Ko for her creativity and coordination of Fenomenal Funds' communications; and Ubolsiri Racharaks (Ja) for erudite and pedantic (in all the best ways) editing

Design and layout: [Lulu Kitololo Studio](#) / Studio Njano

THANK YOU TO ALL 44 PARTICIPATING WOMEN'S FUNDS

Africa and the Middle East

[African Women's Development Fund](#) – Accra, Ghana

[Doria Feminist Fund](#) – Middle East and North Africa

[Fonds pour les Femmes Congolaises](#) – Democratic Republic of Congo

[Urgent Action Fund-Africa](#) – Nairobi, Kenya

[Women Fund Tanzania Trust](#) – Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Asia and the Pacific

[Korea Foundation for Women](#) – Seoul, South Korea

[Mongolian Women's Fund](#) – Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

[Pacific Feminist Fund](#) – Auckland, New Zealand

[TEWA](#) – Lalitpur, Nepal

[Urgent Action Fund-Asia and the Pacific](#) – Australia

[Women's Fund Asia](#) – Colombo, Sri Lanka

[Women's Fund Fiji](#) – Suva, Fiji

Europe

[Bulgarian Fund for Women](#) – Sofia, Bulgaria
[Calala Fondo de Mujeres](#) – Barcelona, Spain
[Ecumenical Women's Initiative](#) – Omiš, Croatia
[FemFund](#) – Warsaw, Poland
[Mediterranean Women's Fund](#) – Montpellier, France
[Reconstruction Women's Fund](#) – Belgrade, Serbia
[Slovak-Czech Women's Fund](#) – Prague, Czech Republic
[Taso Foundation](#) – Tbilisi, Georgia
[Ukrainian Women's Fund](#) – Kyiv, Ukraine
[Women's Fund Armenia](#) – Yerevan, Armenia
[Women's Fund in Georgia](#) – Tbilisi, Georgia

Latin America and the Caribbean

[ELAS+ Doar para Transformar](#) – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
[Fondo Alquimia](#) – Santiago, Chile
[Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres](#) – San José, Costa Rica
[Urgent Action Fund-Latin America and the Caribbean](#) – Bogotá, Colombia | La Paz, Bolivia
[Fondo de Mujeres Bolivia Apthapi Jopueti](#) – La Paz, Bolivia
[Fondo de Mujeres del Sur](#) – Córdoba, Argentina
[Fondo Lunaria](#) – Bogotá, Colombia
[Fondo Semillas](#) – Mexico City, Mexico

Multi-Regional

[Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice](#) – New York, US
[Equality Fund](#) – Ottawa, Canada
[filia.die frauenstiftung](#) – Hamburg, Germany
[FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund](#) – Toronto, Canada
[Global Fund for Women](#) – San Francisco, US
[International Indigenous Women's Forum \(FIMI-AYNI\)](#) – Lima, Peru | Amsterdam, The Netherlands
[Mama Cash](#) – Amsterdam, The Netherlands
[Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism](#) – Alameda, US
[VidaAfrolatina](#) – Washington, DC, US | – New York, US
[Women First International Fund](#) – New York, US
[Women Win](#) – Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Fund M
Fund N

PREFACE

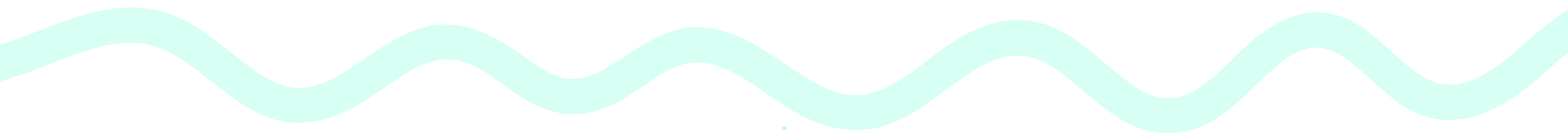
In March 2020, we launched a bold experiment to strengthen work for gender justice. Our hypothesis was that flexible funding, which enabled women's funds to invest in their organizational infrastructure, would contribute to strengthening their resilience. They would then be better positioned to respond to the needs of movements, adapt to an ever-changing environment, and rise to meet new opportunities with funding that would contribute to advancing the gender justice work of women's and feminist movements.

We were also interested in disrupting the power between funders and partners. As our first significant experiment, we co-created a shared governance model for the fund that aspired to "power with" rather than "power over."¹ Our Steering Committee and Advisory Committee had mixed memberships from private funds, women's funds, and the Secretariat of the Prospera International Network of Women's Funds. This experimental model is designed to ensure all members have an equal voice, enriching discussions about the direction of Fenomenal Funds. In the initial phase, powered by our multiple viewpoints and positionalities, we envisioned three grant streams—Collaboration Grants, Resilience Grants, and Narrative Power Grants—to provide women's funds with the resources needed to strengthen their organizational and collective resilience, thereby supporting a robust feminist funding architecture. We also wanted to support women's funds to enhance their visibility and narrative power, bolstering the case for resourcing gender justice movements.

And then Covid-19 intervened. The shared governance model allowed real-time insights to inform Fenomenal Funds' recalibrations. We pivoted to a model that would enable a rapid infusion of funding focused solely on organizational resilience. The first of our Resilience Grants was disbursed in 2020 in a noncompetitive grant round. This was the second significant power shift. At a time of extreme isolation, we embraced the solidarity of a noncompetitive ethos. It was also pragmatic: A noncompetitive approach enabled faster decision-making and the movement of money.

In this, our final report, we share the stories of transformation that have been generated from our final set of Resilience Grant data. The data makes the case that noncompetitive, flexible, learning-focused, long-term funding contributes to strengthening both organizational and movement resilience. Critically, the data also shows that this funding approach drives more relational, reflective, strategic, and responsive resourcing of gender justice movements by women's funds, strengthening the capacity of funds to adapt with agility in the face of unexpected challenges and rise strategically to moments of opportunity.

1. You can read more about our model and vision in the Reimagining Power to Build Resilience report: https://fenomenalfunds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Reimagining_Power_to_Build_Resilience-EN.pdf.




Five years later, women's funds are more resilient. So, while the funding threats are real, women's funds are now better positioned to weather the storms of global economic and political chaos. Not only is organizational infrastructure stronger, but relationships have deepened, and 80% of Prospera members now have financial reserves.²

The data has also enabled us to deepen our understanding of the scope and content of organizational resilience. Resilient people, finance, strategy, and systems continue to be important but so too are resilient mindsets, the tools and practices of power literacy, multifaceted relationships, and the processes to facilitate collective, political feminist knowledge.

We are grateful to everyone who has joined us on this journey. We invite you to expand your framing of organizational resilience to embed the transformative potential of these phenomenal insights.

Shama Dossa & Phoebe So,
Co-Leads Fenomenal Funds



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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2	A FEMINIST VISION FOR ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE: SEVEN WAYS OF WORKING	21
PREFACE	5	1. Care for People	23
THE CONTEXT OF OUR WORK, THE FRAMEWORK OF OUR EXPERIMENT	9	2. Develop Power Literate Leadership and Organizations	25
RESILIENT FUNDS, TRANSFORMATIVE RESOURCING	11	3. Foster resilient mindsets within individuals, organizations, and movements	27
THE POWER OF FINANCIAL CONFIDENCE AND JUST A FEW MORE PEOPLE	13	4. Build relationships within both organizations and movements	28
THE POWER OF COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND THE POLITICAL COMMITMENT TO DISABILITY INCLUSION	16	5. Resource Organizational Systems, Structures, and Processes	29
PAVING THE WAY TO FINANCIAL RESILIENCE	19	6. Evolve organizational financial resilience	30
		7. Facilitate Collective, Political, and Feminist Knowledge and Strategy	32

A CRITICAL INVESTMENT 33

SIX FACTORS THAT DRIVE SUCCESSFUL FUNDING OF RESILIENT ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS 34

- ≈ Pooled Donor Funding 35
- ≈ Participatory, power-literate, and partner-focused grantmaking 36
- ≈ Relationship-building and collaboration rather than competition in grantmaking 37
- ≈ Flexible, multi-year, partner-led grantmaking and accompaniment 38
- ≈ Reciprocal, learning-focused accountability between partners, funders and movements 39
- ≈ The complementarity of organizational and collaborative granting mechanisms 40

A FINAL REFLECTION 41

THE CONTEXT OF OUR WORK, THE FRAMEWORK OF OUR EXPERIMENT

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. In particular, women's funds are focused on the ways in which the interests of the few trump the human rights of the many, particularly women and LGBTQI+ communities. In our first report, *Reimagining Power to Build Resilience*,³ we presented early reflections on the power of organizational resilience as an approach for the transformation of women's funds grantmaking and accompaniment.

Two years on, resilient organizations have become even more critical given the rapidly changing contexts that necessitate almost constant recalibration of strategy and practice. Collective, persistent, and creative resistance is vital if we are to overcome the rise of authoritarian and fascist attacks on democratic institutions, the unfettered pursuit of profit by tech-oligarchs in the digital capitalist economy and their neocolonial expropriation and exploitation of natural resources, and the reinvigoration of xenophobic, racist, misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic movements around the world.

This work calls for change across all layers of society to transform unjust systems. It proposes fairer alternatives for our economic, social, cultural, and political frameworks. But the work brings risk. Feminist initiatives often confront significant resistance, as activists may face opposition and attacks from various quarters, including family, community, religious and economic bodies, as well as state and non-state actors. This includes the difficulty of securing funding for feminist gender justice work.

Fenomenal Funds stands as a beacon on this harmful funding landscape, pooling resources from four private foundations (Foundation for a Just Society, Open Society Foundations, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, and William and Flora Hewlett Foundation) and sharing decision-making power with members of the Prospera International Network of Women's Funds. Leveraging shared governance and participatory grantmaking has enabled real-time pivots to better meet the needs of women's funds.

The underlying premise of Fenomenal Funds is that women's funds—particularly national women's funds in the Global South—contribute to the achievement of gender equality because they are uniquely positioned to understand and resource the needs and priorities of local women's rights organizations and movements. Our hypothesis is that investing flexible funding into organizational infrastructure will contribute to increased resilience among women's funds. We define resilience as the ability to adapt to an ever-changing environment, rise to new opportunities, and remain responsive and accountable to movements. We ground our hypothesis in Stanford University research that shows that organizations with robust infrastructure are more likely to succeed (when success is linked to fulfilling their purpose), which connects with our definition of resilience.⁴

3. Please read it here: https://fenomenalfunds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Reimagining_Power_to_Build_Resilience-EN.pdf.
4. Gregory, A. G., & Howard, D. (2009). The Nonprofit Starvation Cycle. Retrieved from https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_nonprofit_starvation_cycle.

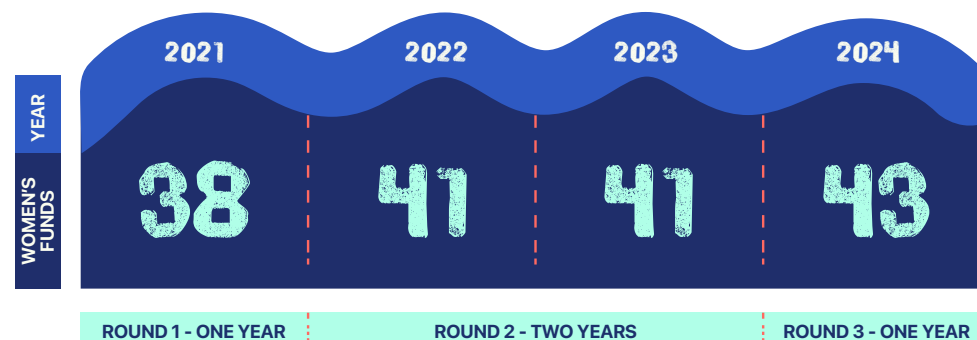
THE FRAMEWORK OF OUR EXPERIMENT

Between 2021–2024, Prospera members had three opportunities to receive a noncompetitive Resilience Grant. Fenomenal Funds' total investment was over USD 12 million.⁵

The first round, in 2020, was the Covid-19 pivot described in the preface. The second round was in response to the constructive feedback from the women's funds and offered a two-year funding window. The decision to disburse a final one-year round recognized the ongoing positive feedback from the women's funds, the insights of our first Resilience Grants report, and our broader organizational context.

Our data insights came through an emergent and participatory learning framework that supported Fenomenal Funds' data collection and reflection process with the women's funds. The data in this report is drawn from grantmaking records, partners' written reports, and team insights. To that end, it is self-generated, based on the perceptions of Fenomenal Funds partners and staff.⁶ It is, therefore, useful to note that the findings of this report are consistent with the findings of the independent, external evaluation⁷ completed by the KIT institute.⁸ The data is presented in multiple formats, including two pathway analyses, a case study, and a comprehensive review of reported approaches and impacts across the 44 women's funds.

OVERVIEW OF RESILIENCE GRANTS FUNDING ROUNDS:



5. The number of funds reported changed year over year as Prospera membership changed and as political contexts changed.
6. In some instances, funds are anonymized for security and confidentiality considerations or the changing membership of Prospera.
7. Read more about it on our website: <https://fenomenalfunds.org/publications/kit/>.
8. The Gender team at KIT (read more: <https://www.kit.nl/institute/impact-areas/gender-equality/>) has been our external learning partner since 2023, worked with us to develop a feminist methodology and implementation plan in support of our learning strategy, and consequently produced ten case studies (read more: <https://www.kit.nl/institute/publication/strengthening-feminist-futures/>) and a final impact report on Fenomenal Funds.

RESILIENT FUNDS, TRANSFORMATIVE RESOURCING:

THE EXPANSIVE IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE IN BETTER FUNDING GENDER JUSTICE

Our analysis of the Resilience Grants' data shows that improved organizational resilience contributes⁹ to strengthening the ability of women's funds to adapt to changing contexts, rise to meet opportunities, and respond to the needs of gender justice movements.¹⁰ The image on the next page shows key steps—though, in reality, the journey is seldom as linear or straightforward. Nonetheless, the data consistently demonstrates that women's funds' organizational infrastructure is stronger now than it was five years ago.

An important nuance shown in the data is the role of flexible and responsive funding in supporting organizational resilience to flourish across the breadth of an ecosystem. External dynamics, as well as the diverse starting points of women's funds (established, nascent, large, small, local, global), inform organizations' decisions on which infrastructure investments to pursue, which approaches to use, and how to contribute to the impact achieved. In our pathways analysis, we explore the journey of two funds: **Ecumenical Women's Initiative** and **Fondo Lunaria**. The pathways are distinct, but both women's funds demonstrate progress toward resilience, with immediate and medium-term changes evident.

The data also makes clear the critical role of accompaniment as an important component in resourcing investments in organizational infrastructure and resilience, which we explore in the case study.

What is also striking about the full data set is the cumulative nature of organizational resilience. Like compound interest, investments in organizational resilience have the capacity to grow exponentially. As we deepened our relationships with women's funds, we observed a cycle where, as improvements in organizational infrastructure took root, personal and organizational confidence in knowledge, skills, and capacity grew, accelerating the pace of the next organizational infrastructure initiative and hastening progress towards women's fund's resilience and their ability to better meet the needs of the women's and feminist movements they support.

Collectively, the Fenomenal Funds data makes an important contribution to validating the hypothesis that resilient women's funds are critical to ensuring that fit-for-purpose funding reaches grassroots women's rights organizations.

9. Change is not linear, and the work of Fenomenal Funds is not the only contributing factor in supporting organizational resilience and network strengthening. We see our work as part of a larger and ongoing effort to strengthen women's/feminist funds' resilience. Learn more in our Theory of Transformation: <https://fenomenalfunds.org/publications/theory-of-transformation/>.
10. See also the KIT Institute independent external evaluations (<https://fenomenalfunds.org/publications/kit/>) and our Collaboration Grants report (<https://fenomenalfunds.org/grantmaking/collaboration-grants/>) for further evidence.

IMPACT OF THE RESILIENCE GRANTS

Partners' self-reported data shows that the Resilience Grant's flexible funding was highly effective.

Align with their own
**STRATEGIC
PRIORITIES**

TRUST-BUILDING
through authentic
vulnerability and
transparent
communications

DEEPER internal
and external
RELATIONSHIPS

**LEARNING AND
INSIGHT-SHARING**
within and across
partners

EVIDENCE-BASED
communications
and engagement

More **RESILIENT,
AGILE, AND
CONFIDENT**

**RESPECTFUL,
RELATIONAL SUPPORT**
allowed women's funds to:

**Strengthened
ORGANIZATIONAL
INFRASTRUCTURE** enabled:

BOOSTED capacity for:

**Women's funds
BECAME:**

INVEST IN PEOPLE,
visibility, organizational
systems and practices

THE ENHANCEMENT
of power literacy
among people and
organizations

Improved
**RESOURCE
MOBILIZATION**

the development of
**FEMINIST
LEADERSHIP
MODELS**

COLLABORATIVE
feminist strategy
and program design

Better positioned to **NAVIGATE
CHALLENGES AND SEIZE
OPPORTUNITIES**

Ultimately, this led to **MORE STRATEGIC,
RESPONSIVE FUNDING THAT ALIGNED WITH
THE NEEDS OF GENDER JUSTICE MOVEMENTS.**

ECUMENICAL WOMEN'S INITIATIVE: PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE

Ecumenical Women's Initiative (EWI) is a small-but-mighty women's fund formally established in Croatia in 2007 that evolved from a funding program initiated in 1992 to support women affected by war in the former Yugoslavia. Pivoting the focus from addressing women merely as war victims to agents of social change, EWI has continued to champion women's rights and foster transformative initiatives in seven countries in the region.

2021- 2024 Resilience Grants

EWI strategically utilized Fenomenal Funds' **FLEXIBLE, NONCOMPETITIVE, MULTI-YEAR FUNDING** to invest in its own self-determined organizational strengthening priorities

2022 two Collaboration Grants* on resource mobilization and narrative power

Created an **OPERATIONAL RESERVE** to resource grantmaking

CONSOLIDATED ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES and initiated a new collaborative grantmaking stream

IMPROVED CARE AND WELL-BEING by increasing staff and reducing burnout

Strengthened financial resilience, **RAISED CAPACITY TO ABSORB GRANTS FROM FUNDERS**, and reduced financial risk

PARTNERED WITH OTHER WOMEN'S FUNDS for resource mobilization (Calala Fondo de Mujeres and Mediterranean Women's Fund)

PARTNERED with feminist theologians and **6 WOMEN'S FUNDS**

Collaborated with sister funds on **SHARED STRATEGIES FOR GROWTH**

Expanded the capacity to **ORGANIZE & FACILITATE EVENTS PARTNERS:** Creating connections and inspiring opportunities with **44** women from **28** partners

GREW ORGANIZATIONAL CONFIDENCE AND POWER LITERACY

Contributed to **BUILDING ALLIANCES** and the capacities of partners for resource mobilization

Contributed to **EXPANDING COLLECTIVE, POLITICAL AND FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE AND STRATEGY**

STRENGTHENED REGIONAL COLLABORATION for continued resource mobilization

Contributed to the enhanced ability to support the movements they serve

- **30% INCREASE** in grantmaking, **122 GRANTS** in 2024 vs. **86** in 2023, and
- **MORE RESOURCES** and accompaniment to grassroots organizations

*"Collaborative Learning on Resource Mobilization" and "On The Right Track Narrative Power Collaboration"

THE POWER OF FINANCIAL CONFIDENCE AND JUST A FEW MORE PEOPLE

ECUMENICAL WOMEN'S INITIATIVE'S STRENGTHENED RESILIENCE INCREASED THEIR GRANTMAKING BY 30%

Ecumenical Women's Initiative (EWI) is a small-but-mighty Croatian women's fund formally established in 2007, after a 15-year gestation. It offers solidarity, financial resources, and accompaniment to women-led organizations and women theologians in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. Leveraging the power of inspiration and relationship, EWI supports locally led, culturally sensitive solutions that both build better communities and undo misconceptions about women.

As a partner of Fenomenal Funds, EWI has received four-year Resilience Grants starting in 2020 and two-year Collaboration Grants in 2022. These grants have been instrumental in bolstering their organizational infrastructure and supporting them to engage in the Collaborative Learning on Resource Mobilization and the On the Right Track Narrative Power Collaboration.

EWI allocated the flexible funds towards several strategic areas:

- ~~~~ Caring for people: Expanding the staff team by two roles allowed us to distribute workloads and eliminated the need to "chase our tails"
- ~~~~ Evolving financial resilience: Created an operational reserve
- ~~~~ Resourcing organizational systems, structures, and processes: Raised organizational capacity to enable EWI in taking on larger grants and increased grantmaking
- ~~~~ Facilitating collective, political, feminist knowledge, and strategy: Convened feminist theologians and partnered with an international coalition of six women's funds seeking partnerships with forward-thinking corporations
- ~~~~ Building relationships: Worked with Calala Fondo de Mujeres and the Mediterranean Women's Fund to extend resource mobilization and grantmaking reach
- ~~~~ Fostering resilient mindsets: Nurtured our work through collaboration, creativity, and alignment with purpose
- ~~~~ Growing power literacy: Embraced the power we hold as women's funds in negotiating partnerships with corporations

EWI's enhanced resilience has enabled them to rise to moments of opportunity:

- 🌊 Grew their organizational confidence by establishing a reserve fund and leveraging it to meet the early expenses associated with new EU funding to address gender-based violence
- 🌊 Reduced financial risk by drawing on our reserve rather than taking out a bank loan to meet the up-front EU grant expenses
- 🌊 Expanded our organizational capacity to successfully organize and facilitate events
- 🌊 Collaborated with sister funds to evolve common communications and monitoring and evaluation strategies for joint resource mobilization

And, it has enhanced their ability to support the movements they serve by:

- 🌊 Facilitating a space for feminist theologians from Africa and the West Balkans to exchange, reflect, and strategize.
- 🌊 Developing "collaboration grants" as a new offering for partners.
- 🌊 Connecting and inspiring 44 women from 28 partners to learn and strategize with their peers.



**ULTIMATELY, THESE INITIATIVES
HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO
AN INCREASE IN EWI'S
RESOURCES FOR GRASSROOTS
ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENT
PARTNERS, GROWING EWI'S
GRANTMAKING BY ALMOST 30%
AND DISBURSING 122 GRANTS
IN 2024, UP FROM 86 IN 2023.**



FONDO LUNARIA: PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE

Fondo Lunaria is a loud, proud, and political feminist fund and a constructor of collective knowledge. Located in Colombia and established in 2005, it backs diverse, young women and trans people, working for a country that supports social justice and rights and is free of sexism, racism, and homophobia.

2021- 2024 Resilience Grants

FLEXIBLE, NON-COMPETITIVE, MULTI-YEAR FUNDING enabled Fondo Lunaria to invest in self-directed priorities for organizational strengthening:

2022 Collaboration Grants for two collaborations* about narrative power

GREW POLITICAL AWARENESS AND POWER LITERACY

Created a diploma course in **PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND A FEMINIST LAB**

Created **INCLUSIVE FEMINIST PRACTICES** and collective knowledge generation

BUILT STRONGER BRIDGES between academia and grassroots activism

Built initiatives centering **GRASSROOTS-DRIVEN LEARNING** and movement priorities

Enhanced the capacity for **FEMINIST ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIC ACTIVISM**

Strengthened inclusive and **TRANSFORMATIVE FEMINIST MOVEMENTS** and leadership

Cultivated broader **MOVEMENT SOLIDARITY** and collective action

95% of staff accessed tertiary education and specialized training

Modified the office for **DISABILITY ACCESSIBILITY.**

STRENGTHENED STAFF CAPACITY in research and accompaniment

Cultivated **INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP** and resilient collective mindsets

Created **INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE** and accessibility

STRENGTHENED INTERNAL CAPACITY and feminist leadership

Fostered **SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE** and adaptability

Focused **ORGANIZATIONAL ACCESSIBILITY** as a resource for movement

A DIVERSE, RESILIENT, AND POLITICALLY GROUNDED YOUTH AND GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT that adapted and responded to changing political and social realities.

*"On the Right Track" and "Alliance of Women's and Feminist Funds of Latin America and the Caribbean" initiatives

THE POWER OF COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND THE POLITICAL COMMITMENT TO DISABILITY INCLUSION


DRIVES FONDO LUNARIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO A STRONG, STRATEGIC, YOUTH-LED MOVEMENT

Fondo Lunaria is a loud, proud, and political feminist fund and a constructor of collective knowledge. Located in Colombia and established in 2005, it backs diverse, young women and trans people, working for a country that supports social justice and rights, free of sexism, racism, and homophobia.

As a Fenomenal Funds partner, Fondo Lunaria Mujer has received four-year resilience grants since 2020 and two-year Collaboration Grants in 2022. These grants have been utilized to strengthen their organizational infrastructure and support their involvement in narrative power strengthening collaborations through On the Right Track and the Alliance of Women's and Feminist Funds of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Fondo Lunaria Mujer allocated the flexible funds towards several strategic areas:

- 🌊 Caring for people: Supported 95% of the team to access tertiary education, evolved movement training opportunities, prioritized English language study for both individual and organizational growth, and hired specialist staff to advance organizational priorities
- 🌊 Evolving financial resilience: Invested in disability-accessible modifications for the Lunaria office—meaning women in wheelchairs could “move autonomously in the space” and movement peers could use the Lunaria office to host their own disability-accessible events
- 🌊 Resourcing organizational systems, structures, and processes: Strengthened the research team to accompany youth leaders as they conducted Lunaria feminist research in the community
- 🌊 Facilitating collective, political, feminist knowledge and strategy: Collectively generated participatory research and developed the diploma in research and the feminist laboratory to strengthen activism by women and trans people
- 🌊 Building relationships: Grew young, inclusive democratic leadership with wisdom and access to context analysis and knowledge
- 🌊 Fostering resilient mindsets: Embraced inclusion and collectivism
- 🌊 Growing power literacy: Navigated the political agendas at play in key issues of research




Fondo Lunaria Mujer's resilience has also enabled it to rise to moments of opportunity:

- 🌊 Bolstered the motivated staff team with skills and knowledge
- 🌊 Prioritized grassroots organizations' learning objectives in developing the diploma in research and the feminist laboratory
- 🌊 Generated collective knowledge on sustainable economic justice, refuted gender essentialism, and welcomed trans-inclusive feminisms

These efforts have enhanced Fondo Lunaria Mujer's ability to support the movements they serve by:

- 🌊 Realizing the political commitment to bridge academic and social movements with a focus on participatory action research approaches in the diploma in research and the feminist laboratory
- 🌊 Ensuring disability accessibility in the Lunaria office and making it available to other social justice actors

**ULTIMATELY, THESE INITIATIVES
HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE
GROWTH OF A DIVERSE,
RESILIENT, POLITICAL MOVEMENT
OF YOUTH LEADERS AND
GRASSROOTS GROUPS ABLE
TO RESPOND TO THE POLITICAL
AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS.**



PAVING THE WAY TO FINANCIAL RESILIENCE:

FENOMENAL FUNDS' ACCOMPANIMENT OF PARTNERS SEEKING EQUIVALENCE DETERMINATIONS

The Resilience Grant data also highlights the importance of effective accompaniment in resourcing organizational infrastructure. Grounded in a feminist approach, we have explored what it takes to build more equitable relationships. In our experience, two components must be present: compassionate curiosity and flexible resources. We have been fortunate to be able to bring both to the Fenomenal Funds' accompaniment work.

In doing so, we have remained attentive to diverse organizational needs, contexts, and priorities while navigating practical challenges like time zone differences and external political upheavals. Our approach has been multifaceted; for example, we have

- built collaborative relationships with women's funds that help us better understand their unique situations and meet them respectfully as they map their journey of accompaniment;

- resourced language justice by ensuring the translation of materials and interpretation of meetings;
- honored time zone justice by scheduling multiple information sessions; and
- simplified reporting, facilitated critical reflection, and provided support for emergent learning.

We also considered structural impediments, which led to our work with women's funds (in particular, smaller ones) to navigate the US Equivalency Determination process, opening up the potential for access to a greater range of funding opportunities.

While accompaniment can sometimes be deprioritized when resources are scarce, our approach centers it and has enabled both organizational resilience and meaningful collaboration to flourish simultaneously.

CASE STUDY:

INFRASTRUCTURE ACCOMPANIMENT AS A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT – FENOMENAL FUNDS' ACCOMPANIMENT OF US EQUIVALENCY DETERMINATIONS

For partners outside the US, Fenomenal Funds proactively supported Equivalency Determination (ED)—the certification marking foreign nonprofits as equivalent to 501(c)(3) public charities, which simplifies their access to philanthropic resources in the US. There are benefits to grantmakers, too. ED streamlines oversight and simplifies grant administration by eliminating the need for expenditure responsibility—the complex compliance process typically required when granting to non-US entities.

Fenomenal Funds accompanied women's funds requiring assistance in obtaining or renewing their ED status and initiated the certification process. This has been vital as US tax law mandates that only grantmakers can initiate and finance the ED certification process, not the grant recipient organization. As part of their accompaniment, Fenomenal Funds covered all costs associated with the process, ran information sessions to explain ED requirements, and supported funds to navigate the certification process, which requires substantial documentation related to governance, finances, and organizational activities.

Fenomenal Funds' accompaniment augmented the support of NGOsource¹¹, which independently manages the certification process, offering regional assistance in local languages and time zones. This dual-track approach is particularly crucial for smaller, non-native-English-speaking women's funds. Mongolian Women's Fund highlighted the tangible benefits: "Fenomenal Funds not only covered all costs but also provided essential guidance through the ED process."

Our accompaniment has shown remarkable results: The number of women's funds obtaining ED with Fenomenal Funds' support surged from 1 in 2021 to 17 in 2024. The proportion of network members with active ED status also rose dramatically: In 2020, 62% of non-US-based members had an active ED status, while in 2024, it increased to 95%.

ED certification unlocked new funding opportunities while boosting the operational credibility and visibility of partners. Bulgarian Fund for Women noted that ED status "increases trust from US donors, enhances our credibility, and simplifies receiving money from the US." Visibility is also crucial for engaging with international funders. Fondo de Mujeres Bolivia Apthapi Jopueti from Bolivia shared, "ED allows us to fulfill requirements to access philanthropic resources and be visible in global networks." Likewise, Women's Fund Fiji noted the transformative effect of ED on fundraising strategies: "This opens a whole new potential set of funders, essential for reducing dependency and strengthening our financial autonomy." And Reconstruction Women's Fund leveraged the status for rapid fund acquisition and fiscal sponsorship capabilities: "We were able to pass due diligence quickly and obtain funds rapidly due to the status, facilitating our ability to become fiscal sponsors for other organizations."

Fenomenal Funds' strategic investment in accompanying partners in ED certification has provided more than a simplification of US funding processes. It has contributed to the resilience and sustainability of women's funds, supporting them to respond dynamically to emerging opportunities and challenges.

11. NGOsource, a project founded and launched by the [Council on Foundations](#) and [TechSoup](#), helps U.S. grantmakers streamline and save in their international giving. <https://www.ngosource.org/who-we-are>

A FEMINIST VISION FOR ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE:

“ 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 Funds*¹²

In addition to demonstrating how organizational resilience drives more strategic and responsive funding of gender justice, the specific ways that the women’s funds approached strengthening their organizational infrastructure offer a feminist vision for organizational resilience. This augments the articulation of resilient people, finance, systems, and strategy evolved by Ford Foundation.¹³

“ Initially uncertain about using funds for internal purposes, we learned that investing in organizational stability and staff well-being directly enhanced our sustainability and productivity. Building on this insight, we launched new initiatives to support the resilience and core needs of partner organizations, promoting long-term impact across our network.

≈ Korea Foundation for Women

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

13. See further: <https://www.fordfoundation.org/work/our-grants/building-institutions-and-networks/how-it-works/>

A FEMINIST VISION FOR ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE: 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
Financial
Resilience

7 FACILITATE
Collective, Political and
Feminist Knowledge
and Strategy

The seven ways of working are built from the women's funds organizational infrastructure priorities and validated by the impacts they observed.



1. CARE FOR PEOPLE



Above all, spaces for reflection, politicization, and personal interrogation were opened...this led to a reflective, committed, questioned, politicized team aware of its personal and collective role in strengthening and articulating organizations and movements of women, feminists, and gender diversities.

 **Fondo de Mujeres Bolivia Apthapi Jopueti**

More than half of the women's funds reported that Fenomenal Funds' flexible resourcing enabled them to strengthen their care for people, particularly staff members. Activities were broad ranging and, in many ways, sought to remedy the tendency in social justice organizations to prioritize the funding of programmatic over institutional activities. Across the spectrum of partners—from small to large funds—funds allocated resources by addressing basic staffing issues:

-  Met staff-related budget deficits. For example, several women's funds reported that unfunded personnel costs were met through the grants.¹⁴
-  Addressed unsustainable workloads, burnout, and turnover risk by augmenting staff teams. For example, partners particularly reported hiring communications¹⁵ and resource mobilization roles.¹⁶



Improved staff remuneration and benefits to address cost of living pressures. For example, partners focused on funding staff well-being packages, including access to the fundamental human rights of health care in countries where employment insurance is a primary means of accessing health care and psychosocial services.¹⁷



Engaged consultants with specific expertise (for example, communications; resource mobilization; monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning; governance; leadership transitions; and human resources) to reduce workload pressures and advance key organizational activities.¹⁸



Grew skills within individuals and teams and built relationships within organizations. For example, retreats brought staff together for the first time, and coaching and training programs were provided.

-
- 14. For example, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice (Astraea), Doria Feminist Fund, FemFund, filia.die frauenstiftung, Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (FCAM), and Slovak-Czech Women's Fund.
 - 15. For example, FemFund, Fondo Alquimia, Mama Cash, Mediterranean Women's Fund, and Mongolian Women's Fund.
 - 16. For example, Calala Fondo de Mujeres, Doria Feminist Fund, Fondo de Mujeres Bolivia Apthapi Jopueti, Mediterranean Women's Fund, Mongolian Women's Fund, Taso Foundation, and Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-Africa).
 - 17. For example, Calala Fondo de Mujeres, FCAM, Korea Foundation for Women, Mediterranean Women's Fund, Reconstruction Women's Fund, Taso Foundation, Tewa, UAF-Africa, and Women's Fund Asia.
 - 18. For example, Calala Fondo de Mujeres, FCAM, Korea Foundation for Women, Mediterranean Women's Fund, Reconstruction Women's Fund, Taso Foundation, Tewa, UAF-Africa, and Women's Fund Asia.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Women's funds perceived that these investments were critical to increasing their strategic and operational capacity. They reflected that evolving organizational culture strengthened relationships that, in turn, deepened the capacity for vulnerable reflection and learning that allowed more sophisticated organizational strategies to be developed.

Additionally, addressing unsustainable workloads, improving staff remuneration and benefits, and increasing access to training and coaching reduced staff turnover. In turn, this enhanced the strategic capacity of funds as they leveraged the deepening of knowledge and experience within teams.



Drawing on resourcing from the Resilience grants we initiated a Reflection and Growth process which was a critical component of several shifts that further align Astraea's culture with our feminist principles... the process led to increases in leadership transparency, relationship building among remote staff, and aligning healing justice in our work. These changes brought about welcome improvements in areas such as retention, morale and increased impact in the communities we partner with. We updated and instituted human resources policies and practices in line with our efforts to build a resilient and diverse team.

≈ **Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice**



In 2022 we definitively incorporated the benefits implemented since the pandemic: a monthly bonus for online work and an annual sustainability bonus for free use for the executive team. We also formalized the 2 weeks of general rest in the middle and end of the year, in addition to the statutory vacations. The strengthening of the team is undoubtedly due to permanent contributions to improving the working conditions of the team. Currently we have a policy of sustainability of the executive team, with permanent spaces of collective care, training spaces and co-evaluation processes. Similarly, the team's internal relations and communications have improved significantly.

≈ **Fondo Alquimia**




2. DEVELOP POWER-LITERATE LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONS







We aim to transform ourselves and our organization by utilizing power, resources, and skills in a non-oppressive, decolonized, and inclusive manner. We view feminist co-leadership as shared accountability and collaboration to meet objectives while fulfilling individual responsibility.

 **Pacific Feminist Fund**

Phenomenal Funds as a bold experiment has taught us important lessons on the constructive and destructive ways in which power can be deployed within feminist processes. In that context, we have found it useful to reflect on what it would take to expand power literacy as a tool of organizational resilience. In doing this, we have returned to the different explorations of power, codified in the very useful All About Power primer¹⁹.

-  The framing of the sites of power as within the self, between individuals, between social groups, and between political and economic formations.
-  The forms of power as hidden or indirect, visible or direct, and invisible.
-  The expressions of power as “power over,” “power to,” “power within,” “power with,” and—in particular—the insights offered into the expression of “power under.”

Our starting point for power literacy is that individuals, organizations, and movements have the

-  vision and commitment to challenge hierarchical structures and practices that replicate patriarchal models of dominance and control;
-  critical awareness and tools to recognize different forms, expressions, and sites of power;
-  capacity to analyze their impact (at a personal, organizational, and structural level); and
-  practices to navigate and, potentially, challenge detrimental expressions of “power over”—including assessing the differential risks based on the conditions of privilege and marginalization.

Power-literate organizations value diverse knowledge, foster transparency, and share power to support inclusive decision-making. They regularly reflect on policies, challenge patriarchal and other oppressive norms, and build collective capacity to use power for innovation, equity, and transformative change.²⁰

19. Read more here: <https://creaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/All-About-Power.pdf>

20. Batliwala, S. (2010). Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud. Retrieved from <https://creaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/feminist-leadership-clearing-conceptual-cloud-srilatha-batliwala.pdf>.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Many of the Resilience and Collaboration Grants have touched on both the positive and negative power dynamics within women's funds and feminist organizations and movements, as have within our own governance experiments. Of course, the challenge is that we exist within patriarchal structures, and so our pursuit of "power with" quickly collides with the real politics and dominance of "power over" strategies, practices, and individual and collective behaviors/egos. While not a total solution, resourcing tools and practices to strengthen capacity for power literacy, including specific efforts to evolve intersectional feminist organizational practices and leadership, was reported as beneficial by several funds.²¹



We came to understand that the nature of our work often involves navigating intimate, challenging, and emotionally charged situations...and we need to provide the necessary support for staff to manage these moments effectively. We gained insight into the historic impact of race on NGO workplace dynamics.... As a result, we are primarily focusing our organizational resilience and strengthening efforts on combating structural discrimination...this focus aligns with our commitment to creating lasting, systemic change both within our organization and in the broader communities we serve.

🌊 Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice

21. For example, Astraea, Calala Fondo du Mujeres, ELAS+, Fondo Lunaria, Mediterranean Women's Fund, Taso Foundation, Women's Fund Asia, and Women's Fund in Georgia.

3. FOSTER RESILIENT MINDSETS WITHIN INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND MOVEMENTS



We have learned a lot about power sharing and are now in a better position to support our grantees in the way they need it. We listen even more to their needs. We facilitate exchanges when they are desired—and partners determine the content. Sometimes cooking or singing together is worth much more than a theoretical input on resilience.

≈ filia.die frauenstiftung

As we considered the funds' reports, we reflected on the current political and economic environment, in particular, the ways in which narratives of fear, exclusion, and individualism are being leveraged by authoritarian leaders. In this context, fostering resilient mindsets within individuals, organizations, and movements is an act of resistance and rebellion.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

We are at a moment in time where advances in neuroscience offer us extraordinary insight into harnessing the power of our brains. While not wishing to diminish the very real threats—practical and existential—we are also mindful of resisting the descent into despair and pessimism. It is important to consciously and collectively foster hope and optimism—albeit at times with reference to very localized or very small examples (like cooking or singing together)—as a valid and vital strategic response.

4. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN BOTH ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS



This closer relationship has enabled the board to provide more effective strategic guidance, which has been essential in ensuring that our resource allocation strategies remain aligned with emerging challenges and opportunities in the context in which we operate.

 **ELAS+**

A number of the funds reflected on relationship building as vital to organizational resilience, both within their organization and externally. For example, several funds used the grant to bring staff and/or board members together in face-to-face meetings,²² sometimes for the first time ever.²³ Funds reported strengthened relationships and acceleration of collective learning and strategy, in turn supporting more effective work. Funds also supported individual or collective coaching to enable stronger relationships between team members,²⁴ as well as the evolution of intersectional feminist models of practice to support the evolution of feminist organizational cultures²⁵ or address the impact of structures of discrimination and oppression within organizations.²⁶

Funds also focused on the value of strengthening relationships with partners. They reflected that their deepened connections and collaborative learning grounded more responsive, agile, and opportunistic funding of partner initiatives.²⁷

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Strong relationships were seen as critical to nurturing strategic and political conversations with organizations and movements. In turn, women's funds can leverage these insights to enhance their ability to mobilize resources, advocate for women's rights, and build networks that support collective action, thereby enhancing their capacity to support feminist movements.



We've focused on enhancing organizational culture through initiatives that promote open communication, inclusivity, and respect. This has contributed to higher employee satisfaction and engagement, fostering a more cohesive and productive workforce.

 **Taso Foundation**

- 22. For example, Korea Foundation for Women, Tewa, Pacific Feminist Fund (PFF), UAF-Africa, Women First International Fund, and Women Win.
- 23. For example, PFF and Women First International Fund.
- 24. For example, African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), PFF, UAF-Asia & Pacific (UAF A&P), UAF-Latin America & the Caribbean (UAF-LAC), and Women's Fund Asia
- 25. For example, Fondo Lunaria, FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund (FRIDA), Fund M, Mongolian Women's Fund, PFF, UAF-Africa, and Women Win.
- 26. For example, AWDF, FCAM, Fondo Alquimia, Fondo de Mujeres del Sur, Fondo Lunaria, FRIDA, Fund M, Taso Foundation, Tewa, UAF-Africa, UAF A&P, UAF-LAC, Women First International Fund, and Women Win.
- 27. For example, FFC, Fund M, and Women's Fund in Georgia.

5. RESOURCE ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS, STRUCTURES, AND PROCESSES



The funds have supported our collective feminist management approach, enabling us to be better prepared to take advantage of opportunities for resource mobilization. We have strengthened [our] administrative capacity, enabling us to process a greater number of financial transactions in increasingly restrictive contexts. And it has allowed us to strengthen team relationships and develop critical co-thinking spaces for timely context reviews and strategic decision-making.

🌿 Fondo de Mujer del Sur

Almost half of the partners invested in strengthening systems, structures, and processes. For example, a number of funds focused on improving operational²⁸ or learning systems²⁹, particularly to streamline efficiency and strengthen feminist approaches to these components of organizational infrastructure. Other funds reframed organizational structures to enable social justice and feminist objectives to be met through governance and operational policies and practices. For example, several funds explored the theory and practice of feminist leadership and management, while others supported the evolution of co-leadership models.³⁰



Investments in key areas that improve operational efficiency help us deliver on our strategic goals.

🌿 Mama Cash

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Partners spoke to the rarity and value of flexible funding that enabled them to direct resources towards organizational systems, structures, and processes. They pointed to the efficiencies they derived from the investment, in particular the ability to redirect time and energy towards internal and external relationship building and strategic discussions. Improved systems enable women's funds to process grants more quickly, track the impact of their work more accurately, and communicate more effectively with stakeholders.³¹



We have been able to absorb larger grants through raised organizational capacities.

🌿 Ecumenical Women's Initiative

28. For example, Astraea, AWDF, Calala Fondo de Mujeres, Mama Cash, and Tewa.

29. For example, Fund M, Women First International Fund, Women Fund Tanzania Trust, and Women's Fund Asia.

30. See footnotes 18 and 19.

31. For example, AWDF, Mama Cash, and Women Fund Tanzania Trust.

6. EVOLVE ORGANIZATIONAL FINANCIAL RESILIENCE



We significantly expanded our participation in international networks. Staff from the grantmaking team were able to attend the Prospera Asia-Pacific regional meeting for two consecutive years, broadening their global perspective and gaining valuable experience in global support, resource mobilization, and fundraising for women's initiatives.

🌿 **Korea Foundation for Women**

At least two-thirds of the Fenomenal Funds partners directed some or all of their Resilience Grants into meeting basic financial needs or diversifying their asset base, either through direct investment into reserves or by resourcing the evolution of financial strategies and systems. Funds reported using the Resilience Grants to achieve the following:

- 🌿 met operational deficits during periods of funding stress³²
- 🌿 established or strengthened operational and strategic reserves and/or endowments³³



focused on growing resource mobilization collaboratively³⁴



accessed funding that required a co-contribution from the partner



For example, the 10% own-contribution requirement of the European Commission³⁵



diversified their asset classes



For example, funds particularly prioritized property investments or property maintenance. Property investment reduces operational costs and provides safe and accessible meeting spaces for movements.³⁶ A smaller number of funds explored investment strategies that enabled them to support these strategies' evolution.³⁷

-
- 32. For example, Astraea, Doria Feminist Fund, FCAM, FemFund, filia.die frauenstiftung, and Slovak-Czech Women's Fund.
 - 33. For example, AWDF, Bulgarian Fund for Women, Doria Feminist Fund, Ecumenical Women's Initiative, ELAS+, FemFund, Fondo de Mujeres Bolivia Apthapi Jopueti, Fondo Semillas, Mongolian Women's Fund, PFF, UAF-Africa, UAF A&P, Women Fund Tanzania Trust, and Women's Fund Asia.
 - 34. For example, Calala Fondo de Mujeres, FemFund, Fondo Semillas, PFF, and Taso Foundation.
 - 35. For example, AWDF, Bulgarian Fund for Women, and Ecumenical Women's Initiative.
 - 36. For example, AWDF, FemFund, Fondo de Mujeres Bolivia Apthapi Jopueti, Fondo Lunaria, Fondo Semillas, Reconstruction Women's Fund, Tewa, UAF-Africa, and Women's Fund in Georgia.
 - 37. For example, Global Fund for Women and Women Fund Tanzania Trust.

developed or evolved resource mobilization strategies or policies

For example, funds experimented with new approaches to target foundations, other intermediary funds, bilateral donors, multilateral institutions, corporate partners, and individuals—particularly nurturing local philanthropic cultures and feminist giving³⁸. For other funds, the grants enabled sustained attention to their fund’s financial policies and procedures.³⁹

invested in finance or resource mobilization activities

For example, some funds reported the engagement of specialized finance or resource mobilization staff or consultants⁴⁰. Other funds highlighted meeting travel costs to support team members to participate in resource mobilization activities or to grow the profile of the fund—with the goal of attracting new donors.⁴¹

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Partners were very clear that financial resilience had a profoundly positive impact on real and perceived organizational stability. For those who invested in reserves, a number also flagged the importance of their reserves in meeting donor co-contribution requirements. A number of funds reported an increase in their resource mobilization. For example, Doria Feminist Fund reported a fourfold increase. For those who invested in property, the political objectives of claiming space, particularly for healing and solidarity activities, as well as contributing to the growth of the physical infrastructure of women’s movements in their region or country, were crucial. Also important was the ability to ensure disability accessibility to buildings when women with disability were often excluded from feminist spaces.



Contributions to reserve and endowment funds have solidified AWDF’s financial position, offering stability amidst external uncertainties. The reserve fund has provided the flexibility to address unplanned emergencies while maintaining core operations. Additionally, the growing reserve has enabled AWDF to prefinance five percent to ten percent of certain projects funded by bilateral and public foundations, ensuring compliance with grant requirements and uninterrupted project implementation. Furthermore, the reserve fund has enabled AWDF to invest in critical, time-sensitive issues, allowing us to act swiftly and remain at the forefront of feminist funding.

African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF)

38. For example, Ecumenical Women’s Initiative, FemFund, Fondo Semillas, Fund N, Mama Cash, and Taso Foundation.

39. For example, Astraea, AWDF, Equality Fund, PFF, UAF-Africa, and UAF A&P.

40. For example, Doria Feminist Fund, Equality Fund, FemFund, FFC, Taso Foundation, Tewa, and VidaAfrolatina.

41. For example, FFC, Fund N, Korea Foundation for Women, VidaAfrolatina, Women’s Fund in Georgia, and Women Win.

7. FACILITATE COLLECTIVE, POLITICAL, AND FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE AND STRATEGY



We believe that collective knowledge construction is essential to strengthening the organizations we support.

 **Fondo Lunaria**

Several funds reported on their investments into collective, political, feminist knowledge generation and sharing. These activities included local language translations of seminal feminist texts or disability-accessible materials;⁴² collaborations with educational institutions to embed feminist knowledge within movements;⁴³ convenings with feminist movements on critical topics, for example building collective strategy to resist trans-exclusionary feminism and commissioning feminist participatory action research on politically sensitive topics or feminist activism⁴⁴; investing in digital platforms to facilitate knowledge sharing among feminist organizations;⁴⁵ and engaging specialists to develop disability-inclusive content⁴⁶. These investments were characterized by their external foci: generating movement knowledge, building nuanced political positions, and grounding in collective understanding. Other women's funds leveraged the funding to strengthen organizational strategies, oftentimes embracing participatory methodologies. Foci included whole-of-organization strategies and the evolution of grantmaking and accompaniment approaches (both standard and emergency grantmaking models),⁴⁷ as well as collective efforts with other feminist funds to engender feminist philanthropic innovation or collective risk management and response in times of crisis and emergency.⁴⁸

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

In our view, expanding the reach of resilient strategy to incorporate the conscious pursuit of collective, political, feminist knowledge is critical to strengthening gender justice movements and outcomes. The insights shared by partners demonstrated the far-reaching potential of these initiatives, including strengthening youth leadership in communities and enriching debates that are critical to community feminist agendas.



Our grantee partners had indicated their need for more spaces for knowledge exchange.... We identified four topics preferred by our partners: one, Black feminisms—theories and practices; two, strategies for healing and preventing sexual violence; three, healing and self-care as liberatory practices; and four, colonial thought and its impact on Afro-descendants.... The impacts include a deeper understanding of similarities about each other's context that fostered feelings of community, mutual understanding, and strength, and the sparking of possibilities for practices and strategies that could be effective in their own contexts.

 **VidaAfrolatina**

42. For example, Global Fund for Women and Reconstruction Women's Fund.

43. For example, VidaAfrolatina.

44. For example, ELAS+ and Fondo Lunaria.

45. For example, Mama Cash.

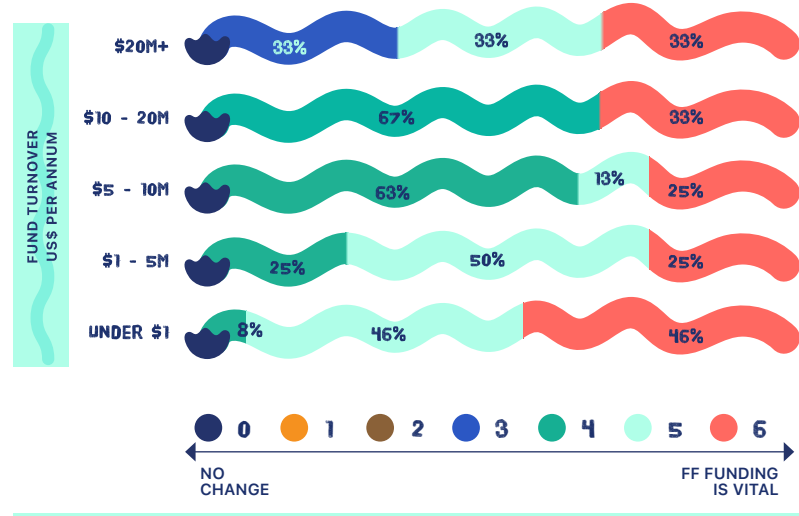
46. For example, Global Fund for Women.

47. For example, Equality Fund, FCAM, and FRIDA

48. For example, Ecumenical Women's Initiative, FemFund, Fondo Semillas, PFF, and Taso Foundation.

A CRITICAL INVESTMENT:

CONTRIBUTION OF THE FUNDING TO ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE CHANGES AND ITS IMPACTS



Self-Reported Changes (% per scale point) in Their Organization Due to the Contribution of Fenomenal Funds Resilience Grants, Using a 7-Point Scale*, n=39

- 7-Point scale, starting from 0 (change would have happened without Resilience Grants) and 6 (Fenomenal Funds resourcing considered as vital/critical). No response of 0 to 2.
- The dollar amount refers to the annual budget of the women's fund.



The stability of the funding led to greater resilience of the movement by maintaining our role as a steady and reliable partner in the communities where we serve.

Reconstruction Women's Fund

In the final learning reports for the Resilience Grants, we asked partners to evaluate how significantly the Fenomenal Funds Resilience Grants contributed to their reported organizational infrastructure changes. We asked them to rank using a 7-point scale, where "0" was the view that change would have happened without the grant, and "6" was the view that the Fenomenal Funds resourcing was critical and the primary reason for the change. The data set includes all funds that provided reports for the final year of funding and who had previously received at least one other round of resilience funding.

The data showed that the grants made an important contribution, and for smaller funds (with annual budgets of <USD 5 million), it was overwhelmingly perceived as making a vital or critical contribution. Seventy-five percent of funds with an annual turnover of USD 1–5 million reported that the funding made a vital or critical contribution, and 92% of the funds with a turnover of less than USD 1 million reported that the funding was vital or critical. Even when larger funds are considered, it is clear that the funding had, at the very least, made a substantial impact, in particular with regard to the scale, quality, and impact of the change. No partner reported that the funding was unimportant or had made only a minimal or notable impact.

SIX FACTORS THAT DRIVE SUCCESSFUL FUNDING OF RESILIENT ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS

OUR GRANTMAKING MODEL

Here is what we learned about resourcing organizational resilience. These are six pathways to funding resilient organizations and movements:



POOLED DONOR FUNDING



PARTICIPATORY, POWER LITERATE, AND PARTNER-FOCUSED GRANTMAKING



FLEXIBLE, MULTI-YEAR, PARTNER-LED GRANTMAKING AND ACCOMPANIMENT



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND COLLABORATION RATHER THAN COMPETITION IN GRANTMAKING



RECIPROCAL, LEARNING-FOCUSED ACCOUNTABILITY BETWEEN PARTNERS, FUNDERS, AND MOVEMENTS



THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF ORGANIZATIONAL AND COLLABORATIVE GRANTING MECHANISMS

The ability to:

- ~ adapt to an ever-changing environment,
- ~ rise to new opportunities,
- ~ remain responsive and accountable to movements.

The Fenomenal Funds investment has demonstrated the power of investing in organizational infrastructure as a driver of more agile, opportunistic, responsive, and accountable funding of women's rights organizations' work for gender justice. So, how can more donors follow this path?



Investing in the organizational resilience of feminist funds is investing in the broader movement ecosystem. It ensures that feminist funds have the capacity, stability, and strategic foresight to sustain bold, flexible, long-term partnerships with those most impacted by inequality. Whether through strengthening internal capacity, resourcing strategic planning, or enabling funds to shape the narrative of why they exist and the critical funding gap they fill, core, flexible, multi-year funding strengthens the capacity of feminist funds to continue resourcing movements. Our message to funders is simple: Trust feminist funds. Fund their vision, not just their projects. Show up for them so they can sustain the movements shaping a world that works for everyone.

~ Women First International Fund



POOLED DONOR FUNDING

The accelerating impacts of the ongoing polycrisis—evident in global political and economic instability and climate change—have significantly heightened the strategic importance of pooled-funding mechanisms. Pooled funding enables like-minded donors to maximize resourcing of common agendas for progressive change, particularly among collaboratives of intermediary funds who are well-positioned to reach grassroots change agents. Pooled funding lowers resourcing barriers for many women's funds, especially national funds who may not ordinarily qualify to receive funding from the individual foundations.⁴⁹



"As we enter a period of financial and political upheaval, the evidence from the work supported by Fenomenal Funds demonstrates that pooled funding delivers a powerful impact for funders and women's funds who share a common agenda. Our critical challenge is to preserve and amplify the unique resilience and collaborative approaches developed by women's funds, even as we navigate competing priorities and funding constraints. This requires deliberate attention to power dynamics within the funding ecosystem, ensuring feminist perspectives remain central rather than peripheral when difficult prioritization decisions must be made."



🌀 *Fenomenal Funds Co-Leads' Reflection on Learning from Challenges:*
Maintaining the Political Commitment for Pooled Funding

49. Learn more about our model and our approach from our Theory of Transformation: https://fenomenalfunds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Fenomenal-Funds-Theory-of-Transformation_spreads.pdf.



PARTICIPATORY, POWER-LITERATE, AND PARTNER-FOCUSED GRANTMAKING



Flexible financing also lays the foundations for trust and reconfiguration of power relations, making counterweights to decision-making, both in the philanthropic sector and in other areas.

≈ **Fondo Semillas**

Fenomenal Funds' participatory grantmaking enabled real-time insights from women's funds on the Advisory Committee and Steering Committee to inform decision-making. Combined with the partner-focused approach to grantmaking—which prioritized the needs of the partners, not the objectives of the donors—Fenomenal Funds pivoted to the idea of resilience grants in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and its ongoing impacts. You can learn more in our Reimagining Power to Build Resilience report.⁵⁰



" Sometimes we learn even more profoundly from challenging experiences. Throughout the Fenomenal Funds experiment—from our shared governance to our Collaboration Grants to our Resilience Grants—we have both been successful and unsuccessful in navigating and negotiating power dynamics. These experiences have informed our thinking on the idea and practice of power literacy and establishing trust as vital components of participatory grantmaking and the evolution of organizational resilience."



≈ ***Fenomenal Funds Co-Leads' Reflection on Learning from Challenges: Power Literacy***

50. Read it here: https://fenomenalfunds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Reimagining_Power_to_Build_Resilience-EN.pdf.



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND COLLABORATION RATHER THAN COMPETITION



Knowing that resources [would] be available for a determined period, and that we could channel all available human and technical resources to solidify the internal processes of our newly established funds, allowed us to start engaging in strategic discussions and learning processes.

≈ **Doria Feminist Fund**

A critical early decision⁵¹ of the Fenomenal Funds Steering Committee was to take a noncompetitive and equal approach to grantmaking. Grants were offered to all members of the Prospera network, meaning we eschewed a competitive process and contributed to a culture of sharing within Prospera. The drive to equal grantmaking was consciously espoused as a form of progressive funding. The Advisory Committee reflected on their practical insights that while all women's funds struggled to allocate grant funds to organizational infrastructure, smaller women's funds were disproportionately challenged by structural limitations such as smaller staff teams and the inability to benefit from economies of scale. By equalizing the resource disbursement across all women's funds, the Advisory Committee hypothesized that smaller funds, for whom the funding would represent a greater proportion of their budget, may perceive a greater scope of change (See Graph on Contribution data on page 33).



"With Prospera member funds ranging from under one million dollars to over twenty million dollars, Fenomenal Funds' equal grantmaking approach may create tension when resources are limited. For example, larger funds might question whether equal distribution optimally serves collective impact, particularly when donors indicate that resources for programs like Fenomenal Funds are already fully allocated. Rather than forcing competition among diverse organizations, the challenge will be expanding the total funding for feminist work. This requires funders and grant recipients to collaborate in growing the overall resource pool while developing distribution approaches that respect different organizational scales and contexts. By shifting from scarcity-driven competition to collective advocacy, we can build sustainable feminist funding ecosystems that strengthen our entire movements."



≈ **Fenomenal Funds Co-Leads' Reflection on Learning from Challenges: Proportional Impact of Funding**

51. Learn more about it in the Reimagining Power report, link in footnote 1.



FLEXIBLE, MULTI-YEAR, PARTNER-LED GRANTMAKING AND ACCOMPANIMENT



Supporting women's funds with flexible funds enables them to reach, respond, and amplify the voices of those at the margins and feminist leaders who steer transformative agendas and programs. It has given us stability to plan a range of activities central to our mission of supporting a strong learning agenda and strengthening networks among community-based women change leaders.

≈ Fund N

Another important early decision was to ensure that women's funds were able to determine their own priorities for how to use the grant funds and in envisaging whether, and in what form, accompaniment might take place. Partners consistently reflected that our flexible approach to amending activities, budget allocations, and no-cost extensions let them maximize the impact of their organizational infrastructure projects in rapidly changing contexts.

In the context of accompaniment, two factors seem important: First, flexibility in funding—and the implicit respect—powers deeper trust between donor and partner. Second, we were also able to leverage the deeper, more trusting relationships that evolved—particularly through the Collaboration Grants—into a dynamic of reciprocal accompaniment, where the organizational wisdom of partners was augmented by our movement-wide perspective.



"We were learning to fly the plane while building it too, which meant wanting to meet the needs of women's funds and also inform them of the next grantmaking cycles. Sometimes, the committees decided to pivot and not follow the initial grantmaking plan—this could be frustrating for some women's funds who would have liked the predictability of funding. At the same time, the ability and decision to pivot allowed us to be more responsive to the needs of women's funds, like delaying the Collaboration Grants by a year and deciding not to have a new grantmaking stream on narrative power. Consequently, we were able to give all women's funds a third round of Resilience Grants in 2024."



≈ *Fenomenal Funds Co-Leads' Reflection on Learning from Challenges: Multi-Year Funding*





RECIPROCAL, LEARNING-FOCUSED ACCOUNTABILITY BETWEEN PARTNERS, FUNDERS, AND MOVEMENTS

Fenomenal Funds adopted an emergent learning framework and, within the context of global timelines and capacity constraints, endeavored to prioritize collective learning, particularly in the context of the Collaboration Grants. Partners reflected that the learning conversations were generative and contributed to strengthening the remaining work of both their Resilience and Collaboration Grant projects.



" Learning from challenges is difficult. It requires a mindset shift to reframe individual and organizational approaches to failure, success, and risk. In the context of partner-donor dynamics, we noticed that conversational reporting elicited greater insights than written reporting and was augmented by a trusting relationship between donor and partner. However, conversational reporting requires a higher level of resourcing and must be factored into program design and operational budgets from the outset. We observed a symbiotic relationship between our flexibility, our approach to accompaniment, our approach to learning, and the capacity to harvest lessons from challenges."



~ Fenomenal Funds Co-Leads' Reflection on Learning from Challenges:
Mindset Shifts





THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF ORGANIZATIONAL AND COLLABORATIVE GRANTING MECHANISMS



Over the past few years, we have made significant progress, thanks in large part to the Resilience Grant, which supported us during a critical transition period... Strengthening partnerships with sister foundations has been another key priority, allowing us to exchange knowledge, best practices, and resources. These strategic collaborations have helped expand our network and shaped our approach to future initiatives.

≈ **Taso Foundation**

Fenomenal Funds' resourcing to strengthen organizational infrastructure was bifurcated—one grantmaking stream focused on the Resilience Grants for individual women's funds, and the other stream focused on the Collaboration Grants between women's funds. In our experience, both streams are necessary. In particular, the Collaboration Grants provided a space at the individual and organizational levels for peer-led learning that bolstered access to and increased confidence in skills and knowledge and improved capacity.

52. Learn more about it in the Funding Social Justice Futures report: https://fenomenalfunds.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Funding-Social-Justice-Futures_Strengthening-Organizations-through-Collaborative-Power.pdf.



" We observed some interesting and unexpected personnel-related differences in women's fund engagement in our two grantmaking streams. The Resilience Grants (which were core funding) more often than not engaged senior management. The Collaboration Grants (which, while flexible in nature, had a substantive focus on an aspect of organizational infrastructure) had a more diverse profile and, particularly in larger funds, often involved the staff with subject-matter expertise relevant to the project (for example, for projects focused on finance, the finance team would be engaged). In this context, we observed some gaps in fully integrating the rich learnings from the Collaboration Grants⁵² into the activities associated with the Resilience Grants.



To bridge this, and to facilitate cross learning both internally for organizations and across the women's fund community, we facilitated Community Conversations to draw out emerging insights from the Collaboration Grants. All Prospera members were welcome to attend, and we received positive feedback—indeed, people suggested it could have been helpful to run sessions more often and earlier in the process. This requires careful resourcing and planning, both to enable support from the funder and to ensure that partners are able to build the activities into their work plans and budgets."



≈ **Fenomenal Funds Co-Leads' Reflection on Learning from Challenges: Integrating Organizational and Collaborative Progress**

A FINAL REFLECTION:

NAVIGATING TURBULENCE BY RESOURCING RESILIENCE AND COLLABORATION

We are in the midst of turbulent times. For those working to secure the future of the planet and people, challenges abound. It can be tempting to fall into a malaise of outrage, despair, and fear.

As our bold experiment comes to an end, the lessons of Fenomenal Funds offer us illuminating pathways to navigate toward a better future with a focus on resilience and collaboration.

While organizational infrastructure and collaboration are often deprioritized by donors and partners alike, our data demonstrates the strength and power of investing in these practices. Stronger organizations deliver more responsive resourcing that better meets the needs of gender justice advocacy.

To that end, we affirm our recommendations on funding resilience:

1. Trust feminist funds and fund their vision, not just their projects
2. Offer multi-year, flexible grants for organizational infrastructure
3. Create noncompetitive, partner-led funding mechanisms
4. Invest in learning systems that empower strategic adaptation
5. Support collaboration and peer-led initiatives
6. Build power literacy and resilient mindsets
7. 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.



www.fenomenalfunds.org