Authentic & Equitable Partnerships:
A Framework for Building Movements

A report for Funders for Reproductive Equity

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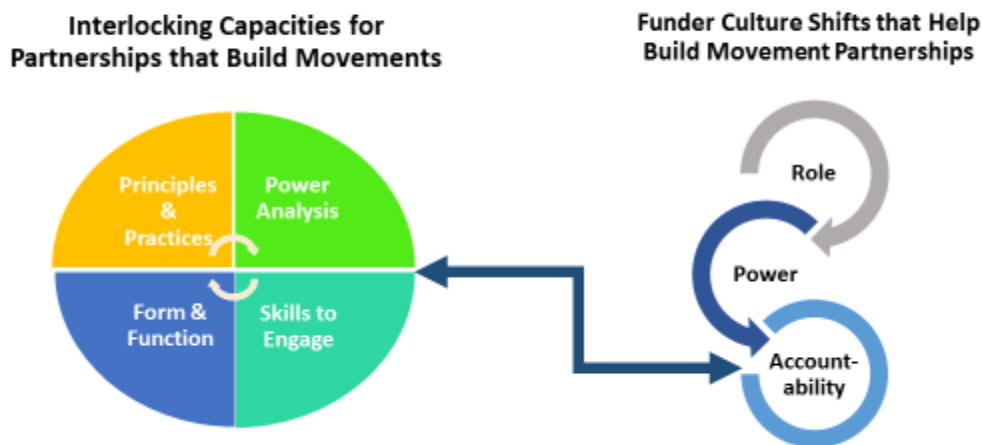**Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates**

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AUTHENTIC & EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS: A FRAMEWORK FOR BUILDING MOVEMENTS

For Funders Network for Reproductive Equity

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Summary

Framework for Authentic & Equitable Partnerships

Interlocking Capacities for Grantee Partnerships:

A. Guiding Principles and Practices for Mutual Accountability
B. Internal Power Analysis and Intentional Power Balancing
C. Skills to Engage
D. Clarity and Agreement about Form and Function

Culture Shifts for Funders:

A. Be Intentional and Transparent about Funder's Role
B. Be Intentional and Transparent about Power
C. Practice Mutual Accountability with Grantees

Introduction

One of the critical components of building a movement for justice concerns how we partner with each other. Movement Strategy Center says that one of the four key components of Transformative Movement Building is "Radical Connection and Community":

> *Transformative movements recognize that everything gets done through relationships and nothing gets done without them. At their heart, movements are about people, and cultures are about people and our relationships to each other and to the earth. Through deep listening, breakthrough conversations, and cultivating radical connections, movements are making leaps previously unthinkable.*[1]

The sexual and reproductive freedom movement[2] is exemplary of social justice movement building in the 21st century. It reveals the complex intersectionality of identities, relationships, and interests that underlies social justice principles, links virtually everyone in shared fate, and complicates conventional wisdom about what it takes to win or even how to define what winning is.

Like other social justice movements, it has been challenged by un-negotiated relationships between large, often white (and middle class, cis, and/or straight) -led, national organizations and smaller, often women of color (and low income, Trans, and/or queer) -led, grassroots organizations at the state and local level. With the support and encouragement, sometimes requirement, of funders, these groups have found themselves side by side at campaign tables, expected to work together to advance or defeat policy efforts, but with very different definitions and analyses of the problem, visions and measures of success, strategies, and styles. Further complicating matters, they have access to different resources from the very funders that push them to work together, and often find themselves feeling more competitive than collaborative for dollars that seem scarce, and indeed are limited.

Despite these challenges, some authentic partnerships have emerged and have contributed to some significant wins – for example, Proposition 4 in California and the Respect ABQ Women campaign in New Mexico, as well as thoughtful initiatives in developing new ways to partner such as All Above All, New Voices and NARAL in Ohio, and the leadership of Forward Together, SisterSong, CoreAlign, and Western States Center. But many joint efforts have fallen short of actual *partnerships*, not only failing to achieve campaign goals but straining relationships, undermining trust, and solidifying siloes, further weakening the movement by draining the capacity and energy for the hard work of partnerships.

Methodology, Findings, and the Evolution to Authentic and Equitable Partnerships

We initially interviewed 14 key informants, including 11 members of Funders for Reproductive Equity (FRE), to learn more about the interest in and need for new approaches, how the term "authentic partnerships" evolved, what enables and inhibits authentic partnerships from the perspective of funders, who exemplifies or effectively promotes authentic partnerships in their work, and what are the skills and the messages to promote authentic partnerships internally and externally.

From this initial inquiry, we identified the following themes:

- Authentic partnerships are critical to the success of the movement. They can make the difference in discrete policy campaigns and they can help transform the landscape and the terms of debate. The lack of authentic partnerships has limited the strength and success of the movement, undermined its potential to be a true movement, and prevented it from connecting to other progressive movements.

- Authentic partnerships are important at three different levels: (1) between differently positioned and resourced local, state, and national groups in the field, (2) between funders and their grantees, and (3) between funders with different resources and vantage points. There is room for improvement at all three levels.

- Authentic partnerships require clear shared goals and expectations, transparency and appreciation about the different contributions that each partner can make as well as the supports they need to participate as equals, and a fair distribution of leadership, power, resources, risks, and recognition. Several interviewees pointed to the particular role that funders can play in either exacerbating or mitigating resource disparities in the field. The sense is that the current pattern of funding decisions, which are not strategically coordinated across FRE, tends to create winners and losers in the field rather than helping to build a collective vision, coordinated strategy, or the potential for collective impact. In turn, different resource levels and power dynamics among funders themselves mirror those forces shaping the field.

- Notably, the funders of color interviewed for this process emphasized the importance of relationship building as a pre-requisite to authentic partnerships. That is, a relationship does not begin at the level of "authentic partnership" but can be built over time and with intentionality to enable true authenticity and true partnership. These funders of color noted that building relationships and trust takes time and that this is unlikely to happen in a moment of crisis or urgent opportunity.

We used these themes as a launching pad for a day-long session for learning and dialogue as part of the FRE's 2015 annual meeting. Following that session, we expanded the circle of informants to include

21 grantees in the field as well as 10 more funders, including members and non-members of FRE, and also cast our research net more broadly to learn from peer movements and recent scholarship. This stage confirmed our previous themes while also producing the following headlines:

- A *culture shift* is desperately needed in how people work together in the movement.
- *How funding is structured* is not taking the movement to the next level, and how some funders show up in movement politics inadvertently disrupts authentic partnerships.
- *Accountability practices* are needed and must be modeled by funders in relationship to grantees and communities served.
- Working toward a shared vision of reproductive freedom and making strategic decisions requires a shared understanding of *transactional and transformational strategy*, how the two relate and how they are different in both approach and outcome.
- *Intersection of movements* can happen if we build relationships, understand and leverage cross-impact, and share knowledge and lessons.
- While important, "authentic partnerships" as a frame can obfuscate dynamics of *race, power, and privilege*, which must be explicitly named and addressed for true "authentic partnerships" to have a chance.

On this last point, more than a few people critiqued the term "authentic partnerships." One comment was it was hard to imagine "funders" and "authentic" in the same sentence; this person articulated what many implied, that the inherent nature of the funding relationship precludes authenticity. Others expressed feeling like it was buzzword without substance. Yet some shared it was refreshing to have this conversation especially in the context of partnering/working with funders. We have chosen to stick with the term, in recognition of the conversations within FRE that catalyzed this work, but to explicitly pair it with "equitable" within the context of power. Whatever we call it, the underlying meaning aims to be reflective of real dynamics and needs in the movement.

Based on our knowledge of, experience with, and intentional scan of research about social justice movement building, we know that our findings are not out of the ordinary. This awareness led us to ask the following question:

We know this – the problem and what's needed to solve it. Why don't we do it? What prevents groups on the ground as well as funders from institutionalizing the best practices already known to support and model authentic and equitable partnerships?

What we heard was that both funders and grantees need explicit guidance on how to put those best practices to work. The framework that follows aims to provide that guidance. It is offered in two parts – one for groups working on the ground and one for funders – that are inextricably linked. It includes explanation of why we believe the identified components are necessary in creating authentic and equitable partnerships and some examples for organizations and individuals to adapt for appropriate use within different cultural contexts.

Framework for Authentic & Equitable Partnerships

Part 1: A Framework for Grantees

The four interlocking capacities are equally important and there is no ideal, linear path to building them. The order in which we list them here reflects one practical and emotional logic flow but should not be interpreted to mean that they have a hierarchy of importance or hard and fast sequence. Different groups will more naturally enter into capacity building from different points. Some will work their way through all four capacities, while others can use this framework diagnostically and focus only on those areas that are lacking or weak.

What is important is that attention be paid to these four interlocking capacities *before* a group of organizations focuses on its campaign goals and strategy or external power analysis or media work or anything else. Attending to this internal work might feel to some as a slow-down or diversion, but we have learned the hard way what happens when we skip over this work, to get to the so-called "real work." The point is that this work, *the work of looking inward and building the capacity to be in partnership together authentically and equitably*, is itself an important and worthy social justice outcome as well as an indispensable step in winning campaigns and building the movement.

As stated in our findings above, partnerships don't *start* at authentic and equitable; they have to intentionally work toward that. This means we ought to be building these relationships before and between moments of crisis or opportunity, so we are well positioned to meet them. However, that does not mean that diverse groups cannot come together, and work towards authenticity and equity, in more intense times. We put the finishing touches on this framework in the wake of an historic election that has heightened the need for the movement to work together effectively – both to support those who will bear the brunt of oppressive policy and politics and to try to mitigate its effects and also to continue building a platform from which a more favorable political environment can rise. Even as partner groups feel the urgency to fight, they can take the lessons included here and intentionally build the capacities needed for authentic and equitable partnerships.

Here are the four interlocking capacities for authentic and equitable partnerships among grantee organizations:

A. Guiding Principles and Practices for Mutual Accountability
B. Internal Power Analysis and Intentional Power Balancing
C. Skills to Engage
D. Clarity and Agreement about Form and Function

Each of these is described in detail.

A. Guiding Principles and Practices for Mutual Accountability

It is critical to take the time to explicitly and intentionally articulate shared principles that resonate with everyone as well as shared practices to bring them to life. Social justice groups tend to be values driven, and so we already move around with guiding principles and norms, and often very good ones. But these aren't often explicitly stated, which makes it hard to negotiate them collectively. Without a shared set of agreements, individual partners acting with integrity to their own principles and norms can begin to doubt and suspect each other, thus undermining their shared purpose. Sometimes, the difference is semantic; other times it is a deeper difference in worldview. Either can undermine a partnership, and neither is insurmountable as long as time, space, and resources are devoted to this discourse and exploration.

While "mutual accountability" can be understood as one principle and practice, we learned from our research that it must be the *central* principle if partnerships are to be truly authentic and equitable. In fact, some suggested we change the name of the overall framework to "accountable partnerships." *"Mutual accountability" is a sense of commitment and responsibility to each other and to the larger shared purpose of the partnership and the communities it serves.* Mutual accountability comes to life by talking and behaving in ways that align with stated values, and by acknowledging and taking responsibility for the *impact* of words and actions, versus good intentions. Mutual accountability can be codified into specific agreements, or can be more informal - but nonetheless explicitly negotiated.

From our study, mutual accountability can be cultivated and demonstrated through the following seven principles and practices:

1. *Committing to transformational, not just transactional, change*: This means changing how business is done internally and devoting time and resources to the internal work of the partnership. Living into this commitment requires redefining "winning" to include measures of long-term change that builds power and that changes hearts and minds as well as policies.

2. *Prioritizing relationships at least as much as task:* This requires taking the time and having the tools to work through conflict, to have challenging conversations, to stay present and involved in an active relationship, to give and receive feedback, and to understand individual power and privilege in the context of the partnership dynamics of race, power and privilege.

3. *Building the collective:* This means affirming the partnership and its collective work while also lifting up individual or organizational contributions. Recognizing structural power dynamics (described in greater detail in the next section), it is especially important for white partners to thoughtfully step back and support the leadership of women of color, while also leaning into what might be the uncomfortable position of listening more than speaking and following more than leading. White partners also can be generous in sharing access to resources including to funders, networks, and media. "More mainstream organizations may have more power and privilege – you have to be up front in acknowledging that," said one interviewee. "As the head

of this organization and a white woman, I need to really listen, be an ally, recognize the power dynamics. My role is stepping back but leaning in."

4. *Centering the lived experience of those most affected:* A central principle to social justice movement building is that those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, and their voices and experiences should lead the change effort. The reality is that many partnerships do not directly include the people most affected, though there might be organizations within the partnership that are closer than others. Partnerships must grapple with how best to hear from and engage marginalized communities that bear the brunt of unjust systems and also the impact of good intentions that are misguided or ill informed.

5. *Trust-building and Truth-telling*: Trust and honesty are two sides of the same coin. Take the time to genuinely see each other and build trusting relationships so people can speak their truth with each other, especially the difficult truths. Create space and mechanisms to share stories and to learn about each other's strengths, vulnerabilities, hopes, and boundaries. Working together means having each other's back and embracing partners publicly. The more this happens, the stronger the bonds will be and the easier it will become to weather challenges together.

6. *Power Sharing*: One metaphor we heard for authentic and equitable partnerships was "building the table, designing the menu, cooking and eating together, as opposed to one group inviting the others to dinner that's already made and just asking us to bring dessert." Below, we discuss how to analyze power dynamics within the partnership and how to balance them equitably, but here it is important simply to have an explicit agreement to share power equitably. This includes setting up decision-making processes, leadership structures, resource allocations, and everything else in a way that balances power, privileges those who are typically most marginalized, and interrupts business as usual.

7. *Transparency*: While the ultimate goal is sharing power, at the very least groups must be transparent about power differentials. This includes acknowledging how different groups interact with funding sources, the media, and others, and what issues might impact participation. Discuss race, power, and privilege explicitly, name how privilege and power manifest in relationships and in the work together, and work collectively to address the interpersonal, institutional, and systemic issues of race, power, and privilege. This principle requires a commitment to over-communicate, rather than risk having critical information becoming concentrated, which not only undermines the work of partners but also serves to tip the power balance insidiously. This also means having explicit feedback loops, ways to interrupt interpersonal dynamics, and protocols to re-visit the guiding principles and practices periodically and adjust them as needed.

Intentionally negotiating and articulating guiding principles and practices for mutual accountability helps to build the "container" for authentic and equitable partnerships. As we wrote about in a previous publication, this is "not to avoid conflict and hard emotions or create some false sense of 'safe space.' Rather, we build it precisely because we know conflict and emotions will arise and that 'safety' can be elusive and subjective. The container helps the group support one another rather than marginalize

individuals, be better able to recover from challenges, and remain intact even as differences are emphasized. It also encourages community members to bring their best and full selves, be respectful in their own words and actions and of others, and create a shared sense of accountability to one another and the process."[3]

B. Internal Power Analysis and Intentional Power Balancing

"We are typically the only group of color and the only reproductive justice organization [at our partnership tables]," said one interviewee. "We bump up against the challenges of how power is operating. We have to critically acknowledge how oppression and privilege plays out and do it in a way of calling people in and not calling out. A lot of the times we are working with well-meaning partners struggling to understand why it is important to address these issues. It is hard being the only organization of color in the room and having to navigate the power dynamics and find ways to call people in."

Groups working together in partnership to advance or block policy change operate in a power context. They aim to confront power structures that control policy decisions, and they work to build their own power in order to do so. Yet, when they come together, they might skip the critical step of examining *how power operates within and among their partnership groups* and being intentional about how they want those dynamics to be shaped. Left unchecked, these dynamics, which mirror the larger context that the groups seek to change, inevitably will undermine the integrity and efficacy of the partnership.

From our work with and study across social justice movements, we have observed (and previously written about) at least four ways that dominant power dynamics can show up within movement partnerships[4]:

1. *Differing worldviews and assumptions shaped by life experiences of privilege and oppression.* Our life experiences, shaped in part by our social location and identity, becomes a lens through which we view and understand everything, even how we define what it means to be a good partner, especially when race, gender, class, other structural power dynamics are at play. What it takes to trust another person, what winning looks like to us, what motivates and frustrates us, and more will vary depending on whether one operates more with a dominant/privileged lens or a marginalized/oppressed one. Of course, we all have myriad identities, and most of us have a mix of both privileged and oppressed identities. How these aggregate will be particular to each person; no simple or sweeping formulas apply. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves and each other, we can build awareness about how our worldviews and assumptions are informed. More importantly, we become more aware that we even have worldviews and assumptions – that what we think and believe, and how we think and believe it, is, in fact, *just one way* – and we can become more explicit and transparent about them in order to negotiate them with partners.

2. *Different ways of doing the work based on racialized and other cultural norms.* Following closely from different worldviews and assumptions will be how we operationalize them through our norms and practices. How we define and practice leadership (and followership), make decisions, communicate, plan, evaluate, meet, celebrate, mourn, support, and challenge each other often look different. While most progressives value diversity, it can be challenging to have different, un-negotiated ways of doing the work when you are trying to work together. Further, those ways that mirror dominant culture[5] – white, male, Christian, middle class, standard English speaking, etc. – get validated externally, by funders, policy makers, the media, and others, and thus can turn a "variety is the spice of life" difference among equals into a "right versus wrong" way of working. Partners have to acknowledge their different approaches *and* also how these differences are amplified or diminished by dominant culture norms in order to negotiate the best *ways* (emphasis intentional; there may be multiple ways) of working for their particular partnership.

3. *Differential access to resources that have disparate economic value.* Once different ways of working get amplified or diminished by dominant culture norms, economic consequences follow. So dominant culture groups quickly become more dominant thanks to the reinforcing support of funders who approve of the way they work. Likewise, marginalized groups become ever more marginalized as they try to stay afloat with minimal support from funders who don't value or recognize their way of working. It is difficult to come to the table as equals when one feels relatively strong financially and the other relatively fragile. In an economically driven frame of reference, which itself is a western construct, other resources, such as lived experience or authentic relationships with people most affected by the issues, are undervalued. So, this becomes a double whammy, widening the power divide between partner groups. This dynamic can be interrupted by not only acknowledging that it exists, but also by taking stock of the different resources each partner brings, re-valuing those resources internally, and communicating publicly, including to funders, about each partner's respective contributions, in the hopes of generating equitable support for different groups. Authentic and equitable partnerships also can go a step further and intentionally redistribute financial resources among partners.

4. *Different levels and types of risk based on racialized and other power structures.* With all of these other differences at play, it is no wonder that differently positioned and resourced partners feel, and indeed truly face, different risks in pursuing the work of the partnership. But it can be hard to name and discuss these risk differentials when players do not share a frame of reference about power differentials. In the absence of an explicit analysis and exploration about power *inside* the partnership, groups with less structural power and privilege can be perceived as being disruptive, passive, hesitant, overly process oriented, or just plain slow to more privileged partners who think of themselves as bold and visionary. Once again, the vision, strategic thinking, and courageous actions of less privileged groups can be overlooked or undervalued, furthering the vicious cycle of inequitable power within the partnership. Instead, being explicit about power structures and how they affect the risks each partner faces can help the partner groups be much more strategic about how to mitigate those risks and make best use of each partner's strengths and sphere of influence. Further, partners with greater privilege can become better allies, thus deepening the level of trust across the partnership.

Obviously, a common theme is simply to discuss power and how it is operating within the partnership, and then to be intentional about shaping power dynamics equitably. Doing an *internal power analysis* is a little different from the kinds of power analysis typically done in campaign planning. In the latter, groups map the context and power relationships in order to determine who the targets are for advocacy, what kinds of messages will be effective, and how best to deliver those messages. The pre-campaign, internal power analysis that our research suggests is critical instead focuses on how dominant power structures (such as racism, sexism, etc.) affect the individual members of the partnership and their relationships with each other. This requires an honest examination of history, how public policies have benefited some while burdening others based on identity, the persistent segregation between dominant and marginalized groups, and subsequently, what kinds of accumulated advantages and disadvantages have accrued to different partner groups, affecting them in at least the four ways named above. There are several approaches to doing this kind of power analysis; many can be found at www.racialequitytools.org

In all human systems, there will be intersecting identities and thus intersecting power structures. Given the particular history of the United States, how all of its institutions were co-created alongside the construction of race, and how its geography continues to be literally and figuratively shaped by race, structural racism is particularly salient to social justice movement building. Thus, authentic and equitable partnerships must be *explicit*, though not exclusive, about race in their power analysis.

C. Skills to Engage

For a vision as bold as sexual and reproductive freedom, the tent must be big enough so it is not just an echo chamber and so that the movement will benefit the people and communities who need it the most. Yet, it is precisely this need to broaden the tent that can challenge groups with different backgrounds, life experiences and priorities, styles, and motivations. Gerber and Jacobs share their advice, "… vet potential stakeholders to determine their capacity for working with the tensions and complexities of diverse perspectives and their willingness to participate in an emergent process, believing that each ideological camp holds a crucial piece of the puzzle and that the tension of differing views actually creates better solutions."[6]

The process of building authentic and equitable partnerships requires not only having conceptual agreement about guiding principles and practices for mutual accountability or a shared internal power analysis and commitment to intentionally balancing power, but also the *skills* to bring those conceptual agreements to life. Our research pointed to four critical skills for sustaining partnerships that are authentic and equitable, as well as some questions to explore in order to build these skills individually and collectively:

1. *Productive conflict:*
   - When and how are conflicts raised and discussed?
   - Are there different patterns of response by race/ethnic identity, type of group etc.? Are cultural differences regarding conflict respected by the partners and the process?
   - What are the responses when an individual or a group raises a difficult issue, especially one involving race, inequities, power, or privilege?

2. *Leadership:*
   - How is leadership being defined? By title? By characteristics? By individuals in the community?
   - What leadership behaviors are being rewarded? Are individuals marginalized if they do not embody specific leadership characteristics?
   - How is leadership cultivated across the partnership?
   - How is leadership shared?

3. *Decision making:*
   - How are decisions made concerning who and how organizations get invited to the partnership?
   - What is the decision-making process? Who is included? Is the process transparent? Are there opportunities for feedback and flexibility to make changes to the process? Who decides?
   - Do decision-making processes center those most impacted and privilege marginalized voices?
   - Do the strategies and possible policy changes anticipate and address the different impacts of a practice on distinct racial groups? Do they take into consideration accumulated advantages for whites and accumulated disadvantages for people of color?

4. *Communication:*
   - Are there times to reflect on and discuss whose voices are dominating decision-making processes and making sure the people most accustomed to controlling these processes are not dominating the process? (i.e., white people with respect to people of color, men with respect with women, cis-gender with respect to transgender people, wealthier with respect to poorer people, professional and government officials with respect to residents)
   - How has the process been examined for unintended consequences of oppression?
   - How are ideas/concerns legitimized within the group? What is the race/ethnic identity or power position of the individuals who legitimize an idea or concern?[7]

D. Clarity and Agreement about Form and Function

Social justice groups, even those who are not terribly process oriented, can appreciate the need to focus on principles, power, and skills. What form of partnership is best suited to meet its purpose might seem simple or overly technical or perhaps even boring by comparison to those other capacities. Yet, not being clear and intentional about form and function is a set-up for mis-understanding, mis-aligned expectations, and missed opportunities.

Even in our personal relationships, most of us have experienced the downside of not having clarity about the kind of relationship we want to have or think we are in. At a movement level, the repercussions can go well beyond a bruised ego to deep distrust and division. Taking the time to explicitly discuss and negotiate the *form* of the partnership can help it function much more effectively and equitably.

Whatever terminology is used – network, coalition, alliance – the important thing is to align form and function. Think of the forms of partnership as a continuum, spanning degrees of formality, complexity, risk, and integration. On one end would be a simple, informal structure to support relatively simple though still essential tasks like staying informed about each other's work. Partners would remain fully autonomous and bear fairly minimal risks for being in partnership. Moving along the continuum would require becoming a bit more formal and complex, perhaps drawing up written agreements to guide shared work on a specific campaign or program. The groups still would remain separate and autonomous at the organizational level, but their shared work would be more integrated. Thus, the risks increase as partner groups share responsibility for results. At the far end, groups might merge or find other ways to fully integrate their organizational structures in order to achieve results that elude them individually. The risks of failure might increase, but so might the rewards as the combined entity wields power greater than the sum of its parts.

There is no right or wrong way to partner, no better or worse form. *The right and best form will be the one that matches what the partnership is trying to accomplish.* A loose network works well for sharing information, but not so much for a time-intense legislative advocacy campaign; a formalized strategic alliance can contribute to targeted systems change but is probably overkill for periodic updates on each other's work. And a merger only makes sense if combined strengths mitigate or at least outweigh combined gaps in capacity.

Once these options are explored and an appropriate form is chosen, there will be implications for the other capacities as well. Mutual accountability must be scaled to the form and function of the partnership. Power can and should be balanced at any point on the continuum, but the ways power manifests will vary greatly – for example, there will be different issues to consider if most of the communications is internal versus external and necessitating a designated representative. Likewise, the skills needed will vary depending on the form. A partnership designed primarily for information sharing should probably focus its skill building on interpersonal communication, while more complicated forms would require more formal communications systems along with leadership structures and decision-making processes. All forms of human interaction would benefit from enhanced skills in conflict negotiation.

Part 2: A Framework for Funders

Foundations can play an important role in building a movement, but it is important to remember that their role is not as a leader or a designer, but as a supporter – in Tom David's eloquent statement, "Movements belong to the people, not their funders." Foundations can help jumpstart or maintain efforts through resources, but the actual movement and credit needs to come from and for those organizations doing the footwork. This is especially important since movements are predicated on power building for its communities and it will be important that organizations do not confuse the power of money with their own power to move what needs to be moved.…

Of course, our emphasis on the separate roles of foundations and movement-builders does not imply a lack of engagement. We would, for example, urge some in the social movement community to stop holding program officers and others at such a distance. We have been struck by those times when organizers deemed it best to keep the foundation outside the doors – even though it sometimes means keeping important expertise in policy and resources at arm's length. There is a role for new partnerships– and while the best way to do this is for the roles to be clear, that will require some experimentation along the way. Such separation and understanding of different roles does not imply that foundations can simply fund movements without themselves being transformed by those movements. While they will not become equal social movement partners, they need to be as committed to the long-term, to relationship-building, and to a willingness to listen to community as are the organizers they support. And foundations will also have to develop even more profoundly that "sixth sense" that allows organizers to figure which people and groups are most likely to stay in the game and see it through to the health justice end."[8]

While the focus of this inquiry was how to cultivate authentic partnerships among grantees, the relationship between granters and funders quickly emerged as an equally important factor in the success of the partnership in achieving lasting wins for the sexual and reproductive freedom movement.

Grantees interviewed expressed some concerns about their typical experiences with funders:

- Being overly "results oriented" and expecting results quickly, thus undercutting relationship building and internal capacity building for authentic and equitable partnerships described above.
- Defining results too narrowly, and thus prioritizing some strategies over others. This impedes movement building, which requires multiple approaches, and undermines relationships and trust among partner groups.
- Cultivating organizations working on a specific strategy rather than cultivating the movement.

- Overly directing the agenda and enlisting grantees to move that agenda rather than following the lead of groups on the ground. This concern is further exacerbated when funders are not transparent about the agenda, and so grant seekers waste their time cultivating relationships that are never going to come to fruition.
- Not being open to feedback and punishing grantees that voice concerns or honest critique.
- Providing one-year grants but wanting long-term outcomes.

Interviews also offered some examples of helpful practices by funding partners that support and advance authentic partnerships among grantees:

- Investing in making time and space for relationship building.
- Holding national organizations accountable for authentically building up and having impact at the state and local level, which includes ensuring that intellectual and infrastructure capacity building is included for state and local organizations.
- Supporting groups who actively address race, power, and privilege dynamics and investing in their leadership and building to scale.
- Conducting due diligence in identifying organizations that are disruptive and destructive in partnerships, and ensuring there is an internal accountability process in place.
- Understanding that partnerships being created for rapid response still need an on-ramp as well as time after the crisis has passed to continue to build the relationship for the next time.

This feedback from interviewees, as well as reflection on effective practices by funders, led to a call by grantees for a culture shift among funders.

Stop:

- stoking competition among groups and exacerbating a scarcity mindset
- forcing partnerships through grants
- being outcome-driven at the expense of process
- not modeling partnerships yet expecting grantees to be partners

Start/Continue:

- asking the question, is there enough money to succeed and how can we bring you to scale to succeed?
- investing in partnership infrastructure, internal development, and relationships
- understanding how large pots of money change the dynamics in relationships – and mitigate that
- using privilege thoughtfully and transparently to lift up issues
- institutionalizing and disseminating learning – and sharing what you are trying
- challenging insularity and building mutual accountability

To more effectively support authentic and equitable partnerships among grantees, funders must shift their institutional cultures in the following ways:

A. Be Intentional and Transparent about the Funder's Role

Social justice movements cannot afford to exclude any of their assets or allies in the struggle for change. At the same time, those assets and allies must be deployed strategically and thoughtfully toward the higher purpose of the movement, which is not only to win specific outcomes but to build power for the communities most impacted.

Gwyn Barley from The Colorado Trust shares in a publication of Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, "If you want to be a partner in the community, you can't start from a mindset of 'my job is to make grants.' You have to start with relationship building and joining people on a journey."[9] This is important advice for funders who are too distant and uninformed about what movements are, what they need to succeed, and what success even looks like. On the other hand, some funders have the opposite challenge – being overly involved in leading and strategizing rather than being an informed and supportive partner.

Some funders of sexual and reproductive freedom have tapped grantees to become grantmakers and to run foundation programs. This is a positive development, enabling philanthropic practice to be better informed by the reality on the ground. And yet, while this may open up the possibility of more trusting interpersonal dynamics between grantmaker and grantee, it should not be confused with a dramatic change in the inherent structural power dynamic between funders and the groups they fund. Foundation program staff who have experience in the field have a unique opportunity to model empathy and humility in their new roles, along with bringing astute insights and perspectives to the funding table. This can help them ask better questions, engage leaders beyond the usual suspects, and support transformative, not just transactional, change.

Without taking over what should appropriately be the responsibility of nonprofit grantees, funders can be better partners to movements themselves. The simple act of being intentional, and then transparent, about the roles they will play with their funded partnership would go a long way in strengthening their relationship with grantees.

GEO offers five roles that grantmakers can take to support movements[10]:

1. Investor
2. Broker
3. Connector
4. Learner
5. Influencer

Just as it is important for partner groups to determine how they will work together and what form their partnership will take, likewise funders can choose a role that is most useful to the partnership. Better still, partner groups can give feedback to help funders determine what their role will be.

B. Be Intentional and Transparent about Power

Just as partner groups must take the time to analyze how structural power dynamics, particularly racism, are operating inside the partnership, and then intentionally shape them to be equitable, so too must funders be willing to expose, examine, and shift their power relationships with grantees. The reality of the philanthropic sector is that decision makers are overwhelmingly white, and they operate in institutional contexts that are fundamentally predicated on the preservation of white privilege and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. Even if the point person from a funder is a person of color, they must be aware of their *institutional* white privilege and wealth privilege, and how that affects the relationship with grantees, no matter their racial identity.

Interviewees offered these suggestions:

- Make a commitment to gain more awareness of power dynamics, racism, and other oppression issues, and communicate dedication to addressing these issues. Funder transparency about their journey opens up space for other organizations and leaders to be honest about those issues themselves.
- Value multiple levels of knowledge and experience and privilege those with on-the-ground direct experience.
- Speak to power dynamics, challenge the dynamics as they manifest, and consider what needs to be transformed/modified in funding structures and processes.

Funder collaboratives and networks also present another layer of power dynamics – between foundations of different sizes, between staff members with different levels of authority within their respective institutions, between professional staff and the philanthropic benefactors that employ them. The tools for conducting an internal power analysis described in the grantee section above can be adapted for funder partnerships as well.

C. Practice Mutual Accountability with Grantees

"Discussing accountability processes usually focuses on the process used with grantees to track organizational outcomes to ensure they follow the agreement on how grant monies are used. Equally important is being transparent regarding the foundation's accountability to the grantees and

communities it serves. This includes tracking responsiveness to community needs, assessing how resources are being distributed and to whom, ensuring that success is being defined by the community/grantees, conducting a structural power analysis, attending to power dynamics at all levels, and reviewing practices to assure they are not contributing to inequities or unintentionally having a racialized impact." [11]

Funders expect grantees to be accountable to the funder for the grant dollars received. And they expect groups working in partnership to be accountable for achieving collective outcomes that match funder expectations and priorities. But as we have seen across myriad movements, accountability works best when it is mutual. This is especially true with funders, because of the un-balancing effect that money can have on any partnership.

Accountability refers to creating processes and systems that are designed to help individuals and groups hold themselves and each other in check for their decisions and actions and for whether the work being done reflects and embodies equity principles. Bring a racial equity lens to accountability means consistently checking the work against a set of questions[12]:

- How is the issue being defined?
- Who is defining it?
- Who is this work going to benefit if it succeeds? What might be the unintended consequences if it succeeds, and for whom?
- Who will it harm if the work does *not* succeed? Who might it benefit?
- How are risks distributed among the stakeholders?
- How will a group know if its plan has accounted for risks and unintended consequences for different racial and ethnic groups?
- What happens if people pull out before the goals are met?
- Who anointed the people and groups being relied on for the answers to these questions?
- Who else can answer these questions to guide the work?

Funders can model the behaviors they seek from the authentic and equitable partnerships they cultivate with their funding. Bring an equity lens, explicit about race, to enhance other practices designed to increase a foundation's effectiveness, such as these helpful suggestions from GEO: "Demonstrate your trustworthiness by being flexible and transparent. In what ways do we demonstrate that our foundation is a trustworthy partner? Do any of our practices send a message that we don't fully trust our partners and grantees? Are any of our accountability measures disincentives for network development? How will our processes affect the dynamics of the network? Let the network make decisions for itself, but offer support when needed. How can we push power and control out? How can we lend support without overpowering the network? How do we balance our goals and accountability requirements with the fluidity of the network process?"[13] Though a helpful set of suggested questions, it is important to racialize them and discuss how power and privilege may be present.[14]

One big opportunity to practice mutual accountability is in sharing mistakes and failures openly. "There is very little space to talk about failures and mistakes. We can't show up in authentic partnerships if we can't own it personally what happened and not get punished for it," noted one of our nonprofit interviewees. Funders can help by not only modeling this kind of transparency but also being sure not to punish grantees for admitting their own struggles.

Partnering authentically and equitably is counter culture. By leading culture shifts within their own institutions and networks, they not only can model this behavior for grantees, but also learn about the reality of what it takes to achieve truly authentic and equitable partnerships that work and win.

Conclusion

It is our hope that this framework will be used as a starting point and that groups committing to practicing or supporting authentic and equitable partnerships will customize the framework and questions offered above to reflect their own cultural norms as well as their own wisdom. We would welcome hearing from users of this framework, including learning about adaptations made, so that our collective knowledge continues to grow.

Endnotes

[1] "Four Elements of Transformative Movements," Movement Strategy Center, http://movementstrategy.org/msc-approach/.

[2] We use the term "sexual and reproductive freedom" to encompass the full spectrum of health, rights, and justice issues and approaches. Where necessary and relevant, we identify specific orientations (i.e., health or rights or justice).

[3] "Paying Attention to White Culture and Privilege: A Missing Link to Advancing Racial Equity," by Gita Gulati-Partee and Maggie Potapchuk, *Foundation Review,* Volume 6, Issue 1, 2014.

[4] These four themes are taken from "Paradox of Power," developed and presented by OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc., www.opensourceleadership.com.

[5] In "Paying Attention to White Culture and Privilege: A Missing Link to Advancing Racial Equity," by Gita Gulati-Partee and Maggie Potapchuk, *Foundation Review,* Volume 6, Issue 1, 2014, we define "dominant culture" as the "unquestioned standards of behavior and ways of functioning embodied by the vast majority of institutions in the United States. Because it is so normalized it can be hard to see, which only adds to its powerful hold. In many ways, it is indistinguishable from what we might call U.S. culture or norms – a focus on individuals over groups, for example, or an emphasis on the written word as a form of professional communication. But it operates in even more subtle ways, by actually defining what "normal" is – and likewise, what "professional," "effective," or even "good" is. In turn, white culture also defines what is not good, "at risk," or "unsustainable." White culture values some ways – ways that are more familiar and come more naturally to those from a white, western tradition – of thinking, behaving, deciding, and knowing, while devaluing or rendering invisible other ways. And it does this without ever having to explicitly say so."

[6] "From Stalemate to Solutions*,*" Karen Abrams Gerber & Andrea Jacobs, *Stanford Social Innovation Review,* April 26, 2016, http://ssir.org/articles/entry/from_stalemate_to_solutions.

[7] Many of these questions are based on questions from: *Concentric Circles: Unpacking Privilege and Power* developed by Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates and www.racialequitytools.org tip sheets developed by Sally Leiderman, Center for Assessment and Policy Development and Maggie Potapchuk.

[8] *Making Change: How Social Movements Work - and How to Support Them*, Manuel Pastor and Rhonda Ortiz. Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE). University of Southern California. 2009. pp. 44-45

[9] *Building Collaboration from the Inside Out,* Lori Bartczak, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2015.

[10] "How Can Grantmakers Support Movements?" in *Many Hands, More Impact: Philanthropy's Role in Supporting Movements*, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2013.

[11] "Paying Attention to White Culture and Privilege: A Missing Link to Advancing Racial Equity," by Gita Gulati-Partee and Maggie Potapchuk, *Foundation Review,* Volume 6, Issue 1, 2014.

[12] Questions are from: https://www.racialequitytools.org/plan/change-process/accountability. Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates and Sally Leiderman, Center for Assessment and Policy Development.

[13] *Cracking the Network Code: Four Principles for Grantmakers,* by Jane Wei-Skillern, Nora Silver, and Eric Heitz, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2013.

[14] *Reviewing Resources Tip Sheet*, from www.racialequitytools.org

Acknowledgements & Additional Resources

We are grateful to the grantee organizations and funders that informed this framework. To honor the anonymity that many requested in exchange for their candor, we cannot list all of them here. Where possible, we have included or referenced materials and tools developed by informants, as well as other practitioners in the field. We fully recognize that our work builds upon and amalgamates the wisdom and experience of others, and we hope that it furthers the conversation and work. We are tremendously grateful to Funders for Reproductive Equity for its steadfast leadership, commitment, and support to authentic and equitable partnerships.

In addition to the resources included in the Endnotes, we would like mention a few that can provide insights on developing authentic and equitable partnerships (and look forward to hearing about more):

- All Above All
- Building Movement Project
- CoreAlign
- Forward Together
- Movement Strategy Center
- SisterSong: Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective
- Western States Center

Crossing Organizational Boundaries to Build New Partnerships, Building Movement Project.

Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building, Maggie Potapchuk, Sally Leiderman, Donna Bivens, and Barbara Major, 2005.

Future Forward: An Experiment Between Funders and Activists, Forward Together.

Developing Authentic Relationships across Differences: Trust Sustainability and Shared Power, Karen Pace, Dionardo Pizaña, Cornell University Cooperative Extension.

Gender, Organizing, and Movement Building at the Intersection of Environmental Justice and Reproductive Justice, Movement Strategy Center and Women's Foundation of California, 2009.

Movement Building Indicators, Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, 2009.

Power and Social Change, Grassroots Policy Project.

We also encourage readers to peruse the resources and tools on the site, www.racialequitytools.org, developed by MP Associates, Center for Assessment and Policy Development, and World Trust Educational Services. Specifically, there are sections on Accountability, Alliances and Coalition, and Structural Racism. Also, www.opensourceleadership.com includes resources for conducting an internal power analysis, determining partnership forms, and negotiating conflict effectively and equitably.

About the Authors

MP Associates and OpenSource Leadership Strategies are national consulting practices with deep track records of working with organizations to align their programs, operations, and culture with their equity and justice values and goals.

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