



FUNDING YOUTH MOVEMENTS

Insights from youth movements
and principles for donors



TORCHLIGHT COLLECTIVE

THE TORCHLIGHT COLLECTIVE is a social enterprise that brings together leading consultants and professionals from around the world to strengthen meaningful adolescent and youth engagement in the global health and development agenda. We leverage our individual and collective strengths to deliver high-quality consulting services to governments, multilateral agencies, donors and civil society organizations.

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When we founded The Torchlight Collective, we wanted to bring together some of the best minds working at the intersection of sexual and reproductive health, human rights and youth movements. Over the past two years, we have benefited from the expertise of many brilliant people, including some of our best partners, and also learned together as a collective. Now, we're proud to introduce the first products in our #TorchlightLearning Series. This collection brings together insights from across our network, and we're excited to be leveraging so much expertise in one place.

Our hope is that these publications offer wisdom, fodder for discussion and practical advice to benefit anyone interested in supporting or learning about youth-led advocacy!

Those of you with money to give or grant:

you'll find out how youth leadership models are evolving, and also principles for supporting youth movements.

Those rebel rousers among us:

you'll find tips on improving your advocacy and building leadership skills; and a quick and dirty guide to the pros/cons of joining a youth-led coalition.

This inaugural series includes the following briefs:

STRONGER TOGETHER

Considerations when joining a youth-led coalition

YOUTH LEADERSHIP FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

New and emerging leadership approaches

FUNDING YOUTH MOVEMENTS

Insights from youth movements and principles for donors

To comment and share your ideas, please visit our blog at www.torchlightcollective.org/learning and follow us on [Facebook](#) / [Twitter](#) / [Instagram](#).

Please read, disseminate and discuss! As always, please reach out with feedback or ideas for future publications.

Thank you for joining the discussion.

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Movement building is typically not a donor-driven initiative. Rather, movements stem from constituents who are affected by an issue and mobilize to take collective action. But at a certain point, movements need funds to sustain themselves and scale up their efforts, as well as track and communicate their impact. This is especially true for movements led by young people, as well as other disenfranchised groups, because they are unlikely to have their own incomes or financial resources.

This document outlines some key principles and ways of working that donors can apply to funding youth movements. It builds on lessons learned from the Torchlight Collective's programming alongside youth-led advocacy coalitions, as well as experiences from other organizations. There are many different funding mechanisms, so utilize the principles that work best for your organization.

Work in partnership with young people to design funding processes:

Involve young people when you are designing your funding program, including funding priorities, to ensure that it addresses their lived realities. One way to have meaningful involvement is to identify existing young leaders from the relevant geographical contexts and/or communities through a transparent and inclusive process, and then establish an advisory committee. This committee can help you through the steps of grant design, selection and more. Young people can also help develop proposal formats that are simple and easy to use for their peers and support grant monitoring and evaluation.

Practical tips

- Discuss the power relations that exist between your organization and young people before starting a funding relationship. Power is about more than 'who has the money' - it is also about knowledge, time, information, north-south, old-young and so on.
- Ensure that there is clarity on roles and responsibilities of those involved as advisors.
- Compensate young people for their time as you would with any other strategic advisors.
- Accept proposals in multiple and local languages to allow individuals and groups from diverse communities to apply.
- Short-term grants make long-term planning difficult; provide reasonable funding cycles and multi-year grants, along with sufficient funding, when possible.
- Spend time thinking about sustainability (what it means and what it looks like) along with the young people from the very beginning and put in place an exit strategy that they understand and are invested in so that ceasing funding does not result in organization collapse.

Partner with the 'key / affected populations' of young people:

Your funding priorities should be informed by the young people who are most affected by the issues on which you and your foundation or group focus. Those most affected are also those who are key to addressing the issues. For example, if you want to focus on reducing unsafe abortion in a community, the affected populations would include young women seeking abortions, at risk of unwanted or unintended pregnancy and those having high unmet needs for contraception.

Practical tips

- Seek out partnerships with existing networks of young people from the key / affected populations to understand their situation, needs and lived realities.
- Include young people from these groups on any relevant advisory committees and ensure that they have the support to contribute effectively.
- Make sure that the privacy and confidentiality of young people are protected and that others in your organization are sensitized to their particular needs.
- Approach this work in a non-judgmental way and create a space where young people from the key / affected populations feel heard and respected.

Invest in capacity strengthening and organizational development:

Making true and meaningful investments in youth movements requires additional time and resources from donors. If you are funding youth advocates or youth-led organizations, then invest in strengthening their capacities or in organizational development. This investment allows funds for programs and activities to be more effective. It also mitigates the fallout of high turnover, as individuals tend to move around, and young people age out of leadership roles.

Practical tips

- Invest time and effort into also strengthening the capacities of adults in your organization on how to work in partnership with young people.
- Fund mentorship systems for young leaders where adult organizations or mentors support them through program planning, resource mobilization, documentation and communication, impact assessment and due diligence.
- Consider making capacity-strengthening resources, including resource people (not just toolkits!), available that are specifically intended to help youth organizations apply for your funding.
- Build in decent salaries - young people who work hard deserve remuneration for their work just like adults.

Fund holistic youth leadership programs:

But first define youth leadership for your organization! Preferably as being inclusive, feminist, transformative, and regenerative (i.e. gets younger people involved and knows when and how to age out). While there are many examples of youth leadership building, too often young people become the kinds of leaders that adults model for them without having the time, space and knowledge to shape new or responsive forms of leadership. This means that many young people want to hold on to power once they get it, much like the adults around them. This kind of leadership is not inclusive, feminist, transformative or regenerative. The whole point of a youth movement should be that it is led by young people. Therefore, when young leaders age out, they need to be able to relinquish power to a second line of leadership. [For more information, see the ["Building Youth Leadership for Collective Action"](#) brief in this learning series.]

Practical tips

- Work with young people to define the youth leadership model that the movement wants to adopt.
- Enable youth movements to establish leadership and accountability structures based on the mutually agreed definition of youth leadership.
- Work with the movement to ensure that the young people in leadership positions are the best fit, not only based on age, but also other criteria co-defined with the movement.

Synergize and synchronize:

Youth-led advocacy and movement-building has seen momentum for several years now. Different donors fund their own versions of youth movements, including iterations of youth engagement (e.g. "youth participation," "leadership development," and "youth development"). Creating several pools of youth advocates can create unhealthy competition between these advocates rather than building solidarity for the broader causes.

In other words, donors need to speak to each other. Building a cohesive youth movement – or youth movements across different regions, issues, and populations – is necessary for young people to bring about change. Ensuring that youth movements, youth advocates and youth-led organizations synchronize their efforts also demonstrates aid effectiveness and provides more sustainable impact in the long-term.

Practical tips

- Pool together donor resources to create larger and more flexible funding grants (but make sure that this doesn't equal added bureaucracy for grantees!)
- Engage in donor knowledge exchange or establish a donor hub where good practices are shared.

- Create opportunities for young advocates to network with each other, collaborate and create a community of learning. This could be through in-person meetings and/or online fora.
- Fund network-type grants that incentivize collective action across networks of youth-led organizations.
- Be an ally when it counts - build relationships with feminist, inclusive youth movements and find common ground that will contribute to larger, collective human rights goals.

Be transparent and flexible:

Don't keep youth organizations in the dark about your funding systems and processes! Youth organizations need to fully understand where you are coming from and your theory of change. Be very clear about your expectations from grantees. Try to also build flexibility into your funding systems to allow young people to make mistakes and learn from them, as well as access technical assistance along the way. Flexibility is also necessary because context is everything.

Practical tips

- Ensure that your grantees are aware of the flexibility within the funds and view your guidance as supportive rather than prescriptive.
- Identify key resource people to support troubleshooting and problem-solving.
- Make your systems responsive to the realities faced by youth groups and movements. Many youth groups are not registered or do not have financial entities due to lack of capacity, legal reasons, unsupportive governments, etc.
- Build in budgets and time for linking and learning where youth movements can link and learn with other movements, i.e. those more experienced, other 'marginalized' groups, etc. in order to grow.
- Encourage creativity and innovation because young people have the potential to come up with new solutions/approaches to existing problems as long as you provide them with the resources and the flexibility to do so.
- Be aware of safety and security of the young people you work with, as many young people work in dangerous contexts and topics. Provide them with the tools (e.g. digital safety) and resource people to ensure their safety, including space for 'self-care.'
- Use a combination of traditional (i.e. email) and new communication methods that are youth-accessible, such as WhatsApp and Slack.

Be an inspiration to other donors on youth movement building:

Other than specific participatory grant makers like the FRIDA Fund and the Red Umbrella Fund – which let their communities shape the funding priorities – there are very few donors that explicitly fund movements. If

you want to fund a youth movement, then learn from the experiences of these funds, and share your insights with other donors so that they can be inspired as well.

Practical tips

- Document your own process of funding a youth movement along with its impact to contribute to the evidence base.
- Talk to other donors about ways to work together and coordinate based on best practices.



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