Refugee Livelihood Lab

What is not working in the granting space?

Participatory Grantmaking Initiative of the Refugee Livelihood Lab

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While the insights below came up in conversations in the context of granting and philanthropy in the migrant justice space, based on our experience, we have seen the challenges and barriers identified here surface among funders across sectors and different types of funders (grantors, investors, etc.).

- **Limited opportunity to learn about funders**, leading to uncertainty about potential discrimination during the grant application and selection process. Further to this we might not know the history/harms/practices of funders prior to applying.

- **Current terminology and language reinforces power imbalances.** Prefer language that is non-hierarchical and addresses issues like racism directly. There's a desire to shift towards collaborative language, such as using "memorandum of collaboration" instead of "contract" and "member/user" instead of "client."

- **There is a lot of code switching that happens.** Applicants often have to fit into the funder's understanding of the problem area and the scope and we have to apply within their scope of the understanding.

- **Lack of a process for iterative learnings** to roll over into a new grant or for iterative learnings during the grant to shift the project. When the grant ends, work ends.   When a new grant is available it always feels like we're "reinventing the wheel" to funder objectives each time. Funder prefers newness rather than building upon existing

- **No flexibility in shifting projects when life circumstances change.** There's a need to prioritize people over rigid project deliverables.

- **There is no real time/feedback to organizations** interested in applying to help them identify if they are eligible before they invest the time to apply

- **Overwhelming and alienating process**, with complex requirements, inaccessible language, and unnecessary steps. The whole process of applying for the grant is daunting. Where do I start? How do I talk to the funder? Should I have a fully thought out plan and partners first and that apply? Sometimes, I don't know how to budget something for the idea.

- Grants are often too small to make meaningful impact and **focused too much on performative metrics**.

- **The lengthy and non-communicative process of applying for a grant can be traumatic** (long/elongated/lots of barriers) which feels similar to other processes that migrants often have to face (triggering).

- **No feedback given to people who submit the grant** on what they could change or elaborate in the grant but rather they make a decision. Even if they don't get it to then after it that they have a communication loop to improve it the next time

- **Can I apply for this grant and live while I am working on this project?**

- **It's very confusing if I understand if I even qualify for grants.** They have workshops but it's still not very clear. Workshop times are not accessible as I'm working

- **Requirements like sector-specific language and finding matching funds create barriers for new or smaller organizations.**

- **Funders require extensive proof of background and eligibility**, often dismissing the contributions of those on the ground doing the work

- **Other structural barriers include -**

  - Many grants are geared toward younger leaders, leaving out older or senior applicants.

  - Need to be a registered society

  - The funder sometimes requires you to confirm your partners before you even get the grant

- There's a **need for continued support even after a grant is awarded**..

- **Lack of Investment in the Humans:** Assumptions that you should spend the money only on the project and not grant money to support the human doing the work. It's a reinforcement of systemic oppression and an assumption that we shouldn't getting paid to be doing good work

- **Checkmarking BIPOC leadership and/or inclusion.** Grants sometimes ask us to list the leadership backgrounds to ensure they are BIPOC led however there is no recognition that the staff who are doing the work on the ground are racialized and doing the work. The directors are not necessarily doing the work on the ground.

- **Funders prioritize questions that will make it easier for them to filter** the responses rather than giving space to ask important questions to organizations about who is doing the work

- **Funding is prioritized to organizations who have been around a lot time** and doing the work rather than building capacity of organizations who aren't involved but have lots of great lived experiences, community engagement

- **Having really strict budget lines** to be able to spend money. No flexibility to spend on what's needed