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FOUNDATIONS IN EUROPE WORKING TOGETHER

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Contents

Foundations in Europe Working Together

In this guide, staff, executives and board members of European foundations talk candidly about the benefits, challenges and costs involved in collaborating with different foundations both in their own countries and across Europe. Their experiences show that when managed well and creatively, the diversity of European collaboration can become a strong asset for foundations. This guide builds on a 2009 GrantCraft publication "Funder Collaboratives — Why and How Funders Work Together".

Drawing on Diversity

Europe is an intricate mosaic composed of numerous languages, cultures, traditions and regulatory environments that together affect how philanthropy is done. Even within countries, there is a huge diversity and yet foundations in Europe increasingly collaborate. Without a standard form for working together, this rich tapestry of differences makes for dynamic relations.

Collaboration between European foundations takes many forms and usually involves a medley of stakeholders who join forces for different reasons. From three small foundations that join-up locally, share due diligence and refer to one another's potential beneficiaries, to a global call for proposals to fund rigorous impact evaluation exercises or an entirely new endowed fund, collaboratives vary in scope and size. What can you learn from these experiences in terms of the circumstances, arrangements and competencies that lead to success? To learn how foundations work together one has to start with why foundations and people are driven to engage with others. From the interviews with practitioners the following aspects emerged.

More impact, more voice, more value, more Europe. Having a larger impact is a crucial driver for foundations to engage in collaboration. A majority of practitioners interviewed stressed that when working together, foundations can achieve goals that would be otherwise unattainable. One programme director attested: "We were able to raise ten times the resources that we were able to dedicate ourselves to this particular issue by setting up a joint programme," and added, "we actually attracted new funders and fresh money by actively looking for partners." As emphasized by another: "[Our foundation] has a broad range of interests; the money is never enough, so we need partners in crime. Co-funding is the one area that enables us to engage with more issues. Alone we could never have achieved this level of funding."

Yet collaboration is not just about raising resources, it is also about raising voice, directly or indirectly. This is seen both in the case of the European Consortium of Foundations on Human Rights and Disability which "aims to breathe life and vigour into the application of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" and the Corston Independent Funders' Coalition (CIFC), involving over 20 different funders who spoke out as one on the situation of women in the UK justice system. Such joint advocacy efforts are increasingly important at the European level because, particularly in many areas of interest to European foundations, extensive decision-making and executive powers are vested in the European institutions. Just think of maritime development,

WHERE THE EXAMPLES COME FROM

For this guide, we approached staff, executives and board members of foundations throughout Europe; interviewees work in 12 countries — Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom. More than 15 different nationalities contributed towards this guide. See page 29 for a full list of contributors.

environment and biodiversity but also migration and border control, scientific and technological development, social inclusion etc. and the point makes itself.

Diversity as an opportunity for learning. European foundations usually have diverse experiences both within and across borders. Learning from the practices of peers is an important element in almost any collaborative venture among foundations. A joint learning that redresses somewhat the relative isolation that is inherent to the autonomy of foundations. In learning the diversity is considered an added value: "We need to find partners beyond who we are. We need to collaborate with a whole range of different organisations. Look and reach out for people who do not agree with us [and] not just sit in our own little room [but] learn from others outside our own entities."

Some of the diversity in practice stems from the different institutional and internal constraints of foundations in Europe, the modus operandi, size, political weights and attitudes, languages and cultures. Besides being inspiring, these differences also represent a challenge. Learning to deal with this diversity is critical for effective collaboration and requires creative thinking: "Just because people are from different sectors, countries and cultures, it does not mean that they are going to be creative. Creativity is a culture you have to cultivate; it is not automatic even if you have a diverse group."

Efficiency and risk-sharing. Working together takes time and all parties somehow have to step out of their comfort zone, but the potential rewards seem to compensate these efforts. As one interviewee put it: "Working with others is more productive, more effective and more efficient [...]. Collaboration gives you access to additional ideas and financial resources, contacts and names." And there is the attraction of 'safety in numbers' when breaking new ground: "A lot of time collaboration is about minimising risk so that you are not alone and you are not out there taking all the weight for what may or may not go so well." In addition to sharing risks and enhancing your own efficiency, you can also help others, as discovered by two large

Foundations in Europe working together: How is it different?

In Europe, values around philanthropy, about individual and collective responsibilities are different compared to the US, and philanthropy also varies enormously from country to country. Aside from multiple governments, laws, languages, history and contexts, there is a wealth of nuances and less obvious caveats that make the process of European foundations working together different:

● Europe is a continent of over 30 countries with different historical contexts and cultural sensitivities. Although not always self-evident, these distinctions inevitably influence the nature and development of any decision making or negotiation.

● Even with shared interests and similar goals, European foundations have diverse operating rationales, which make working together an intricate process.

● Organisational and political hierarchies are important in Europe. They vary considerably and drive the work of European foundations in different ways but they are not always easily talked about.

● Relations between governments and foundations both within and across countries are varied. Such stakeholder relations set a precedent for the way in which foundations advocate and work together on public policy.

● Collaboration involves people and personal networks; many networks are within countries or language groups; cross-European networks have developed at a different pace.

● Related to networks, a general lack of public information about who does what in philanthropy in Europe makes collaboration more difficult.

● The European Union and the notion of what is and is not common EU policy is evolving rapidly: collaboration mirrors the leveraging strength of Europe's stakeholders around (un)common issues.

Ways to Use This Guide

The guide aims to help you achieve better results when exploring or expanding joint initiatives with other foundations; it does not seek to convince foundations that they should work together. This follows the GrantCraft philosophy: guides are not meant to give instructions or prescribe solutions but are intended to spark ideas, stimulate discussion and suggest possibilities. Some ways you can use the guide are:

- Reading the guide before you engage in a collaborative-working relationship with other foundations in your own country or abroad may help you identify some of the questions and issues that need to be addressed.

- Selecting and discussing some of the quotes in the guide as (practice) statements for discussion with your partners to discover common ground when developing a collaborative.

- Drawing on experiences described in the guide, you can develop an agenda to discuss your collaboration plans with staff or board members of your foundation.

- Using the 'health check' given at the end of the guide to reflect with partners on progress made can be helpful for future planning.

- Looking back on a particular collaboration experience, you can use the guide to help you identify your own lessons learned.

Irish foundations who agreed to use one single reporting format for grantees. This also illustrates that benefits can be found in working together on small, simple things.

Why not? Foundations weigh up the benefits but there are also costs, if only the time investment, as one informant crisply formulated: "After this experience, we know exactly what such collaboration is about in terms of investment required, not only financial investment but human resources."

Other challenges and drawbacks to working together mentioned by practitioners are less control, loss of organisational identity and reputational risks. Everyone interviewed emphasized that they had put in considerable effort and had to find ways to deal with a variety of challenges. Some foundations grew more cautious: "[Our experience] has led us to consider what our criteria actually are for getting involved in a partnership."

Consciously or unconsciously, our experience influences our decisions to (re)engage and shape new collaboration. This is why reflection on practice is critical. Both reflection on one's own experience, to help you understand what you "bring to the table", and reflection on the practices of others which allows you to learn from their perspectives, and from their successes in solving the dilemmas involved in working together as foundations in Europe.

Working together within countries has several benefits and happens more and more. There are also benefits to working together across borders. However, our diversity increases the costs and risks involved in collaborating among foundations across Europe. This is still a challenge, as one European foundation executive observed: "Europe is still very much different countries. There are still different national identities, and if this is Greece or Spain or Italy and we've got to deal with our officials and what does Europe actually do, and how important is Europe in certain policy areas? I think we may find over time, as the Lisbon Treaty and its impacts become more apparent, we might see a shift in understanding."

Starting Out: How To Get It Right

Practice shows that collaboration among foundations in Europe is tailor-made and involves a whole spectrum of considerations that merit attention at the early stages of the process. There is a clear need to explore the reasons for collaborating and to develop joint agendas, but collaborations will only get off on the right foot if those involved also pay attention and address blind spots, office and power politics, and 'no-go' areas.

Explore your own motives. You need to understand and be frank about your own reasons for collaborating. It's only after you have identified and acknowledged your reason(s) for working with others that you can weigh up the costs and benefits of collaboration: "What is the agenda and purpose of coming together? What are the learning opportunities? What is the added value?" are typical questions at this stage. Any prospective partner involved in negotiating a joint venture at this early stage should have a good understanding of their own organisation, in terms of strategies, limitations, priorities and processes, and also at a practical level, what can and can't be contributed. Recognising and acknowledging your combined differences and limitations will be essential for moving towards a common ground and developing a shared perspective of the future.

Getting involved. Foundations become involved in the exploratory phase of a collaborative effort either as initiators or invitees. Experience suggests that it can take some time to get the right people around the table. Initially you might not even know who the right people are. So a certain degree of ambivalence or uncertainty, at least at the outset, is to be expected.

Whether orchestrated or serendipity, collaboration depends on pioneers to get it going. Any individual or any organisation can assume this role. With their focus on strategy, the founders, executives or board members of your foundation can identify a sound rationale for joint work as can programme officers,

who, as one executive observed: "very often pick up early the tales and signals that demonstrate the need to collaborate."

Knowing each other. In some emerging partnerships, foundations carry out mapping exercises to identify which players are already working on an issue. These exercises are useful because foundations are numerous in Europe, but they tend to be "siloed", by national borders, by areas of focus and by profile. There is not much data and transparency which complicates breaking out of these silos. Increasingly national platforms and the European Foundation Centre have connected foundations by actively creating spaces for foundations to engage with each other and also national and international multi-stakeholder platforms have emerged on thematic issues.

This said, by and large, partners in collaboration often still find each other on the basis of familiarity and complementarity. Often people have somehow met already, if not in person, their organisations know each other. Sometimes, the camaraderie enjoyed is interpreted as a closed circle by onlookers, while conversely the practitioners interviewed in this research emphasised that new entrants are most welcome as they provide fresh thinking and much-needed impetus.

As collaboration is about people as well as organisations there is an important personal dimension of getting to know each other. A range of activities exist that create time and space for asking ques-

tions and getting perspectives beyond what is on paper. Some organisations strongly recommend conducting joint site visits as their preferred option of becoming familiar with other foundations.

Developing a joint agenda. Partners usually go in with a shared interest which they develop together into a joint roadmap. One practitioner noted: "You should have a rough idea, and then you look for others who have the same concerns, then sharpen and develop your ideas with them." Without exception, those interviewed stressed the importance of being open-minded. While the individual agenda of a foundation is a logical driver to initially engage in collaboration, eventually partners commit to an agenda they jointly develop and adopt: "If you go into collaboration expecting to be able to influence other foundations and change them to your way

"You have to be prepared to compromise and give up something."

of thinking and working, I think, it's doomed from the start." Another interviewee said: "You cannot cooperate with others by giving them orders. You have to let go irrespective of whether the collaboration involves money, ideas or all of these." In order to succeed you have to be patient and accept that trade-offs will be needed: "Working together means everybody has to give up a bit of independence in order to shape something jointly." Another stressed: "You have to be prepared to compromise and give up something."

Commitments and shared assets. Talking about contributions at this early stage is not always evident, particularly when partners are new to each other. It may be helpful to explore the boundaries of what is and is not possible. This also means considering what partners can offer in addition to financial resources. Many foundations in Europe make grants on a small scale. Others are limited by

their statutes and regulatory environments. They can nevertheless make important contributions through expertise, networks, influence and a variety of other tangible and intangible assets. Such contributions, however, can have no value unless they are explicitly tabled and acknowledged by all those involved in the collaborative.

Helping hands. In some cases, project initiators contracted external assistance for research purposes and to facilitate processes during exploratory phases. Independent research carried out by external agencies can deepen understanding of the topic at hand. A content expert can help uncover key issues, different actors, their relations and perspectives on the issue, and may propose a way forward. Even deciding on what function you want your outside expert take on is part and parcel of the engagement process.

External assistance can also offer partners greater assurance that they are all fully and equally informed. For example, in one case, a facilitator helped to frame discussions, first by meeting all the partners individually to iron out any misunderstandings prior to them entering the group setting. But partners must be sure to remain in the driver's seat, as one facilitator stressed: "they [the prospective partners] have to set the pace. Only when working out their issues as a group, the chemistry develops and the group really builds mutual trust."

Securing buy-in at all levels. Collaborative ventures may very well be prompted by programme staff but they always need solid backing from the governing bodies and executive levels of the partners involved. It is a good rule of thumb to try to keep the topic of collaboration on your board's agenda. Having well-informed trustees may be helpful as the collaborative effort evolves. To encourage buy-in, one programme manager recalled: "Other foundations brought their trustees to some [of the funder group] meetings, so they saw it happening."
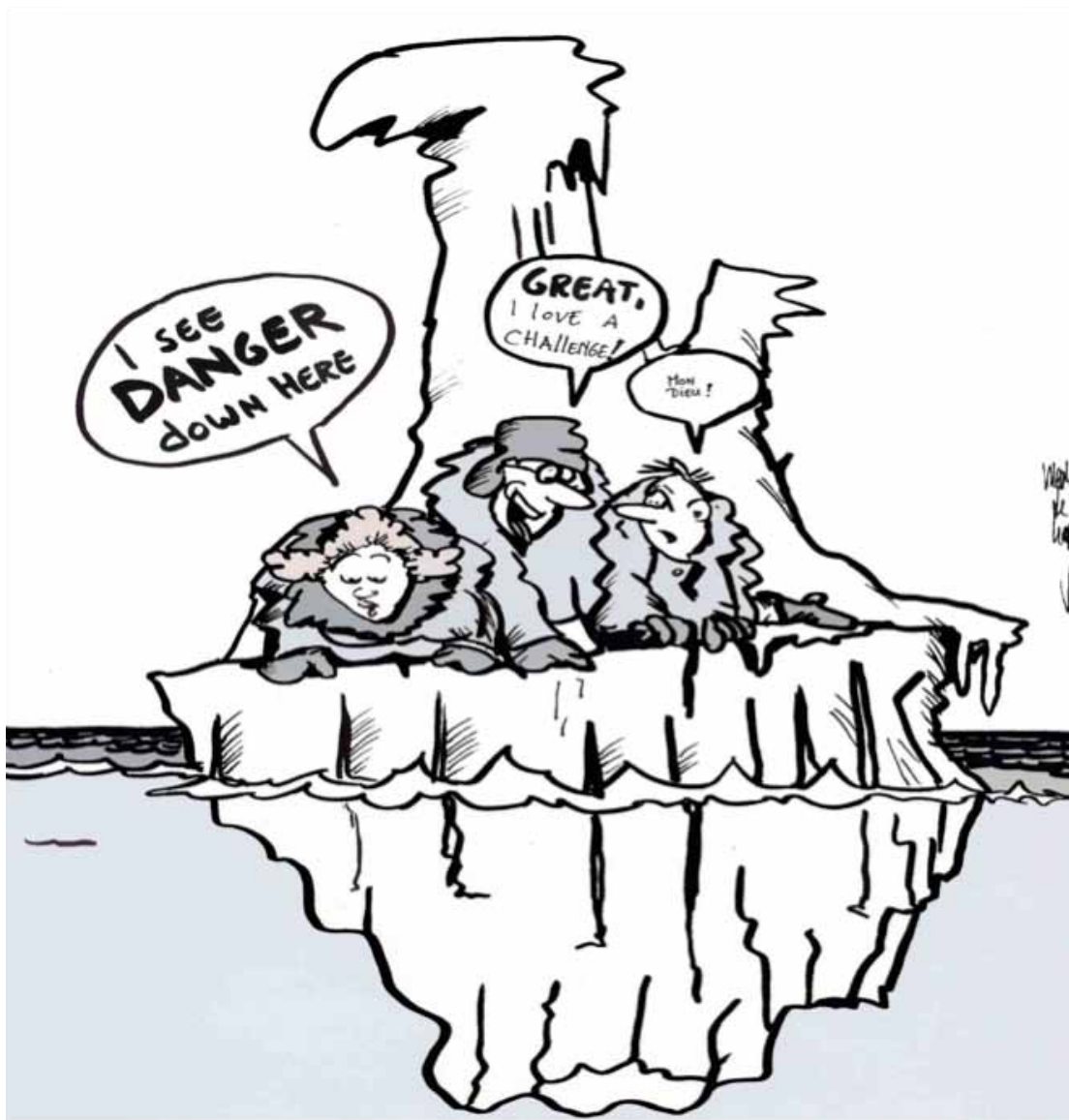
When the initiative to work together emerges at the upper, boardroom level, the enthusiasm among those engaged must trickle down the organisa-

Like an iceberg, aspects of collaboration may manifest only as small evident parts of more substantial features that are out of sight.

tional hierarchy. According to one foundation board member: "There are three levels involved in any lasting collaboration effort: board/director, director/executive and operational. If there is no personal chemistry at the operational level, then the collaboration will not work. So if the board level initiates a collaborative effort, you need to watch and make sure that there is a connection at the operational and executive level, because that is where the effort is made meaningful. We learnt that to ignore this rule is a mistake."

Common goals. Before moving ahead, a clear and common goal is required to get buy-in at all levels of the participating organisations and to give your collaboration direction. When there are shared values, a common vision and clear objectives, it is easier to deal with diversity: "You may go in saying, okay, we're all operating in the same space, but with different approaches. Nevertheless, we are all trying to achieve the same things. If we agree on the objective, then it matters less if we have different operating styles."

A common goal can be referred to in the ensuing debates and decision-making processes and bring people together when differences seemingly prevail. A foundation executive recalled a situation where this had not happened and reflected: "I would do it differently and establish a clear aim: What do we want to achieve together? Which institutions do we really want to have an influence on? Because it was too broad and we didn't have a core strategy about how we wanted to convert the products into policies."

Go or no-go. Once you have explored individual and shared agendas, established a common goal and reflected upon potential contributions you then need to identify concrete steps to move ahead. Making a business case where individual and shared interests of the partners come together concludes the exploratory phase.

Different foundations have different decision-making procedures and you have to establish what each prospective partner may need to take a definitive "go or no-go" decision in order for the partnership to move ahead collectively. For some, the decision may be much more evident and at a practical level, much easier to take than for others. In some cases it may be decided to go ahead with a few partners and not wait for all to decide to join. Such multiple speed partnerships are complex and arrangements may have to allow for flexibility for others to join at a later stage.

Tip of the iceberg. Collaborative initiatives often appear to run into trouble because they focus exclusively on the rational, overt aspects of working together, overlooking the powerful role played by concealed or seemingly irrational factors. Like an iceberg, aspects of collaboration may manifest only as small evident parts of more substantial features that are out of sight. It is critical to the success of collaboration that blind spots, office and power politics, tacit assumptions, "no-go" areas, secret hopes, wishes and fears, are continually explored at every stage of the process. Otherwise, ignoring these signals can bring up unexpected surprises that may drain the energy from your efforts, if not completely derail them.

Solid information and frank conversations are needed to fully get to grip with your collaboration's "iceberg" in its entirety. Trust is a pre-requisite for such frank exchanges, and yet at this initial stage, it may be still fragile. Trust develops between people who set out to work together because they believe in the potential contributions of the other. Developing such trust amid attempts to marry agendas is no small feat, particularly when strong personalities are at play.

Probing to uncover the invisible part of the iceberg, carefully and respectfully, helps to establish trust and a comfort zone. Practitioners overwhelmingly recommended to take time and create opportunities to explore together organisational identities, ways of working and perspectives on the issue to be addressed. Key questions for these initial steps are:

- **Motives and agendas.** What drives your organisation? What do you want to get out of this collaborative effort? And what do your partners seek? Do you understand what drives them? You don't need to be the same, but are you compatible? Can you capture what the synergy is?

- **Partners.** Who is at the table? What makes them different? How much influence do they have? Would it add value to involve other partners or other organisational representatives? And remember, differences are easier to deal with when agendas are aligned.

- **Language.** Do you have a shared vocabulary? Language is a critical issue at this stage. English is often the common denominator in Europe, but do you all mean the same thing with what you say? Are you comfortable admitting that you do not understand something?

- **Common goals.** You may have different agendas but do you really have a common goal? How do you know that you are making progress? Even if your collaboration is not experimental, agree on regular intervals to evaluate both the process and the outcomes.

The Human Factor

Developing good working relations between foundations boils down to the capacity of people to work together, drawing on individual skills and on the support and flexibility provided by the organisations involved, to explore new ideas, negotiate practical bottlenecks, share responsibilities and ultimately promote new initiatives. So how do people build and nurture such relationships? What does it take to effectively tap into this human factor?

As one practitioner observed: "Collaboration needs certain kinds of personalities and skills […] not everyone works that easily with others, irrespective of whether it is inside or outside their own organisation." For example, how do you respond to critical remarks? Or when someone is very emotionally attached to something. Sometimes this leads to tensions. In addition to a certain skill set, it takes time for relations to develop. The informal dimension of establishing collaboration is essential: "a lot of trust is developed over drinks," as one interviewee noted. And being able to speak in your partner's tongue can apparently be a real ice-breaker: "It all started with a coffee, and in Italian, of course." In the experiences contributed by practitioners, time and again the human factor had been critical in collaboration. This section addresses the diverse range of aspects of this human factor, touching upon such issues as chemistry between people, trust, group dynamics, roles, language, style and power.

Elusive chemistry. Chemistry between people, in combination with trust, is most frequently mentioned when talking about how foundations in Europe work together. Starting out, relationship-building among foundations seems a rather organic and personable process: "I think often times we assume things work in such a linear way and it doesn't work that way. In this case it was more of a knock on the door: 'would you be interested?' I

think it's evolutionary. I also don't think foundations always make very conscious decisions about whether or not to collaborate. I think the point is, does it make sense and does it add value according to each organisation's criteria."

"It all started with a coffee, and in Italian, of course."

Even with the feedback given by numerous practitioners, pinning down the ingredients of 'good chemistry' and how it emerges isn't easy. However, the impact of absent chemistry seems clearer to respondents. According to one foundation board member, it is in fact, "a deal-breaker if it does not burn for all or both, you need to get out. Being reliable is important but it is really not worth it if there is no personal chemistry at all levels."

Similarly, there is no clarity about what threatens chemistry. Different opinions may imply a heated debate as the chair of a large national collaborative effort recalls: "I had to sometimes keep people apart a bit because they wanted to control it and own it. I had to say no, it's got to be democratic." But debate and differences of opinion do not nec-

essarily kill chemistry. Another interviewee suggested a lethal ingredient however: "Egos can be poison to collaboration: in businesses the need to generate profits helps to keep ego in check. Poverty and need also control egos but foundations do not have such [corrective] mechanisms."

Trust, discretion and inclusion. While talking about working together among foundations, respondents reflected at length on the nature of trust: "What I see is that people are really open about certain things and they know that information is not used outside for other purposes; people

"When new people come in, they quickly realise how open our conversation is and they adapt quickly."

know it is confidential information and they treat it confidentially." While not sharing information outside the circle is important, trust is also about what you share and address within the group: "I think that it is very important to have...trust among each other that everybody's concerns are heard and taken into account and that we collectively look for solutions to attend to everybody's needs."

Commitment to the collaboration. Trust is not something that you whip up at short notice. The people involved must go beyond the content, engaging in personal working relationships. This requires a great deal of investment. "If I think about venturing in a possible new transnational project, first of all I would not underestimate, as I did at the beginning, the energy, time and effort required to be an active partner." Presence and active participation in discussions and decision making is part of the trust-building process: "For it to work properly, you have to actually make the investment not only in contributing, but actually being present, so I think [our initiative] has worked and

grown because the steering committee meets twice a year, and we all attend, and so we've got to know each other and trust each other."

Setting the tone. In well-established collaborations, trust can be a distinctive feature that sets the tone for old and new members: "When new people come in, they quickly realise how open our conversation is and they adapt quickly. Maybe not at the first meeting but by the second meeting, I felt confident to open up and participate in the way the others did; there is a core group that has been working together already for many years that inspires and sets an example for the others."

Avoid danger zones. Despite the many benefits that come with trust, interviewees also flagged dangers. For example, an over-reliance on trust in favour of formalising arrangements can make things awkward and even undermine success: "Sometimes when a foundation had a problem with their own budget, the contribution came very late. Although there was a trust it would come."

Formalising business affairs can only offer some security so it's important to be alert for any potential warning signs. Funding shortfalls can cause a great deal of tension, particularly in situations where agreements have been signed and funders pull out with little warning. In one such case, one respondent recalled: "The chairman was furious [and said to the party in question] 'You signed a contract, you made a commitment, you live up to your commitment'."

Group dynamics. "Collectively as a group you need to have good process skills, being able to negotiate difficulties and coach others when needed." This is particularly important within the European context of different identities and cultures. For example, the pioneers who were interviewed learnt through trial and error that awareness of cultural differences is fundamental and that stereotypes inevitably exist, whether unfounded or not. As one foundation professional reflected: "It's always interesting to see how groups deal with conflict. In my country we are very direct, and I expected the colleagues from England to be more like the House of Lords but they were also very direct. Sometimes people behaved

in a completely different way but as it turned out we found a common way of dealing with things."

In groups where diversity is prevalent, it's important to continually develop individual competencies to work together in a context of diversity. Even cultivating the skills needed to manage diverse groups can be a multi-cultural challenge. According to one respondent, a German organisation "had an approach of doing something consciously in favour of group dynamics. They made plays and games and not everybody felt comfortable. I wouldn't say that helps in the European context." Whereas a UK philanthropist admitted that only after having been exposed to both effective and ineffective collaboration among European funders, did he understand the absolute need for skills that favour constructive group dynamics.

LEADERSHIP ROLES: CHAMPIONS AND SHEPHERDS

Leadership implies a light touch and strong vision to see through clear decisions with dedication and discipline while empowering the group to engage as you go along. Leadership roles that seem important when European foundations work together are the 'shepherd' and the 'champion'. Any collaborative effort requires both roles to be played. Only in rare cases does one person (or organisation) fulfil both roles, normally several persons alternate between these roles.

A shepherd seeks to bring together different organisations and systematically ushers them along in one direction: "I initiated the whole thing and I kept everyone going. It was thousands of emails; it took a long time to get everyone on board, paying the money…writing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), getting everyone to sign it. Every step of the way, I kind of shepherded it and believed in it and was quite insistent that everyone would be represented. And I guess I saw that we could really make a difference, we could change the agenda. And of course when we did, we had a huge leverage."

At the same time successful collaborations also depend on one or more passionate figureheads – champions – who get things started and provide initial leadership, pulling and leading ahead of the pack. Champions make a huge difference, and in European ventures, they need not necessarily come from the top of the larger foundations that operate internationally: "If it hadn't been for this one person from a tiny foundation pushing for this, nothing would have happened", remarked one executive.

Champions and shepherds are roles. Most partnerships elect people in functions: a chair, sometimes a co-chair and often there is a coordinator,

"…you've got to have more face-to-face at the start, build up the trust, and the language barrier does not make it easier to communicate."

secretariat or programme manager. Competencies of ideal chairs include understanding how groups work, strong facilitation skills, demonstrated ability to frame issues, to encourage learning, and above all, always aim for team productivity. Integrity and a genuine interest in participants are highly valued: "Leading by example…getting to know how the respective foundations work by visiting them and understanding what their differences are."

Chairs can be the champions but there is no standard division of roles: sometimes a coordinator assumes that role while the chair is more of a shepherd: "The chair is important but the secretariat may be even more important. They get guidance from the chair and that is critical but a lot of content is developed by the secretariat and they push for certain things. The chair's role is mainly directing the secretariat and making sure that all the participating foundations are happy."

When reflecting on how European foundations work together, chemistry between people and trust are frequently mentioned.

Common language and shared vocabulary. English has fast become the 'lingua franca' of business but its fluency, both spoken and written, varies greatly across the European foundation community. When working across borders, the fact that you have to speak about sensitive things either in a foreign language or in 'international English' can be a genuine barrier. And in a context where trust is needed, barriers may pile up one on the other: "It takes a lot longer. So maybe it is that you've got to have more face-to-face at the start, build up the trust, and the language barrier does not make it easier to communicate."

With non-natives all using international English, misunderstandings can happen, something which is a problem when it remains unnoticed. People can be reluctant to ask a non-native speaker who is struggling to express herself to clarify what she just said, and the same goes for asking a proficient speaker to explain herself which can be embarrassing for someone less fluent. Diverse levels of proficiency influence how people interact in groups: "The mother tongue of one of the first leaders of the group was French and sometimes he was unable to express himself in the way he liked to. At the end, he stepped down. He didn't feel comfortable.

It was very unfortunate, because he was very good but he himself thought he should have been more precise."

Even when speaking the same language and working with partners from your own country, you have to develop a shared vocabulary as a group. Regarding terminology, foundations should not be lured into a false sense of security in thinking that they speak the same language. For effective internal communications, defining and agreeing on a glossary of terms for a funder collaborative takes time. In the absence of such a shared vocabulary the only option is to be practical and accommodate diverse needs, as one professional experienced: "It's extremely challenging intellectually to keep saying exactly the same thing using different vocabularies. I did not change the strategy that I had in mind at all, but you know, every foundation has its own jargon, every foundation has a priority so I had to formulate at least six times exactly the same four-page strategy to do exactly the same activities, rewording them to suit everybody's needs."

Personal style and corporate cultures. Professionals in foundations differ in terms of personal styles and drivers, and this affects collaboration, as one

practitioner remarked: "What also matters is your background, where you come from." While personal drivers and generational differences may be in play, not all differences are merely personal. Behaviours and preferences may also reflect different corporate cultures. From the very small to the very large, from banking foundations to family foundations to corporate foundations, organisational cultures vary across Europe as well as within countries. Some foundations are reserved if not introvert, while others are open and interactive; some have a more private sector style and culture, and others – although independent – have organisational cultures more similar to the public sector, NGOs or grassroots movements.

Some feel that the cultural gap between foundations and private sector organisational culture can be wide: "We had some difficulties with people that came from a completely different background, from private companies, the private sector. Whereas others had worked in the non-profit sector anyway, they came from the same culture and background, and this was absolutely helpful." Others however believe that the foundation sector and the private sector can be "perfectly complementary as they can both behave in ways that the other never could."

Relations between foundations and governments are not straightforward either and some foundation partners find it challenging to work collaboratively with the public sector and with elected officials, as one reflected: "Politics are very difficult because they [city councils and leaders] are thinking about their voters." Yet others, drawing on different experiences in different contexts, will emphasise that all lasting change needs collaborating with partners that have influence, including actors from the public sector, whatever may drive them.

Hierarchies and decision-making. Dealing with hierarchies can be complicated when foundations in Europe work together. "I think in Europe more than in the US, hierarchy is an issue. If you want to address people, you have to know at which layer within the foundation you need to enter and at which level you can discuss what. It's not like you can easily reach people. Also connecting with the people that are at a higher level can be dif-

ficult. I think maybe in the States people are more approachable, while in Europe it really depends on the culture in the different countries, for example, in Germany it is very hierarchical."

Adopting communication processes that are appropriate to the internal foundation hierarchies embedded within your collaboration is essential. The rule is that — at least formally — executives talk with other executives, but initiatives can break away from this lineage. "In our group we can make decisions very quickly. We have close contact to the decision makers in our organisations. So when there is a problem with a project, we can easily and quickly find out how we're going to react. That is something quite unique".

"I think in Europe more than in the US, hierarchy is an issue."

What level of decision-making power an executive, a director or programme officer has can vary substantially and this can be critically important for the collaborative process. Knowing which level of the hierarchy to address, and how, matters seriously. Yet finding out exactly how the different hierarchies work can be delicate. Making assumptions about hierarchies can be dangerous. One interviewee recalled: "She did not understand the power of a programme manager in some foundations. For her, a programme manager is someone who executes orders. So when the programme manager disagreed she said let's go to the director. And if he doesn't agree, let's go to the vice-president."

To complicate matters, as a standard practice in the world of organisations that strive for the public good, the importance of money is underplayed. Yet that does not mean that it does not matter. In Europe people would rather not discuss money among strangers, but however sensitive the topic, money talks and should be talked about because if not, misunderstandings and power politics can come into play.

While decision-making may appear as polite debate in the boardroom, negotiating also happens in the corridors of power: "A lot of things are said and are discussed in the corridors, outside the meeting, and when you arrive at the meeting, everybody knows more or less the agenda of the others; you need to have developed some sort of consensus before the meeting. It is really very much about how open people are, sometimes everyone seems to have hidden agendas. So there is always a little bit of negotiation before entering the meeting, people sound out ideas and rally other people around their point of view."

Bringing out relational sensitivities. Reflecting on the human factor in collaboration, it seems there is an iterative process that generates information as well as the trust needed to share information. This implies that gathering and sharing the intelligence about contexts, organisational formalities as well as the personal drivers and experience that guide decisions is not a simple one-step scoping exercise; it is a process of interaction. An important part of dealing with the human dimensions is being able to identify the endless list of subtle tell-tale signs that flag sensitivities so that the conversations can be well timed. To summarise it seems that working from information and intelligence about people and organisations gives better results compared to relying on assumptions about how others are similar or different. Secondly a gradual approach may be needed because bringing out information about such differences cultivates trust and at the same time requires a certain degree of trust. All the issues identified in this chapter can be entry points and while there may be hesitation to speak about them initially, conducted well these conversations should pay-off in the long run.

Building African research capacities for the control of neglected tropical diseases

Neglected tropical diseases affect over 1 billion people mostly in Africa. As the name suggests, compared to HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, these diseases receive relatively little attention. Under the coordination of VolkswagenStiftung, several European foundations, namely Fondation Mérieux, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian and the Nuffield Foundation, met in 2008 to explore possibilities for collaboration around these neglected tropical diseases. All participants at the meeting were working at operational levels in their respective foundation. The meeting was inspiring: "We felt that there is so much talk about collaboration but this was actually a concrete opportunity to do it. We all could have set up our own fellowship program, but doing a common project we have much more impact."

At the end of their meeting the foundations immediately defined the next steps, and started working on a joint position paper. It was an investment but there was great energy: "I am not sure if we had less work in those days, but I know at the time, we took the time to do it and everybody was very proactive." Within nine months the European Foundation Initiative for African Research into Neglected Tropical Diseases (EFINTD) issued its first call for proposals, soliciting fellowship applications, having secured executive endorsement from the individual foundations involved: "We were able to convince our executives to put in the money. Everybody had to go to their internal committees. It seemed we had the space to experiment: everybody was interested to see how this collaboration would work. What may have helped is that it was not a big amount of money for any of the partners so everybody played the game."

The collaborative does more than jointly granting fellowships: Meetings are organised in which scientists from the North and South meet and exchange ideas. Fellows are offered possibilities to develop non-technical skills and knowledge in order to manage research projects, programmes and to influence public health policies. As the name of the collaborative implies, it is about research and capacity building.

There is no formal contract among the foundations that partner in the initiative because they feel it is not needed and seeking a legal arrangement may make working together actually more complicated. As a group of funders they decided to partner with a technical agency that provides administrative support and substantive follow-up to all the fellowships and reports to the group. After the first call, another foundation, Fondazione Cariplo expressed interest to join and came aboard. The foundation demonstrated willingness to fit into the existing format: "He said 'ok these are the rules so we work with those'." At the same time, in addition to financial resources, they also contributed their experiences which helped improve certain work processes.

An issue that was extensively discussed was the regional spread in connection with the competitive quality criteria for awarding fellowships. Since the quality in education and research is not equally spread among scientists from English, French and Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa, Francophone and Lusophone countries were underrepresented among the fellowships granted on a competitive basis. So the Portuguese partner decided to also fund other fellowships targeting capacity-building at other levels, particularly at PhD level. This additional step is done completely within the context of the joint initiative. The experience showed that new partners can join the group but what if the people in the group change: "We know each other and meeting each other a few times a year is enough but if you are new it is different". And when the person representing the leader and champion leaves you also have to make choices, "these are difficult decisions and it is not always easy to talk about them, but we have a solid basis and the experience has proved we work together well in practice."

After three calls all involved are still very much motivated and energized. They are looking to involve new partners, and are networking and planning the future. Contacts with public and private funders are expected to bring in more resources into the initiative. The future will tell. "We may not all have the same time horizon, but EFINTD shows that collaboration in Europe works."

For more information about the initiative: http://www.ntd-africa.net.

An article written by the group about the experience was featured in a peer-reviewed, open access journal on neglected diseases: http://www.plosntds.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pntd.0001020

Organising for Collaboration

Funder collaboration in Europe is much more than pooling financial resources to make grants. Learning, research, developing networks and influencing policy at the national, European and international levels are all important. And when organisations with different organisational rationales work together for a common goal, varying models of collaborations tend to emerge. But no matter which model is agreed upon, the next crucial steps are to find the most suitable governance and administrative structures and processes to kick-start the collaborative.

All practitioners interviewed said that their working relations with other foundations involved some aspect of learning. Many also aimed to either directly or indirectly inform public opinion. Some aligned specific operations, for instance by jointly funding a mapping exercise, or by engaging in multi-annual, multi-stakeholder and multi-million thematic commitments. Without a blueprint for foundations on how to work together, either at the national or supranational level, models of collaboration among European foundations tend to be tailor-made. Foundations can choose from a wide range of options: they can jointly fund an activity; commission a common research project; act as a clearing house; launch a collective campaign; grant a joint award or launch a joint call for proposals; or a combination of several of these. The list of possibilities is endless. And models co-exist closely: sometimes large numbers join up for one component while a subgroup undertakes specific joint projects. Thriving hybrid ventures exist and there are no clearly demarcated stages with all funders collectively moving from one model to the next.

Considering options. Once partners have decided what to do, there are practicalities that require attention: How will learning and exchange be organised? Do you want a closed or open network? Work with a group that involves funders only? How much flexibility do you need to include new partners? And when you decide to pool resources, is that to fund your network's activities, or is a sub-granting mechanism more convenient? Can any of the partners offer a suitable arrangement for sub-granting, or will you develop an entirely new process? To what extent do partners need to be involved in decision-making? Would a temporary arrangement or a long-term shell to pool funds be more suitable? Would your 'venture' benefit from an entirely new and independent operational or grant-making foundation?

Some questions may be more relevant than others but all merit reflection. What you aim for and what you can have might be two different things, as observed by one practitioner: "Everybody has different needs; pure grant-making, operational and mixed all have different logics. It is not always easy to follow up on all these different logics and come up with something that makes sense."

So the model you choose has to match your common objectives, and at the same time, must fit the operational rationale of each partner as well as the size and nature of their contributions. When discussing the finer details, you may have to revisit the issue of partner selection and whether the right people are around the table. If not, you may have to adjust your ambitions. It's for this reason, among others,

that clarifying expectations is important early on so as to avoid disappointments further down the line: "Some foundations had problems to give money to a general programme because they were only allowed, by their own statutes, to invest in their own country. So on one side you have this big message: this is a joint project, and we decide on everything together. But after the whole identification process we seem to say that we can only fund organisations based in the territory of reference of each funder."

Testing flexible structures. Because collaborative arrangements have to be designed on a case-by-case basis, there is a genuine possibility that organisational diversity will lead to lengthy discussions about structure. Some avoid this by immediately identifying some type of joint collaborative action once they had agreed on the basics and set out to learn by doing. In at least two of the more successful cases reviewed, the foundations involved maintained a strong focus on their joint, overall objective and started with a simple flexible structure, testing it at a small scale for some time before adopting a more structured approach.

Contributing resources and assets. While all partners may be perfectly lined up to work collectively towards an end goal, money talk touches upon a number of complex and sometimes sensitive matters. The resounding advice given by respondents is to be open and clear about it.

The assets that partners contribute do not have to be equal or financial. Foundations with larger endowments and incomes may put more into the pot; a partner with unparalleled technical expertise or expertise in communications or administration may manage those aspects of the workflow, while another partner may offer facilities for the group's meetings and thus take care of reflective needs: "Like many other aspects of collaboration, managing diverse contributions requires a true, frank and direct conversation among partners [so that] everyone contributes to the extent of their possibilities."

Governing collaboration. While the issue of trust has already been touched upon, the degree of formality concerning your collaboration's governance arrangements will also depend on the scope of activity, as well as the range of partners involved. The general consensus remains that often setting such arrangements in stone isn't necessary: "You do not need a MoU, the most important ingredient for collaboration is trust." But while informality is fine for some groups, it might not always be appropriate. "There was no formal agreement. It was really built on that trust. It would have been better if we had a kind of MoU or letter of intent for each foundation. This would have made sure that everything was in place."

Steering committees are considered particularly constructive in collaborations involving a larger number of funders. However, there are down-

More than money

Time and again the interviewees stressed that foundation bring more to a collaborative than monetary resources. When foundations work together, non-monetary contributions can include for example:

Expertise and experience: "Change needs to develop from the people at the ground who have the expertise. If we're looking at how to leverage our funds, collaborating is the way to go."

Personality attributes: "We had one colleague who is still now a close friend of all these foundations and she was like the Godmother of this venture."

Networks and relationships: "We appreciated very much their [youthful] approach: They were very determined and there was great interconnection in the field."

Standing and reputation: "In their country they were identified as a key performer in the field."

A drive to be innovative and catalytic: "We have a mandate to be catalytic. We wanted to move away from a situation in which we were the only funder supporting pan-European work."

Business processes: "We offered a small foundation the possibility to take advantage of our peer review system."

Standby-capacity-plus: "NEF, the Network of European Foundations, played an administrative role but there was also opportunity to have a broader discussion, with other foundations, and they were very active finding contacts for us in Brussels."

Physical infrastructure: "Reflection centres in Mali and in France were made available for strategy meetings."

sides to a two-tiered management structure, particularly if you have a heterogeneous group: "When we established the management committee, they became a sort of inner team. The people on the outside didn't feel as involved. There was a real separation between the management group, which was made up of five grant makers, and the rest. We missed out on their [the broader group's] knowledge and expertise and the leverage that their trustees had."

Where collaboration involves the establishment of an entirely new organisation, it must be registered and regulated according to by-laws. Awaiting a European Foundation Statute, which would create a single European legal form, international partners will continue to have to weigh the pros and cons of where in Europe to register new organisations.

Inclusive decision making. Clear decision-making processes as well as criteria for decision-making are essential. Processes have to accommodate the different operating rationales and hierarchies of each partner. Establish which issues require the input of all partners and which can be delegated. A 'one foundation, one vote' policy seems to be the sector's standard irrespective of the size of foundations involved and their contributions to a pooled fund. One interviewee involved in an advocacy group argued: "The mandate we had was in our numbers, not in how big or small the foundations were. So that's why it was important. Everybody, whether they were tiny or huge, had the same power."

In cases where there is greater emphasis on pooled funding and grant-making, the one-man-one-vote system could also be applied, as having the involvement of everyone in the decision-making is seen by many to add value. A programme manager from a large foundation reflected: "Sometimes when you are a big funder you get frustrated — 'Why does it take so long to get a decision?' — but in this case every time it is worthwhile because the others bring so much to the process."

Another practitioner spoke of the value of investing time in decision making so as to prevent constant re-negotiation: "Once that's done, well, then

you've got to live with those decisions, and go for it; even if you're not going to like everything".

Administrating resources. Whether its thousands or millions, how you administer pooled resources and assets really depends on what works best for you and your partners. For cross-border operations in Europe, you have to find administrative procedures that suit the — possibly quite different – operational logic of the partners involved and take into account all possible fiscal and financial barriers.

Explore the different models available and what they would entail for each individual member. The arrangements should include decisions about:

- How to select providers/grantees — collectively by the funders involved, or individually, following a certain standardised procedure, or delegated to a third party;

- How to administer contracts and resources — individually by each funder, delegated to one of the funding partners, or to an existing or newly-established third party.

Some partnerships mix and match the arrangements, by choice or simply because it responds to the operational rationale of one or more partners. Creativity is also a must: "Through a kind of constrained structure, we now have a joint venture with them and they're going to fund it through that because for them that's the only way they can do it. It's so complicated, it's unbelievable."

Some partnerships choose to concentrate all administrative duties with one of the partners, but there are downsides as well, as partners may eventually feel that the joint operation is too identified with just one partner. Using a third party to undertake these tasks and outsource project management is also an option. The Network of European Foundations (NEF) provides such services to partnerships involving its members. The European Foundation Centre (EFC) manages limited amounts of resources that members contribute to the running of specific thematic networks.

With regard to the recruitment of a dedicated programme manager one size may not always fit all and may need change over the life cycle of a col-

laboration: "In the second phase, we've had a secretariat, and it's changed the dynamic, and made us a lot more effective and efficient. We can now focus on what we need to focus on, and then the programme manager can tell us what's going on and manage the grants. I think the project would be a disaster if we didn't have that at this stage."

Communication, branding and copyrights. External communication strategies depend very much on the goal of the collaboration. Some goals

"You need to be ready to give up on some visibility."

require extensive public relations, while others are better served by staying off the public radar. When the objective is to bring unity to the voices of a diverse group, you should be very clear about that and be aware that not all you say will be for public consumption: "When communicating you must always be thinking of each other and how it may affect your individual reputation. We had it documented in the MoU that we could only speak out as a coalition on certain topics."

Some collaborations emphasise their broad and diverse support by always and scrupulously identifying all partners involved but other cases feature the development of a new collective brand: "The profile and identity of the initiative is important to maintain even though there are different players involved. For the most part, we put the money out to NGOs and let them take credit for a lot of it. But we've learned that we need some brand identity to have influence".

Branding is a delicate subject: "You have to accept that there is a collective logo and branding which is separate from the individual funding identities. As a consequence your individual exposure suffers. This situation forces you to adapt and you need to be ready to give up on some visibility". Collective branding can also present opportunities, especially

to foundations that prefer anonymity regarding whom they fund and their work. Copyright ownership also needs to be discussed and the "creative commons" can be a good option when a collaborative collectively creates content.

The internet is clearly a useful vehicle for external branding, but several funder collaboratives also use it for learning and internal communication, in addition to holding telephone and face-to-face meetings as and when needed. For example the Association of Charitable Foundations created a learning platform for its members; the League of Accessible Historical Cities has a public website, while the European Consortium of Foundations on Human Rights and Disabilities, a broader group, uses the ARIADNE platform of European Human Rights Funders Network for information sharing and networking. Use of new internet technology and communications is still less common in Europe compared to the US for example, although this is changing: "Increasingly we're going to be seeing the use of webinars and things like that, and I think that's one of the things that we can do in terms of knowledge sharing and learning. You can have subject matter webinars, and you don't need to be there, and it's an hour to an hour and a half. You can do it from your desk."

Comings and goings. Newcomers add value to an existing collaboration by bringing in funding, skills, experience, reputation or contacts. Practitioners note that integrating newcomers' requires some care and flexibility from both sides. One new entrant to a group said that they: "Had to listen and work with the existing ideas and adapted our own ideas to fit together." The degree of adaptation is not always straightforward: "Sometimes we had strong personalities coming on board or a change of personnel in foundations and this was not always easy. There were new debates and a need to find a new consensus and sometimes they wanted to form the partnership in a different way that the others didn't want because we felt that it was going well."

A veteran of a foundation collaborative reflected: "We can have that conversation [with a newcomer] quite quickly: why we're doing or not doing some-

thing. We have materials so that new foundations coming in will know what we are about and I think that's helpful. So if you're coming in halfway into a cycle, it is set, you know what you're entering. Later when we start to talk about what the next round will look like, then everybody is again an equal partner around the table, including the newcomers. In that way we are always evolving." Another interviewee suggests that taking time to re-examine the entire collaborative effort — preferably in a closed pressure cooker type session following the entry of a newcomer was a time-saver.

Coping with departures, particularly at the leadership level requires an extra effort on the part of those organisations that are continuing, even within well-established collaborations. "You need a very strong expert in the field of your group who's responsible to prepare, to evaluate, who has contacts… when our expert left there was nobody who had the capacity and expertise to follow on." One respondent described a case where an individual, who was seen to be a major pillar of the collaboration, suddenly stepped down. His replacement was much younger and considered by the group as less interested, yet, they managed to follow through.

Time horizons, sustainability and exit. Foundations as organisations can have a different time horizon and yet work well together. Alignment is not always easy and it is important to keep it real. According to one practitioner: "Organisations need to take a medium to long-term horizon of five to ten years. Many people are naturally impatient and grossly underestimate how long it takes to achieve meaningful change."

Partners may have different perspectives on ending or exiting from the process, as well as the importance to set a date for exit: "The one thing that I've learned from funding collaboration or consortia is that they need a very specific focus and have to be time-bound, because otherwise the energy just dies off eventually, and you're trying to keep something alive that isn't. There's no end to it. But if you fund from the beginning, being very specific on this is what we're doing, or that's what you're seeking to achieve, and that's what you're going to fund, you can keep it going and the partners in it know

why they're involved, and it's linked to their objectives, and thus you keep the focus and the energy."

Another respondent endorsed the idea that discussing an exit strategy is an agenda point that needs to be explored and discussed at the beginning and regularly, particularly for those collaborations that are not fixed by time: "When developing an initiative you should discuss exiting at the same time, this should be a general principle for all foundations, as perpetual funding is not possible. We need to free up funds and look for new ideas as times evolve. Having this discussion at the beginning allows you to come with the announcement of leaving a collaborative project."

Yet obliging those in the collaboration to sign up to an exit strategy early on can also be counterproductive and at the cost of short-term alignment. In some cases flexibility regarding the long-term vision keeps the focus on common ground: "We are all committed for this phase but I know some of us want to grow bigger and to continue for many more years, while others have a different perspective and come in for a limited period of time. Being the chair, I know who thinks what, but it is not an issue that is easy to deal with. Because the ideas are really quite different, especially the growth scenario, for example, is not shared by many…So we are clear about the short and medium term, but we do not have a shared vision for the long-term."

Approaching the collaborative effort in this open way may also spark the unexpected. The example of the Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme (YEPP) illustrates that there are various options and that postponing a discussion can lead to interesting and unforeseen outcomes.

YEPP: Exit as a process

YEPP is a collaborative initiative involving several European and US foundations, set up to improve the lives of young people at risk in disadvantaged areas in Europe. During the initial phase (2001-2006), partners focused on seven local sites in six European countries. The programme was then extended until 2011 during which time new partners became engaged and new sites developed. YEPP is a shining example of how a funder collaborative can evolve into a grantee collaborative, thereby encouraging local ownership and sustainability: "Over the years, foundations gradually exited while the emphasis on local organisations grew. The people working locally decided that they wanted to continue implementing the YEPP model and [the] transnational exchanges. Foundations will still support, at least the start-up phase of this new organisation. Since 2012, it is no longer a foundation-led programme: The steering committee won't just be foundations, the decision-making process will be in the hands of the people who have been working locally with a couple of people who will manage the transnational working group in Berlin."

The gradual exit of foundations from YEPP was financially as well as strategically inspired: "Some of the foundations, especially the smaller ones, were very clear from the very beginning saying that they could commit for five years. But during these ten years, we lost some of the funders because they were not able to sustain a project for such a long time. The other reason for this evolution is linked to the fact that the local sites were more and more [...] active agents within the whole process."

The local sites had built a network, they became experts in the methodology, they related to the implementing institute and they collaborated with them in reflecting and reshaping the whole model. This corresponds exactly to what YEPP wants to do, namely: "Having communities and young people involved in the decision-making process; it would have been contradictory for us to keep the power in our hands."

Keep Looking Ahead

Increasingly foundations are choosing to work together at the local level, as well as at the national, European and international levels. This emerging trend reflects the growing interconnectedness of the challenges faced by society worldwide. Collaboration therefore appears to offer a sensible way forward for foundations to tackle common problems. To work together successfully it helps to look at past and present experiences and benchmark how well you are managing the complexities, risks and costs associated with such joint ventures.

Foundations tackle complex issues in a wide range of areas, from social welfare, education and culture, to science and technology, the environment and social innovation. And while the focus of many foundations might be thematically and geographically determined, the problems they wish to address seem to be increasingly interconnected at the European level, if not globally. That is why collaboration between foundations — even in its lightest form — appears more relevant than ever. It is therefore important to understand the factors influencing European philanthropy and what it will look like ten years from now, as well as how the globalised context will affect collaboration and bring new models of working together to the fore. Based on the feedback from this guide's sample of interviewees, such questions cannot be categorically answered. Still, some ventured to look ahead.

Meeting the European challenge. As European integration evolves, foundations may increasingly benefit from — and thus be prepared to invest in — collaboration on issues that are decided upon or influenced by European level decision making: "There's a link between the European and domestic developments on migration policy. There's a competence that sits at the European level and a competence that sits at the national. As a local, national foundation, if you're only focusing on the domestic, and not with an eye to try to also influence the European, there are things that you could be doing nationally that could be undermined or completely out of line of what's going on in Europe, so you need to have an eye on both."

In Europe, foundations historically have played very different roles when it comes to working with governments and influencing policies and public opinion. Reflection on these different roles and approaches will be needed when foundations increasingly join up to deal with European-level concerns, as one respondent explained: "As a collaborative we do not do advocacy, because not all foundations that are members are at ease with giving policy recommendations. But you cannot work on this theme, for example, without selecting an issue and focusing [on it]. Through that selection you indirectly set an agenda, even without actively advocating for policy change."

Another respondent reflected that: "There is a cultural problem, to strengthen identification with Europe and to see that we are a common European society, European foundations will have to play their role. At times this role is to be played individually, but to live up to their potential, foundations in Europe have to be able to draw on their collective creativity and work well together."

Networks as incubators for future collaboration. Funders are connected to national platforms of foundations in almost every European country. These national associations provide excellent opportunities to explore new partnerships, bringing together foundations with different profiles and interests. National platforms often organize events and convene members around topics and themes. In Europe these platforms join in the Donors and Funders Network of Europe (DAFNE). The EFC provides opportunities and space for European foundations to meet each other, identify common interests, and develop the elusive chemistry needed for collaboration. Not only at conferences but particularly in the thematic networks, foundations have opportunities to share, learn and sound out ideas for practical initiatives to work together. The EFC and NEF also share information about the achievements of their members' collaborative ventures.

There are many other networks bringing together philanthropic actors: ARIADNE, a European group of funders invested in human rights and social justice. ARIADNE hosts an internet portal which is used by a variety of formal and informal groups of human rights funders to exchange information and collaborate. Similarly, the European Venture Philanthropy Association brings together venture philanthropists, and the European Network of Political Foundations integrates foundations related to political parties from 20 countries. The list goes on.

Learning by doing. Research on collaboration among foundations in Europe is still relatively new and hard to come by. The experience and information gap will be gradually filled through conscious and coherent learning and most of all through openness. As one foundation executive expressed: "Foundations need this explorative attitude. They should welcome newcomers, relish the differences as opportunities for exploration, learning and engaging with this continent that we are part of."

Among practitioners, theories do little to breed trust and on-the-job learning seems a necessary process to undergo for perfecting practice: "I think that learning from doing and from relating to other

Trendsetters? Funder advocacy in Europe

The Corston Independent Funders Coalition (CIFC) is a unique collaboration between foundations; "unique" firstly because of the unusually large number of organisations involved, and secondly because it is rare in Europe for foundations and trusts to engage in "funder advocacy". The initiative aims to jointly influence an area of social change in which they consider themselves to be key stakeholders and supports the Corston Agenda that seeks improved community alternatives to custody for women and investment in diverting vulnerable women away from offending.

What started out in June 2008 as an open letter signed by 33 trustees and officers from 23 grant makers to Jack Straw MP, the then Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, led to a £15.6 million commitment from the minister to the Corston agenda. This in turn led to a pooled fund between government and grant makers and shared decision making in support of the Corston agenda. The coalition continues to advocate and act as a critical friend to ministers ensuring that the Corston agenda stays at the forefront of policy.

The CIFC demonstrates the role of funder advocacy and the potential of funder-government collaboration. Speaking about the undertaking, one of the coalition's champions said: "We set out as a coalition to advocate rather than to fund. We wanted to use our overview, the longevity of our commitment and the fact that we had invested a lot in this area to encourage the government not to put legislation in place that would undermine our work…. We have secured a commitment from the new government, and we have shown that foundations can work together to build on the expertise of our grantees and our own overview of the sector and strategically support the changes we seek".

people is a lot more effective. Reading is great, but when you work at a very operational level, there is not enough time to read and to reflect about things. Doing things together has a lot more impact." This type of learning – learning-by-doing – can be quite profound if properly designed and accompanied: "Collaboration forces you to re-examine your values and assumptions and this debate around practical issues is very necessary."

Worthwhile learning by doing requires a systematic approach and documenting practice. Only a few collaborations evaluate and build in impact assessment into their collaborative process. The European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM) learned to evaluate on-the-go: "After the first round we did a very informal evaluation, after the second we did a process evaluation — which at the last moment they tried to convert into an impact evaluation which was really complicated — and now for the third round we are building in everything needed to evaluate impact; it is a really structural approach."

An honest evaluation of collaborative efforts not only allows you and your partners to track how you are doing, over time you can transform your investment into knowledge capital for new ventures. Publicly sharing such evaluations has proven to benefit broader learning, as observed by the One Foundation and the Atlantic Philanthropies when they published an external evaluation of their joint work with grantees in Ireland. So if you are not in a position to learn by doing, you can learn from what has been tried and tested by others. The publication 'Swissnex' by Fondation 1796 and the Foundation Strategy Group (FSG), offers a candid account of their experience of a global public-private partnership. The publication concludes with a series of principles that are very much in line with the experiences of those who contributed to this GrantCraft guide. Inspired by these Swissnex principles, the 'Collaborative health check' (see box) may help foundations to assess how well they are doing in their emerging or mature collaborative ventures.

Collaborative Health Check

When exploring a collaborative venture:

☐ Do you understand how your organisation can benefit from this collaboration? Did you consider potential costs and risks involved?

☐ Do you know your partners? Are the right partners involved? Does this collaboration tap into the interests of all involved?

☐ Does the initiative have champions who are able and willing to guide the process? And mindful shepherds who usher and connect?

☐ Does everyone involved understand and acknowledge the various agendas and rationales that underlie the participation of those involved?

☐ Have you made your shared goal explicit? Is there an emerging roadmap, a shared sense of some of the key milestones of your journey?

When getting ready to work together:

☐ Are you able to find win-win solutions? Are the structures, arrangements and procedures flexible and fit both your goals and the diversity of the partners involved?

☐ Does the group have the creativity and skills to get un-stuck when differences and tensions hamper progress?

☐ Are you all open to cultural differences? Did you develop a shared vocabulary?

☐ Do you have the time (and resources) to be patient? Are you aware of the (different) time horizons that your partners manage?

☐ Does everyone feel (equally) included? Does everyone involved trust each other?

As your partnership matures:

☐ Have you been able to adapt to changes in the external environment? To exits of partners and new entrants? Can conditions be re-negotiated?

☐ How transparent, constructive and inclusive is the communication between partners?

☐ Do you systematically monitor progress towards (shared) goals? Are you set up to learn from what you are doing?

☐ Does everyone involved acknowledge one another's contributions? Are (reciprocal) commitments and responsibilities honoured?

☐ Did you find ways to be frank? Are there any remaining no-go areas?

After: Fondation 1796 and FSG (2011),
Collaboration and Partnerships: the 'swissnex' Case, pages 23-25

A Sample of Collaborations

This is a non-exhaustive list of collaboratives involving European foundations.

ARIADNE is a European network of funders invested in Human Rights: http://ariadne-network.eu/

Children and Violence Evaluation Challenge Fund funds robust and rigorous evaluation of violence prevention and child protection in low and middle income countries: http://www.evaluationchallenge.org/

European Alliance for Democratic Citizenship to help young Europeans develop skills and take action for a democratic and sustainable Europe: http://www.nef-europe.org/content/18/european-alliance-democratic-citizenship

European Climate Foundation (ECF) was founded by a group of European foundations and aims to promote climate and energy policies that greatly reduce Europe's greenhouse gas emissions and help Europe play an even stronger international leadership role in mitigating climate change: http://www.europeanclimate.org/

European Consortium of Foundations on Human Rights and Disabilities aims to play a catalytic role to ensure that the EU and European governments and other relevant stakeholders commit to the ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: http://www.efc.be/Networking/InterestGroupsAndFora/Disability/Pages/theEuropeanConsortiumofFoundationsonHumanRightsandDisability.aspx

European Foreign and Security Policy Studies is a research and training program jointly developed by three European foundations that supports research projects which go beyond the national views currently dominating academic and practical approaches towards a common European Foreign and Security Policy: http://www.efsps.eu/

European Foundations Initiative on Dementia (EFID) aims to improve the perception of dementia and stimulate solidarity: http://www.nef-europe.org/content/18/european-foundations-initiative-dementia

European Fund for the Balkans supports initiatives that bring the Western Balkans closer to the EU: http://www.balkanfund.org/

European HIV/AIDS Funders Group (EFG) is a knowledge-based network dedicated to strengthening European philanthropy in the field of HIV/AIDS: http://www.efc.be/NETWORKING/INTERESTGROUPSANDFORA/HIVAIDS/Pages/About.aspx

European Initiative for African research on Neglected Diseases (EIFNTD) aims to build African research capacities to control neglected tropical diseases: http://www.ntd-africa.net/

European Program on Integration and Migration (EPIM) makes grants to improve the lives of regular and undocumented migrants: http://www.epim.info/

Funders' Collaborative to Support Transition to Democracy in Tunisia. Originating from the Global Philanthropy Leadership Initiative, this collaborative will fund capacity development of local actors in support of the transition process to democracy.

Funders' Forum on Sustainable Cities is an initiative originating from the Global Philanthropy Leadership Initiative to promote exchange of knowledge and practices in promoting sustainable and inclusive cities.

Global Philanthropy Leadership Initiative is a limited life collaborative aimed at catalysing actions and collaborations in strategic areas towards advancing international philanthropy: http://www.efc.be/NETWORKING/INTERESTGROUPSANDFORA/GLOBAL/Pages/GPLM.aspx

Indigo - European Asset-building Innovation Network brings together specialized foundations and other organizations with experience in asset building aiming to act as a laboratory of information exchange and learning: http://www.indigo-asset-building.eu/

LabforCulture.org is funded by a number of European foundations and seeks to ensure that all those working on cultural collaboration have access to up-to-the-minute information, encouraging the cultural sector to become more experimental with online technologies. http://www.labforculture.org/en

League of Historical and Accessible Cities (LHAC) aims to find innovative ideas to reconcile cultural heritage protection and accessibility: http://www.lhac.eu/

Learning for Well-Being Consortium aims to inspire and engage policy makers, foundations and other stakeholders in Europe to listen more to children and young people, and to take more initiatives with them for their well-being in their learning environments: http://www.eiesp.org/site/pages/view/60-learning-for-well-being-consortium.html

Network of European Foundations (NEF) offers a platform to initiate cooperation among foundations and aims to serve as a launching pad for new ideas and initiatives related to Europe: http://www.nef-europe.org/

Oceans 5 is a global funder's collaborative, comprised of new and experienced philanthropists, committed to protecting the five oceans of the planet: http://www.oceans5.org/

Roma Education Fund aims to help close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma Children: http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/

Somerset House Child Protection Funders Group seeks to unite private funds around a clear and pressing goal: reducing reliance on residential institutions for children who are at risk of separation from their families and those currently living in institutions.

Strategic Fund for Turkey aims to support local groups in Turkey that work to protect and promote human rights in Turkey, particularly those set up by vulnerable groups: http://www.global-dialogue.eu/our-projects/strategic-fund-turkey

Transnational Giving Europe covers 15 countries and is at European level the only existing practical solution to support a beneficiary located in a foreign country with all the tax advantages in the country of residence of the donor: http://www.transnationalgiving.eu/tge/default.aspx?id=219948&LangType=1033

Youth Empowerment Partnership Programme (YEPP) enables young people to develop projects and achieve youth and community empowerment: http://www.yepp-community.org/yepp/cms/index.php

Further Reading

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http://www.acf.org.uk/uploadedFiles/IFF/More%20than%20Money%20-%20the%20potential%20of%20cross%20sector%20relationships.pdf

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ABOUT THE FOUNDATION CENTER

Established in 1956, the Foundation Center is the leading source of information about philanthropy worldwide. Through data, analysis, and training, it connects people who want to change the world to the resources they need to succeed. The Center maintains the most comprehensive database on U.S. and, increasingly, global funders and their grants – a robust, accessible knowledge bank for the sector. It also operates research, education, and training programs designed to advance knowledge of philanthropy at every level.

ABOUT THE EUROPEAN FOUNDATION CENTRE

The European Foundation Centre, founded in 1989, is an international membership association representing public-benefit foundations and corporate funders active in philanthropy in Europe, and beyond. The Centre develops and pursues activities in line with its four key objectives: creating an enabling legal and fiscal environment; documenting the foundation landscape; building the capacity of foundation professionals; and promoting collaboration, both among foundations and between foundations and other actors.

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