

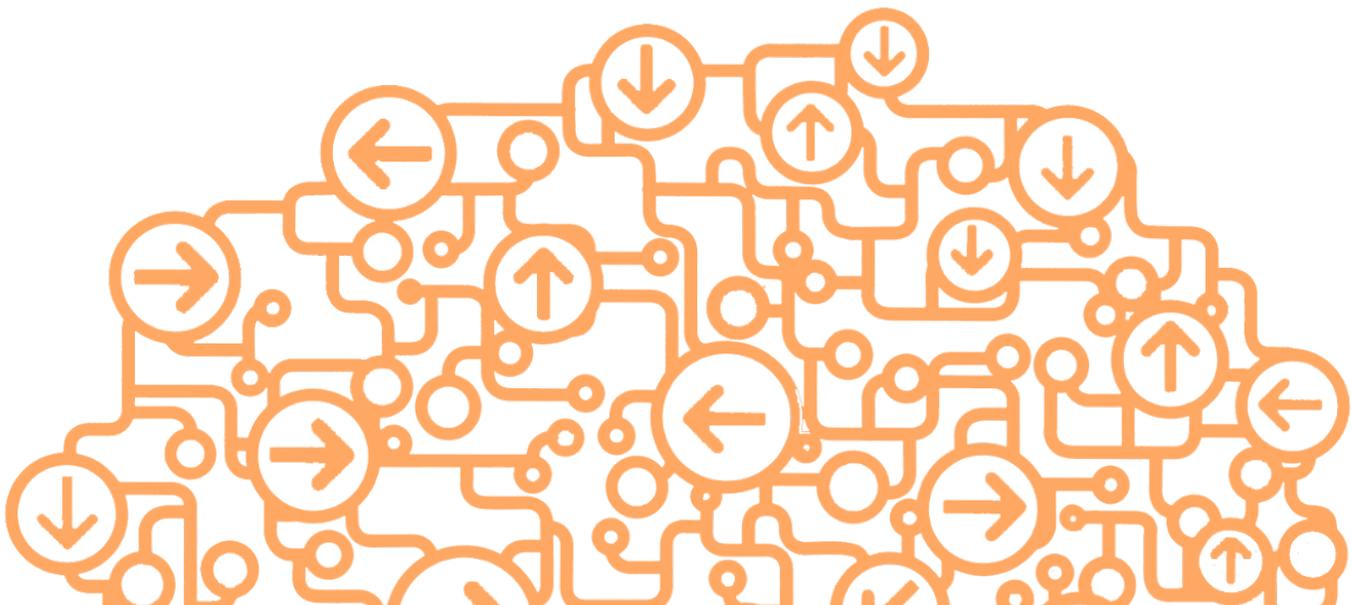


# GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTIONS WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION GRANTEES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

Community-driven systems change is rooted in principles of justice and solidarity. What does a justice and solidarity approach look like in interacting with and supporting people and communities to address the issue(s) at hand?

A justice approach to global development is about fairness, rights, and the equitable distribution of money, opportunities, and power among all members of society. With a justice approach, symptomatic and reactive fixes are inadequate – it is necessary to expose and redress that which is unfair and inequitable. Justice approaches often go hand in hand with a commitment of solidarity – the sense that we are all responsible to fight injustice towards ourselves and others.

Justice and solidarity mean that power is more equitably distributed. Redressing imbalances in power means shifting power towards those who are marginalized, harmed, and oppressed, and being guided by their experience, expertise, and leadership on addressing the issues that are harming them.



Here are some guidelines around how we might interact with CBO grantees and their communities within a justice and solidarity approach –

- 1- Be guided by mutual respect, appreciation, and trust. Approach each interaction as a partnership rather than a top-down relationship.
- 2- Be aware of the power you hold regardless of the equality you seek – and think about how what you say/ what you do will be interpreted because of this power you hold. A simple question may be interpreted as a directive or guidance.
- 3- Be a partner and ally. Do not micromanage. If, when, and where your support is requested, step in from a place of trust and support, not suspicion.
- 4- Accountability should be a two-way relationship. Are you willing as a funder to share with grantees the same things you expect them to share with you? For example, audit reports, salary budgets, sources of funding, accounting of overall project budget, etc. If not, why not?
- 5- Learn what is, and follow the process for, appropriate and respectful “community entry” at the start of an initiative. Learn about and respect norms, consult with CBO and community leaders, and follow protocols.
- 6- Learn what is, and follow the process for, appropriate and respectful transition out at the end of an initiative. This includes being clear from the start about the length of the partnership and the plan for transition, as well as proper close-out and debrief meetings with important community and government stakeholders.
- 7- Be careful not to raise false expectations at all stages – pre-partnership, early on in the partnership, throughout the partnership, and at the end.
- 8- Treat CBOs and communities with respect. Respect and appreciate that they understand the context better than you do.
- 9- Consider what information you request of CBO grantees, and why and how.
  - a. Minimize the burden you put on partners. Only ask for what you absolutely need – not that which is ‘interesting to know’.
  - b. Respect that some data may be confidential/ sensitive and should not be requested.
  - c. Assign a focal person (or gatekeeper) at your organization for communication to CBO grantee-partners so that partners are not receiving different requests from different staff members at your organization. This focal person can then filter, consolidate, and prioritize or deprioritize different requests for information as needed.
  - d. Try to consolidate any requests for information (and minimize what you ask for), so partners are not receiving multiple requests all the time.

- e. Sometimes extensive back and forth over email can be a substantial burden on partners – issues may be discussed more quickly with fewer misunderstandings over a phone call.
- 10- Have anonymous/ confidential feedback loops through which CBOs can share honest feedback on how you as a donor can do better. This includes feedback on your systems and procedures, protocols, templates, etc. Listen to / read this feedback carefully and use it to improve your practice
  - 11- Use different methods for communication, being flexible to use different methods according to what is most supportive, easy, and helpful for different partners.
  - 12- Minimize the burden on CBO grantee-partners. In order to minimize the burden on CBO grantee-partners, you will need to take on more burden. This might include, for example, arranging translators so that CBO staff are not preoccupied with translating for their colleagues while interacting with you, using multiple methods of communication depending on what works for different partners, organizing your own logistics for site visits, accepting proposals and reports that are written by hand and/or in other languages and figuring out how to translate and digitize them on your end, etc.
  - 13- Recognize that the risk CBOs take in partnering with you is often far greater than any risk you take in partnering with them. In partnering with a given funder, CBOs may risk compromising on their organizational identity and mission, their capacity to remain responsive to the true needs of their community, their trust and legitimacy in their community as they may be perceived as implementers of an external agenda, and their resilience and relevance as their attention and work is shifted to funder priorities and programs which may fade away after a funding cycle. Be aware of and sensitive to the implications of these risks.

## GUIDELINES FOR SITE VISITS

Here are some specific guidelines for funders' site visits to CBOs and their communities –

- 1- Be humble, patient, respectful and flexible.
- 2- Discuss with grantee partners what is helpful and appropriate when it comes to site visits. Their perspective may change over time.
  - a. Frequency
  - b. Nature / approach
  - c. Objectives
  - d. Cultural norms

- 3- Consider these questions before you plan a site visit –
  - a. Is this visit necessary?
  - b. Is this visit more about you than about the partners and the communities?
  - c. What disruption will it cause? Is that disruption worth it? How can the disruption be minimized?
  - d. Could you get the same information without a site visit? In a way that would be less disruptive to partners and communities?
  - e. Is it necessary to visit communities (beyond the CBO's office)? What disruption will it cause? Is that disruption worth it?
  - f. Where a site visit may be important for relationship building, understanding the context, etc. – discuss the objectives and goals with partners, and plan the visit with them.
  
- 4- Thoughtfully and collaboratively plan all site visits with CBO partners –
  - a. Let them know well in advance and check if the proposed dates and times work for them.
  - b. Communicate your purpose, objectives, and expectations with partners, and ask partners about their objectives and expectations of your visit as well. Discuss any issues or questions on either side that should be addressed during the visit. Both parties should discuss and agree upon mutual objectives for the visit and how to achieve them.
  - c. Find out in advance about cultural or community norms and practices that may affect your visit. Ensure to plan for adequate time to follow, respect, and appreciate cultural norms and practices. These are important for CBO partners' nurturing of trust and respect with their communities.
  - d. Plan for and carry out any important courtesies – such as informing relevant government officials about your visit and conducting visits with relevant authorities at the community level such as traditional authorities, elders, etc. These are important for CBO partners' maintenance of open relationships with critical stakeholders, for transparency and accountability, to demonstrate respect of social norms, and to strengthen pathways for systemic change.
  
- 5- Based on the objectives, goals, expectations, and plans, prepare thoroughly for your visit. Review relevant documents and communications so that you are familiar and refreshed with your understanding of the organization, their community, the work they are doing, and the specific issues or questions to be explored during your visit.
  
- 6- Being respectful of partners' time. Stick to the time that you have indicated you are coming for visits. For example, if you have said we will have a two-hour meeting starting at 9am, be there at 9am and limit it to the two hours. Recognize that the funder-grantee power difference means that if you ask if it's okay to extend the meeting, grantees are unlikely to say no – they may feel obliged to acquiesce to your request even if they have other commitments.

- 7- Use caution and discretion, and get informed consent, when taking photos or videos.
  - a. Photography and videoing can be a significant distraction and disruption to community members. It can also create concern and unease. If the photos and videos are not necessary, try to avoid them. Minimize disruptions to the CBO and community.
  - b. Recognize that there is a power difference that may not enable them to truly give voluntary consent – they may feel obliged to consent even if they don't feel comfortable.
  - c. Think about the purpose of the photos or videos you are seeking to capture. Ensure that they are in line with principles of justice and solidarity, and not charity. Review guidelines for ethical storytelling, photography, and communications.
  
- 8- Take on the logistical burdens. For example –
  - a. Proactively prepare for and reimburse costs that the partner may incur – transport, refreshments/meals, bringing community members together, etc. You will need to bring cash in local currency with you for this purpose.
  - b. Arrange your own translator if needed, so that CBO staff are not trying to translate and participate in conversation with you simultaneously.
  - c. Arrange your own transport if possible. You may require a four-wheel-drive vehicle to reach CBO partners' locations or catchment areas during different weather conditions.
  - d. Arrange your own accommodation if possible.
  
- 9- After the site visit, discuss with partners what went well and what could have been improved. Encourage honest feedback, listen authentically and humbly to the feedback, and work to improve for next time.

*We hope these guidelines and questions have supported your thinking and planning around interactions with CBOs and communities. Please feel free to contact us at [learning@firelightfoundation.org](mailto:learning@firelightfoundation.org) to discuss further.*