

Supporting Learning? Exploring the relationship between grantee learning and grantmaking practice in the transparency and accountability sector

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Abbreviations

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| DFID | Department for International Development |
| GPSA | Global Partnership for Social Accountability |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MAVC | Making All Voices Count |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| OSF | Open Society Foundations |
| T/AI | Transparency and Accountability Initiative |
| TA | Transparency and Accountability |
| TALEARN | A community of Transparency and Accountability funders, civil society organizations, and researchers |

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Executive Summary

Grantmakers and grantees are responsible for ensuring that their resources are used effectively and in a way that achieves the greatest possible impact. However in the transparency and accountability (TA) sector there is limited understanding of which approaches are most effective and whether and how successful interventions can be scaled up or applied to different contexts. This makes taking decisions about which approaches to use, or to fund, difficult.

Within sector discussions about impact, there is increasing focus on strengthening grantee learning in order to provide answers to questions about what works. At the same time, learning is critical to the effectiveness of TA interventions as grantees need to adapt their plans in response to the dynamic and complex environments in which they are working.

Drawing on interviews with grantmakers, grantees and sector experts, this study explores the relationship between grantmaking practice and grantee learning. The study is intended to provide a basis for discussions between grantmakers, and within the wider TA sector.

Examples of areas where grantmaking practice constrains grantee learning

- Short-term project funding usually does not allow the time or the resources for learning and grantees are often focused on implementation, reporting and securing further funding.
- Project funding can also constrain organisational learning by creating silos within organisations and undermining the coherence of organisational strategy.
- Grant agreements which are tied to specific plans and related indicators can undermine grantees incentive to learn as they do not have the flexibility within the grant to adapt and improve their approach.
- Grantmakers are not explicit about their support for learning which often means that grantees are then unclear whether they can include resources for learning within their grant proposals and budgets.

The grantees interviewed as part of this study share common grantmakers but they exhibit a wide range of learning practices. Some organisations place learning at the heart of their strategy and have integrated processes of critical reflection within their day-to-day work. Others recognise the importance of learning but are focused on implementation and struggle to find the time and space for learning. Grantmakers shape the environment in which grantees learn but the study explores how grantmaking practice interacts with grantee's own commitment and capacity for organisational learning.

The study concludes by making four broad recommendations which are followed by emerging examples of good practice. These include co-design of reporting formats by grantmakers and grantees, grantmaker funded critical friends to encourage grantees to learn and grantmaker facilitation of links between practitioners and academic researchers within the field.

The report recommends that in order to support grantee learning, grantmakers should:

- Be transparent about their commitment to learning, along with their expectations and support for grantees
- Develop and maintain relationships with grantees that support learning
- Invest in resources and skills to support learning
- Ensure that grantmaking systems and practices support learning as well as accountability.

Specific recommendations (included in the summary table below) include highlighting commitment to learning as selection criteria for grantees, working with grantees to identify indicators which are useful for learning as well as accountability and providing funding for learning reviews or evaluations.

| Building block of learning | Internal constraints on grantee learning | Grantmaker-related constraints | Recommendations for grantmaker support |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Commitment to Learning | <p>Lack of organisational strategy</p> <p>Lack of priority on learning in strategy</p> <p>Lack of organisational learning agenda (focus)</p> <p>Focus on implementation and securing funding</p> | <p>Lack of clear prioritisation and commitment to learning by grantmakers.</p> <p>Funding linked to projects designed in response to grantmaker strategy rather than in support of grantees' organisational strategy.</p> <p>Grantmaker focus on grantees delivering quantifiable, measurable outputs increases focus on implementation.</p> <p>Short-term funding creates insecurity – leads to focus on implementation and fundraising and lack of openness.</p> <p>Short-term funding does not provide a realistic timeframe to learn about change and impact.</p> | <p>Define 'learning' and explain to grantees where learning fits in your grantmaking strategy.</p> <p>Be transparent about how learning that is shared will be used and how it relates to grantee selection and renewal processes.</p> <p>Identify where there is a shared learning agenda (often linked to shared assumptions) between grantmaker and grantee and focus learning exchange in this area.</p> <p>Explore how commitment to learning can be assessed or demonstrated within the proposal or grant selection process.</p> <p>Review – with grantees if possible – how reporting formats can encourage genuine reflection and highlight learning.</p> <p>Experiment/pilot alternative reporting approaches that might support greater understanding and learning.</p> <p>When renewing or extending grants, use, where possible, the opportunity to learn and reflect and share the learning.</p> |
| Culture and Relationships | <p>Leadership and management who are unwilling or unable to deal with critical inquiry and feedback</p> <p>Defensive patterns of behaviour that</p> | <p>Lack of critical engagement by grantmakers with grantees to stimulate internal discussion and debate.</p> | <p>Encourage and support grantees to experiment and try new approaches in order to generate learning – where appropriate.</p> <p>Provide support for 'critical friends' to work alongside</p> |

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| | <p>prevent discussion of critical questions or internal challenging of assumptions</p> <p>Organisation has a strong sense of how things are done and change and experimentation are not encouraged</p> <p>Hierarchical structure works against learning and valuing everyone's input</p> <p>Lack of engagement and relationships with external actors or across internal teams, which promotes openness and prevents 'groupthink'.</p> | <p>Short term funding leads to organisational insecurity and staff insecurity.</p> <p>Project funding creates siloes within organisations and does not cover costs of learning.</p> <p>Lack of incentive from grantmakers to innovate and experiment with new approaches.</p> | <p>grantees to help them to understand how their learning can be strengthened and develop their critical and adaptive capacities.</p> <p>Ensure that support for increasing the supply of learning opportunities and products is informed by growing understanding of what support helps grantees to use/apply what is on offer and what grantmaker-related constraints remain.</p> <p>Ensure that investment in strengthening learning is reviewed/evaluated in order to strengthen the sector's understanding about how to support learning and how to learn effectively.</p> <p>Engage with grantees when proposals do not adequately demonstrate integration of learning or include critical assumptions.</p> <p>Use the grant inception phase to explore grantee proposals further in order to create a 'learning relationship'.</p> |
| <p>Resources and Skills</p> | <p>Insufficient resources for individual and team staff development and learning</p> <p>Lack of skills to identify how to strengthen learning</p> <p>Lack of resources/external support to develop systems and practices that support learning (learning how to learn)</p> <p>Insufficient resource/skills to support</p> | <p>Restricted funding that provides no funding or no flexibility for supporting learning</p> <p>Lack of transparency about whether grantmaker will provide resources/support for learning</p> <p>Resources absorbed by reporting which has weak emphasis on learning</p> | <p>Be transparent about the support that is available for grantee learning.</p> <p>Gather feedback from grantees in order to better understand whether current grantmaking practice supports learning (particularly in relation to level of engagement, support and security)</p> <p>Recognise that learning relationships with grantees require time and commitment (and resources on the part of the grantmaker).</p> |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| | <p>documentation and sharing of learning externally</p> <p>Insufficient resources to engage externally to access others learning; insufficient resources to support experimentation</p> <p>Lack of resources for evaluation and impact assessment.</p> | <p>Lack of transparency about whether grantmakers are willing to support external support for grantee learning or research.</p> <p>Limited investment by grantmakers in evaluation and impact assessment.</p> | <p>Provide, where appropriate, support for dedicated research capacity for grantees or broker/support partnerships between grantees and researchers.</p> <p>Review how to reduce reporting requirements for grantees to free up time for learning and/or make more use of reports for learning</p> <p>Provide resources for evaluation or impact assessment, with other donors if necessary</p> <p>Provide resources for grantees to conduct learning-focused review of their work.</p> |
| Systems and Practices | <p>Lack of commitment to facilitating learning focus within existing systems and practices (performance management, IT, monitoring and evaluation) .</p> <p>M&E systems/processes do not collect and analyse information that can support learning.</p> <p>Lack of resources for learning activities.</p> <p>Lack of understanding of how to strengthen learning focus within organisation.</p> | <p>Lack of transparency about whether grantmaker will provide resources/support for learning.</p> <p>Grantmaker reporting and accountability mechanisms focused on pre-determined quantitative indicators relating to activities and outputs.</p> | <p>Work with grantees to identify indicators that are of value for learning, as well as accountability purposes.</p> <p>Encourage grantees to provide evidence of progress and results beyond the indicators identified.</p> |

Table 1: Summary of findings

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Research

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation commissioned this study under the auspices of the Transparency and Accountability Initiative (T/AI) of which it is a member. T/AI is a donor collaborative working to expand the impact and scale of transparency and accountability interventions in or benefitting developing countries. T/AI works with a diverse set of donors, researchers and practitioners in the transparency and accountability field. Discussions within T/AI have highlighted the role of grantmaking practices in enabling or constraining learning about ‘what works’ in the sector.

The purpose of this study is:

- To inform grantmakers about the relationship between grantee learning and grantmaking practice.
- To make recommendations about how grantmakers can adapt their grantmaking practice and funding strategies to remove constraints on grantee learning and support more effective learning.
- To serve as an input for ongoing discussions among grantmakers and between grantmakers and grantees.

The study focused on the grantees and grantmaking practice of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Omidyar Network, the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA).

1.2 Research approach

The findings of this study are based on:

- *An initial call with grantees and grantmakers to inform the research approach for the study (August 2014)*
- *Interviews (September – November 2014)*
41 interviews with grantmakers (7), re-granting organisations (4) grantees (24) and experts (6) in the field¹.
- *Literature review (September – November 2014)*
Literature review covering relevant research, blogs and reports relating to learning and grantmaking practice².
- *Validation survey (November 2014)*
50 completed responses from grantees to an online questionnaire to validate findings and prioritise areas for grantmaker support³.

¹ The complete list of interviewees is available in Annex D. The interview format used is available in Annex B.

² A selected bibliography is outlined in Annex E.

³ The questionnaire format used is available in Annex C.

- *Virtual Roundtable (20th November 2014)*
Feedback from grantmakers involved in the study to early findings through a virtual roundtable.
- *Additional interviews (February 2014)*
Further expert interviews to refine analysis and recommendations

The table below outlines the main areas of inquiry for the study.

| Main areas of Inquiry | Questions the study seeks to address |
|--|--|
| Learning in the TA sector | <p>Why is learning considered important for achieving impact and effectiveness in the TA sector?</p> <p>Is there a shared understanding of the value and purpose of grantee learning in the TA sector?</p> <p>What are the challenges for learning about impact and effectiveness in the TA sector?</p> <p>How do tensions between learning and accountability in the grantmaking relationship affect grantee learning in the TA sector?</p> |
| Grantmaker influence on grantee learning | <p>What are the constraints on grantee learning? How are constraints on learning linked to grantee commitment and capacity to learn?</p> <p>How does the relationship between grantmakers and grantees affect grantees commitment and capacity to learn?</p> <p>How does the way that grantees are funded influence their learning?</p> <p>How do proposal formats and grant inception processes constrain or support learning?</p> <p>How do current approaches to monitoring progress and results constrain or support learning?</p> <p>How do report formats constrain or support learning and the sharing of learning?</p> <p>How can end of grant/evaluation processes support learning and the sharing of learning?</p> <p>What examples of good practice or new approaches can be identified?</p> |

Table 2: Main areas of inquiry

1.3 Understanding learning in the TA sector

Learning is defined as the acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught⁴. When asked about the process of learning in the TA sector, interviewees focused primarily on learning from experience, exposure to the learning of others and the importance of ongoing processes of critical reflection.

The value of learning for the TA sector

Most interviewees highlighted that, given the complexity of the TA sector, learning was critical to the overall effectiveness of TA interventions by enabling practical improvements and strategic adaptation. Many also identified the need for more evidence of impact in order to support improved understanding of 'what works'.



Diagram 1: Three main areas where learning adds value to the TA sector

'The TA sector is inherently complex, involving shifting political dynamics that present organizations working on these issues with an evolving set of challenges and opportunities. Organizations aiming to contribute to change in such conditions must continuously learn and adapt, reevaluating and modifying their initial assumptions based on new data, experience and reflection.'

Terms of Reference for this Study

'There is little understanding of why, when and how initiatives succeed or fail. We lack information on how impact was achieved and how similar work can be scaled up and used across different political contexts.'

Transparency and Accountability Initiative website

Understanding the value and role of grantee learning

Across grantmaker and grantee interviews there was a lack of consensus about the role grantee learning can play in building sector-wide understanding of impact and 'what works'. Most grantees are pre-occupied with their own implementation and focus on learning that will improve their own effectiveness. A small number of grantees, often the ones with dedicated research and learning capacity, did feel that they could contribute to discussions about impact and scale. Grantmakers and grantees recognised that expectations of grantees in relation to learning need to be linked to grantees existing capacity to generate evidence and knowledge and to the support grantmakers are providing.

As well as learning from their own experience, grantees have increasing opportunities to learn from other practitioners and new research (through, for example, GPSA, T/AI and Making All Voices Count (MAVC)). For many

⁴ Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.

grantmakers who are supporting these initiatives there is clear expectation that grantees will apply and integrate the learning of others in their work.

1.4 Why is learning challenging for the TA sector?

Strengthening organisational learning is not a straightforward process in any sector⁵. In interviews, grantees and grantmakers identified specific challenges which stem firstly from the nature of the TA sector (the changes it is trying to bring about, the contexts it is working in) and secondly from the nature of the relationship between grantmakers and grantees.

Challenge: The complexity of TA interventions

This section draws on relevant literature about the complexity of working in the governance and TA sector, and how interviewees articulated their broad challenges in terms of learning about their work⁶.

- *Influence rather than control over changes:* TA organisations are often dependent on the actions of others (governments, companies and citizens) to achieve results. They do not have power or control over these actors and there is not a direct cause and effect relationship between the activities that they undertake and end results in terms of greater responsiveness and accountability.
- *Context specific nature of change:* Learning about ‘what works’ is complicated by the centrality of context to change processes. For grantees it can be difficult to identify what is relevant to share from their learning and how to use learning from other contexts. Recent discussions within GPSA, MAVC and TALEARN (a community of TA funders, civil society organisations and researchers) have highlighted the potential for learning across contexts in order to identify principles and patterns underpinning change⁷.
- *Non-linear, unpredictable and dynamic nature of change:* TA grantees cannot predict how change will happen. In order to be effective, organisations have to be constantly monitoring developments in their focus area and adapt their approach accordingly. This can then undermine the usefulness of information gathered through formal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process or for donor reporting. This information is commonly linked to indicators which were outlined in the original (linear) plan or grant agreement.
- *Multiple actors involved and interventions needed at many levels:* TA organisations are part of a broader complex environment (or system) where different elements and actors inter-relate in unpredictable ways. When results are achieved it is likely to be the result of multi-pronged strategies⁸ (for example building citizen voice as well supporting government responsiveness) operating at many levels, making it more difficult to understand the contribution of

⁵ BOND, 2006

⁶ Overseas Development Institute, 2014

⁷ Guertzovich & Rosenzweig, 2014

⁸ Fox, 2014

individual actors or activities. This makes it hard for grantees to identify in a rigorous way what worked or didn't in their approach.

In addition, organisations are likely to focus on collecting information and evidence that confirms their contribution rather than trying to understand their own part within the broader system. Without this wider perspective, organisations are unlikely to be able to identify the combination of efforts or enabling conditions that contributed to the changes that have taken place.

- *Long-term nature of change:* Change processes can often be long and drawn out – with many (even long-term) TA initiatives like the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative being considered a 'work in progress'. The chain linking the activity undertaken by a TA grantee and the impact on people's lives is long and the answer to whether an approach has worked is often 'we don't know yet' rather than a definite 'yes' or 'no'. This can also make it difficult for grantees and grantmakers to understand how to measure progress and to understand results within a grantmaking cycle when processes of change may be slow, at a standstill or even reverse.

Challenge: Tensions between accountability and learning in the grantmaking relationship

Accountability within a grantmaking relationship is predominantly a top down exercise with grantmakers being held accountable to the people whose money they are spending and grantees being held accountable to the grantmakers. Grantmakers have a responsibility to invest grant money well and put in place processes and mechanisms to ensure that the funds disbursed are used in line with their intentions. However, the mechanisms that have been put in place to satisfy concerns relating to accountability can constrain grantee learning.

In their paper 'The Reputation Trap of NGO Accountability' Gent et al. (2014) argue that tools used by grantmakers to improve the accountability of NGOs, namely reporting based on pre-determined indicators and short funding cycles, can undermine grantee commitment to learning and effectiveness. These tools incentivise grantees to focus on short-term tangible results which can be attributed to their activities (even if these may undermine their long-term impact).

Examples of tensions between accountability and learning drawn from interviews

- *Proposals/Grantee selection:* In a competitive funding environment TA organisations can feel under pressure to present simple or linear models of change in their proposals. Regardless of internal learning and availability of external evidence there is also an incentive to be overly optimistic about the timescale for change, or over-emphasise the contribution/control of the organisation, in order to represent 'value for money' when being considered alongside other potential grantees.

However, if the organisations are selected they then have to report against the results that they said that they would achieve. Trust between grantees and grantmakers can be quickly undermined when grantees cannot deliver what was

expected. Grantees may begin to feel insecure, undermining openness between grantmakers and their grantees. This in turn inhibits the sharing of learning.

- *Monitoring:* Grantmakers may try to enhance accountability (and their ability to assess performance) by tying funding to specific activities and achievement of progress, or results linked to pre-determined indicators. These indicators are usually quantitative and focus on the activities of grantees and any outputs they have produced. This information enables grantees to describe their work but it is insufficient for learning. In order to understand the difference they are making, grantees have to gather and triangulate a much wider range of information.
- *Reporting:* Current reporting practice focuses on activities, progress against indicators and results. The information included in reports often lacks explanatory or narrative value – it fails to answer the ‘so what?’ Grantees are not encouraged to explore causal links between their activities and any observable changes or the contribution of other actors/contextual factors, which is necessary for effective learning.
- *Tying funding to specific projects and programmes:* Tying funding to particular projects or programmes strengthens accountability by allowing grantmakers to trace where resources have been used. However, this can create silos within organisations and undermine attempts to strengthen and fund organisational learning. For grantmakers there may also be a missed opportunity to understand the ‘ripple effects’ of their funding – grantees often synthesise learning at the organisational level and there may be impact/results which their support has contributed to that are not captured in project/programme level reporting.

The implications for grantee learning and grantmaker practice

The influence of grantmaking practice on grantee learning has to be understood within the broader context of the challenges outlined above. Learning is not easy. For grantees, it involves gathering information from multiple sources, understanding what the information means and how to apply it to ongoing and future work. Sharing learning (in reports for grantmakers or knowledge products) requires further critical analysis and grantees to distill information in such a way that is accessible for readers who have not been actively involved in the process and may not understand the context.

If grantmakers want to support grantee learning, then it will need more than a change in report or proposal formats. It will require commitment of time and resources and a willingness to share responsibility for learning and achieving results with their grantees. The following sections outline how grantmaking practice can constrain grantee learning and how grantmakers can adapt their approach to offer greater support.

Diversity of grantee learning practice and grantmaker practice

There is a wide diversity of learning practice amongst grantees and of grantmaking practice within grantmakers. This study cannot capture or adequately reflect this diversity. Where 'grantees' and 'grantmakers' are used as collective terms below – it is in the sense of grantees and grantmakers in general – where there are examples of good practice they have been highlighted in section 3. In interviews grantees often did not distinguish between the practice of the five grantmakers involved in the study and their other grantmakers, so the sections below should not be seen as an assessment of their grantmaking practice but how grantmaking, in general, interacts with grantee learning.

2 How does grantmaking practice constrain grantee learning?

The grantees interviewed for this study share grantmakers and yet there is a range of commitment to, and capacity for, learning. This stretches from self-identifying learning organisations through to grantees who see themselves as ‘implementers’ and for whom learning is not a priority. Grantmaking practice can constrain grantee learning practice but these constraints need to be understood in the context of internal dynamics which effect organisational learning.

In order to provide a framework for analysis of how grantee organisational learning is affected by grantmaker practice, the study has drawn on the work of Bruce Britton to identify four building blocks for organisational learning⁹ (see diagram 2 below).

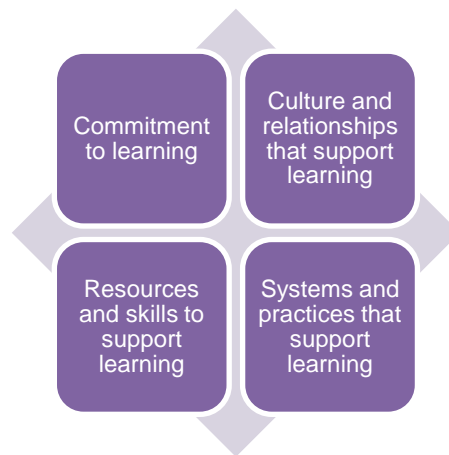


Diagram 2: Building blocks for organisational learning

Irrespective of the grantees commitment and culture of learning they identified common constraints linked to grantmaking practice, both in the interviews and in the online survey. The most significant constraints that were highlighted were:

- Lack of transparency about the shared challenge of trying to achieve results in the TA sector and an over-reliance on indicators/metrics for assessing performance.
- Lack of flexibility for grantees to adapt their plans (and indicators) based on learning.
- Lack of security due to short-term funding and/or lack of support for core/organisational costs.
- Lack of clarity about whether grantmakers regard costs associated with learning as ‘legitimate’.
- Over-reliance on written forms of communication (proposals, reporting) which are not sufficient to develop relationships of trust and openness which support sharing of learning.

⁹ Britton, 1998 & 2005

2.1 Commitment to learning

In interviews, almost all grantees reported that the emphasis on learning had increased in their organisation over the last five years. Most provided examples of new activities or practices that had been introduced to support learning. However, it was clear that many organisations struggle to create the time for learning given the pressure to implement their grant-funded activities, demonstrate their effectiveness and raise funds to ensure the continuation of their work.

Amongst the grantees interviewed there were self-identifying learning organisations. Their commitment to learning was core to their organisational strategy and approach – with implementation seen as an opportunity to learn as well as to achieve results. These organisations often had an action research or think tank background or a strong emphasis on participation in their approach (balancing upwards accountability to grantmakers with downwards accountability to communities or users). They were committed to investing their own resources (core or unrestricted funding) to support learning when they could not secure dedicated resources within budgets submitted to grantmakers.

These organisations pro-actively manage their relationships with grantmakers to minimise the constraints on their learning and effectiveness. With a strong sense of organisational sovereignty, they view grantmakers as facilitators of their strategy and purpose, rather than acting as implementers of a grantmaker-designed approach. They negotiate with grantmakers over how their performance will be assessed (including on specific indicators). These organisations often had examples of instances where they had not taken funding if they felt that it would potentially negatively impact on their learning and effectiveness.

Commitment to Learning

‘When taking on new areas of work, we go through a process of asking – what will we learn from this? How can it strengthen our understanding in relation to our theory of change?’

Panthea Lee, the Reboot

‘The organisation feels extremely empowered. We have moved from a space where we were not certain if what we are doing works to being sure. The evidence is there.’

Everlyn Kemento, Well Told Story

‘In relation to project funding we have a good intensive discussion from the very beginning – we want to be quite persistent. We don’t take all the opportunities. We want to be selective – choosing the funders that have the same objectives as us. We have to deal with sustainability but we can overcome that.’

Chitra Retna S., Article 33

| Internal constraints on grantee learning | Grantmaker-related constraints |
|---|---|
| Lack of organisational strategy | Lack of clear prioritisation and commitment to learning by grantmakers. |
| Lack of priority on learning in organisational strategy | Funding linked to projects designed in response to grantmaker strategy rather than in support of grantee's organisational strategy. |
| Lack of organisational learning agenda (focus for learning) | Grantmaker focus on grantees delivering quantifiable, measurable outputs increases focus on implementation. |
| Focus on implementation and securing funding | Short-term funding creates insecurity – leads to focus on implementation and fundraising and lack of openness |
| | Short-term funding does not provide a realistic timeframe to learn about change and impact. |

Table 3: Constraints on grantees commitment to learning

2.2 Culture and relationships that support learning

Across the interviews, the role of organisational culture and the importance of relationships in supporting learning was a key theme. Grantees highlighted the role of leadership in creating an open and supportive culture which enables staff to ask critical questions and regularly reflect on the assumptions underpinning their own work. Learning needs relationships within an organisation to be underpinned by mutual trust, respect and support. Without this foundation, the effectiveness of learning activities and processes can be undermined.

Grantees who talked about their learning culture were often small (under 30 employees) or young organisations (both in terms of their organisational history and the age of their staff). Interviewees identified challenges in creating or retaining their learning culture as their organisations develop. For example, as organisations grow they often become more hierarchical and create separate teams for management purposes. These changes can have an impact on knowledge flows and the sharing of learning. In a similar way as staff become more experienced they may be more likely to think that they 'know' the answer and become less questioning of their own ideas and assumptions.

The quality of external relationships can also be important for learning. Grantees often highlighted the contribution of peer organisations in helping them to analyse shifts in their context. Gathering feedback from external actors concerning the influence or impact of activities was also seen as important for understanding what works. Some grantees had even involved people from outside of their organisation in the processes of reflection and learning to strengthen critical inquiry and prevent 'groupthink'. In some instances, grantees had received support from grantmakers

for external experts, mentors or ‘critical friends’ to accompany their process of implementation in order to strengthen their approach and focus their learning.

Culture and commitment to learning

‘We are trying to strengthen our learning but it is hard. People are used to a certain way of doing things; they feel threatened by the motivation for focusing on learning. They feel that they are going to be singled out and their failure highlighted. It is hard to change the culture without leaders being behind you and actively engaging.’

Grantee interview

‘The culture is important. I appreciate the ability to fail – safe in the knowledge that it’s ok and a normal part of working on these kinds of projects.’

Tim Hughes, Involve

‘Staff ask why are we questioning ourselves, the donor isn’t questioning us so why should we scrutinise ourselves. But it’s slowly becoming an accepted habit.’

Chitra Retna S., Article 33

| Internal constraints on grantee learning | Grantmaker-related constraints |
|--|--|
| Leadership and management who are unwilling or unable to deal with critical inquiry and feedback | Lack of critical engagement by grantmakers with grantees to encourage learning. |
| Defensive patterns of behaviour that prevent discussion of critical questions or internal challenging of assumptions | Short term funding leads to organisational insecurity and staff insecurity. |
| Organisation/staff have a strong sense of how things are done, and change and experimentation is not encouraged. | Project funding creates siloes within organisations and does not cover costs of learning |
| Strong sense of hierarchy or team-orientation which hinders sharing of learning and valuing everyone’s input | Lack of encouragement from grantmakers to innovate and experiment with new approaches. |
| Lack of engagement and relationships with external actors or across internal teams, which promotes openness and prevents ‘groupthink’. | |

Table 4: Constraints on grantees developing a culture and relationships that support learning

2.3 Resources and skills that support learning

The majority of grantees do not have dedicated budgets for organisational learning. They find it hard to prioritise spending unrestricted or core funding on learning given the pressures to invest in areas where the returns are more tangible (for example fundraising or implementation). In addition many grantmakers do not actively encourage grantees to budget for knowledge and learning or ask them to specify how they will invest unrestricted/core support in this area¹⁰.

With limited resources and other pressures on staff time, there is a desire to invest in approaches/activities that are going to be effective. Some grantees highlighted that they need support to identify the most appropriate approaches to strengthen their learning. One grantee had received support from a grantmaker for a consultant to review their internal processes and systems in order to recommend how these could be adapted to strengthen the focus on learning. The appropriate approach to learning will vary across grantees and the sector. The appetite amongst grantees to trial learning activities was demonstrated in the recent TALEARN survey where 19 organisations expressed willingness to pilot approaches and share their experience.

Many grantees wanted to invest in documentation of learning and expressed frustration that their existing capacity for writing and distilling experience is absorbed by donor reporting. During interviews, the potential to improve the effectiveness of current approaches to documenting learning (through case studies, lessons learned reports or most significant change stories) was raised. Developing and testing common formats for documentation could enhance comparability and allow for learning across organisations¹¹.

Some organisations do have dedicated capacity for documentation of learning but it is important that the learning documented is also applied by the organisation. There is the potential for grantees to focus on producing learning and knowledge products (which also may support fundraising or profile raising objectives) at the expense of ensuring that their learning is improving the effectiveness of their own approaches. If asked to provide evidence of learning by grantmakers in return for increased support, grantees may end up focusing on producing outputs or adding activities, rather than thinking more broadly about how they can strengthen their learning processes and culture.

Some grantmakers have supported their grantees to experiment or test different approaches to achieving their objectives. This is a common approach in the technology sector. Experimenting with different approaches can be costly but there are examples within the TA sector including Oxfam GB's Chukua Hatua¹² programme in Tanzania and Article 33's work with parliamentarians in Indonesia. These approaches help strengthen and deepen learning and can provide useful

¹⁰ The GPSA asks all grantees to develop a knowledge and learning plan. There is the potential for other grantmakers to learn from GPSAs experience in this area.

¹¹ The potential for case studies to support sector learning is being explored as part of the Global Delivery Initiative led by the World Bank and GIZ.

¹² Chukua Hatua programme has featured in Duncan Green's From Poverty to Power Blog which can be retrieved from: <http://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/tag/chukua-hatua/>

indications of what works. Experimentation often requires more flexible and responsive M&E as traditional methods assume that projects start with a specific approach in mind.

As outlined in section 1.4 identifying what works and the contribution of individual actors to change is difficult. Some grantees identified a need for more resources dedicated to evaluation and impact assessment. One grantee even highlighted that they do not accept funding from grantmakers who will not allow them to budget for evaluation or participatory review of their work.

Resources and skills for learning

'The fundamental thing for grantmakers is if they want learning – there has to be a budget line for it.'

Tim Hughes, Involve

'I have had to hire a coordinator to do the reporting – to just do that work – this is the only way to free me up to do the learning and knowledge management.'

Everlyn Kemento, Well Told Story

| Internal constraints on grantee learning | Grantmaker-related constraints |
|--|--|
| Insufficient resources for individual and team staff development and learning | Restricted funding that provides no funding or no flexibility for supporting learning |
| Lack of skills and knowledge to develop plan for strengthening learning | Lack of transparency about whether grantmaker will provide resources/support for learning. |
| Insufficient resources/external support to develop systems and practices that support learning (learning how to learn) | Resources absorbed by reporting which has weak emphasis on learning |
| Insufficient resource/skills to support documentation and sharing of learning externally | Lack of transparency about whether grantmakers are willing to support external support for grantee learning. |
| Insufficient time and resources to engage externally to access others learning | Limited investment by grantmakers in evaluation and impact assessment. |
| Insufficient resources to support experimentation | Lack of transparency about whether grantmakers are willing to support grantees to trial or experiment with different approaches. |
| Lack of resources for evaluation and impact assessment. | |

Table 5: Constraints on grantee resources and skills to support learning

2.4 Systems and practices that support learning¹³

Learning is an ongoing process (at the individual and organisational level). Grantees with a strong commitment to learning gave examples of how the focus on learning has been integrated across their organisational systems (from IT to performance management). Learning is part of the way that they go about their work facilitated by systems and a limited number of activities which support their learning culture. Examples of specific activities which grantees found valuable for learning include peer review of strategies and plans, regular meetings focusing on context analysis or new research, trouble-shooting meetings where staff can admit that they are 'lost or don't know what to do' and ask colleagues for support. These practices promote and are underpinned by the culture and commitment of an organisation.

For many grantmakers who were interviewed there should be a clear connection between the information that grantees were collecting for reporting purposes (as part of their M&E system) and learning. However grantees highlighted that the information they collect in order to report to grantmakers (in line with agreed indicators or metrics) is insufficient for learning purposes and it often does not help them to understand their own effectiveness. The data collected is usually quantitative and often doesn't capture the most important information relating to the effectiveness and impact of a TA strategy (for example changes in the external context). In reality, learning often happens in parallel to the process of reporting to donors and formal M&E systems.

Grantees highlighted that for M&E systems to more effectively support learning there would need to be a significant shift in grantmaker attitude to assessing results. Rather than accountability being framed around "prove that you did what you were supposed to do" the focus needs to be "let's learn together about how greater transparency can support increased accountability". Whilst grantees recognised that grantmakers were under pressure to show results, some were skeptical about whether rigid and overly quantitative M&E approaches actually provide grantmakers with the information they need to assess grantee performance.

Systems and practices that support learning

'Our M&E sits separately from our learning processes. It has nothing to do with learning – it is about accountability. Our indicators don't provide us with the information we need to learn – they are there to comfort donors. We have to achieve the results they want and then focus ourselves on what is really needed to make the change as the context shifts.'

Grantee interview

¹³ In Bruce Brittons' (1998) paper the Learning NGO he outlines eight key functions for learning NGOs. These have been developed into an assessment tool – the learning NGO questionnaire which is available at www.thelearningngo.wordpress.com/2011/02/01/the-learning-ngo-questionnaire/.

| Internal constraints on grantee learning | Grantmaker-related constraints |
|---|--|
| Lack of commitment to facilitating learning focus within existing systems and practices (performance management, IT, monitoring and evaluation) | Lack of transparency about whether grantmaker will provide resources/support for learning. |
| M&E systems/processes do not collect and analyse information that can support learning. | Grantmaker reporting and accountability mechanisms focused on pre-determined quantitative indicators relating to activities and outputs. |
| Lack of resources for learning activities. | |
| Lack of understanding of how to strengthen learning focus within organisation. | |

Table 6: Constraints on grantees developing systems and practices that support learning

3 How can grantmakers support grantee learning?

This section draws on interviews, survey data and examples of grantmaker practice identified as part of the literature review to make recommendations about how grantmakers can more effectively support grantee learning. This study is not an assessment of current grantmaking practice of the five grantmakers involved and how they support learning and so the recommendations remain broad. Questions have been added at the end of each section to guide internal discussion within grantmakers (and between grantmakers) that will support deeper exploration.

3.1 Be transparent about commitment to learning and how expectations and support for grantees are connected

In interviews, grantees highlighted that they were sometimes confused about grantmaker expectations in relation to their learning. Most TA sector grantees receive funding from multiple grantmakers¹⁴ and have to grapple with how to respond and try to reconcile their different approaches, philosophies and practice. Almost 30% of respondents to the survey strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘It is not clear why grantmakers are interested in learning but it seems like it is a new buzzword.’

In interviews grantees primarily highlighted the value of learning for them is to improve their own effectiveness. But over 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that grantmakers were interested in their learning to inform their own grantmaking practice and in order to build an evidence base to support continued funding of the TA sector.

In terms of increased support for learning, grantees were unclear how they would be expected to demonstrate that they were learning. The connection between strengthened organisational learning and results is not straightforward. Grantees were unclear about the extent grantmakers were expecting them to contribute to debates about ‘what works’ and how. Much of what grantees learn may be too specific to directly contribute to broader sectoral debates or to inform grantmaker strategy.

‘There is a clear difference between wanting grantees to learn so that they get better at what they are doing and wanting grantees to learn so that you (the grantmaker) can get better at what you are doing.’

Grantmaker interview

‘Learning can help you to adapt and improve your strategy but it doesn’t change the context. Getting better at learning won’t necessarily change the external reality which makes the biggest difference in terms of results.’

Jasminka Friscik, ESE Macedonia

¹⁴ 49% of survey respondents were funded by two or more of the five grantmakers involved in the study.

In interviews many grantees voiced concerns about sharing their learning with grantmakers because of fears that it could negatively impact on future funding. Whilst some grantees were comfortable with the association between learning and failure (learning from mistakes), many felt this was unhelpful as grantees do not want grantmakers to see them as organisations that fail.

'We share our mistakes internally – but there is an organisational blockage mentally when it comes to sharing learning with donors because we assume they will take note of that and that will influence future grant decisions in a negative way.'

Chitra Retna S., Article 33 Indonesia

'Failure discourse is distinctly project based – we did this 2 year project and it didn't achieve what we anticipated – so it was a failure. With a longer term perspective you can say we tried this and it didn't work, so we adapted. We need to think differently about failure.'

Brendan Halloran, Transparency and Accountability Initiative

They also highlighted that there was little incentive to share learning about how and why particular approaches have not been successful if this admission of 'failure' leads to funding being withdrawn and re-directed to organisations or approaches that are seen to be more successful. When grantees' learning relates to grantmakers own strategy, grantees need to be reassured that there is an openness to discuss learning that challenges grantmakers ideas or assumptions.

On the other hand, some grantees expressed disappointment at the lack of critical engagement/interest in their work from grantmakers. The emphasis on 'grantee learning' was seen as reflecting a power dynamic (what about grantmaker learning?). Grantmakers have the potential to learn and share their learning about what works based on their engagement with their grantees and the wider sector. For some grantees, there was a desire to understand more clearly how their grant (and its learning) fits within their grantmakers broader portfolio.

Transparency about grantmaker commitment to learning would support grantees to understand whether there was a willingness to fund grantees experimenting with multiple approaches. Grantmakers raised concerns that grantees often propose an extension/scale up of their existing approach rather than pushing themselves to try new ideas. However, current incentives may encourage grantees to 'play it safe' and continue to offer grantmakers extended versions of the existing work that they have been willing to fund.

90% of respondents to the survey felt that it was very important or important for grantmakers to support and encourage organisations to be ambitious and try out new ideas – understanding that although success/results cannot be guaranteed, this will generate new learning.

92% of respondents to the survey felt that it was very important or important for grantmakers to support learning by providing reassurance that funding will not be jeopardised by grantees being more open about their learning and/or mistakes.

In interviews, grantmakers gave examples of where they had provided support for grantee learning but often this was provided on a case-by-case or ad hoc basis. The availability of support was often not transparent as grantmakers were not able to provide this support to all grantees (for resource and internal capacity reasons).

Some grantmakers have categorised their grantees based on the support that they are able to provide in terms of learning and the grantees internal capacity and willingness to learn. Their expectations of grantees in terms of learning are then linked to this categorisation.

In some instances, this also affects the type of funding a grantee receives. Some grantmakers provide core/programme funding to organisations to build their capacity to learn and then move them on to project funding. Others provide project support initially and once the grantee has 'proved themselves' they transition onto core or programme support where the grantee may have more flexibility and resources to experiment.

Examples of where grantmaking practice supports learning

GPSA: Priority on learning visible in strategy and results framework

GPSA has a pillar within its strategy and results framework that is dedicated to learning (Learning for Improvement).¹⁵ Grantees develop a Knowledge and Learning Plan as part of their grant and learning related questions are asked at grant proposal and reporting stage.

GPSA also explained how it understands grantee learning to be the extent to which a grantee "gains and uses knowledge, from both its own work and that of others, to influence its policy, strategy, plans and actions."¹⁶

Open Society Foundations: Specific objective in grantmaking strategy on documentation of learning

The Open Society Foundations Accountability and Monitoring in Health Initiative¹⁷ has an explicit objective relating to documenting learning in order to ensure that it remained an area of focus for the grantmaker and grantees.

Comic Relief: Use of learning questions to provide focus to sharing learning with grantees

Comic Relief¹⁸ encourages grantees to identify learning questions during the grant inception phase which they will reflect on during the grant period. Learning questions often relate to assumptions in the overall Theory of Change and open up the opportunity for discussions between programme officers and grantees about these in a reflective (rather than judgemental) space.

Global Witness: Motivated to share learning in order to shape grantmaker strategy

Global Witness highlighted how they had been able to use their learning to influence the strategic framework and logframe of their donor. This opened up potential funding opportunities for Global Witness, but also strengthened the impact of the donor programme as a whole.

¹⁵ Global Partnership for Social Accountability, 2014a

¹⁶ Global Partnership for Social Accountability, 2014b

¹⁷ Stone, 2014

¹⁸ Comic Relief, 2013

Recommendations for Grantmakers

- Define 'learning' and explain to grantees where learning fits within the broader grantmaking strategy.
- Be transparent about how learning that is shared will be used and how it relates to grantee selection and renewal processes.
- Identify where there is a shared learning agenda (often linked to shared assumptions) between grantmaker and grantee and focus learning exchange in this area.
- Encourage and support grantees to experiment and try new approaches in order to generate learning.
- Be transparent about the support that is available for grantee learning and what the expectations of grantee learning are.

Questions for grantmakers

Where does learning fit in your grantmaking strategy? How do you intend to use learning that grantees share with you?

What support are you able to offer to grantees to strengthen their learning? What do you expect in return for additional support?

3.2 Strengthen relationships with grantees in order to support learning

In interviews and in responses to the survey grantees highlighted the importance of the relationship with their grantmaker in encouraging them to learn and share their learning. Consistently interviewees stressed the importance of mutual trust, active engagement and openness to support learning. Grantmakers and grantees recognised that there was an over-reliance on written forms of communication (reports, email) which do not support sharing of learning unless trust is already established.

Both grantmakers and grantees felt that trust was built through development of a personal relationship, including face-to-face meetings and site visits. Building a relationship that is supportive of learning takes time and commitment – particularly when grantees are geographically (and sometimes culturally) distant from their grantmakers. Grantmakers highlighted that they struggle to find the time to develop these relationships with all their grantees, especially if the timeframe for support is short.

Many grantees highlighted that they don't expect grantmakers to be uncritical but to engage with them openly about concerns and to view challenges that grantees face as a shared obstacle to be overcome/managed, not a failing on the part of the grantee. Some interviewees felt that grantmakers could play a role in encouraging leaders to prioritise learning where this is not happening. Through being more

transparent about the priority placed on learning and engaging leaders in discussions about learning this could incentivise change.

88% of respondents to the survey felt that feedback and follow up on reports and proposals was very important or important as an opportunity to strengthen the relationship with their grantmaker.

94% of respondents felt that grantmakers engaging with them proactively and openly when there are concerns about the results that are being achieved was very important or important in supporting learning.

84% of respondents felt that grantmakers sharing their learning from their portfolio and broader engagement in the transparency and accountability sector was very important or important in supporting learning.

'One of the most important things – is if we have a good contact person in the funding organisation – we have more spaces to discuss and more flexibility to communicate our concerns and we develop informal mechanisms of learning where we share or they ask a lot of things about the project itself. This is very helpful.'

Grantee Interview

'Some donors don't seem very interested. You may not even get a comment or question on what you report. There is no feedback.'

Grantee interview

'I get told that I am unusual all the time as I read all the grantees reports and provide feedback or ask questions.'

Jean Ross, Ford Foundation

Grantmaker practice which supports learning

Article 33 and the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs

Article 33 has received a grant as part of the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade's 15 year programme to strengthen the knowledge sector in Indonesia. The purpose of this programme is to change the institutional landscape of government, private sector, and civil society organisations that provide research and analysis to support the development of public policy. The resources and security provided by this programme have facilitated Article 33 to experiment with different approaches (to generate new learning), undertake research projects which generate knowledge they can apply and also to think about what systems and practices the organisation needs to put in place for the long-term in order to support learning.

Grantee insecurity and grantmaker practice

One grantee who was interviewed talked about how the continuation of their grant was conditional on achievement of a particular target/indicator. A few months before their performance was going to be assessed, it became clear that they were unlikely to be able to achieve what they had agreed with their grantmaker. In the grantees view, they were making progress and achieving results – it was simply the case that the indicator they had agreed with the grantmaker did not adequately reflect that. Because of the conditional nature of the grant, the grantees began to prepare their redundancy plans for staff involved in the project and tried every possible way to achieve the target. During this period, the grantee was focused neither on learning nor achieving results but achieving a target in order to retain funding and retain their staff in post. In the event, the grantee was able to meet the target. At the review meeting, the grantmaker revealed that they would have continued the grant without the achievement of the target as they could see progress was being made.

Hewlett Foundation: Understanding grantee perceptions

Grantee perception reports provide a useful opportunity for grantees to share their feedback about the quality of their relationship. For the 2013 Grantee Perception Report Hewlett Foundation grantees were asked, "At this point in time, what is one word that best describes the Foundation?" Sixty grantees described Hewlett as "supportive," the most commonly used word.

The Rockefeller Foundation: Dealing with grantmaker time constraints

"Most foundations have capacity limitations on the amount of time that can be devoted to monitoring and learning with grantees and partners, visiting field projects, and working collaboratively—activities that we know contribute to greater collaborative learning and effective relationships. Recognizing these limitations, the foundation awards grants to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) groups and specialists in developing and developed countries who act as monitoring partners, or what we call "critical friends," throughout the life of initiatives (typically a five- to six-year period)"

Recommendations for grantmakers

- Gather feedback from grantees in order to better understand whether current grantmaking practice supports learning (particularly in relation to level of engagement, support and security)

- Recognise that learning relationships with grantees require time and commitment (and resources on the part of the grantmaker). If grantmakers do not have the internal capacity to support all grantees then expectations of grantees need to reflect the level of investment in, and capacity of, the grantee.

Questions for grantmakers

Do you have sufficient time to invest in building relationships of trust with your grantees?

To what extent do your grantees feel secure and supported by you as a grantmaker?

3.3 Invest in resources and skills to support learning

In interviews and in responses to the survey, grantees were clear about how grantmakers should give their funding in order to best support learning: fund flexibly, over the longer term and in support of organisational strategy and learning.

97% of respondents to the survey stated that providing flexibility to adapt grant-related activities (when there was a strong rationale) was very important or important in terms of supporting learning.

Over 85% felt that longer-term funding was very important or important in supporting grantee learning.

Over 85% of respondents felt that grantmakers should provide more flexible funding (core funds, general support grant, programmatic funding) to allow greater flexibility to create time/resources for learning and sharing.

'We always try to negotiate flexibility with donors – we don't always succeed. If we write a proposal for a two year timeframe – that will go stale pretty quickly. We want donors to trust us and give us money to exercise our judgement about how to respond to the changes and learning. We don't want grants where we have to decide on a Tuesday what we are going to do for the next two years and then just implement – the real work is in how we respond to change.'

Grantee interview

However, one grantee admitted that these changes would not necessarily lead to strengthened learning, as organisations that have a strong focus on implementation or weak commitment to learning were likely to use the flexibility to do more rather than learning more. Grantmakers are clearly concerned about how to provide grantees with the flexibility they need to learn and adapt without undermining grant accountability. In the case of Twaweza, grantmakers have provided greater flexibility in return for a strong framework for learning which involves external processes of evaluation. This is not an approach which grantmakers have taken with other grantees.

Providing increased flexibility and longer term funding to grantees who lack a strong commitment and culture of learning is unlikely to be effective in terms of supporting learning (although it may have other benefits). In these instances, grantmakers need to use their influence within their relationship and through their grantmaking practice

to communicate their commitment to learning and engage the leadership within grantee organisations directly on this issue. Some grantmakers argued that if there was not a commitment to learning from senior leaders then grants should not be given.

As highlighted in section 2 whilst grantees were clear how grantmakers should fund them many expressed a desire for support to help them to understand how they could use any additional resources to strengthen their learning. At the same time, some grantees raised concerns about grantmakers being too prescriptive about what 'good' learning practice looks like. Grantees who have a strong emphasis on learning often spoke about how they had piloted or experimented with different practices and approaches, in order to try and find the right approach for their organisation. Grantmakers may gravitate towards supporting grantee strategy development and M&E systems as proxies for supporting learning because these are tangible and measurable. In some instances this may be what grantees want and need but it is important that a broader range of options are considered.

Many grantees welcomed the increase in opportunities to come together with their peer organisations (either funded or convened by grantmakers) in order to learn and also to provide the space and time for them to reflect on their own work. Grantees similarly highlighted the increase in learning opportunities and resources which are on offer online through initiatives like MAVC, GPSA and TALEARN. But in interviews many grantees highlighted that they often didn't have the time to engage, as the reality of their day-to-day work has not changed.

Increasing supply and access to learning products and opportunities is attractive to grantmakers as they support learning 'at scale' and the outputs are easily quantifiable and measured. In comparison, strengthening organisational learning may be more resource intensive and the benefits more intangible. However, focusing on 'supply' will not improve effectiveness and impact of the sector if there is not a complementary process of stimulating demand and uptake from practitioners and grantees.

Irish Aid Multi Annual Partnerships: Providing flexibility for grantees

In *Monitoring Flexible Funding: Navigating the Challenges*, Garbutt et al. highlight the example of Irish Aid Multi Annual Partnerships, which offers flexible funding and asks partners to set what they consider to be realistic benchmarks that they are comfortable they are able to achieve. They allow partners flexibility in how they monitor the programme, as long as they are able to indicate contribution to the agreed benchmarks. The main issue for the Multi Annual Partnerships partners is having an M&E system that is robust enough to feed into the benchmarks and can be scrutinised for accuracy if Irish Aid wanted to assess the quality of the information provided in the annual reports.¹⁹

GPSA: Connecting the sector's research agenda and grantee learning

During a recent social accountability research workshop hosted by GPSA, in partnership with MAVC and T/AI, key research questions were identified and discussed by a broad group of academics, grantmaker staff and practitioners.²⁰ Similar processes of identifying research areas are ongoing within MAVC. There is a clear need to understand how to close the loop between generation of new knowledge through research and grantee practice and learning.

MAVC/GPSA: Create partnerships between grantees and researchers or fund dedicated research capacity

Both MAVC and GPSA will be supporting a small number of research initiatives where researchers are working with grantees to answer research questions which they have identified as being relevant for their practice. The Hewlett Foundation and the Omidyar Network have also provided additional support to mySociety to invest in dedicated learning/research capacity.

Rockerfeller Foundation: Critical Friends/Accompaniment of grantees

There are a number of initiatives²¹ that aim to strengthen grantee analytical and adaptive capacity and have provided mentors or coaches to act as critical friends. The Rockerfeller Foundation describes what being a critical friend entails 'They work with grantees to identify key learning questions, help to set up monitoring systems, and provide support in analyzing monitoring data. The most significant feature of the critical friends is that they build trust with grantees and partners to ask tough evaluative questions, and they support grantees in seeking and using feedback to make improvements throughout the life of the initiative.'²²

Recommendations for grantmakers

- Review funding approach and consider whether it can be adapted to provide greater security and flexibility for grantees to support them to learn.
- Provide support for 'critical friends' to work alongside grantees to help them to understand how their learning can be strengthened and develop their critical and adaptive capacities.

¹⁹ Garbutt, et al., 2009

²⁰ Global Partnership for Social Accountability, 2015

²¹ Other examples include Transparency International support for local mentors for its national chapters, GPSA funding of Partnership for Transparency as part of the capacity building plans of some of its grantees and INTRAC's work with grantees of Norwegian Church Aid, Church of Sweden and Christian Aid.

²² Hailey, et al., 2011

- Provide, where appropriate, support for dedicated research capacity for grantees or broker/support partnerships between grantees and researchers.
- Ensure that support for increasing the supply of learning opportunities and products is informed by growing understanding of what support helps grantees to use/apply what is on offer and what grantmaker-related constraints remain.
- Ensure that investment in strengthening learning is reviewed/evaluated in order to strengthen the sector's understanding about how to support learning and how to learn effectively.

Questions for grantmakers

How effectively does your funding approach support grantees to learn by offering flexibility and security?

Do you legitimise grantee focus on learning by encouraging them to include resources in their budgets for learning?

3.4 Ensure grantmaking systems and practice supports learning

During interviews grantees highlighted that grantmaking practice is driven by a desire to ensure accountability and apart from a few exceptions, the focus on learning is not prominent.

Proposal/Grant Selection

In interviews, grantmakers and grantees recognised that (with some exceptions) proposal formats and grant selection processes do not have a strong learning focus. Grantees are rarely asked about how their previous learning (or learning of others) has informed their proposed approach. It appeared to be more common for grantees to be pushed to be more ambitious in terms of results, than to be challenged on the fundamental assumptions underlying their strategies.

Many grantees struggle to answer learning-related questions. The experience of recent GPSA²³ round of applications is that grantees find it difficult to demonstrate how their learning has informed their proposals. In a recent analysis of 40 GPSA applications strategies, only 12 justified their strategies on the basis of past experiences and only 2 had considered alternative strategies and demonstrated why their approach was most appropriate for the local context. It is unclear whether the weak answers to learning related questions in the GPSA process and in other grantmakers processes are a reflection of grantee learning or grantee inexperience in answering these kinds of questions.

During this phase, grantees and grantmakers recognised that there is an opportunity to create a relationship with grantees which supports learning. The proposal format (whether using a logframe or theory of change) was less important than whether

²³ GPSA, 2014a

'Often the narrative in our proposals doesn't stand up to scrutiny, even at the level of an undergraduate essay.'

Grantee interview

grantmakers critically engaged with grantees proposals in order to understand their challenges and test their assumptions.

Monitoring and Reporting

Whilst grantees recognised the need to distil information for grantmakers (and for their upstream accountability systems) many felt that effectiveness of pre-determined indicators in effectively assessing grantee performance was incomplete, as well as the risk of creating perverse incentives for grantees. Given the complexity of the TA sector, identifying indicators which are useful for both accountability and learning can be difficult and a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches may be more appropriate. Grantees argued for more openness from grantmakers about the information that they need for their upstream accountability systems to help them to identify indicators/metrics that can meet grantmaker needs as well as supporting learning.

Grantees often need flexibility within the grant timeframe to adapt their plan and potentially also their indicators. Grantmakers could allow for annual reviews of grant-related indicators or give grantees more time (within a defined scoping phase) to develop their approach and ensure that the indicators that they choose are the most effective ones.

Reports for grantmakers tend to follow indicators selected at the beginning of the grant. This leads to a focus on outputs and progress against pre-determined plans and indicators. Often there is no space or encouragement for grantees to go beyond reporting what they have done and any changes that have been observed – there is little incentive to investigate causality or contribution.

The desire to secure or maintain funding can encourage organisations to present the best possible interpretation of their work and to gloss over mistakes or challenges. As highlighted above grantmakers often expressed disappointment about the responses they get to learning related questions when these are included in report formats. Grantees want to represent themselves in a positive light. They filter the learning they are prepared to share on the basis of their fear of potential consequences of being honest or open. Learning-related questions are being viewed in a similar way to the interview question 'what is your greatest weakness?' Grantees try to answer this question in a way that will reflect positively on them, rather than being open about actual areas of weakness.

'The way I look at our metrics is ... I ask ..what am I willing to prioritise regardless of what we learn, regardless of anything else? Over what element of the project am I prepared to suspend judgement and continue to implement in order to hit the target even if it is not relevant anymore?.... the context may have changed or we know it would be more effective to approach it a different way but we have to stick with the pre-determined path.'

Grantee interview

It would be much better to start the report with the learning and then go on to demonstrate the accountability for the funds. At the moment there is no good incentive to share learning in the way that the reporting to donors occurs.'

Walter Flores, CEGGS

End of grant/renewal process

Both grantmakers and grantees highlighted that the end of a grant/grant renewal process can provide an opportunity to reflect, document learning and ensure that it is integrated into future planning. However, grantees highlighted that without a strong shared commitment to learning and a supportive relationship concerns about future funding may affect grantees' willingness to be open at this stage.

Only a small number of grantees had experience an external evaluation. Their experience had generally been positive with evaluations providing useful recommendations for how they could improve their approach. In some instances it had led to increased grantmaker support or had been helpful for grantees in securing funding from other grantmakers. Most evaluations however were not shared publicly and did not contribute to wider sector learning. Where grantmakers do conduct reviews with their grantees at the end of a grant, these are not shared externally or with other grantmakers.

Given the complexity of TA interventions the costs of thorough impact assessments or evaluations that focus on learning (and 'what works') may be disproportionate compared to the investment in TA interventions by individual donors. However, in the interviews it became apparent that this was an area identified in interviews where grantmakers could jointly fund reviews of a group of grantees whose work they are all supporting and that is thematically or geographically connected.

Dutch Government: An alternative approach to grantee selection

The Dutch Government invited NGOs and consortia to bid for funding under a new strategic partnership programme focused on lobbying and advocacy²⁴ by detailing their track record (including their learning) and their Theory of Change (with clear reference to learning and evidence). The details of the strategic partnership would be developed collaboratively at a later stage with those organisations that were selected.

This was an entirely new way of securing funding for NGOs and presented considerable challenges. Often NGOs found that their previous reports and M&E systems were not able to provide a clear narrative of how the organisation had learned and adapted or where they had deepened their experience and expertise. The detailed information about numbers of meetings, workshops and reports that had been gathered for accountability purposes, didn't explain how change had happened or the organisations contribution.

In trying to retrospectively reconstruct their track record, many organisations had to go back to the individuals involved in order to document their learning and the rationale for adaptation and change. Learning had been happening, it just had not been documented or captured in organisational systems.

Open Society Foundations: Engaging grantees in a review of grantmaking practice

The Open Society Foundations created a grant making design team which was made up of eight staff and eight grantees to review grant making. This has led to changes in the Foundations internal processes and highlighted key areas where change is needed, for example in the end of grant report, which is not well coordinated with grant renewal processes, leading to additional work for both OSF and their grantees.

Comic Relief: Supporting grantees to identify indicators

In its new programme focusing on women's empowerment Comic Relief has provided support to grantees to identify appropriate indicators. It has provided an indicator bank (grantees are not obliged to choose indicators from the list) and suggested data collection tools. Grantees have access to consultancy support in the grant inception phase from the consultancy who worked with Comic Relief to develop the indicator bank. Under each outcome, grantees have to identify a minimum of two indicators of which one has to be quantitative. There is also the option to include indicators which are non-prescriptive - and commit the grantee to demonstrating evidence of progress (not what the evidence will be). This retains accountability but allows grantees greater flexibility.

Norwegian Church Aid, Christian Aid and Church of Sweden: Review and development of joint reporting format

As part of a broader advocacy capacity building programme INTRAC worked with Norwegian Church Aid, Christian Aid and Church of Sweden and their grantees to develop (in a workshop setting) a joint reporting format. The process of developing the reporting format built trust amongst and strengthened mutual understanding. It primarily focused on trying to find questions which prompted reflection and encouraged grantees to talk about the impact and effectiveness of the working they were doing. This included replacing language which referred to changes to plans as 'deviations' (strong negative connotation) with language around adaptation on the basis of learning and changes in the context.²⁵

Adessium Foundation: Learning and reflection at the end of a grant

The Adessium Foundation provided resources for Global Witness to undertake learning reviews with the support of an external consultant as an alternative to external evaluation. The reviews produced valuable insights which were discussed during the annual strategic retreat. There is now an organisational commitment to conduct learning reviews across Global Witness campaigns.

²⁴ Government of the Netherlands, 2014

²⁵ Rose, 2015

Recommendations for grantmakers

Proposal/grant inception

- Highlight commitment to learning as a selection criteria for grantees.
- Explore how commitment to learning can be assessed or demonstrated within the proposal or grant selection process.
- Engage with grantees when proposals do not adequately demonstrate integration of learning or include critical assumptions.
- Use the grant inception phase to explore grantee proposals further in order to create a 'learning relationship'. Specific areas for discussion relate to the assumptions included in the proposal and the challenges that grantees will face in implementation, and how they will adapt their plans in response to feedback and changes in the context. There should be open discussion about how performance will be assessed and indicators/metrics should be mutually owned.

Monitoring

- Work with grantees to identify indicators that are of value for learning, as well as accountability purposes.
- Encourage grantees to provide evidence of progress and results beyond the indicators identified.

Reporting

- Review how to reduce reporting requirements for grantees to free up time for learning and/or make more use of reports for learning
- Review – with grantees if possible – how reporting formats can encourage genuine reflection and highlight learning.
- Experiment/pilot alternative reporting approaches that might support greater understanding and learning.
- Provide feedback and ask questions in response to reports, ideally over the phone or face-to-face, in order to promote dialogue.

End of grant/renewal

- When renewing or extending grants, use, where possible, the opportunity to learn and reflect and share the learning.
- Provide resources for evaluation or impact assessment, with other donors if necessary
- Provide resources for grantees to conduct learning-focused review of their work.

Questions for grantmakers

How is your commitment to learning reflected in your grantmaking practice? Is it visible and communicated at all stages of the grantmaking cycle?

How effectively do your current reporting requirements encourage grantees to learn and share learning?

How effective is your reporting format (and your indicators) in supporting you to understand grantee performance?

4 Questions for further research and discussion

4.1 For further research

What is the link between strengthening grantee learning capacities and practices and effectiveness/impact?

How can grantee capacity and commitment to learning be assessed? How can progress and results be measured?

How can the loop between learning and knowledge production and application and uptake be closed?

4.2 For further discussion with TALEARN

What concrete examples do grantees have of where their learning has contributed to increased effectiveness and impact?

What does impact, success and failure really mean in the TA sector, and what are the implications for learning and grantmaking practice?

What do grantees want to learn about – what does a grantee-led learning and research agenda look like?

How can monitoring and evaluation more effectively support grantee learning?

How did organizations manage to embed learning at the center of their organizational culture and practice, and what role (if any) did funders play in this process?

4.3 For further discussion between grantmakers

How can grantmakers more effectively collaborate to support the learning of their grantees?

How can grantmakers learn from each other about emerging approaches to strengthening and supporting grantee learning?

How can grantmakers collectively strengthen systematic knowledge (for example through impact assessment and evaluation) in the TA sector?

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, grantee learning is critical to improved effectiveness and impact of the TA sector. Grantee learning can also make a valuable contribution to discussions about 'what works'. However, the complexity of the TA sector creates challenges in terms of learning about effectiveness and impact and ensuring that grantmaking practice can support the drive for accountability **and** the desire for learning.

To strengthen learning in the TA sector, grantmakers and grantees must develop a shared commitment to and understanding of learning, build relationships of trust and openness, invest in resources and skills to support learning and ensure that their systems and practices promote learning as well as accountability.

Strengthening learning will take commitment and time. Grantees need flexibility, security and engagement from their grantmakers in order to be able learn and share their learning. Grantmakers, in turn, need the time and space to be open to more grantee-centred approaches and be willing and able to cede some elements of control in order to facilitate grantee learning.

This study provides a framework for further discussions within and between grantmakers and between grantmakers and grantees. It is hoped that through these discussions new approaches can be developed that will strengthen the sector's approach to learning and support increased effectiveness and impact.

Annex A: How can grantees strengthen their learning?

This study has focused on the role that grantmakers can play in supporting grantees to strengthen their learning practice. It focuses on how to strengthen learning at the organisational level. This section highlights some initial ideas (based on interviews and the wider literature review) about how grantees can strengthen their learning.

1) Assess current learning practice

There are a number of self-assessment tools that grantees can use to provide a basis for internal discussion about their current learning practice. Three examples are listed below:

The Learning NGO Questionnaire

This questionnaire developed by Bruce Britton draws on his paper *The Learning NGO and the 8 functions*.

<https://thelearningngo.wordpress.com/2011/02/01/the-learning-ngo-questionnaire/>

The Learning Organisation

This assessment designed by academics at Harvard Business School assesses organisations according to three building blocks (a supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and practices, leadership that reinforces learning). It is not tailored to NGOs/social change organisation but provides an alternative perspective to the Learning NGO questionnaire.

https://hbs.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b7rYZGRxuMEyHRz

Grantees may also want to consider combining a focus on organisational learning with a consideration of the individual learning needs of staff (which might involve training for example).

2) Identify areas of focus for learning based on organisational strategy and information being collected for reporting or monitoring and evaluation

There are a range of ways to identify a learning focus.

Focus learning on the assumptions underpinning your strategy

Focusing at this level also helps to stimulate critical thinking within the organisation and can help ensure that learning is used and integrated within future strategy and plans.

Focus learning on challenges and obstacles to effective implementation

If learning is linked directly to implementation it can help ensure that plans are being

adapted based on learning on a regular basis and make use of relevant monitoring information.

Pre-mortem exercise

One way to identify where learning could be most useful or lead to enhanced effectiveness would be to conduct a pre-mortem exercise. This is a strategy testing tool which helps to expose assumptions and challenges.

The approach is described on the Hewlett Foundation website and was recently used by the civil society members of the EITI board when considering whether to change their strategy.

<http://www.hewlett.org/blog/posts/power-premortems>

Focus learning in areas where you can contribute to sector-wide discussions

This approach could involve looking at the questions that are being asked within the wider TA sector and consider how your learning can feed into those discussions. At the recent Social Accountability Research Workshop key research questions were identified and there is the potential for grantees day-to-day experience of what works or doesn't in engaging Government to help to provide answers to some of the questions.

Learn with peer organisations

Convene a group of peer organisations working in the same area (geographically or thematically) and identify areas where it would be helpful to share learning. Or invite other organisations to participate in strategy development or learning review processes in order to promote critical thinking or recognise other perspectives. One example of this approach is the Community of Practitioners on Accountability and Social Action on Health.

<http://www.copasah.net>

3) Review current grant agreements and consider how future proposals can integrate resources to support learning

This study primarily relates to how grantmakers influence grantee learning practice. Grantees may want to consider what impact their grantmakers and funding base has on their commitment and capacity and learn and where they may be able to secure more support for learning practice.

4) Review existing organisational systems and practices and consider how learning can be strengthened within them

Grantees can strengthen their learning practice and critical reflection without additional resources from grantmakers. Existing systems can be strengthened by considering how they can more effectively support learning. The changes required

may be as simple as adding reflective questions to internal reports or using them regularly in staff meetings.

When introducing new activities or practices, it is useful to gather feedback on whether these are useful and interesting for staff. It may be worthwhile considering all new additions to be trials or pilots in order to ensure that the right tools are chosen for the long-term.

If a focus on learning is relatively new within your organisation learning activities should build openness and trust. Asking people to share their failures may not be the most effective first step.

Useful resources which provide ideas about how to strengthen organisational learning include:

Barefoot Guide to Organisational Learning Practices in Organisations and Social Change

<http://www.barefootguide.org/barefoot-guide-2.html>

Organisational learning resources collated by Oliver Serrat from the Asia Development Bank

<http://issuu.com/celcius233>

Examples taken from grantee interviews

Basic management practice relevant for learning

Clear organisational strategy (in order to structure learning and reflection)
Team meetings that include reflection and learning questions
Shared drive or document storage
Organisational email list for sharing information internally
Good induction/handover processes to ensure learning is institutionalised
Trip/back to office reports
Engagement in relevant networks and coalitions
M&E system which collect data that can be used for learning
Identification of individual and organisational learning needs (both in terms of external capacity building and internal reflection)

Sharing learning externally

Newletter/email list
Website

Creating opportunities to learn and reflect

Internal peer review of project proposals
After activity reviews of specific activities or projects
Periodic retrospective reviews or learning reviews
Fishbowl – problem-solving/trouble shooting meetings
Staff retreats or away days
Communities of practice either thematic or contextually focused
Engaging external stakeholders and experts

Brown bag/internal knowledge sharing events
Reading groups
External input into strategy and project development

Learning as an organisational priority

Budgets for learning at the organisational or individual level
Performance management that values learning.
Documentation of learning
Documentation - through briefing notes, webcasts and webinars
Engagement in learning platforms and portals
Support for development of evidence base
Independent evaluation which is shared publicly

Documentation

Using digital storytelling approaches to document learning
Using social media to share learning and good practice
Using blogs to document iterative learning

Engaging external stakeholders and experts to support learning

Facilitated learning exchanges
Engaging external experts (including academics) to accompany specific initiatives to strengthen focus on reflection on learning (and/or evidence generation)
Collective/360 organisational review
Locally based mentors to support learning
Action Learning Sets
Mentoring and/or coaching
Collaborating with research organisations to produce knowledge products

Knowledge production, research and evidence

Research agenda alongside implementation of grants/organisational strategy

5) Engage your grantmakers in discussions about learning

As part of the grantmaking cycle grantees should take opportunities at the proposal, reporting and end of grant stage to engage grantmakers in discussions about learning where possible.

6) Wherever possible look for opportunities to share your learning and to learn from others

There are many opportunities through TALEARN, MAVC and GPSA for grantees to share their learning with others. In interviews, grantees recognised the importance of sharing learning about where strategy or implementation has proved to be more difficult than anticipated and why, as well as stories of success.

Annex B: Interview format (grantee version)

Selection of interviewees

Grantmakers identified potential grantees for interview and efforts were made to try and reflect the breadth of the transparency and accountability (TA) sector (purposive sampling of grantees working at the global level, national level, large and small organisations, regranteeing organisations, organisations that were identified as having strong learning practice and those whose learning was less visible to grantmakers)²⁶.

Interviewee

Name:

Organisation:

Grantmakers – type of funding and length of relationship:

Understanding of the value of learning

- 1.) What do you understand by 'learning' and why do you think it is important for your organisation and the wider TA sector?
- 2.) Why do you think that your donors/grantmakers are interested in learning?

Learning practice

- 3.) Has the emphasis in your organisation on learning increased, decreased or stayed the same in the last five years?
- 4.) What system or practices do you have in place to encourage learning within your organisation?
- 5.) What difference does the learning make to your work?
- 6.) What are the major obstacles/brakes on internal learning?
- 7.) What are the major incentives or constraints on sharing your learning externally?
- 8.) How could grantmakers provide greater support for your organisational learning?

Grantmaker practice

- 9.) In what ways do the requirements of your grantmakers affect learning within your organisation?

Proposal/Grant inception

- 10.) To what extent have you been asked (or do you) to share your learning as part of proposals to donors? How could proposals better encourage reflection about ToCs, defining and measuring success and how learning will be integrated?

²⁶ Interviews were carried out on unattributable basis. Content of participants was sought were quotes are attributed.

Monitoring

- 11.) Does the information that you collect in order to report back to donors support learning? If so how, if not, why not?

Reporting

- 12.) Are there opportunities (or do you) share your learning and how you have incorporated it into your work as part of donor reporting?

End of Grant/Evaluation/Renewal

- 13.) What learning have you shared with your grantmaker at the end of your grant? Has your work been evaluated? Did the evaluation provide useful reflection and learning for you?
- 14.) How has this been integrated into your ongoing work? What was the response of your grantmaker? Did you share your evaluation findings publicly?
- 15.) How flexible have you found your grantmaker if/when you have had to change/adapt your approach as a result of learning or changes in the context?
- 16.) As well as the formal requirements of grantmaker, how important is the softer-side of the relationship to encouraging your organisation to learn and share learning?
- 17.) How could your grantmaker change or improve their requirements or their approach to support greater learning within your organisation and sharing of that learning?

Annex C: Online Questionnaire

Background to online questionnaire

The questionnaire was distributed by grantmakers and promoted via relevant communities of practice and through social media. The grantees who completed the survey spanned national (46%), regional (11%) and global levels (39%) and large and small organisations (57% under 30 employees, 39% over 30 employees). 80% of respondents were funded by one of 5 grantmakers involved in the study. 60% received funding from OSF and 50% received funding from two or more of the grantmakers. All considered themselves part of the TA sector.

Perceptions of grantees on grantmaking practices

Introduction

This survey forms part of a research study commissioned by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (with the Transparency and Accountability Initiative). The study focuses on how foundations' grantmaking practices incentivise or disincentivise learning by grantees in the transparency and accountability sector.

Interviews with grantees, grantmakers and re-granting organisations have taken place over the last two months which have informed the questions below. The final study is intended to inform key grantmakers and provide a basis for discussions about potential changes to grantmaking practice.

Q1. Does your organisation consider itself as part of the 'Transparency and Accountability' sector?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

Your organisation

Q2. How many employees are there working within your organisation?

- Under 30
- Over 30
- Not applicable

Q3. At which level does your organisation predominantly work at?

- Local or National level
- Regional level
- Global level
- None of the above are applicable

Q4. Please indicated which of the following donors you are funded by:

- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

- The Omidyar Network
- Global Partnership for Social Accountability
- Open Society Foundations
- The Ford Foundation
- None of the above

Q5: Motivations for grantmaker interest in learning

Why do you think grantmakers are interested in learning?

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| i. Because grantmakers want their grantees to be learning and improving in their implementation of grants | | | | | |
| ii. Because grantmakers want grantees to be conscious and regularly reviewing whether their approach (theory of change) remains relevant based on what they are learning | | | | | |
| iii. Grantmakers want grantees to be providing information about 'what works' and to have access to the learning to inform their grantmaking practice. | | | | | |
| iv. Grantmakers are not seeing the results they want and they want to know why. | | | | | |
| v. Because grantmakers want to build an evidence base for continued funding of transparency and accountability work and they want their grantees to be part of building that evidence base. | | | | | |
| vi. Because grantmakers want to be able to base their choices in what to fund on evidence and the learning from their grantees. | | | | | |
| vii. Because grantmakers want to be able to base their choices in what to fund on evidence and the learning from their grantees. | | | | | |
| viii. Because grantmakers think that their grantees don't share learning with them when things do not turn out as expected and they want to create greater openness. | | | | | |
| ix. It is not clear why grantmakers are interested in learning but it seems like it is a new buzzword. | | | | | |

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

Q6. Grantmaker influence on grantee learning practice (Funding)

The following rating questions relate to elements of grantmaking practice which can impact on learning and sharing by grantees. These are drawn from interviews with grantees.

Please rate how important or unimportant you feel these elements of grantmaking practice are in supporting organisations to strengthen their learning and ability/willingness to share that learning externally.

1 2 3 4 5

| | | | | | | |
|--------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| x. | Provide more flexible funding (core funds, general support grant, programmatic funding) to allow greater flexibility to create time/resources for learning and sharing | | | | | |
| xi. | Provide grants over a longer period so that learning can consider outcomes and impact (not just activities/implementation) | | | | | |
| xii. | Provide grants over a longer period so that the organisation has an element of financial security and has time for learning | | | | | |
| xiii. | Provide specific funding and sufficient flexibility for dedicated staff who can support learning | | | | | |
| xiv. | Provide more flexibility in relation to overheads for projects so there can be time/resources/capacity for learning | | | | | |
| xv. | Allow for budget and resources to be invested to greater documentation of learning | | | | | |
| xvi. | Provide opportunities (and/or funding) for grantees and the broader sector to come together and share experiences | | | | | |
| xvii. | Fund external evaluations of your organisation which are focused on learning as well as grant accountability | | | | | |
| xviii. | Provide opportunities for your organisation to receive support from external consultants to address learning or related needs | | | | | |

1 = very unimportant, 2 = unimportant, 3 = neutral, 4 = important, 5 = very important

Q7. Grantmaker influence on grantee learning practice (Influence)

Please rate how important or unimportant you feel these elements of grantmaking practice are in supporting organisations to strengthen their learning and ability/willingness to share that learning externally.

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| xix. | Use their influence with senior leaders to encourage greater commitment to, and practice of, learning | | | | | |
| xx. | Specifically integrate questions about learning (and how the organisation learns) as part of the grant management process (proposals/reporting/evaluation) | | | | | |
| xxi. | Share their learning from their portfolio and broader engagement in the transparency and accountability sector | | | | | |
| xxii. | Make suggestions or facilitate contacts with others which could help with learning | | | | | |
| xxiii. | Give grantees a say in their strategic frameworks and let grantees know when there are opportunities to influence them | | | | | |

1 = very unimportant, 2 = unimportant, 3 = neutral, 4 = important, 5 = very important

Q8. Grantmaker influence on grantee learning practice (Flexibility)

Please rate how important or unimportant you feel these elements of grantmaking practice are in supporting organisations to strengthen their learning and ability/willingness to share that learning externally.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| i. Provide flexibility when grantees are implementing the grant-related activities if there is a need to adapt the approach or strategy if there is a strong rationale | | | | | |
| ii. Provide flexibility if there is a need to change the indicators or metrics which are linked to grant accountability if there is strong rationale | | | | | |
| iii. Support and encourage organisations to be ambitious and try out new ideas – understanding that although success/results cannot be guaranteed this will generate new learning | | | | | |

1 = very unimportant, 2 = unimportant, 3 = neutral, 4 = important, 5 = very important

Q9. Grantmaker influence on grantee learning practices (Relationship – transparency and accountability)

Please rate how important or unimportant you feel these elements of grantmaking practice are in supporting organisations to strengthen their learning and ability/willingness to share that learning externally.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| i. Provide flexibility when grantees are implementing the grant-related activities if there is a need to adapt the approach or strategy if there is a strong rationale | | | | | |
| ii. Provide flexibility if there is a need to change the indicators or metrics which are linked to grant accountability if there is strong rationale | | | | | |
| iii. Support and encourage organisations to be ambitious and try out new ideas – understanding that although success/results cannot be guaranteed this will generate new learning | | | | | |

1 = very unimportant, 2 = unimportant, 3 = neutral, 4 = important, 5 = very important

Q10. Grantmaker influence on grantee learning practices (Greater focus on learning in grant-giving)

- Ask for information about our learning and evidence which underpins the organisation's approach during the proposal/grant inception stage
- Ask grantees to include information about your learning in your reporting
- Delink evaluations/final grant reports from future funding to allow for a focus on learning rather than accountability
- Reduce reporting burden by permitting reports to be submitted in any format (so that the same report can be used for multiple funders)

- Fund jointly and collaborate with other donors

Q11. How adequately do the following statements describe your organisations attitude to sharing learning externally?

- We are interested in documenting and sharing learning as this helps us to get recognition and profile for our work
- We know that future funding of the sector relies on having a stronger evidence base and evidence of 'what works' and we want to play our role in this
- We don't have the time to share our learning and the benefits of doing so are unclear
- We don't have opportunities to attend meetings/conferences where we can learn and share
- We don't want to share our mistakes/learning externally as it could potentially damage future funding opportunities
- We don't have leadership which supports us to share
- Our learning is specific to our issues, organisation and context so we are not sure how interested anyone else would be in it

Q12. If not captured in your answers above, what more could grantmakers do to support grantees to learn and share that learning?

Q13. If you would like to receive further information as this study progresses, please provide your email address. This is optional.

Annex D: List of Interviewees

| Grantees (24 interviews) | |
|---|--|
| 1. Abongile Sipondo | Public Services Accountability Monitor (Southern Africa) |
| 2. Varja Lipovsek | Twaweza (East Africa) |
| 3. Dario Ramirez | Article 19 (Mexico) |
| 4. Walter Flores | CEGGS (Guatemala) |
| 5. Jasminka Frisjick | ESE (Macedonia) |
| 6. Miano Munene | HERAF (Kenya) |
| 7. Edward Premdas Pinto | CHSJ (India) & COPASAH |
| 8. Chitra Retna S. | Article 33 (Indonesia) |
| 9. Renzo Lavin | ACIJ (Argentina) |
| 10. Lukman Hakim | FITRA (Indonesia) |
| 11. Everlyn Kemunto Oiruria | Well Told Story (Kenya/East Africa) |
| 12. Laura James | OKFN |
| 13. John Wonderlich | Sunlight Foundation |
| 14. Tim Hughes | Involve |
| 15. David McNair | ONE |
| 16. Nisrine Bouhamidi | CARE (Morocco) |
| 17. George Osei-Bimpeh | SEND Ghana |
| 18. Rachel Rank | Publish What You Fund |
| 19. Alan Hudson | Global Integrity |
| 20. Tom Steinberg | mySociety |
| 21. Renata Terrazas | Fundar (Mexico) |
| 22. Brett Prowse and Marc Crow (also regranter) | Global Witness |
| 23. Finn Heinrich and Rute Caldeira* also regranter | Transparency International |
| 24. Manoj Rai | PRIA India |
| Regranting organisations (4 interviews) | |
| 25. Marjan Besuijen | Making All Voices Count |
| 26. Helena Hofbauer | International Budget Partnership |
| 27. Suneeta Kaimal | Natural Resources Governance Institute |
| 28. Antonio Capillo | Comic Relief |
| Grantmakers (7 interviews) | |
| 29. Kevin Bohrer | The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation |
| 30. Cynthia Eyakuze | Open Society Foundations |
| 31. Laura Bacon | Omidyar Network |
| 32. Jean Ross | Ford Foundation |
| 33. Olive Ann Moore | Global Partnership for Social Accountability |
| 34. Micol Martini | Department for International Development |
| 35. Sandra Dunsmore | Open Society Foundations |

| Others (6 interviews) | |
|---|--|
| 36. Panthea Lee | The Reboot |
| 37. Brendan Halloran | Transparency and Accountability Initiative |
| 38. Doug Reeler | CDRA |
| 39. Florencia Guerovitch | Consultant to the GPSA |
| 40. Bruce Britton | INTRAC Associate |
| 41. Joanna Watson and Astrid Foxen | Tearfund |

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