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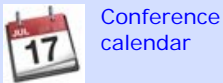
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Filiz Bikmen Bugay

When does collaboration make sense?

Navigating the collaboration maze

Filiz Bikmen Bugay

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Many foundations and other organizations are trying to navigate through the collaboration maze these days: philanthropic support organizations collaborating; philanthropic support organizations encouraging and/or supporting collaborations among their members; foundations collaborating with one another; and (last but certainly not least) foundations promoting collaboration among groups they fund. Finding a way around can be daunting. One potential guide might be to think of it in terms of 'macro, meso and micro' levels of analysis, to borrow Kumi Naidoo's phrase.

At the macro level, the Council on Foundations' report *Effective Collaborations* takes up the issue of collaboration among philanthropic support organizations. The main conclusion is that these organizations should collaborate for the sake of common purpose, member benefit and efficiency. While I do not work for a grantmaker group, I found the outlined drivers and barriers (increased value, greater impact, leveraging resources, advancing a sectorwide agenda), as well as much of the report content, to be very relevant to the Sabanci Foundation's own experience and current strategic planning with regard to collaboration.

At the meso level, Marc Pfitzer and Mike Stamp's *Multiplying Impact through Philanthropic Collaboration* discusses alternative ways one particular support organization, the European Foundation Centre (EFC), might promote collaboration among its members. Based on their research, the authors conclude that 'many European foundations are not yet convinced that collaboration creates sufficient additional value to merit the effort it requires'. In the face of this challenge, they propose a 'division of labour' – between promoting an enabling environment, on the one hand, and provision of services that support implementation of collaborations, on the other. Promoting an enabling environment involves three stages (openness to collaboration, opportunity recognition, and engagement of partners) while the provision of services role has just two (planning and set up, and operation/implementation). The authors suggest that the EFC focuses on the former and generates demand for the latter.



Again, I was struck by the parallels between the EFC's role in promoting collaboration among its members and Sabanci's role in promoting collaboration among its grantees. Sabanci has adopted what I have come to call 'genetically modified grantmaking'. Its programme strategy requires that women, youth and disability groups apply one another's lenses in their strategy and fieldwork. The foundation supports this by facilitating communication and sharing experiences among grantees. These activities have led organizations to go beyond sharing information to actually working together in the field.

On the 'micro' level (foundations collaborating), John Kania and Mark Kramer's 'Collective Impact' accuses foundations of too much isolated action, resulting in limited impact. Sabanci's four-year partnership with the UN agencies in Turkey, the Ministry of Interior and Sabanci University on Promoting and Protecting the Human Rights of Women and Girls seems to resemble a 'multi-stakeholder initiative', which is one of the types of collaboration the authors identify. The foundation has made great progress in creating a supporting infrastructure (building expertise and mechanisms for gender-sensitive policies and services at the local level, which proved to be replicable nationwide), alignment and accountability. However, sorting out how to effectively measure impact remains a challenge.

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Kania and Kramer conclude that 'collaboration for the sake of collaboration' leads to failed initiatives and lack of sustained impact. Surely all would agree that doing anything 'just for the sake of it' is never a good thing. As these efforts often cost more time than they do money, one must be realistic about the amount of collaborative work foundations have the capacity to manage when weaving through the collaboration maze. Whether at the macro, meso or micro level, collaborative programmes should be, just like any other tool, employed where greatest impact and 'return on investment' is most likely to be achieved.

Filiz Bikmen Bugay is director of programmes at the Sabanci Foundation. Email filiz@sabancivakfi.org

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Jessica Bearman and Anna Pond (2010) *Effective Collaborations: Recommendations for a connected philanthropic infrastructure* Council on Foundations: visit <https://personify-web.cof.org/EbusPPROD/OnlineStore/DCDProductDetail/tab...>

Marc Pfitzer and Mike Stamp (2010) *Multiplying Impact through Philanthropic Collaboration*, commissioned by the EFC from FSG Social Impact Advisors: visit <http://www.efc.be/Networking/Documents/Multiplying%20ImpactthroughPhilan...>

John Kania and Mark Kramer (2010) 'Collective Impact' in *Stanford Social Innovation Review*: www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

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