FILLING THE GAPS

How and Why to Better Meet Community Networks' Financial Needs

The world is embarking on a Fast-Track strategy to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030

To reach this visionary goal after three decades of the most serious epidemic in living memory, countries will need to use the powerful tools available, hold one another accountable for results and make sure that no one is left behind.

There is now wide recognition that community responses must play an increasing role in addressing the epidemic in the years ahead. Governments, bilateral donors and leading technical and guidance-setting agencies (e.g., WHO) increasingly agree that the most effective HIV responses are those in which communities play more influential and extensive roles.

Growing needs, growing urgency: the challenges of funding gaps

Yet, funding community-based HIV responses is not commensurate with the needs. And, while such funding gaps are nothing new, the need to fill those gaps has never been more urgent. UNAIDS has estimated that to achieve bold Fast Track HIV treatment and prevention targets, investments in community mobilization and services must increase more than threefold between 2015 and 2020. The Robert Networks Fund (RCNF) is an ideal vehicle through which to understand and respond to these funding gaps.

MOST AFFECTED BY FUNDING GAPS: UNDER-SERVED POPULATIONS AT THE HEART OF HIV COMMUNITY NETWORKS

The Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund supports networks representing 'inadequately served populations' (ISPs) in the HIV response.

ISPs include people living with HIV, gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM), people who use drugs, prisoners, sex workers and transgender people. In some localities, ISPs also include women and girls, youth, migrants and people living in rural areas.

Current funding gap across RCNF grantees and applicants

When soliciting proposals, the RCNF asks applicants to provide total-funding amounts to meet all needs based on in-depth and verifiable analyses. In August 2015, applicants submitted proposals for the next round of RCNF funding. Preliminary analysis of the proposals shows a range of funding gaps between applicants' requests and available resources. Perhaps the most important number is the top level: the total amount requested in the 41 applications from civil society networks deemed eligible for funding was nearly $73 million for three years from 2016 (see Figure 1).
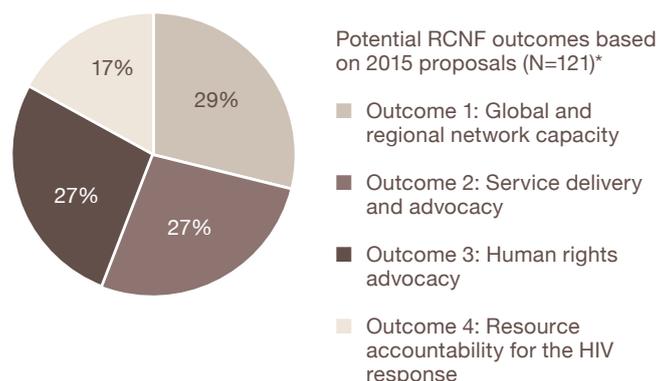
If funding levels for RCNF over the period 2016–2018 remain the same as for the previous three years, a total of approximately $18 million would be allocated. **The overarching funding gap for all eligible networks therefore would be $53 million over a crucial three-year period when scaling up of HIV services worldwide is supposed to accelerate.**

Figure 2. RCNF outcomes that could be addressed, as per proposals from eligible applicants to RFP 2015

29%
27%
27%
17%

Potential RCNF outcomes based on 2015 proposals (N=121)*

- Outcome 1: Global and regional network capacity
- Outcome 2: Service delivery and advocacy
- Outcome 3: Human rights advocacy
- Outcome 4: Resource accountability for the HIV response

* N represents the number of times the four outcomes are targeted in the sum of all 41 eligible proposals

Figure 1. Cumulative funding requests for all eligible proposals (RFP 2015)

Budgets presented in all eligible proposals (41 total eligible); RFP 2015, for years 2016–2018	Amounts requested in USD
Requested budget Year 1	**$ 24.941.259**
Requested budget Year 2	**$ 24.050.619**
Requested budget Year 3	**$ 23.500.776**
Total requested	**$ 72.492.654**

Without an increase in funding, the RCNF will not be able to expand its roster of grantees and those networks that are funded will primarily be able to cover a portion of their core costs. Many supported networks rely on a basic level of RCNF funding for their core operations since they have few other options for such critical resources that help them operate. With additional financial resources from the RCNF, they would then have sufficient and sustainable capacity and be able to fund and expand the programmes that constituents want and need. Figure 2 shows the wide range of programmatic objectives grantees could accomplish if RCNF were able to allocate greater resources to them.

Opportunities that could be missed: examples of funding applicants' desired activities

Listed below are examples of activities and priorities that eligible networks included in their 2015 proposals. All refer to what networks could do if they were fully funded. They are arranged by the RCNF's four main outcome areas, thereby underscoring the fact that the majority of these activities and outcomes refer to programmatic priorities that would have to be scaled back or even abandoned based on the size and persistence of funding gaps.

OUTCOME 1: STRENGTHENING NETWORKS' CAPACITY

- Stronger organizational capacity among **MSM and transgender networks** that will create a well-informed, re-energized and expanding constituency base joining advocacy efforts at the global, regional, and national levels:

- Continue to build the capacity of **sex worker organizations** to develop and implement their own programmes and advocate for funding in their own countries as well as be able to take the lead in training other service providers on how to properly develop and implement rights-based programming.

- Increased staffing will allow for i) increased opportunities to **expand government and civil society partnerships;** ii) increased sustainability of implemented activities/network operations; and iii) development and dissemination of vital knowledge products.

OUTCOME 2: SERVICE DELIVERY AND ADVOCACY

- Equitable and effective HIV/AIDS services will be provided to **rural populations.**

- Strengthen the overall services for migrant workers by integrating awareness and HIV prevention programmes at government policy and practice level and improving the situation for **migrants** themselves.

- Improve the quality of life of people living with HIV and other ISPs by **removing barriers related to intellectual property** that negatively affect general access to medication. The program will build the capacity of Latin American civil society groups to i) review national patent laws and produce research to improve access to antiretrovirals (ARVs); ii) advocate for the incorporation of best practice intellectual property provisions; and iii) monitor patent-granting procedures and advocate against the granting of non-inventive patents.

- Develop and strengthen civil society capacity to ensure continued **advocacy against HIV criminalisation**—and enable PLHIV networks to alliances advocate against related punitive laws aimed at people living with HIV and ISPs that harm human rights and impede the HIV response.

- Collect **unique trans-specific data** on experiences of HIV service provision, essential for the development of suitable and sustainable responses. Making progress in this area will help overcome the vicious circle of ignoring trans populations' vulnerability due to a lack of data and clarify an urgent need for trans-sensitive services.

- Create a critical mass of advocates at national, regional and global level who will constantly **push the female agenda** and gain access to treatment and prevention services at all platforms.

OUTCOME 3: HUMAN RIGHTS

- Build capacity of (ex) **prisoners** and facilitate the establishment of community-based (ex) prisoners organizations, thus educating new leaders in prison health. And in countries where such work is problematic, represent prisoners' community interests through engagement with prison health professional associations and governments.

- Support and undertake research and analysis to drive durable change and advocacy to influence policymakers, challenge human rights violations against **people who use drugs,** and build capacity to ensure new civil society and ISP champions and leaders.

- Conduct legal environment assessments and provide **country-specific legal literacy information and training.** Such documentation by ISPs will provide an entry point for access to justice; access to pro bono legal services; increased possibility of redress; and identification of cases for strategic litigation. Moreover, human rights defenders will be supported and public education campaigns developed to maximize the impact of strategic litigation.

OUTCOME 4: RESOURCE ACCOUNTABILITY

- Research and develop a unique clearinghouse of evidence to inform policies and programmes, resulting in **efficient use of available resources.** The findings should show, among other things, social protection and care and support practices that are ready for policy support and scale-up; practices that should not be scaled up; practices that require more evidence before being adopted and implemented; and new areas that need research.

- Train and support ISPs to engage regularly and more effectively in **state budget monitoring** and advocacy around services along the continuum of HIV care. New voices and insight will lead to more knowledge about existing gaps and the costs of filling them.

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Reference: RCNF