ROBERT CARR FUND for civil society networks

Robert Carr Fund RFP 2018
Annex 2: Lessons Learnt from Consortia Building and Management, and Guidance on Consortium Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

An assessment of the Robert Carr Fund consortium model, conducted in early 2018, examined the performance of and experience with this model over the period of 2015-2017. The assessment focused on identifying lessons learned, highlighting both successes and challenges. The following is a summary of key lessons learned, which should be instructive to applicants in forming or planning for strengthening of their existing consortia.

This is not a list of requirements to apply for funding as a consortium. The following should, instead, be seen as guidance on how to build and/or manage a consortium. That said, a Memorandum of Understanding between consortium members is one of the required supporting documents for an application submitted on behalf of a consortium. The understanding is that a single consortium may not be able to achieve all of the elements outlined below at any given time, but all consortia should seek to build on and expand on these practices where opportunities are present.

How can consortia be structured to support their work?

- **A well-composed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between consortium members is a requirement for all consortia – please review a more detailed guidance on the scope of the MoU at the end of this document.** The MoU should be a living document, which outlines rules and processes, and which is **regularly discussed and updated by members**. Consortia that have MoUs with contingency plans in place tend to be better prepared to handle any disputes.

- Consortia operating and communicating effectively are usually led by a lead organization with a **clear Terms of Reference** (ToR) for its role and responsibilities. The ToR should discussed by and agreed upon by members.

- **Consortium-related decision-making processes** must be clear to all members, particularly who has the authority to make what levels of decisions. This is particularly important for budget-related issues, where regular revisions may be necessary to address emerging opportunities and challenges.

- In order for the lead organization to perform its functions optimally, it must be **adequately resourced**. These resources are used to support an organization **with clear and shared vision**, having **systems** (e.g. bookkeeping and accounting etc.) **and staff (full or part-time or outsourced) with technical skills** on governance, finances and monitoring & evaluation & learning, and **a designated focal point, experienced person tasked with building capacity** of and communication with emerging leaders within the consortium.

- Depending on the focus of a consortium, consortium members' budgets need to reflect both **specific individual (i.e. organization/s) and collective (i.e. consortium as a whole) core needs and/or activities**, to successfully enable consortium to reach capacity strengthening and/or advocacy goals.

- Flexibility in the lead role can be beneficial to a consortium. Some consortia practice **rotation of consortium-leadership**, allowing different member organizations to fill the lead role over time. This, and other arrangements can assure accountability and responsiveness within the consortium. The rotation of the consortium leadership implies a rotation of certain leadership functions e.g. those related to coordination, and does not imply either a rotation of contractual agreement with Aidsfonds as the Fund Management Agent of the Robert Carr Fund or a rotation of disbursements to different members of the consortium.

What binds a consortium together?

- Consortia should be built on **trust and common values** between members. They articulate a longer-term impact that they wish to achieve together (beyond the duration of a single grant).

- Beyond shared values, consortia may find it helpful to have an explicit shared **strategy** in place, which defines priorities, campaigns/advocacy plans, research and documentation plans, etc. A joint **work plan**, guided by the strategy and including at least one joint strategic activity, is a feature demonstrated by consortia, who cooperate effectively.

- A sense of **identity** as a consortium is key. This can be built through a deliberate movement-building process and/or a joint learning/reflective process on goals and/or activities, and identification of both consortium's **added value** and how to communicate that to an outside audience.

- **Proactive** partnering and **collaborative** membership in consortia often leads to members working together – and sometimes reaching beyond the consortium to other strategic partners - on specific issues. These relationships come from proactive strategizing, and are built upon the trust of and shared strategies and/or identity described above.

How can a consortia maintain connectivity?

- Consortia who have **mapped the strengths and weaknesses** of their members, and developed **capacity plans** to actively share knowledge and strengths with newer, emerging members, show strength. They may also have a plan in place to **nurture and develop individual leaders**, especially new or young individuals, through mentorship or professional development opportunities.

- Consortia whose members **meet face-to-face** and engage in **joint learning/reflective processes** report greater ease of work. Consortium rules, processes and systems are assessed annually during these meetings, and adjustments are made, specifically to encourage joint ownership of the consortia. Jointly mapping any gaps or overlaps in efforts, and making plans to address those together can also be helpful.

- Communication between consortia members should not be limited to formal meetings only. Members could benefit greatly from talking to each other and **working together regularly**. Discussions do not necessarily need to be led by the lead organization; there are self-driven links between individual members, as well. In some cases, **working groups** exist to discuss specialized content, and may involve actors outside of the consortium, as well. Effective **communication tools** are in place, utilizing new technologies as appropriate.

- Members should also undertake discussion on how the consortium and/or its initiatives can be **further resourced**, as it strengthens collaborations beyond a single grant. Active planning for **fundraising** allows the consortium to grow with a joint sense of ownership.

How can a consortia achieve and communicate results?

- Consortia that **systematically and actively utilize consistent monitoring, evaluation and learning approaches (e.g. Robert Carr Fund's MEL tools)** for reporting and showcasing results in capacity strengthening and/or advocacy tend to be better placed to articulate and substantiate the added value of networks and consortia. Their members understand and can effectively report using MEL tools to report on **interim outcomes** which bring them closer to their long term impact goals.

- Consortia that constantly work on developing stronger capacity in **storytelling** and **communicating their value** to others outside of the consortium, including donors, usually communicate more effectively.

Guidance for developing a Consortium Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

Consortia applying for Robert Carr Fund's funding are expected to submit a consortium MoU, signed by each consortium partner, submitted together with the application.

A consortium MoU must contain the following items:

- A description of the added value of the consortium and a description of the roles of the different partners.

- A description of a system of decision-making, internal accountability and a way of working together. Issues which must be addressed are: internal transparency, quality assurance, knowledge sharing and applicability of policies. A consortium must be able to deal with decision-making on extra funding opportunities. Part of a governance structure may be the formation of a committee of representatives of all consortia partners. It is possible to request a budget for meetings.

- A description of how budget decisions will be made including around decision making around final funding awards, budget changes and protocols around underspend/overspend within the consortium.

- Special attention is required for policies and procedures on Corruption, Fraud and Mismanagement and whistleblowing as well as Integrity policies. The rules and procedures need to be aligned with the Aidsfonds grant regulations.