

F/M Process: For Funders, With Movements for Social Justice

Background

In 2008 FNTG formalized a process emerging out of ongoing work with the World Social Forum and the US Social Forum, aimed at increasing funder support to movement-building for systemic change.

From its creation in the unfolding drama of Seattle during the 1999 WTO Ministerial to its efforts to support funder involvement in the early development of the World Social Forum process, FNTG has encouraged grantmakers to think about the significance and character of the global movement for social and economic justice, and about linkages between US and international organizing.

Inspired and challenged by the success of the US Social Forum in Atlanta in June 2007, funders with FNTG's USSF delegation began to deepen discussions with social movement allies on ways to strengthen grantmaking across issues and sectors in support of movement building in a global context.

A process launched at a convening of sixty funders and two dozen movement leaders at Fort Mason in San Francisco in January 2008 described strategic areas of work, beginning with redefining relationships and developing principles for funder/movement collaboration. Smaller discussions between funders and movement activists in Providence, RI in April 2008, and in New York in December further refined objectives and clarified the goals of this effort.

A second large F/M convening in Detroit in March 2009 – selected to coincide with a US Social Forum National Planning Committee meeting to launch organizing for a second USSF in Detroit in June 2010 – brought together forty funders and twenty movement leaders to review the social movement ecosystem, and to revise and deepen analysis and commitments for moving this process forward in concrete and strategic ways.

Four working groups were set up, each with specific strategies and joint funder and movement leadership to help provide direction and sustain momentum:

- * Increasing capital to movement-building
- * “Accompanying” the USSF within the context of the World Social Forum process
- * Responding to the economic crisis
- * Mobilizing for climate justice

As a funder affinity group that frames our work within a global analysis, FNTG hopes this ongoing initiative can over time contribute positively to the emerging field of social justice philanthropy by emphasizing the importance of local, national and international movement-building towards needed global economic change and social transformation.

Principles of Engagement

Following presentation and discussion of how can funder and movement leaders can deepen best practices in relationships between philanthropy and social justice movements, the following agreement was endorsed by participants at the Detroit F/M convening.

Our Agreements for Working Together

- * We acknowledge the power imbalance inherent in the way our society, and specifically, philanthropy work.
- * We commit to broadening philanthropic support for social justice movement building.
- * We commit to exploring mechanisms of accountability across the spectrum of those engaged in the F/M process.
- * We commit to understanding, respecting and exploring our diverse and shared frameworks and visions for change, and to recognizing a multiplicity of strategies and methods.
- * We commit to inclusivity, hard work, and patience.
- * We commit to transparency and communication.
- * We commit to respecting cultural differences, embracing human diversity and challenging ourselves to overcome the boundaries that limit our potential to create social change.
- * We commit to cooperation and collaboration.
- * We commit to challenging oppression and misuse of power.
- * We commit to working together to increase resources for social justice movement-building.
- * We commit to fostering broad support for social change work and avoiding isolation.
- * We commit to a space where we can engage in healthy political struggle.
- * We commit to speaking for ourselves and creating a safe space for open, honest dialogue that is respected.
- * We commit to challenging our own oppressions and rising above them.
- * We commit to prioritizing support to people and communities directly affected.

Social Justice Movements in the F/M Process

A number of initiatives currently being undertaken by FNTG as well as the F/M process itself are being developed by funders working closely with movement leaders connected to three overlapping networks: The World Social Forum, the US Social Forum and the Grassroots Global Justice alliance. Leadership structures of GGJ and the USSF, which are also represented on the WSF International Council, undertake their own consultative processes for determining how and through whom they agree engage with funders in these initiatives.

FNTG could have drawn from innumerable social movements, networks and organizations with experience and expertise in movement-building for the original Fort Mason meeting and for this ongoing process. FNTG chose to engage with these three networks in developing our work on movement-building for a number of reasons:

- None are monolithic (in terms of working within a single sector or constituency, with a single methodology or political approach), and all three encompass within them a broad array of social, economic and cultural movements;
- In various ways all see the importance of linking local struggles to global movements, and define themselves as part of an international movement for global justice working within a context of neoliberal market-led globalization.
- All are relatively open and non-elitist, with transparent procedures for accepting new members, relatively accountable governance structures, and strong if not perfect internal cultures of democratic decision-making.

The World Social Forum

www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

is regular meeting held by members of the global justice movement to coordinate world campaigns, share and refine organizing strategies, and inform each other about movements from around the world and their issues. Over 120 representatives of NGOs, trade unions and social movements participate in the WSF International Council and its various Commissions and working groups.

The United States Social Forum

[\(https://www.ussf2007.org/\)](https://www.ussf2007.org/) Growing out of the World Social Forum process, the first USSF national gathering of the took place in Atlanta at the end of June, 2007, bringing together some 13,000 activists, organizers, people of color, working people, poor people, and indigenous people from across the United States and from around the world. Over 60 local and national networks, organizations and trades unions have been represented on USSF National Planning Committee, and Regional and Local Organizing Committees.

- To an important extent, all are honest brokers in the sense of not claiming or purporting to speak for or represent the “movement” as a whole. Indeed the WSF Charter Principles states clearly that social forums represent an open space, one which by definition cannot claim to speak on behalf either of the forum itself or the wider global justice movement. The GGJ alliance also makes clear that it does not represent all movements or grassroots organizations in the U.S. that are interested in or concerned with global justice.

- FNTG itself has a long history of engagement and interaction with all three networks:

- FNTG has organized annual funder delegations to the WSF, and has helped over 225 funders and donors participate in the forum since 2002. FNTG's coordinator is an observer member of the WSF International Council.

- FNTG and members of its Steering Committee helped organize the participation of over 60 grassroots activists at WSF 2002, and produced a documentary of this entitled "Another World Is Possible: U.S. Grassroots Voices at the World Social Forum." GGJ was later to emerge from this experience.

- FNTG began helping to organize funder support for the USSF in 2003, and organized a delegation of over 50 funders and donors to the first USSF in Atlanta. FNTG's coordinator participates as an observer member of the USSF National Planning Committee.

- FNTG and GGJ jointly host receptions for US funders and activists attending the WSF, and have worked together for years in organizing a number of funder briefings and funder learning calls on the WSF, on social forums as an organizing approach, and on plans for the development of a US Social Forum.

Grassroots Global Justice Alliance

(<http://www.ggjalliance.org/mission.php>) is an alliance of over 70 U.S.-based grassroots groups and national networks who understand the connections between the local issues they work on and the global context, and see themselves as part of an international movement for global justice. GGJ emerged out of the participation of grassroots organizers from the US in the first and second WSFs held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001 and 2002.

The US Social Forum was "incubated" within Grassroots Global Justice, and GGJ has organized the participation of 75 or more local activists and community members annually to WSFs in Brazil, Mumbai, Caracas and Nairobi.

FNTG has worked closely with and kept funders informed of the development of the WSF, the USSF and GGJ since 2001. Through the years we have developed relations of trust with leaders and active members of all three networks. Without insisting that these networks represent the only or even the best movement interlocutors possible, their demonstrated commitment to building strong social movements, the breadth and diversity of their memberships, their links to many other networks, institutions and movements as well as the historical connections that exist between them and FNTG provide reasons to engage with these particular sets of actors through the F/M process.