

FROM ACTIVISTS TO DONORS: FIVE KEY POINTS ABOUT CENTERING CARE



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**URGENT
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FUNDS**



Sustaining Feminist Activism Worldwide



Since 1997, the Urgent Action Sister Funds have supported feminist activists and movements worldwide by rapidly meeting their urgent funding and accompaniment needs. We have a deep understanding of the changing contexts, risks, and emergencies faced by women, trans, and non-binary activists, and the kinds of collective care and protection support that they need.

We place care at the center of everything we do. Care is connecting our being with that which sustains life in all its dimensions. Care is the thread that weaves our **Sisterhood Feminist Principles of Philanthropy** and gives meaning to our funding model, engagement with feminist movements, and internal practices.

The following reflections and activist recommendations come from our 2017-21 global research¹ —**How can we ground ourselves in care and dance our revolution?**— for which we interviewed 132 feminist activists, researchers, and healing practitioners from 63 countries and 9 donors to feminist movements. This project was seeded by the 2007 Urgent Action Fund publication, **What's the Point of Revolution if We Can't Dance?**, by Jane Barry and Jelena Đorđević.

1 The research team was made up of activist-researchers located in the regions where each of the Urgent Action Sister Funds operate. UAF LAC led the research process on behalf of the Urgent Action Sister Funds.

HOW IS CARE RELATED TO FUNDING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS?

Donors accompanying feminist and social movements have an obligation to shift our philanthropic practices to prioritize **dignified lives** for activists, who risk everything to protect the human rights of all of us and the rights of our shared planet.

We recognize that there is greater awareness in philanthropy now on the importance of collective care and protection than when **What's the Point of Revolution if We Can't Dance?** was published. We start from the assumption that donors are willing to consider how they can better support practices that enable truly sustainable activism.





One donor we interviewed shared, *“Funders weren’t even talking about comprehensive care and protection 10 or 20 years ago... Now we say ‘oh, of course there’s an emotional component’. Sometimes just right when the trauma happens, not before or after, but at least funders are starting to think about physical, digital and emotional [protection] in a more integrated way.”*

But despite progress, there is much more we can do to recognize the importance of contributing to the collective care and protection of social movements, and incorporate care into our own internal practices. We believe that listening to women, trans, and non-binary activists and learning from their experiences helps donors to consider new ways of being. We hope to create new possibilities together for how we collectively fund feminist and social movements in ways that promote their care and protection.



GUIDANCE FROM ACTIVISTS




These **five key points**, collated from across our interviews with activists, share how donors can better support activists and movements to center collective care.

Ground grantee-donor relationships in trust, co-responsibility, and respect

01

Interviewees expressed that **relationships with donors are often a source of stress**. There is widespread perception that this is due, in part, to a lack of trust and respect for the work they do. Building trust requires **empathy, solidarity, and co-responsibility** to recognize activists as co-partners and understand how donor practices impact activists. Work to **transform grantmaking practices** to be less burdensome and more responsive to the challenges faced by activists. Modify **evaluation approaches** to center activists' voices and experiences, and consider how donors and grantees can learn together.



"Donors can also play a kind of an ally role. Financial support is always very important, but if we [also] have partnership, it is much better. This would allow for [donors] to truly listen to our experience and expertise."

Olga Karatch | Belarus

02

Recognize and support multiple care and protection approaches and practices, based on the specific needs of activists in different contexts

Care is situated and rooted in context. Support for activists must always be **grounded in respect for their autonomy to choose approaches that work for them**. Many activists want donors to be more open to supporting community concepts and practices, including Indigenous cultural traditions and diverse spiritualities. **Be willing to resource a variety of care practices**, including therapies, psycho-emotional and spiritual accompaniment, strengthening networks of *acompañantes*, shelters, ceremonial houses, exchange of intergenerational knowledge, legal advice and accompaniment actions in instances of attacks and criminalization, and other diverse practices and approaches in relation to healing and care.

"What works in Palestine might not work in Tunisia. What works in Lebanon won't work in Morocco. Donors... should trust the organizations in all regions about what and how care and protection can be."

Angelique Abboud | Palestine

“This could be done by donors connecting us with activists in other countries to exchange information and share experiences. This would help us find strength from each other and know what’s happening in other places. It’s rewarding. It gives me thoughts and insights on what I can do in China.”

Jing Xiong, Feminist Voices | China

Support collective learning around care and protection across countries and regions

03

Promote **exchanges that help deepen reflections and collective learning** about care and protection across regions. Donors can serve as a bridge between activists in different countries by resourcing activist-led spaces focused on sharing collective care and protection practices. Activists also highlighted the need for donors to support **more research and campaigns** to further deepen shared understanding of how activists are engaging in care and emphasize why care is critical to sustaining activism.

04

Improve the quality and flexibility of financing

Allocate more unrestricted resources to help **reduce the structural precarity** most women, trans, and non-binary activists experience. **Provide multi-year support** to reduce the stress of uncertainty and support activists to plan more easily. This contributes to the **sustainability of activists' organizations and movements**. In addition to general support, activists suggested allocating **a specific budget for activities - decided by the grantee partner - that strengthen their care and protection**.

Finally, activists mentioned that donors **must not reinforce inequalities between large international organizations and smaller local organizations**. Deliver resources directly to those who have less access to them or work with local and regional feminist funds to ensure small organizations are well resourced.

"Donors just want to fund specific projects that last one or two years, and after that we have to start over. It's that cycle that kills us. It means we can't think long-term, because we can't plan with such short-term contracts. This is something common to the movement, and something that we need to think about [regarding] care."

Massan d'Almeida,
President of XOESE, Le Fonds pour les Femmes Francophones
(XOESE, The Funds for Francophone Women) | Togo

Resource all aspects of an organization's budget, including salaries and benefits. Many activists emphasized the role donors play in **promoting their dignity and autonomy, including their labor rights and sustainability**. Working to protect rights without having social security, a pension, and labor and health rights is a contradiction and an obstacle to care and protection. Support organizations in a way that allows them to pay better salaries so that activists can support both themselves and their families.

**Promote the
dignity of activists
and activism
by contributing
to salaries and
ensuring labor and
health rights**

05

"[It is] very important for donors to understand — that it's crucial to work both from the inside out and from the outside in. I'm referring to outside... the goal for which they [the organization or collective] were created. It might be defense of sexual and reproductive rights, land and territory, against violence, all the issues we work with. It's very necessary that funds are allocated for that. At the same time, it's very important... to allocate funding to people in the organizations and collectives, who make this work of defense and assistance possible [from the inside]. We need to have the right conditions regarding wellbeing, labor rights, rest, attention and healing from the impacts of violence."

Ana Maria Hernandez Cardenas, Consorcio Oaxaca | México

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

To center care, it is vital to **recognize ourselves in the humanity that connects us.** We can begin the transformation from our own experiences and our own bodies. As the Urgent Action Sister Funds, we call for open dialogue within yourself and with your colleagues about the interdependence between ourselves and others. Identify from your own contexts the tools we have to protect and care for life in all its forms. Transformation occurs according to our collective rhythm without the requirement for perfection. We must constantly engage each other and follow multiple paths to build and deconstruct ourselves together towards a greater understanding of care and how to resource it. We invite you to continue asking yourself, **How can we ground ourselves in care and dance our revolution?**



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