

# EVIDENCE BRIEF: INVESTING IN EQUITY



**KROC SCHOOL**  
Institute for Peace and Justice

## OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE OF THE INVESTING IN EQUITY STUDY

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda remains “severely underfunded”<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, there is consensus that the WPS funding system is beset with challenges that often makes the funding that does exist difficult to access and divorced from the genuine needs of communities suffering from conflict. While these challenges are presently well known, a variety of research and assessment efforts to date have struggled to identify concrete strategies that can drive real change in both policy and practice.

To address this challenge of pushing forward genuine change, the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice (Kroc IPJ) is undertaking a year-long Participatory Action Research (PAR) study led by a diverse team of experts including local women peacebuilders and peace funders. The focus of the research is on how to create equitable funding partnerships which authentically address needs on the ground, the needs of women peacebuilders, and the requirements of funders. Building on the [Investing in Equity Progress Report](#), this brief lays out preliminary findings from the research project in an effort to provide evidence-based contributions to drive forward more effective WPS funding strategies.<sup>2</sup>

### *The survey says...*

**100% OF LOCAL WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS** said that, if certain equity-based improvements were made to the funding system, the outcomes of local peacebuilding projects would be positively impacted.

**92% OF PEACE FUNDERS** said that having equity with your local partners positively impacts the outcome of the peacebuilding project being funded.

*“This space of funding is an echo chamber right now, we need more movement, more communications on the issues, more research and data, and we must start de-jargonizing the agenda.”*

» PEACE FUNDER INTERVIEW, AUGUST 2020

## KEY FINDINGS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTORS IN THE FUNDING SYSTEM

The preliminary findings in this brief demonstrate two crucial areas of agreement among peace funders (PF) and local women peacebuilders (WPB). First, PF and WPB agree that achieving equity within a funding partnership is vital to achieving positive peacebuilding outcomes. Second, PF and WPB share a vision for the future funding system, including necessary improvements needed to build equitable funding partnerships. With these areas of agreement in mind, the findings below outline barriers, challenges and opportunities to realize an improved WPS funding system that strengthens equitable partnerships occurring at every stage of the project cycle. The findings and recommendations below are based on the research undertaken to date as part of the Investing in Equity research initiative, including results from surveys of PF and WPB, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and local consultations. The information is organized following the funding lifecycle - from the decision on what to fund through to evaluation of projects.

<sup>1</sup> [UN Peacebuilding Fund Strategy 2020-24](#), page 4

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this brief, local women peacebuilders (WPB) are referred to as local women working within their communities on peacebuilding initiatives and peace funders (PF) as organizational entities across sectors that fund WPS and WPB.

## KEY FINDINGS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTORS IN THE FUNDING SYSTEM

» Out of all WPB surveyed, only *one* said the funding system is currently working well.

» All but *one* PF indicated that the WPS agenda has a “somewhat or very important influence” on decision-making about funding allocation.

### FINDING

### RECOMMENDATION

While 92% of PF indicated that the WPS agenda has an important influence on decision-making about funding allocation, 42% of PF reported that decisions are made by staff and top level leadership in strategic planning meetings. An additional 15% of those decisions are influenced by government policy.

PF can create processes that allow decision-making processes to begin with a landscape analysis and proactive input by WPB and CSOs on local needs and emerging issues. At a national level, advocacy for a renewed WPS National Action Plan (NAP) could support locally-driven shifts to funding focus areas.

PF announce funding opportunities through internal or partner networks (25%) with an additional 22% via PF website. Meanwhile, WPB look for funding opportunities through email or an existing PF relationship. Therefore, nearly half of the announcements exist where WPBs aren't looking.

PF can release announcements where WPB access information including via email, press, messaging or social media platforms.  
WPB can attend networking events to increase visibility, build connections with PF, and educate themselves about other sources of information on funding opportunities.

Funding announcements are “elite” and out of reach for many WPB since they are often written in English, offered through the internet only, and structured in a way that demands prior technical capacity.

PF can create internal procedures for more equitable outreach including analog application options and announcements in multiple languages.  
WPB can proactively request technical support from PF and partner networks prior to funding opportunities being announced.

85% of WPB find it “generally difficult” to apply for funding. Online platforms, application length and complexity account for 54% of major barriers to completing applications as identified by WPB.

PF can shift to initial Statements of Interest, which are shorter and might allow for equitable processes such as co-designing the project and timeline. PF can also consider holding “office hours”, advocate for longer response times for grant applications cycles, and place completion time estimates on each announcement.

A potential contributing factor to this challenge is that only 1 in 4 local organizations, WPB included, have dedicated staff for fundraising and proposal writing.

WPB can seek out local or external resources to support them in efficiently responding to funding opportunities.

WPB note a significant increase in competition for grants among local organizations as well as with INGOs working in-country. Some WPB find that local staff with grant application skills often leave for better salaries at INGOs. PF express concern about creating unintended competition.

The nature of the relationships between INGOs, local WPB organizations, and external funders can be jointly assessed to ensure more equitable allocation of funding and avoid harmful competitive dynamics.  
WPB can redouble their efforts to create networks and build coalitions that are able to work together to jointly address key local issues.

WPB cite a decrease in long term and core funding available over the past five years. However, PF report that funding amounts to WPS initiatives in that time period have increased overall. A lack of core funding remains the most cited barrier to achieving WPB organizational goals.

PF can consider shifting more of their funding to core support. For those that can't, they should work with WPB to understand how project support can best be utilized to implement projects *and* address organizational or technical needs.  
WPB can explore different types of organizational structures and collaborative models that require less core support to sustain.

58% of PF indicate that their most common timeframe of WPS funding is 1-3 years. The majority of WPB express a need for core and project funding for at least 2-5 years in order to plan, create, and properly implement effective peacebuilding programming.

WPB can help PF advocate within their organizations for more flexibility - longer timeframes and rapid-response funding when needed.  
Where timeframes cannot be extended, WPM and PF should come to a shared and honest assessment of what outcomes are possible within the shorter timeframe.

A common barrier identified by PF as a difficulty within funding partnerships is that project evaluation reports from WPB do not meet PF organizational standards.

PF can pilot different evaluation approaches and use those pilots to advocate within their own organizations for more participatory, grounded evaluation processes.

WPB express difficulty fulfilling M&E requirements, noting in particular that quantitative indicators are not sufficient to capture program impact.

WPB can communicate with PF to ensure that grants align expectations with resources in regard to evaluation. WPB can meet the funder's requirements *and* gather data on qualitative indicators in order to demonstrate their value.

## CONCLUSION

In assessing these recommendations, common themes that emerge include co-creation, flexibility, and the need for deep and ongoing communication between WPB and PF. An unexpected outcome of COVID-19 was the rapid response and implementation of several of the changes described above, including: emergency funding windows, rapid fund dispersal, adjustments to project timelines and increased communication among actors in the funding system. Suddenly those within the system needed to be more flexible, needed to collaborate and co-create more effectively, and needed to communicate more as situations changed. As one PF noted, "If we could continue with some of the changes accomplished during COVID-19, this [WPS funding system] would work better for everyone."

Thus, while the changes needed are complex and multi-layered, the pandemic response has shown that such changes are possible. What this evidence brief and the broader Investing in Equity research project demonstrates is that there is a strong shared consensus among PF and WPB upon which to build change efforts and that there is clarity on both the challenges to be addressed and the strategies needed to overcome those challenges.

## LEARN MORE

True to PAR, the data presented in this brief was iteratively and jointly captured by the Investing in Equity research team, composed of both PF and WPB. At the end of 2020, the final report of this project will be published. All materials and outputs from the research initiative will be made publicly available along with the final report for future research. For additional information, please contact the Kroc IPJ.

## HELP US GROW THIS INITIATIVE

To create institutional change, we aim to reach people at all levels and sectors within the WPS funding field. This includes local women peacebuilders, local and external funders, INGOs, IGOs, foundations, corporate philanthropy and governments.

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 [sandiego.edu/peace/wps](https://sandiego.edu/peace/wps)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO JOIN THIS INITIATIVE AND/OR OUR EMAIL LIST, CONTACT:

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