



Better Funding Practice

# Building *Trust* *with Partners*





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# Better Funding Practices: *Building Trust with Partners*

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Better Funding believes that ***lasting social change depends on strong and equitable relationships*** between funders and the organisations they support. However traditional funding models often place disproportionate power in the hands of funders, leaving community-based organisations navigating rigid requirements, short-term funding cycles, and limited opportunities for honest and open dialogue.

Building trust with grantee partners is ***essential to shifting this dynamic***. Relationships rooted in trust enable organisations to focus their time and energy on delivering their critical missions. When trust is present, partners are more likely to share challenges openly, adapt to changing realities, and be able to serve communities more effectively.

For funders, ***investing in trust is not just a relational practice***, it is also a strategic one. Healthy partnerships lead to better outcomes, stronger organisations, and more sustainable impact.





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# Why does *trust* matter in funder-partner relationships?

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Trust is the foundation of effective collaboration and partnership. When funders demonstrate trust in their partners' expertise and leadership, it can lead to:



***Better decision-making,*** informed by local knowledge and lived experience.



***Greater flexibility,*** allowing organisations to adapt to changing circumstances.



***Open communication,*** including honest conversations about challenges and learning.



***Reduced administrative burden,*** enabling partners to focus on their core work and missions.

Ultimately, trust signals that funders see partners not simply as grant recipients, but as equal collaborators working toward shared goals.



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# How to *build trust* with partners?

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Here are some key practices that can help cultivate strong, trust-based partnerships:

## 01. Valuing partner expertise

Recognise partners as experts in their own contexts and approach the relationship with humility, curiosity, and respect for local knowledge. Whenever possible, promote opportunities for cross-learning and collaboration among partners, creating spaces where organisations can share knowledge, experiences, and strategies with one another.

## 02. Provide flexible, unrestricted funding

Whenever possible, provide *unrestricted grants* or ask prospective partners what their greatest needs are. This flexibility allows organisations to allocate resources where they are most effective.

## 03. Be transparent about expectations and decisions

Communicate openly and clearly about your funding priorities and limitations, ensuring that partners (and prospective partners) understand your decision-making processes and time-frames. This transparency reduces uncertainty and fosters mutual understanding.





## 04. Simplify application and reporting processes

Long application forms and complex reporting requirements place a serious burden on limited staff capacity. Regularly review your application and reporting processes to ensure that they are accessible and efficient for busy non-profit organisations. This could include:

- Shorter proposals focused on key information.
- Offering a call or meeting in lieu of written reporting.
- Accepting existing reports prepared for other donors.



## 05. Create spaces for open and honest dialogue

Encourage partners to share both successes and challenges without fear that transparency could jeopardise funding. This space can be created with regular check-ins and informal conversations.

## 06. Be responsive and accessible

Timely communication builds confidence and reduces uncertainty. Being available to your partners to respond to questions and provide sounding board support can help to strengthen relationships and build trust.



## 07. Commit to long-term partnerships

Short funding cycles can undermine organisational stability and reduce the impact of your support. Multi-year funding demonstrates confidence in partners and allows them to plan more strategically, as well as builds stronger relationships between funders and partners.



## 08. Recognise and support organisational health

Strong organisations require more support than just project funding. Explore how you can also invest in staff wellbeing, leadership development and the financial resilience and infrastructure of your partner organisations.

This can include supporting *capacity strengthening* efforts that enable organisations to grow, adapt, and sustain their work over time.

## 09. Share influence

Trust also involves using your position to open doors for your partners. This can include introducing leaders to other funders and networks, supporting their participation in philanthropic spaces, and inviting them to share their experiences and perspectives in panels, convenings, and decision-making spaces.

By amplifying partner voices and visibility, funders can help shift who is seen, heard, and resourced within the ecosystem.

## 10. Share and redistribute risk

Funding relationships often place disproportionate risk on partner organisations. Explore how you can take on or redistribute some of this risk through your funding structures, processes, and expectations. This might include flexible timelines, adaptive funding, or reducing compliance burdens.

Sharing risk more equitably enables organisations to operate with greater stability and confidence.





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# What Does This Look Like in Practice?

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The Roger Raymond Charitable Trust adopts a human-centred approach to grant-making. It deliberately strips away over-complicated and time-consuming processes, instead prioritising relationship-building with its grantee partners.

Rather than asking organisations to complete application forms, they rely on face-to-face meetings and conversations that enable both parties to get to know one another and start to build a relationship. The Trust asks key questions such as **“What is your most difficult project to fund?”** reflecting their openness to supporting work that other funders may not. They also recognise that circumstances change and promote a model of open, two-way communication and flexibility, so that partners feel comfortable to share challenges.

Their approach to reporting also promotes the building of trust. Instead of asking their partners to draft specific reports for them, they rely on organisations’ existing annual reports, accounts and regular catch up meetings to stay connected to the work they’re supporting.

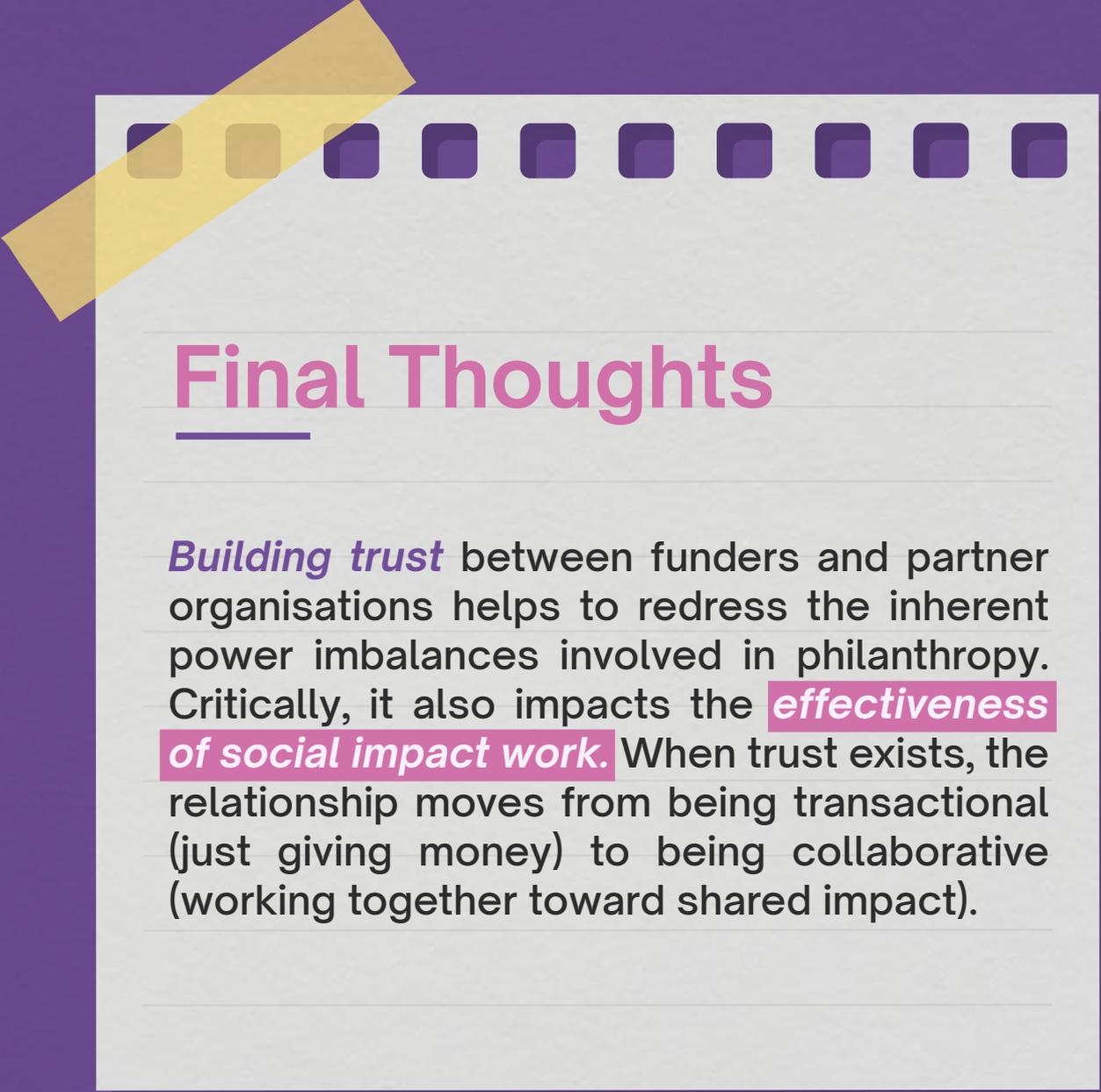
By recognising that the implementing partners are the real experts in their work, and taking a human-centred approach to all aspects of their funding, they are able to build real trust with their partners and strengthen the effectiveness of their grant-making.



Learn more about the Roger Raymond Charitable Trust’s approach to grant-making.

[Roger Raymond Charitable Trust’s](#)





## Final Thoughts

*Building trust* between funders and partner organisations helps to redress the inherent power imbalances involved in philanthropy. Critically, it also impacts the **effectiveness of social impact work**. When trust exists, the relationship moves from being transactional (just giving money) to being collaborative (working together toward shared impact).



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## **We would love to hear from you:**

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**As a funder, what are your best practices for building trust with partners?**

**As a community-based organisation, what are the best ways funders can build trust with you?**

**Share your experiences: what has worked, and what hasn't?**

***Let's learn together* and strengthen the field.**